

Finnish parents want assessment that supports and motivates learning

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In Finland, parents often regard assessment carried out in schools primarily as a tool for supporting pupils' learning and growth. However, many parents would also like to see more of numerical assessment, a

new study from the University of Eastern Finland shows. The researchers analyzed the beliefs and conceptions of assessment among Finnish parents of pupils in grades six and nine of Finnish basic education. The study was based on 622 open-ended responses by parents regarding the assessment of their children.

Assessment plays multiple roles

In addition to pupils, assessment also concerns [parents](#) in many ways. So far, however, parents' beliefs about assessment have been studied only scarcely in Finland and also globally.

"It is important to explore parents' conceptions of assessment because assessment-related information is relevant not only to teachers and pupils, but also to parents, and the idea is to collaborate in order to achieve smoother learning paths," says lead author, Postdoctoral Researcher Juuso Henrik Nieminen from the University of Eastern Finland.

The Finnish National Core Curriculum for [comprehensive schools](#) requires the use of diverse forms of assessment, including self- and peer-assessment, exams, oral presentations, and portfolios. These can support the individual growth of children and adolescents as learners and make their diverse skills visible in a fair manner.

At the same time, assessment also plays a societal role. Numerical data that is based on assessment is used to admit pupils to different educational institutions and, consequently, to different roles in society. Parents are, understandably, interested in this aspect of assessment.

"Studies show that parents can even be opposed to assessment methods that differ from the ones used in their time. However, assessment that is based on exams alone doesn't adequately meet the desired learning

outcomes of [school](#) today," says Professor Päivi Atjonen from the University of Eastern Finland.

According to various reports and evaluations, there are many supporters of numerical and comparative assessment also among parents in Finland, although teachers are instructed not to compare pupils with each other, but only with the desired learning outcomes.

In contrast to this, the study published now shows that Finnish parents primarily regard assessment as a promoter and supporter of learning and growth. They hoped for diverse forms of assessment and challenged the exam-driven assessment culture.

Support for learning, and comparison

The Finnish assessment culture is strikingly different to the assessment culture of many Asian countries, for example. In Finland, the focus of assessment is not on testing and control, but rather on personal growth, learning, and positive feedback.

"Many parents emphasized even the ethical role of assessment in supporting pupils' participation, and they hoped that children wouldn't have to act in a certain, adult-dictated manner, simply for the sake of assessment," Nieminen says.

On the other hand, parents also wished for more numerical assessment and less pupil-oriented methods, because they felt that "a number speaks a thousand words"—to both children and adults. Parents also regarded numerical assessment as an easier way to compare children with each other, and as something that motivates the child.

"However, I dare to say that comparing children and adolescents who are in a sensitive age is not really helpful or motivating", Atjonen says.

Parents play a role in the assessment process

Based on their findings, the researchers propose that schools should engage in an increasingly close dialog with parents.

"Many of the recent changes in basic education assessment require that schools keep parents informed of current issues, but that is not enough. Assessment should be discussed face-to-face because it clarifies many things and increases mutual understanding. The results of this study, too, show that parents have many pedagogically important messages to schools," Atjonen points out.

In the future, research could focus on developing teachers', pupils' and parents' shared assessment competence.

"In order to achieve this, [assessment](#) should be made more visible to homes. Some schools have succeeded in this with, e.g., digital solutions, but we need research-based knowledge on other good practices as well," Atjonen says.

The research was published in *Studies in Educational Evaluation*.

More information: Juuso Henrik Nieminen et al, Parents' beliefs about assessment: A conceptual framework and findings from Finnish basic education, *Studies in Educational Evaluation* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.stueduc.2021.101097](#)

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