Review

Psychology and counseling responsibilities for continuous assessment in Malaysian school system

Aqeel Khan* and Okwun, Christopher Kalu

Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling, Faculty of Education, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur- 50603, Malaysia.

Accepted 12 July, 2010

Continuous assessment with its guidance-oriented characteristics in students teaching and learning is integral in determining the quality of students’ performance, and professional responsibility for technical input is ideal. Mass failure at all levels of Malaysian education appears to be the most credible claim for failing standards in education and this suggests significant inadequacies in the management of continuous assessment. To avoid high risk of abnormal development of our youngsters, psychology counseling in all spheres of our human development is indispensable. Hence, effective implementation of continuous assessment to curtail mass failure in Malaysian school system needs to be exposed.

Key words: Psychology, counseling, academic achievement, continuous assessment.

INTRODUCTION

Continuous assessment remains the umbrella of Educational and counseling Psychology. In Malaysia, according to Isa (2009), pre-school education is not compulsory, though it is highly encouraged; and parents can enroll their children either in public or private kindergartens. It is worthy of note that the focus of preschool education is to assist the children in socializing, providing a medium of transition before they enroll in primary school. The curriculum guidelines are provided to the operators by the Ministry of Education; however, the teaching is informal with the environment created to minimize inhibition in children and fostering creativity.

Formal education starts at the age of seven when children gain admission into primary school. Primary school is a compulsory form of education in Malaysia, where children attend primary level for six years: Progressively moving from standard 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6. Basically there are two types of public schools available: The national schools and vernacular schools. Malay language (Bahasa Malaysia) is the main medium of instruction in national schools; however, English is a compulsory subject. In vernacular schools, depending on whether it is a Chinese or Indian vernacular school, Chinese or Tamil is used as the main medium of instruction. Malay and English languages are compulsory subjects.

The teaching of primary school is based on the Integrated Curriculum for Primary School (ICPS). The curriculum is design-based on the National Policy of Education. It stresses on form aspects of education:

1. An integrated approach
2. Individual holistic development
3. Equal education for all
4. Life long education

The most important aspect of all these forms is the integrated approach, which serves as the main focus in the design of ICPS. Integrated approach incorporates the element of knowledge, skills and values in fostering the integrated development of intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical aspects of the individuals. After the students finish their primary school at the age of 12, they progress to Form 1 in secondary school. Secondary school provides five years of education for students age 13 to 17. Secondary school education in Malaysia comprises of two levels:

1. Lower secondary level (Form 1 to 3, ages 13-15)
2. Upper secondary level (Form 4 to 5, ages 16-17)

Throughout the three years in lower secondary level,
students learn general subjects. The upper secondary education offers more specialized fields of study, where, depending on the qualifications they gained during the lower Secondary Examinations, students can decide to choose their own stream of studies:

1. The Science or Arts stream in academic (regular) schools or religious schools
2. Technical or vocational schools
3. National religious secondary schools
4. Special education schools (for visually or hearing impaired students).

TWO OTHER TYPES OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS OFFERED BY MALAYSIA

1. Smart Schools: One of the seven flagship applications of the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC), which uses information communication and technology (ICT) in the learning and teaching process
2. Sports Schools: Which aim at nurturing and developing athletic potential among school students.

THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF SECONDARY EDUCATION AS OUTLINED BY CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT CENTER (2002)

To further develop the potential of the individual in holistic, balanced and integrated manner encompassing the intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical aspects in order to create a balanced and harmonious human being with high moral standards.

THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF SECONDARY EDUCATION GEARED TOWARDS STUDENTS

1. Understand, be aware of and appreciate the history as well as the socio-cultural milieu of the country.
2. Upgrade their competence in and usage of Bahasa Melayu (Malay language) as the official and national language towards the acquisition of knowledge and the achievement of national unity.
3. Develop a sense of responsibility and be prepared to serve religion and nation.

According to Yates (1992), Malaysian society should be aware of the magnitude of overall risk associated with poor continuous assessment practices associated with many educational systems. Perhaps Malaysia also needs a practical experience like the threatening defeat which the USA faced in 1957 when the USSR launched their spaceship “sputnik”, a situation that led the USA to practically dispense money in order to facilitate the improvement of education, of which the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) emerged. While the USA has a competitive focus to benefit from its experience, Malaysia does not yet, have such a focus, and even the basic idea of the obvious relationship between educational and national development has yet to bestow some benefits on Malaysian education. Still, it can be argued that Malaysia faces the internal threat of underdevelopment at a magnitude best described by the situation analysis of Malaysian youths without the basic education. There is need, therefore, to return to the basic consideration of what the psychological support services can offer to ameliorate the situation.

In view of the fore-going, the specific problem in this paper is to argue the case for a psychological attitude, as a strategic counseling responsibility for continuous assessment in Malaysian education. How can all the stakeholders in education at all levels embrace a psychological attitude as a prerequisite entry condition into continuous assessment processes for those who offer and those who consume the service?

PSYCHOLOGICAL ATTITUDE TOWARDS CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT

One of the common characteristics of continuous assessment is that it is guidance oriented towards improving the performance of learners. In this connection, the psychological education model of guidance and counseling comes into focus. As a model of deliberate teaching of psychological courses to enable learners to acquire knowledge and skills for effective functioning, it lends itself to continuous assessment. This should explain why continuous assessment should receive full attention in every school setting.

Continuous assessment may be best appreciated if we understand it from the viewpoint of psychology as a way of logical thinking. If counselors are to give meaningful help to improve peoples' performance or function, they need, first, to understand the target behavior as accurately as possible. In this regard, the psychological education model of counseling may have its worries about the clinical model, but both are keen on the outcome of a helping process, and it is for this reason that continuous assessment is best supported by a psychological attitude, that is, using psychological measurement and evaluation of people’s behavior to understand them effectively. The counselor's characteristics ought to come into play here as it deals directly with the psychological or personality variables of the whole person in relation to the environmental situation. Wyatt (1968) made a striking expression about a clinical attitude which no counselor of whatever theoretical learning should miss where informational service or continuous assessment is concerned.

Psychology counseling has to do with the actual behavior and actual urges, interests, and apprehension of people in on-going life. The emphasis is the importance
of the steam of experience, in its affective as well as cognitive aspects. The emphasis includes the plurality of experience (several things going on simultaneously), changes in self-awareness, the metaphorical and symbolic quality of thought and especially, the important consequences of the mind’s capacity for creating meaning.

The term clinical also suggests the psychologist’s willingness to study the behavior of people through direct observation frequently in transactional settings; involving varying degrees of participation and interaction. As Wyatt (1968) puts it, a psychological approach is clinical to the extent that it attempts to understand people in their natural complexity and their continuous adaptive transformations.

The application of psychology and counseling gained credence as (Mailumo 1984; Mailumo and Bahago, 2000) “The normal person would be benefiting, hence enhancing the performance of both gifted and specially, challenged by making informed decisions on how best to help them."

The responsibility placed on the counselor is immense to ensure that nothing goes amiss with the handling of people’s performance in a learning situation. Attitude formation and development change fall under the affective component of human functioning, and counselors might do well to specifically adopt affective education approaches when and where necessary.

Affective education counseling

Mosher and Sprinthall (1971) and Mailumo (1980) opined that affective education is a component of the wider psychological education and counseling, and can be effectively utilized to facilitate all stakeholders in education in forming, developing, sustaining and modifying their attitude, not only to their handling of continuous assessment, but the counselor’s professional leadership in the management of this crucial psychological support service for the benefit of all concerned. This would seem to be the most effective way to achieve the psychological attitude as counseling responsibility for effective continuous assessment in Malaysian educational system. The strategies as thus explained would be helpful.

Teamwork

There are attractive opportunities for school managers, counselors, teachers and parents plus other stakeholders working together and strictly obeying the rules of teamwork to achieve the essential psychological attitude.

Preventive approach

Much damage is being done already in the poor handling of continuous assessment, as some teachers and most parents do not even know the properties of continuous assessment. Hence affective education counseling could be utilized in the primary, secondary, tertiary and help stakeholders achieve the right attitude. At each stage, the problem is ameliorated from escalating and simultaneously aided to get to a better stage.

Counselor’s roles

Above all other strategies, any system of education at any level, wishing to do well in its continuous assessment practice, ought to recognize the professionalism it requires and the psychological education model of counseling has prescribed the appropriate roles for the counselor to give the right service. According to Boley (1994), in his study on restructuring children’s education, strengthens the counselor’s leadership in affective education counseling. However, Pine (1974) and Arbuckle (1976) submitted that counselors would have to shift their priorities to four key roles as strategists, consultants, trainers and coordinators, to effectively teach or prepare parents, teachers, school managers and students to function more skilfully.

Affective control and performance

Emotion or affective self-control is central in the pursuit of excellent performance. This is reported by many studies (Garbei and Seligman, 1980; Mengness, 1977; Miller, 1980; Glass and Carver, 1980; Mailumo, 1984; Mahoney and Thoresen, 1974). In claiming support for effective performance, Mahoney and Thoresen refer to self-control as power to the person. Miller’s research and broad review of other studies confirm that controllability reduces stress and enhances performance. Miller as well as Menges, agrees on the issue of intentionality, internality and/or controllability as fundamental to competent performance. These are the building blocks of psychological attitude to continuous assessment practice.

Safe tools for affective education

Safe tools for affective education counseling have been found from many studies (Mailumo, 1984) namely information issues, processes, technologies, events or situations of varying values and sensitivities. These can be utilized to enable those concerned with continuous assessment to make appropriate decisions with a psychological attitude fully conscious of consequences and the tasks involved are largely skilled ones coming under skilled training rather than chance tasks. On this score, Hersen and Bellack (1980) made a wide review of research and practice of social skills training (SSI), giving
an insight into what is possible. One must also give recognition to social skills training with children and youths (Cartledge and Milburn, 1980; Spirack and Shure, 1974; Bouchard et al., 1980).

METHODS

The following eight methodological approaches have been found feasible in helping people to develop better perception of problem situations Mailumo (1984). For those concerned with continuous assessment service to improve Malaysian education in response to the kind of critical assessment made by the UN Common Country Assessment, the following methodological steps can be taken in affective education counseling to achieve a psychological attitude for continuous assessment as a prelude to effective participation in its practice.

Introduction oriented/ consultation meeting

This is to develop and/or communicate strategies, clarify issues, communicate intentions and design activities concerning continuous assessment and the necessity to handle it with sustainable psychological attitude.

Personal effectiveness efficiency procedures

As it has been exemplified in the search of excellence in the best-run American companies by Peters and Waterman (1982), any organization which looks forward to achieving its goals may demand personal effectiveness and efficiency of its individual employees before it can hope to arrive at its corporate effectiveness/efficiency in its organizational behavior. In Malaysian Educational system, more than any other organization, a psychological attitude in continuous assessment needs to be pursued with such personal and corporate efficiency, which has been designed by Liberman et al. (1975).

Observation, feedback and reinforcement

Just as continuous assessment itself is guidance-oriented, its practice would do well with close observation, feedback and reinforcement. Trover et al. (1978) suggest that one of the most important factors in feedback is the amount of positive comment rather than negative comment or destructive criticism. It is a point that is very salient.

The Carkhuff classroom communication model

This simplified model helps towards the achievement of personal effectiveness/efficiency in task situations (Table 1).

Coaching

This is step by step approach in any task situation for mastery learning. First steps are usually mastered before any steps are taken in any such tasks.

Problem solving/ conflict resolution model

This goes hand-in-hand with the Carkhuff Classroom Communication Model and Clinical Interview Model.

Role-play and role reversal

Demonstration, modeling and practice

These are good examples of psycho dramatic counseling (Moreno, 1975).

Part of the National Education Philosophy in Malaysia states that the aim of education is to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, physically balanced and harmonious. Every individual has the unique personality, and examination results alone cannot be used as a yardstick to evaluate a person. There is serious lack of character development in the school system; hence more efforts are needed to address psychological, counseling and emotional needs of students as these will help to curb the number of delinquencies.

Students should also be made to realize that academic achievements alone will not help them prepare for the real challenges in life, but a strong character will. One of the best ways to mould students’ character is to encourage them to actively take parts in extracurricular activities to learn thing which are not taught in the class room and in text books. By devising psychology and counseling principles, the students will have the

| Table 1. The Carkhuff classroom communication model. |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| **Counselor**  | **Attending**  | **Personalizing** | **Imitating**  |
| Client         | Exploring      | Understanding   | Acting         | Learning       |

- **Client**
- **Exploring**
- **Understanding**
- **Acting**
- **Learning**
opportunity to build their confidence, broaden their knowledge, and acquire valuable skills such as time management, leadership, critical thinking, communication, decision making, public speaking, survival skills and life saving techniques. Furthermore, it will instill in them a greater sense of responsibility and discipline.

CONCLUSION

It is true that examinations are important especially as a tool to gauge students’ mastery of certain subjects, but they are not an accurate reflection of students’ actual abilities, and do not reflect students’ character. Without the psychological attitude as a counseling responsibility for continuous assessment, mass failure would continue to characterize Malaysian Education especially English Language, and the special status given to continuous assessment would only expose children to the high risk of low quality education and poor socio-economic performance and poor national development. On the other hand, psychological support services like counseling have the capacity to reverse the undesirable situation. As reported by UN, Common country Assessment can only be ignored at Malaysian peril.

REFERENCES
