Secondary school teachers' lifelong learning of assessment: Autonomy in developing alternative assessment methods

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Assessment plays a major role in teaching and learning processes. According to Hungarian rules and regulations, teachers are obliged to evaluate their students' knowledge, behavior, and diligence in the form of grades on a scale from 1 to 5. In addition, they should also develop students' skills, abilities, knowledge, proficiencies, emotional, and volitional characteristics. Although teachers acquire theoretical knowledge during their university studies on how to develop students through assessment, there are neither guidelines nor output requirements; therefore, the learning process of fulfilling this aim happens in their daily teaching practice, which leads to autonomous, lifelong learning. There have been only a few pieces of research in connection with assessment in Hungary focusing on ways that aim to fulfill roles other than grade giving. This paper aims to explore teachers' views on, motivations for, purposes, and ways of using alternative assessment. For this exploratory study, four semi-structured interviews were conducted, transcribed, and analyzed with the constant comparative method. Purposive sampling was applied in order to explore the views of Hungarian secondary school teachers already using ways of alternative assessment. Findings show that teachers are using alternative assessment methods because they find grading insufficient to fulfill several roles. Moreover, in their opinion, it might even hinder the development of certain skills, as a result of which, they feel the need to learn and innovate in their assessment methods.

Keywords: assessment; alternative assessment; grades; teachers' lifelong learning

INTRODUCTION

Assessment plays a major role in teaching and learning processes (Boud, 2000). According to Hungarian rules and regulations, teachers are obliged to evaluate students' knowledge, behavior, and diligence in the form of grades on a scale from 1 to 5, as a consequence of which assessment is mainly based on these numerical values. These grades have a great impact on students' lives as they define their enrollment possibilities in all levels of education (Act CCIV on National Higher Education, 2011). Therefore, it is no surprise that stakeholders (schools, parents, and students) lay great emphasis on grades (Boud, 2000). However, in theory, school assessment should serve the development of students; as there are neither guidelines nor output requirements, it entirely depends on teachers how they fulfill the development of students. Although teachers acquire theoretical knowledge during their university studies on how to develop students through assessment, the learning process of fulfilling this aim happens in their everyday teaching practice. *"Teacher professional learning is now mostly conceptualized in the literature as dynamic, ongoing, continuous, and set in teachers' daily lives – embedded in the classroom context and constructed through experience and practice"* (Caena, 2011, p. 10). In accordance with Caena (2011), this paper adopts *"a 'change as professional learning' perspective, inspired*

by adult learning and situated cognition theories, according to the paradigm of the teacher as reflective practitioner, taking responsibility for learning to improve the quality of professional performance" (p. 4).

There have been only a few pieces of research in connection with assessment in Hungary focusing on ways that aim to fulfill roles other than grade giving (Hubai & Lázár, 2018). Thus, this paper aims to explore teachers' views on, motivations for, purposes, and ways of using alternative assessment. For this exploratory study, four semi-structured interviews were conducted and analyzed with the constant comparative method. Purposive sampling was applied in order to explore the views of Hungarian secondary school teachers already using ways of alternative assessment. After describing the official rules and regulations in connection with school assessment and the need for alternative ways of assessment, the interviewed teachers' views, motivations, purposes, and practices are presented that shed light on how they experiment and innovate – as part of their lifelong learning – in order to reach their pedagogical aims.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature on educational effectiveness outlines a conceptual framework with teachers at its center; there is a positive correlation between the results of students and teacher quality, which is greatly affected by teachers' ability to pursue lifelong learning (Caena, 2011). Kwakman (2003) differentiates between teachers' learning and professional development stating that not all learning results in professional development. Research shows that effective learning resulting in professional development takes place in teachers' daily teaching practice in connection with their concrete tasks, activities, and situations (Bruce, Esmonde, Ross, Dookie, & Beatty, 2010; Caena, 2011; Kwakman, 2003; Mercer et al., 2017; Putnam & Borko, 2000; Runhaar, 2008; Webster-Wright, 2009). Runhaar (2008) "operationalize[s] teacher learning at the workplace as reflection, asking for feedback, innovative behaviour and knowledge sharing" (p. 79). The present research aims to look at this innovative behavior by exploring teachers' views on assessment, their motivations and purposes of using alternative ways of assessment, as well as their daily practices of how they learn to fulfill their pedagogical aims.

According to the literature of assessment, its broad definition "denotes any appraisal (or judgment, or evaluation) of a student's work or performance" (Sadler, 1989, p. 120). There are three main types of assessment. The formative and summative distinction was first used by Scriven (1966). Although he argues for the primary importance of a final evaluation of a project or a person, which he defines as summative assessment, he also acknowledges that it is necessary to evaluate the process of development as well (formative assessment). The third main type is diagnostic assessment that analyzes a situation in order to gather detailed information before making a pedagogical decision (Vidákovich, 1990). The three types of assessments have different goals. Diagnostic assessment aims to diagnose a situation in order to make informed decisions; formative assessment aims to keep track of students' progress and identify ways of helping it along; and summative assessment aims to identify overall levels of achievement and measure students' results against them (Rea-Dickins, 2000).

What happens in reality is that assessment is associated with graded tests and examinations (Cohen, 2001). Moreover, the aims of the different types of assessment might also be confused (Golnhofer, 2003). An example of that is when there is a diagnostic test in the beginning of the school year (the aim would be to gather information on students' prior knowledge), and students get 1–5 grades on the test, which is counted into their average, affecting their end of term grade, confusing the aims of diagnostic assessment with summative assessment. Olechowski (2003) defines summative assessment as any evaluation resulting in a grade. He draws attention to the fact that assessment is a necessary tool to help development of students, as a consequence of which it should have a supportive role. His conclusion is that besides grade giving, there should also be alternative, supporting, developmental performance evaluation taking place. By analyzing the literature, Tsagari (2004) arrives to similar conclusions. According to her, criticism aims at high stakes, standardized tests because they affect the school

curriculum by making teachers concentrate only on those subjects and skills that are included in the examinations, restricting teachers' methods to employ exam preparation practices, and encouraging students "to adopt 'surface' approaches to learning as opposed to 'deep' approaches" (p. 3). It also results in students taking the role of "passive recipients of knowledge and their needs and intentions are generally ignored [which has] detrimental consequences on students' intrinsic motivation, self-confidence, effort, interest and involvement [moreover, these processes] induce negative feelings [...] such as anxiety, boredom, worry and fear" (Tsagari, 2004, p. 4). Kohn (2015) argues that the presence of grades decreases students' interest in whatever they are learning, increases preferences for easier tasks, and negatively affects the quality of students' thinking.

The official rules and regulations of student assessment in Hungary are described in the current Act on National Public Education (Act CXC on National Public Education, 2011). According to the chapter entitled "Fulfilment of Student Obligations," teachers should "regularly evaluate the student's performance and progress in form of grades throughout the teaching year and rate it in forms of marks at the end of the term and the teaching year" (Act CXC, 2011, Section 54/1). The act continues to detail the grading system by distinguishing three categories:

Grades and marks should be as follows:

- Evaluation and assessment of the student's knowledge: excellent (5), good (4), average (3), satisfactory (2), and unsatisfactory (1);
- Evaluation and assessment of the student's behavior: exemplary (5), good (4), variable (3), and bad (2); and
- Evaluation and assessment of the student's diligence: exemplary (5), good (4), variable (3), and negligent (2) (Act CXC, 2011, Section 54/2).

Therefore, the three categories of knowledge, behavior, and diligence are all assessed on a scale from 1 to 5. In addition, enrollment to secondary and tertiary education is also affected by grades. The Ministerial Decree 20/2012 (VIII. 31.) on the operation of public education institutions by the Ministry of Human Capacities states that secondary schools can decide whom to accept based on the given student's previous academic record, meaning the end of term grades, and the results of a centralized written exam on mathematics and Hungarian language. According to Act CCIV of 2011 on National Higher Education, the enrollment to tertiary education, similarly to secondary education, takes into account the earlier school performance of the applicants, meaning the end of term grades, and the results of the centralized secondary school leaving examination (Article 40). Although in both cases "institutions may make admission subject to the fulfilment of reasonable and non-discriminatory requirements" (Act CCIV, 2011, Article 40), the decision is mainly based on students' grades and exam results. The OECD (2013, p. 204) report also claims that "Hungary, along with many other European countries, relies primarily on numerical marks for formal reporting." Section 62 (Act CXC, 2011) mentions that the feedback should include explanation in the form of oral or written feedback as Hubai and Lázár (2018) point out, without any guidelines or examples regarding the execution of it,

teachers do not have formal rules about how they should explain the grades they give to their students. As a consequence of this, it is no surprise that stakeholders (schools, parents, and students) lay great emphasis on grades and exam preparation.

On the other hand, the act on education starts with the section entitled “Purpose and Principles of the Act” stating that schools should provide “*comprehensive evaluation adjusted to the requirements and ensuring the development of children/students*” (Act CXC, 2011, Section 1/1), that is, according to the purpose and principles, assessment should serve the development of students. Moreover, Section 64 deals with the promotion system of teachers that is based on eight competences of teachers specified in 326/2013. (VIII. 30.) governmental decree Section 7, and these teacher competences are the following:

1. professional duties, knowledge of the particular science, discipline, and curricula;
2. planning educational processes and activities and self-reflection required for their implementation;
3. providing learning support;
4. developing students’ personality, individual treatment, preparation for the integration and successful teaching of disadvantaged students, students with special educational needs or with learning, adaptive, and/or behavioural difficulties;
5. promoting and developing student groups and communities, creating opportunities, openness to social and cultural diversity, integrative activities, form teacher’s activities;
6. ongoing evaluation and analysis of educational processes and the development of students’ personality;
7. communication and professional cooperation, problem solving; and
8. commitment to and responsibility for professional development.

The sixth competence, ongoing evaluation and analysis of educational processes and the development of students’ personality, is in line with the purpose and principles of the educational act stating that teachers should develop students’ personalities with the help of evaluating and analyzing educational processes. Furthermore, the eighth competence requires teachers to be committed and takes responsibility for their own professional development. These are the expectations toward teachers; however, these documents do not contain any guidelines or examples of how these should be met.

According to Alderson and Banerjee (2001), as a result of the negative consequences of grading and testing, alternative assessments appeared, which they characterize by the following: alternative assessments are less formal than traditional testing, gather information on students’ work over a period of time rather than being taken at one point in time, fulfill formative rather than summative functions, are low stakes in terms of consequences, and are claimed to have beneficial washback effects. Having reviewed the literature, we can see that although teachers acquire knowledge on different types of assessment, in practice, grade giving, the summative role of assessment is overwhelming, and other roles of assessment appear as alternatives, which

results in the fact that the learning process of fulfilling the development of students happens in teachers’ daily teaching practice.

The learning processes of teachers historically have been linked with planned professional development activities (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 1994). Guskey (1986) argues that as these activities rely on the concept of a deficit in teacher skills and knowledge, they might be ineffective. Guskey’s (1986) model of the process of teacher change emphasizes the change in teachers’ classroom practice that results in change in students’ learning outcomes affecting change in teachers’ beliefs and attitudes. Although Cobb, Wood, and Yackel (1990) agree with Guskey in the importance of a continuous interplay between teachers’ beliefs and practices resulting in professional development, they criticize Guskey for missing the importance of teachers’ reasons and motivations for reorganizing their classroom practices. Teachers’ motivations proved to be a substantial component from preservice teachers (Smid, 2018) to teachers of adult learners (Kálmán, 2018). Clarke and Peter (1993) also identify analogous processes to Guskey’s; however, instead of a linear model, they develop a cyclic one and argue that any model of teacher professional growth should be independent of participation in in-service activities. According to Clarke and Peter (1993), teachers engage in professional experimentation continuously, they reflect on the consequences of that experimentation and modify their practice accordingly. Some adaptations are temporary; others lead to long-term modifications to practice, which they call professional growth. Clarke and Peter’s (1993) model of teacher change contains four domains where these processes occur: the personal domain (teacher knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes), the domain of practice (professional experimentation), the domain of consequence (salient outcomes), and the external domain (sources of information, stimulus, or support). The mediating processes of reflection and enaction are linking all the domains depicting multiple growth pathways.

METHODS

As I wanted to gain insights into the use of alternative assessment methods, the research questions I intended to answer with the study were the following:

1. How do teachers define assessment and alternative assessment?
2. What alternative assessment methods do teachers report to use in public secondary education in Hungary?
3. Why do teachers use alternative assessment methods in public secondary education in Hungary?
4. What are the views of teachers using alternative methods on assessment?

As the aims of the research were to explore teachers’ views on, motivations for, purposes, and ways of using alternative assessment, this exploratory nature required the qualitative paradigm. In order to give space for emerging themes, semi-structured interviews were conducted. The instrument was first based on a list of preliminary questions, and was later developed into an interview guide. The first

version of the interview guide was subjected to expert opinion, after which the questions were grouped, reordered, and some of them rephrased. Each interview was transcribed, and following expert opinion, smaller modifications were made to the interview guide. The final interview guide contained an introduction, questions on background data, and the main questions with possible subquestions in brackets (Appendix). Some of the main questions were the following: “What does assessment mean to you?, What would you call traditional assessment?, Compared to this, what would you call alternative assessment?, What ways of assessment do you use?, Can you describe how it happens?, Why did you introduce this form of assessment?, What was the reaction of your students when you introduced it?, How have you been using it?, What kind of advantages and disadvantages of it do you see?, How effective do you think this way of assessment is?, Has it brought about any changes in students’ behavior?” (Appendix).

To select the participants, purposive sampling was applied. A Facebook group was launched for teachers who were interested in the use of gamification in education in 2014. By 2018, it had more than 2,600 members, many of whom use alternative assessment methods. Four teachers were selected from this group according to the following criteria: (a) They were known for using alternative assessment methods; (b) they taught different fields of subjects; and (c) they worked in different public, secondary schools in Hungary. The interviews were carried out in Hungarian, the mother tongue of the participants. The interviews took place between April and June 2018. Table 1 shows the background data of the participants and the interviews.

Initial coding happened parallel with transcribing the interviews to find emerging themes and see if the questions elicited sufficiently rich data. The constant comparative method was used to compare data with codes, and codes with codes, so that it would result in sorting of the initial codes into more elaborate codes (Lapan, Quartaroli, & Riemer, 2012). The data were copied to the atlas.ti program for focused coding. Themes that summarized groups of open codes were created. These themes linked with the initial research questions can be seen in Table 2. The following “Results and Discussion” section is organized according to these emerging themes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Teachers’ definitions of assessment

One of the emerging themes proved to be what views teachers expressed concerning definitional issues of assessment in

general, traditional, and alternative assessments, which answers the first research question of the study – How do teachers define assessment and alternative assessment? All the participants defined traditional assessment as grade giving, which is the 1–5 scale in the Hungarian system and alternative assessment as anything that is different from grade giving. Ann said that alternative assessment is “*anything other than grade giving.*” Luke said that alternative assessment is what “*provides more than just giving a grade, or for example you don’t give a grade at all.*” Mary expressed that alternative assessment is difficult to define because in the Hungarian context grade giving is compulsory, so “*most alternative assessments must result in a grade eventually.*” Ivy added that traditional assessment compares students to each other creating categorization and competition among students, while assessment should help the development of the student.

“For me assessment means that the teacher evaluates the student’s performance compared to himself or herself and not to somebody else’s performance. It can give motivational power, so it is constructive, and it can take many different forms [...] depending on what that exact student needs.” (Ivy)

All of them emphasized that as grade giving is compulsory, most of the alternative ways of assessment have to result in a grade eventually. However, the emphasis is not on grades, but the several aims that school assessment has to serve. According to all the participants, its main purpose is to facilitate the learning process through giving feedback to the students.

Forms of assessment

Answering the second research question – What alternative assessment methods do teachers report to use in public secondary education in Hungary? – the four participants listed 119 ways of assessment that they report to use (each one of them between 25 and 35 ways). Table 3 shows a possible categorization of them: from left to right in the order of complexity (from the left the simpler ones to the more complex ones on the right).

Table 3 contains ways of assessment that can be compared according to their complexity and form (oral, textual, numerical, and other). Other ways of assessment that are not in Table 3 also appeared which differ in their actors, such as different forms of peer- and self-assessment and evaluation that the students give to the teacher. They can vary from simple to complex ones, and they can also be oral, written, numerical, or happen in any other ways.

Table 1. Background data

	1st interview	2nd interview	3rd interview	4th interview
Pseudonym	Ann	Mary	Luke	Ivy
Gender	Female	Female	Male	Female
Age (years)	34	37	29	29
Field of subjects taught	Science	Humanities	Languages	Languages
Interview length (min)	74	76	77	51

Table 2. Research questions linked with emerging themes

Research questions	Emerging themes	Number of quotations
1. How do teachers define assessment and alternative assessment?	Definitions of assessment (in general, traditional, and alternative)	63
2. What alternative assessment methods do teachers report to use in public secondary education in Hungary?	Forms of assessment (exact examples and practices)	119
3. Why do teachers use alternative assessment methods in public secondary education in Hungary?	Motivations and purposes (why they do something as they do it)	131
4. What are the views of teachers using alternative methods on assessment?	Beliefs about assessment	348
	Consequences (what results they see due to using alternative assessment methods)	194
	Teacher characteristics (personality or behavioral traits that could affect their views on assessment)	302

Table 3. Ways of assessment categorized from simple to more complex ones

Simple → complex			
Oral	Praise during the lesson, chat-time, and countdown	Evaluation of oral tests: video tests, pair speaking tests, interview tests, presentations, exam simulations, and monologues	Individual consultation, group discussion, debate, Q&A session
Textual	Remarks on a test: praise, encouragement, things that are good, and things to improve	Evaluation of written tests: writing tests in groups, tests that are compiled by the students for themselves, online quizzes, sample tests, essays, extended reports, note taking, written classwork, and group work	Providing lots of textual explanations and feedback
Numerical	Points and plus-minus signs	Percentages, extra points, and credits that can be exchanged for grades or other goods (e.g., skipping homework)	Rubrics, point-collecting systems, e.g., based on gamification
Other	Smileys, stamps, stickers, drawings, codes, and pictograms	Board game tests, creating crosswords, sudoku, word-finder, activity cards, cartoons, video editing, mind maps, SMS conversations, and creating online tasks for others or solving them, e.g., on www.learningapps.org	Creative tasks in which students have to create a physical product, group project, poster, drama, role play, simulation, and mystery game

Purposes and motivations of using alternative assessment methods

In connection with the purposes and motivations of why teachers started using alternative ways of assessment, answering the third research question, two main categories emerged: one is the teachers' perspectives and the other is those of the students. From the teachers' perspectives, a recurring theme is their own experiences as former students that encouraged them to innovate as teachers. *"When I introduce something new, I never have pedagogical purposes, but more like gut feelings, for example, I hated oral tests [as a student], so I knew I should do them differently [as a teacher], and then I find the pedagogical reasons what is good for what"* (Ann). *"What happened with me in secondary school was that you got a grade from 1 to 5, and together with that grade, you got a category in the class how you could perform [...] you were constantly compared to others"* (Ivy). Other motivations from the teachers' perspective were, for example, to be liked by the students, to

have opportunities for experimenting, to make grading easier, to win time during lessons, and to be perceived as more fair, *"My greatest struggle at the moment is to provide assessment that is fair and complies with all the rules and regulations of the school at the same time, which is really difficult"* (Luke).

Most of the purposes of using alternative assessment methods, however, are about students. First, the following purposes appeared in all four interviews. Everybody mentioned that the purpose of assessment is to provide constructive feedback that helps students to improve, and also to motivate and engage students in learning. Although they teach different subjects, raising students' interest in their subjects and making the learning process enjoyable also emerged in all the interviews. According to all the participants, assessment based on grades is usually stressful for students, which hinders effective learning for this reason. Other purposes that they all articulated were reducing stress and developing students' different skills.

They differed in the specific skills they listed. Ann, the science teacher, listed the following: “I want them to be able to use ICT [information and communications technology],” “to solve real life problems,” “to build knowledge for themselves,” “to be able to speak for at least three minutes,” “to be creative,” “to develop their cooperation, their communication skills with each other, and it is also a very important part of the subject knowledge that they can communicate using the jargon, which is the first step in applying knowledge,” and “self-regulation in which self-assessment is crucial.”

In addition to the common purposes, Mary, who mainly teaches Hungarian literature and grammar, named the following: “to develop real self-knowledge,” “to feel safe gaining the skills getting to know the subject, to know me, to know my methods,” “to develop, to learn something the student didn’t know before, to strengthen the belief that wherever he/she stands is temporary, so the assessment should never impose permanent categories [...] it should show a present state that he/she has already achieved together with the way for development,” also “to learn how to work together,” and “to appreciate the development compared to the student’s own previous state.”

Luke (English and Hungarian as a foreign language teacher) emphasized the following purposes of introducing alternative assessment:

“Autonomy, I have realized that learner autonomy is not something that you can give to students [...] and then they immediately become autonomous learners, [...] but it is something that they have to learn, and in the beginning they don’t know how to deal with freedom, [...] so my goal is to develop autonomous learners who can take responsibility for their own learning processes.”

He also mentioned reducing stress specifically in order to develop students’ speaking skills: “I never give grades to oral tests, so that they don’t feel stressed because for me the point of oral tests is to develop their speaking skills, which is only possible if they’re not stressed.” In connection with peer-assessment, he detailed the following:

“The 1-5 scale cannot provide constructive, useful feedback on their performance, how they should develop, what their strengths and weaknesses are, so on the one hand, I’d like to provide them with this information, but on the other hand, I’d also like them to be able to form such statements, give, and get this kind of feedback from their peers, too.”

Ivy (English as a foreign language teacher) teaches extremely disadvantaged students with different kinds of learning disabilities; therefore, her main purpose was to engage students and raise their motivation, so that they participate in the lessons. She wanted them to believe that they are capable and can be assessed based on their performance. These were her initial purposes; however, she has achieved much more that will be detailed in the “Consequences of using alternative assessment” section.

Teachers’ views of assessment

All participants stated that they would like to provide feedback to students that helps them to improve, which implies that in their view, the role of assessment is to give feedback that supports students’ development. All of them also believe that students should feel safe in order to be able to learn, and this is closely related to assessment. One way how a safe learning environment can be achieved is through the transparency of assessment. “Obviously, I have provided them with the criteria for all the grades because it is extremely important that they know the expectations how they will be assessed” (Ann). “I use rubrics, like the matura exam ones, and every time it is there what the performance contained, what was missing, how to make it better [...] We write a lot, and I assess every single piece of writing like that” (Mary). “My students say that it is better that in my subject, they can schedule their time, they know what to expect, there are no surprise tests, etc. And it matters a lot for them” (Mary).

“I told them the number of points that they had to collect in a monthly period [...] they knew in advance what was worth how much, what the topics were, and in the beginning of each lesson what was going to happen on that exact lesson, and that gave them a sense of security. [...] I think it also enhanced their motivation that they always knew what was going to happen.” (Ivy)

“I use online questionnaires in which there are given criteria [...] based on which] they have to assess themselves, their group, and their group members, and then I also tell them what I have seen, [...] so basically we agree on the assessment together.” (Luke)

Luke’s discussion about the grades implies that he believes that students should be involved in their own assessment processes. It has also appeared in the other interviews in the form of self- and peer-assessments, as well as in the practice that all of them regularly ask their students for anonymous feedback in order to develop their assessment practices. They really take into consideration students’ opinions and change things based on them. “I have changed accordingly [based on students’ feedback...] and first they were shocked that I was really interested in their opinion, unfortunately it was shocking for them that somebody was interested in their opinion, and then they started valuing themselves that their thoughts really mattered” (Ann). “Students love to be involved. They love that they can be part of making the rules. They love that they can create tasks. It is really cute when a student thanks you for a task” (Mary). This positive feedback from the students also motivates teachers to develop their assessment practices. It becomes a cornerstone of their lifelong learning as well.

“I asked for feedback after the units, at the end of each month. [...] In the beginning only a few students filled them in [around 50%...] but the numbers grew when they realized that what they had written about really changed [...] I also emphasized that I changed those things because they asked.” (Luke)

This leads to the concept emphasized by all of them: facilitating autonomous learning. One of its components is the aforementioned involvement of students in their own assessment. The other component is giving them the freedom of choice. All of the participants offer a set of tasks from which students can choose. The amount of freedom depends on the tasks, topics, subjects, etc., but the element of the freedom of choice is always there. Some examples are the following. Ann uses online video tests in which students can always choose from three given titles. Mary offers creative tasks for each topic that students can choose from such as writing an SMS discussion between two literary characters, drawing illustrations to a literary piece, creating an alternative ending to a story, taking selfies with a related statue, solving or creating learning apps, and many more. According to Ivy:

“if you take into consideration what they like, it creates such motivation, together with assessment that compares their performance to themselves and not to others, that they will do things that they wouldn’t in the beginning [...] because they really understand that they might need it in the future.”

Luke’s students can create vocabulary tasks, such as cross-words, word finders, activity cards, etc., that they bring to class and their peers solve them. He also offers opportunities for individual practice of topics that the particular student needs, which is connected to the next view.

All of the participants agreed that students vary greatly thus they value diversity, and believe that teachers should individualize their assessment as much as possible to facilitate each student’s improvement. It appears most strikingly in Ivy’s case as her EFL group contains students from beginners to upper-intermediates:

“Their differences are taken into account. An A0 student never has to do the exact same task as a B2 student and vice versa. So there are groups of students who work together and others alone etc. [...] I think that if you, as a teacher, have a good schema how you structure your lessons, which is flexible but also has a fixed frame, it is manageable.”

Luke also provides examples how he caters for individual goals:

“Being at an English lesson can be a must or it can be a useful thing where you can reach a goal of yours, so for example if you would like to take a language exam soon then it is manageable that the goal shouldn’t be what I say as a teacher, but it should be your goal [...] for example [some of my students] did only language exam tasks and got their grades for that [...] and they were really happy that they didn’t have to do unnecessary tasks that didn’t help them reach their goal.”

Ann believes that it is not only students’ individual goals that teachers should care for, but also trust them and help them in finding their own learning methods:

“Students are not stupid. They know exactly what is good and useful for them, and if you help them develop, they appreciate it. When I was a student, I knew exactly what was nonsense and we just had to survive it and what was meaningful. [...] For example there is the classic end of unit test, which is also optional, nothing is compulsory, so they can choose this test; or a test that they compile for themselves, they send it to me, I print it out, and they write it during the lesson; or a presentation; or a video test; or group work; or the so called extra, which can be anything creative [...]; so they can freely choose from these activities.”

Mary shows how she makes this individual progress of each student visible for them that develops students’ self-knowledge as well:

“I use this point collecting system in which students can continuously see their own progress, the types of tasks they choose, the types they don’t, and the skills these tasks develop. [...] So any time we can sit down have a look at it [...] and see their strengths, the things that don’t go that well, what to develop, what they like doing, what they want to improve, and maybe what cannot be improved that much, so it’s OK to know that, too, we should have this self-knowledge.”

Although there were no questions in connection with homework, it turned out that none of them gives homework, or homework is optional. Ann listed activities from which students can choose, and among these activities there are some that can be done at home, but they can also choose from activities carried out in class. Luke struggled a lot with homework:

I used to give workbook exercises for homework, and in most groups, the majority of students didn’t do them, so when we were checking the homework only about quarter of the group was doing something, and nothing seemed to motivate the rest, not even getting 1s. [...] So I was thinking a lot about how I could motivate them to do homework, and it turned out that the best motivation is no homework. So now if I find a workbook question important or useful, we do it during the lesson, otherwise I upload the solutions to the Internet, so before the test anybody can practice and check for themselves, and if they don’t understand something, they can ask me.

Mary also changed her practices:

“When I started assessment through this point system, it was before the changes in the matura exam and the National Core Curriculum, and students didn’t have to stay in the school for 35-37 hours [a week]. As now this is the situation, I can’t do this with the students that they have to solve 40 other exercises because they won’t be able to do them, even if they want to, so I can’t frustrate them with this. This is why I really consciously started paying attention so that they can collect their points in

class with class work and tests, and homework has become extra opportunity if they need help."

Ivy argues similarly:

"I hardly ever give homework, and I can't see any drawbacks of it; moreover, it creates such concentration during the lessons that it is really unnecessary. [...] I don't think that homework is the bogeyman or a monster, but it worked for me that basically they just had to learn at home and didn't have to produce big things because all the production could happen in class. It was so intensive learning that [...] it was enough. I think it's another great advantage [of her alternative assessment system] that nothing changed as they weren't burdened with workbook exercises for example."

Besides the claimed views and opinions of the participants, there are some characteristics and behavioral traits that are common in all of them. They all value honesty highly, which includes acknowledging their own mistakes in front of their students as well. They show great flexibility, being able to change, which is proven by the fact that they constantly improve their assessment practices. They also have lots of dilemmas, questioning their own practices, and presenting a lot of doubt and self-criticism (62 quotations divided among the participants almost equally). These might also contribute to the results they have achieved presented in the next section.

Consequences of using alternative assessment

First, I compare the participants' purposes of introducing alternative ways of assessment with the results they claim to have achieved. Second, I look at other results and consequences that emerged from the data. When asked if their aims were achieved, participants referred to two sources. As mentioned before, all the participants ask for anonymous feedback, as a result of which, they can reflect on the opinion of their students. This is one of the sources they refer to. The other source is their students' daily work and behavior.

The primary aim of the participants is to facilitate the development of students. Mary summarizes this process in the following way:

"My colleagues help a lot in this because we share this vision that [...] we have to assess students' work in a realistic way, so they learn that development means that you have to solve more and more difficult or different tasks and what was enough yesterday may not be enough today, and there might be tears and sadness and rigor, but somewhat we put up with it together."

Ivy (who works with special needs students) sees the development of her students as follows:

"In the first lessons they solved two exercises and by the end of the semester, it became, just like in a normal school, six to seven complex tasks in different formats. From there, it was impossible to raise it any further

because of the time limit [40-minute-long lessons], that's all we could fit into each lesson."

Luke said that his students created tasks for each other, and these tasks became more and more sophisticated. In connection with the video tests, Ann mentioned how she could see the quality of students' work improve.

Another important aim was to raise motivation and engagement during the lesson and in connection with the subject. For Ivy:

"Motivation would have started at the point to simply make them participate in anything that is related to the English language or, god forbid, is happening in English. So my assessment started by giving points for participation. [...] They collected points individually. [...] I only told them the upper limit, and I said to them that they had to reach it in a month. [...] They have never asked what happens below it. [...] So after the first period of point collecting, everybody reached the limit and got a 5. [...] Then this upper limit increased in each period. It mainly doubled monthly from September until about February, after that it remained the same [...] when I saw that we had reached [...] the number of tasks they could do during a lesson."

Ann, the science teacher, described how the attitude of her students changed: *"when they understood that this assessment was not against them but it was for them, they became extremely open; from enemies we became colleagues, and the cool guy from the back row moved to the first row."* In connection with oral tests, Ann introduced a way that two students had to interview each other while the others could send in their question like in a TV show. She reported that *"students loved it. It was entertaining, so students started preparing these shows [...] once they even performed a play in which the platypus debated the marsupial; [...] they enjoyed it so much."* Luke, similarly to the others, described that in the beginning it was difficult to introduce something new, but *"after they got used to it, they liked it."* Mary also emphasized the recurring theme that after many years being assessed through grades, students categorize themselves, and many of them believe that they would never be able to achieve something. Consequently, she puts it the following way:

"It has been a learning process for me as well [...] to break it down to small pieces, forget what we thought at university [teacher training] that students would learn everything we taught them, and start from the beginning, build up piece by piece, provide lots of successful experiences for the students, which result in self-confidence, and that will affect their performance. And more or less I think I have succeeded in that." (Mary)

This leads to the aims of reducing stress and developing autonomous learners. All of the participants teach not only secondary school students but also adults. They have encountered great differences between their secondary school and adult students, which also inspired them to innovate. Ivy's secondary school students perform differentiated tasks

based on their level of language knowledge, but get the same grade (5) if they collect the set of points with their own tasks. She compares her secondary school and adult students and draws valuable conclusions in connection with assessment and the teaching and learning process:

“[In the secondary school,] it’s the same grade [5] through different work, but everybody is doing their best, and this is what matters. [...] What I saw is that they understood that you can’t expect the same performance from everybody, but those who know more, can be expected to do more. It made them value diversity. [...] While among adults, I couldn’t do it. It was degrading for them to get easier tasks than the others. Everybody had to do exactly the same tasks all the time. [...] I think it is because they have been brought up in a school system where they were always compared to a standard. And they don’t know that this standard is just the performance of somebody else. [...] It has become so internalized now [...] that I couldn’t make them believe that here, they could be themselves. [...] The other thing that it results in is that they wait for you to pour the knowledge into their heads. [...] If assessment is uniform then the effort of many students diminish because they might have tried to reach the goal in different ways, and if they weren’t valued, they stop making the effort and accept that it is the teacher who gives you the right way, and if you do it differently then you’re not good enough. [...] You don’t make the effort, for this reason, you don’t develop. And obviously, this affects your learning greatly. [...] Most of the adults cannot learn English partly because they don’t even try to make the effort, [...] they wait for someone else to give them the knowledge. Alternative assessment, on the other hand, helps in developing autonomy: to believe that you can make the effort and you can choose your own tools for it.” (Ivy)

The participants would like to develop autonomous learners as they also experience how necessary autonomous lifelong learning is in their everyday life. They develop their teaching practices including their assessment methods, which are challenging and rewarding at the same time, and motivate them to fulfill the aforementioned aims.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper aimed to explore how teachers’ views on, motivations for, purposes, and ways of using alternative assessment evolve as a result of lifelong learning. According to the literature, teacher learning takes place most effectively in their daily teaching practice. Teachers in Hungarian public education are required to assess students’ knowledge, behavior, and diligence in the form of grades on a scale from 1 to 5. It is also required that school assessment should serve the development of students, and that teachers should be committed and take responsibility for their own professional development. Participants of the semi-structured interviews all defined traditional assessment as grade giving, and alternative assessment as ways of assessment that are different from grade giving, and fulfill several roles, such as

comparing students to their own previous performance (instead of a centralized standard) in order to show their personal development. The four participants listed 119 ways of assessment that they use.

My findings show that the main purpose of teachers using alternative assessment methods is to provide constructive feedback that helps students to improve, and also to motivate and engage students in learning. Although they teach different subjects, raising students’ interest in their subjects and making the learning process enjoyable also emerged in all the interviews. According to each participant, assessment based on grades is usually stressful for students, which hinders effective learning, so another purpose that they all articulated was to reduce stress and to develop students’ different skills. One of the most important skills appeared to be autonomy. Other skills that teachers listed were, for example, ICT-use, real-life problem solving, knowledge building, creativity, communication, cooperation, self-knowledge, and self-regulation.

The participants’ main views on assessment are the following: they all believe that students should feel safe in order to be able to learn, and this is closely related to assessment. One way it can be achieved is through the transparency of assessment. Students should know the criteria, what is expected from them, how the assessment process will happen, what the consequences will be, and what they should do about it. This should result in a relaxed classroom atmosphere in which students have the freedom to choose and to experiment with different task types, topics (e.g., that they can bring in their own interests). This leads to the concept emphasized by all of them: facilitating autonomous learning. According to the participants, it also requires that students take part in their own assessment processes. It assumes a good relationship with students, honest and positive communication, and trust. Students should be provided with the opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning processes. All of the participants agree that students vary greatly, so teachers should individualize their assessment as much as possible to facilitate each student’s improvement. They all ask for detailed, anonymous feedback from their students, so that they can improve their work together based on students’ feedback. They always reflect on the feedback and modify things accordingly, which students highly appreciate.

Moreover, this process not only helps them in realizing the aforementioned goals, but also it is a lifelong learning process for the teachers. According to the literature, professional development is set in teachers’ daily lives “*constructed through experience and practice, in sustained, iterative cycles of goal setting, planning, practicing, and reflecting*,” (Canea, 2011, p. 10) and the data show that these innovative teachers are doing that. In order to reach their pedagogical goals, they continuously experiment with their assessment methods, they reflect on the consequences of their practices, and then they modify and adapt the assessment methods accordingly.

Although the study has shown the aforementioned results, in order to reach data saturation, more interviews should be conducted. One possible future research direction can be to link teacher characteristics to lifelong learning as personality and behavioral traits emerged from the data, this study has not

elaborated on them. As the research context of the study was public secondary education in Hungary, another possible future research direction can be to explore the necessary and sufficient conditions for teachers to use alternative assessment methods in this context, in order to map the possible ways how teachers' professional growth can be facilitated from the different stakeholders' point of view. Finally, it might also be intriguing to investigate teachers' views on alternative assessment in different contexts.

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APPENDIX: FINAL INTERVIEW GUIDE IN ENGLISH

Dear Colleague,

Thank you very much for participating in this interview contributing to my PhD research. I am Márta Barbarics. I study at ELTE, Faculty of Education in the Language Pedagogy Programme. My research is about assessment in secondary schools. I would like to get acquainted with the views of teachers on assessment, so there are no right or wrong answers, as I am interested in your personal experience and opinion. The data will be used for research purposes only. You remain anonymous. If you are interested, I am happy to share the results with you. If you agree to record the interview, we can start. Participation is voluntary. Thank you very much! First of all, let me ask you some background data.

- How old are you?
- Where did you graduate (which university, which program)?
- Which subject(s) do you teach?
- Which grades (age groups)?
- Where (which school)?
- How long have you been teaching there?
- Did you teach somewhere else before?
- Have you ever lived or worked abroad?

We will be talking about assessment in more detail. People mean different things by assessment. What does assessment mean to you?

- What would you call traditional assessment?
- Compared to this, what would you call alternative assessment?
- What ways of assessment do you use?

From these ones which ones would you call alternative assessment? (From here, we go through the different ways one by one with the following questions.)

- Can you describe how it happens? (What do you assess? What do you give feedback on?)
- Why did you introduce this form of assessment?
- What would you like to reach by using it?
- What was the reaction of your students when you introduced it?
- How have you been using it? (How long have you been using it? Have you ever modified something about it? If yes, what and why?)
- What kind of advantages and disadvantages of it do you see?
- How effective do you think this way of assessment is? (What makes it effective?)
- Has it brought about any changes in students' behavior? (attitude, motivation, engagement results, and so on)

Is there anything we haven't talked about and you think it is connected to this topic and you would like to share it?

Thank you very much for the interview!