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## PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' VIEWS AND OPINIONS ABOUT THE IDEA OF THE NATIONAL LEVELS OF STUDENTS' ATTAINMENT: CASE STUDY ENGLAND

**Abstract:** The aim of this study is to research perceptions of primary school teachers in England about the implementation of the national levels of students' attainment and Standard Assessment Task (SAT). Teachers' views and opinions were studied by using a semi-structured interview created for this purpose. The following themes are explored: procedure of determining the students' level of attainment, responsibility for achieving high level of attainment, providing assistance to teachers in achieving the defined levels as well as what happens if students are under achieving and who and how provide help to teachers if they have problems to reach the required standards. The research involved twelve teachers from Hertfordshire. The respondents stated that the assessment of teachers should not be neglected in the process of student assessment since only the achievements of students in SAT are favoured. In addition, it is highlighted that personal and family context should be taken into account when assessing student achievement and based on that assessment the performance of teachers and schools should be estimated. Although teachers consider themselves to be largely responsible for achieving the results, they also point out the significant role of students, as well as the entire school and family environment.

In this context, participation of school management, educational psychologist and teaching assistant are highlighted in the process of improving student achievement. Although the size of the sample does not allow the generalization of the outcomes, the research results indicate the tendency which can be significant for the process of standardization of education in Serbia.

**Key words:** England, primary school teachers, SAT.

### Introduction

The current context of evaluation of education includes the teachers' assessment on the knowledge and progress of students, the national testing of students' educational achievements, the assessment system based on the national standards of educational achievement, the final and graduation exams at the end of a particular education cycle, as well as the international examinations of educational achievements (TIMSS, PISA).

In this paper we deal with implementation of standardized tests, which are one of the ways to evaluate students' achievements at a certain level of education (at the end of a class, a cycle

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of education, transition from primary to high school, etc.). We focus on the situation in England, in the form of a study case taking into consideration that England is one of the European countries in which standardized testing has had a tradition nearly three decades long and a country where there have been frequent debates about the purposefulness of this way of evaluating pupils' achievements (Maksimovic, 2017).

### **NATIONAL LEVELS OF STUDENTS' ATTAINMENT IN ENGLAND: IMPLEMENTATION WITHIN THE SYSTEM AND A CRITICAL REVIEW**

The basics of standardization of education in England were set at the end of the 1980s. Until then, the English education system had been decentralized. In 1988, the Education Reform Act (1988) was adopted, and as its most significant part, a binding National Curriculum (1988) for all English state schools was presented. This law stipulates that students' knowledge will be measured by Standard Assessment Task (SAT). The subjects from which students' achievements are assessed are English and Mathematics, which are designated as key core subjects in the National Core Subjects. In 1990, the Office for Standardization in Education (OFSTED) was established, responsible for creating tests, conducting tests and communicating the results.

Full-time education in England begins at the age of five. In the English context, schooling is arranged across stages of learning, with the curriculum being organised from an early years Foundation Stage through Key Stages (KS) 1-4. Each of these stages is age-related. Thus, the Primary education phase comprises the Foundation Stage and KS1 and KS2.

In England, a National Curriculum covering KS1-4 was introduced in 1988 and was extended to cover the early years Foundation Stage in 2002. The National Curriculum in England also outlines the programmes of study for each subject for each stage of learning. These programmes determine the essential matters, skills and processes which must be covered in schools and provide the basis from which units of work can be developed for teaching and everyday assessment (Riggall and Sharp, 2008, 3-4).

At the end of key stage 1, teachers have to assess a National Curriculum level for each pupil across three subject areas - in English pupils must be given a level for reading, writing, and speaking and listening; they are also given an overall subject level for Mathematics and a level for each attainment target in Science. Tests and tasks produced by the Standards and Testing Agency (an executive agency of the national Department of Education) are used by teachers to help them reach these assessment outcomes in reading, writing and Mathematics. At the end of key stage 2, teachers need to determine a National Curriculum level of attainment for each pupil in English, Mathematics and Science. To do this each pupil sits a series of externally marked English and Mathematics tests developed by the Standards and Testing Agency. Each pupil sits three tests in English (reading, writing, and spelling) and three tests in Mathematics (non-calculator, calculator, and mental mathematics). The results from these external and teacher assessments determine school accountability and are used to calculate school performance tables which present the attainments of schools in relation to the percentage of their pupils meeting and exceeding national attainment level expectations. These data are also used as a source of evidence by the *Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED)* which is the national agency that inspects the quality of schools. Furthermore, the Agency for Standardization in Education, on the basis of the accomplishments of the students, formed the so-called "School League Tables". The students' results in each school are published in the

media as a ranking list informing the public about more or less successful schools (Rosenthal, 2004).

Consequently, there is a question of financing and survival of schools whose students achieved low results. The first step in the case of lower results is the reaction of the educational inspection, which needs to determine the kind of weaknesses in schools and develop a strategy for improving their work. However, if after several years students of the school included in the support program continued to have low level of achievement on standardized tests, the school could get closed and students moved to another school.

This approach has many negative consequences, which are pointed out by teachers and academics dealing with standardization in education (Alexander, 2011; Galton, 2008; Isaacs, 2010; Reay & William, 1999; Swaffield, 2010). Moris Galton (2008), an expert in the field of elementary education, a professor emeritus at Cambridge University, stresses that teachers in England are under unbearable pressure to achieve defined standards of achievement and that this practice has numerous unsupportive effect on children's wellbeing. First of all, the dominant focus on Mathematics and English led to the neglect of other subjects in the educational process and to the situation that children's success in creative spheres was not considered. Education experts also emphasize that the initial positions, levels of knowledge and development of pupils at the time they leave school should be taken into accounts.

Apart from teachers, students also attribute great importance to the results achieved in the national tests. Students develop a picture of themselves and anticipate success in life and work, based on scores that come from English and Mathematics. As an example, a sentence of one 11-year-old girl, who feared the low results on the test, is often quoted: "I will be nobody and nothing" (Reay & William, 1999). Furthermore, Sue Swaffield (2010) emphasizes that national standardized tests represent a way of assessing and checking student achievement that is not consistent with the way students acquire knowledge. Namely, in a daily work with students, teachers encourage creative approach to the topics they deal with, and group work, as opposed to paper-pen testing, when students work without support from peers and teachers and must be concentrated on choosing just one correct answer to the question in the test.

Tina Isaacs (2010), a professor at the Institute of Education at the University of London, who during the 1990s was involved in the work of the Agency for Standardization in Education, several years after she left that organization, opens the question of whether the system assesses the effects of education. The educational process has evolved or has become obscured by the constant demands of the government for higher standards of student achievement. Continuous insistence on achieving high educational results has neglected the holistic approach to the development of students' personalities. In similar manner, Robin Alexander (2011) stressed the dangers of the constant tendency to set and reach high standards in elementary education. He emphasizes that there is no dilemma that high standards are needed for education in the 21st century. However, Alexander warns that by emphasizing the fact that standards in education are getting higher, the number of students that cannot successfully reach those standards is increasing. At the same time, policy makers expect these tests to simultaneously assess students' success, evaluate schools, and follow the national standards of achievement. Alexander cites an example of a different approach to assessing student achievement - all areas of the national curriculum should be covered and final testing at the end of the primary school should be a culmination of the process of

learning and progress of students. At the same time, this author emphasizes that some "education myths", which are linked to national standardized testing should be abandoned. Teachers, and not tests, lead to achieving a certain level of student achievement standards, and tests are just one of many ways to assess the performance of set standards (Alexander, 2011).

### **METHODOLOGY**

The aim of this study is to investigate primary school teachers' views and opinions about the idea of the national levels of students' attainment in England. For that purpose a semi-structured interview with open formulated questions was created and used. The interview schedule consisted of 5 connected themes: 1) teachers' opinions about the way and procedure for determining the students' level of attainment; 2) responsibility for achieving a high level of student attainment; 3) providing teachers assistance and support to achieve the defined National Curriculum levels for students; 4) what happens if students are under achieving, 5) who and how helps teachers if they have problems to reach the required standards.

Twelve primary school teachers were interviewed across Hertfordshire. All of the interviewed were female – while three of them had more than 20 years' work experience, five of them between 10 and 20 years' work experience and four between 5 and 10 years' work experience. Four teachers interviewed came from schools with over 300 pupils, three from schools with 200 to 300 pupils, and five from schools with less than 200 pupils.

After the initial contact with teachers, it was decided to keep the interview format flexible to fit the teachers' time which they could set aside for the interview. All teachers were interviewed on the one to one basis. All interviews were recorded and later transcribed. The conversation with teachers was anonymous and that is the reason why through the text only general information about teachers is used.

The research was conducted in the school year of 2011/2012 whilst the first author was engaged as a visiting researcher at the University of Cambridge.

### **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

Themes from the interview schedule allowed us to give summarized discussion of the findings. We used the themes from interview to provide a structure of the findings presentation. Each theme was discussed by using the teachers' statements to illustrate the issue.

#### **What do the national levels of students' attainment look like?**

According to the official educational documents, pupils aged 5-16 in maintained schools must be taught the National Curriculum which is divided into four "Key Stages" that generally depend on children's age. The National Curriculum sets standards of achievement in each subject for pupils aged 5-14. For most subjects, these standards range from Levels 1 through to 8. Pupils progress through the levels as they get older and learn more:  
most 7 year olds are expected to achieve Level 2  
most 11 year olds are expected to achieve Level 4

most 14 year olds are expected to achieve Level 5 or 6

#### Teacher assessments

Throughout the year, all teachers assess their pupils' progress in each subject as a normal part of their teaching. The teacher decides which level best describes a pupil's performance in each area of learning in that subject. They must report their assessments in English and Mathematics when pupils reach the end of each key stage. Teacher assessments are not reported in the Primary School Achievement and Attainment Tables.

The National tests, taken at the end of each key stage, give a snapshot of a pupil's attainment in the core subjects. SAT tests are used to show a child's progress compared with other children born in the same month. The mean (average) score for each age group on the assessment is set at 100 and the standard deviation at 15. For any age group a given numerical value has the same meaning in terms of standing relative to the group. For example, an eight year old and a nine year old, each of whom has a standard age score of 105, have performed equally well in relation to the average for their respective age groups. At the end of KS2 pupils are tested in English and Mathematics. These end of key stage tests give an independent and nationally standardized measure of how pupils and schools are doing compared with the national standards in the core subjects.

The interviewed teachers insisted on importance of recognizing and accepting the teachers' assessment, which all of them see as more important than the official SAT. Teachers emphasized that testing children is not the best way of getting insight of pupils' results as well as teachers' work. Teachers who work with younger children were especially against testing practice.

*“Well, we do teacher assessment as well as national tests at the end of year 2. We look at the reading, writing and math and make decision based on our knowledge and also we do national test in Key Stage 1. As well as children don't know that they are doing national tests it is fine. They just think that they are working some work with me. We never say: “Here is a test”. Sometimes I tell them I can't help them with their work, but for this age is too early to do formal test. They are too young to set and work test properly. They don't learn like that. I don't like giving them test, because I don't teach them that way and don't teach them to work tests.”*  
(Female teacher, 11-20 years of work experience)

Teachers also spoke about the contexts in which they work. They used to say that SAT is unfair to students with special needs, with certain difficulties as well as gifted children. The most important result of SAT is to determine if there is expected percentage of students at the defined level. Primary school teachers interviewed highlighted great differences in students' starting position - from pupils who already learned to read and write before they start school, to children who hardly withstand separation from their parents at the end of the first grade. Accordingly, teachers also value the progress in working with children living in the environment with numerous disruptive factors (poverty, incomplete/separate families) and whose development is disharmonious. Teachers consider that in such circumstances, the success is when children learn to read and write, even when it is below the defined standards for their age - the progress is higher compared to the progress of students who could read and write when started school, and who on standardized testing at the end of primary school showed average achievement.

*“Apparently, parents think that they can chose a good school for their children based on the OFSTED assessment. But, my opinion is different. If you have able children, if they come from very supportive family, if children can read when they come to school, then those children are going to be better at the age of 11. If you are in school with lot of challenges, lot changing population with particularly minorities, it is harder to reach level 4 or 5 at the age of 11. But that doesn’t mean that you are a bad school. I feel very strongly about this.”*

(Female teacher, 11-20 years of work experience)

Frustrations rose when teachers were speaking about the publication of the results of public examination and national tests. Teachers emphasized that the *Primary league tables* is an example of very unfair educational policy and practice and attitude towards schools.

*“I think children are assessed for the purpose of league tables and they do not give a full picture of a school, however, this is what some parents look for when choosing a school.”*

(Female teacher, 21+ years of work experience)

Speaking about this problem, it is important to emphasise that, the media have carried out national wide comparisons between the average grades of levels of students’ performance, and thus identified the “best” and “weakest” school in England (West & Yolonon, 2010).

However, some teachers talked about a practice that some of them additionally prepare children for the tests. Although they don’t agree with the way of measuring assessment they are aware that SATs results could significantly influence the future school’s work, and they try to intensify their teaching so that children can score better on the test (through prior additional testing and similar):

*“I used old test paper of SATs from math and reading to test them. I use this test paper to use children on the tests. Because they will have SATs anyway, so I want to prepare them for that kind of assessment. They should know what they are going to get. They got good idea what can they expect on SATs. I don’t like testing. But, if they should be tested, I want to help them before SATs.”*

(Female teacher, 11-20 years of work experience)

The findings show that Morris Galton (2008) noted earlier that teachers in England are under the great pressure to achieve high levels of student achievement, and while aiming at this goal, they change their pedagogical practice and deviate from their own beliefs by applying teaching to the test.

### **Responsibility for achieving a high level of student attainment**

In terms of the responsibility for achieving a high level of student attainment the interviewed teachers talked about their own role in that process as well as students’ and head teachers’ responsibility.

Teachers see themselves as persons who are accountable for what is going on in their classroom. However, they are exposed to a lot of external pressure: they face government expectations and parental expectations sometimes, as well. In most of the cases parents are very keen on having their children do well on the test.

Because of a great number of persons who are involved in the process of students' learning and progress, teachers often say that all of them share responsibility for the final outcomes. So when we were speaking about responsibility for achieving a high level of students' attainment, teachers said that all of those people had their part in a play.

*"I think the teachers, and the students, they get it together. I think it is to do in a working relationship. The young people should achieve as much as they possibly can. And teachers are there to support them, to facilitate them."*

(Female teacher, 11-20 years of work experience)

Furthermore, teachers described the specific atmosphere in schools which influenced everyday school work. Many teachers said that head teachers and schools' managements have very important role in raising standards in classrooms. School is seen as a learning community where teachers and students need to feel that they belong to. Head teachers and management should help students and teachers to feel free to learn together even if they make some mistakes.

*"So, I think it is both, teachers and students responsible. But, school also. I mean teachers and students are come together in schools, and I think is very much together with the culture of the school. When I say school culture, I mean that young people feel that they belong and that they are together in the school that it is their school, because otherwise, they do not try, and they do not give them the best. Equally, teachers need to feel they belong there. It is one school value. That is learning culture that the people are happy to be there. It is a lot to do with the quality of teachers and the management. Management is very important, they actually have a power to decisions how school should work and create the atmosphere."*

(Female teacher, 11-20 years of work experience)

### **Who (if any) provides teachers with assistance and support to achieve the defined National Curriculum levels for students?**

One of the themes in the interview was support which teachers get to achieve the defined National Curriculum levels. We were interested in finding out who provides teachers with assistance and support to reach high levels of students' attainment.

Teachers' responses showed that they find cooperation with their colleagues to be very important. Teachers said that mainly colleagues help them. They do a lot in-house training, moderating, looking the other teachers work, see how they might work differently. Teachers emphasised that head teachers and management are aware of importance of support and the focus nowadays is much more on communication than it used to be. Also, teachers pointed out that teaching assistance has a big role in helping them to improve students' attainment. A great number of teachers said they enjoy working together with their colleagues and that they support each other.

*"We are very lucky here; we have very supportive staff, support one another. We getting have a much better communication. We set up meetings where teachers can get together, talk about what does level 3 look like, what it does look like at Key Stage 1 and what it does look like at Key Stage 2, and we have some work been done on, what we called transition from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2. So, we have been supporting each other, in a way."*

(Female teacher, 5-10 years of work experience)

The role of head teachers and school management are recognized as very important for helping teachers to reach required standards of students' attainment. Head teachers are recognized as persons who could have significant influence on school efficiency.

A lot of schools have teaching assistant who work with underachieving or with gifted children. All interviewed teachers confirmed that they are considerably supported by their teaching assistants.

*"In the moment, and that is common for lot schools, we have teaching assistants. The effect is defined very much from how they are trained, which skill they do have. Teaching assistant might work with group of children who are not at the level at they should be, children with low ability. But, in my school they are tend to work with high ability children, and teachers work with low ability children."*

(Female teacher, 11-20 years of work experience)

During the interviews teachers stated that they feel supported in the process of reaching high levels of students' attainment. The fact that many schools have teaching assistants is emphasised as very helpful as well the support by head teachers and school management.

### **What happens if students are underachieving?**

Although teachers pointed out that they have been supported in the process of achieving high levels of students' attainment, we wanted to investigate what happens if students are underachieving and school does not meet the required standards.

During the interviews teachers were asked to explain what is going on if students do not achieve the expected levels at Key Stages 1 and 2. Their responses could be organized in several categories.

The largest category of responses represent answers about activities in school. These activities take place within the school and involve, in the first place, teachers' engagement. Teachers track and discuss how students make progress and try to find ways to help students who are underachieving. Cooperation between teachers and a head teacher is emphasized as very important in helping students who are underachieving. At the same time, teachers stressed that help of teaching assistants is very useful, especially when it comes to group work – they organize students in groups and try to satisfy specific students' needs. Parents are also recognized as important partners – school and family should have the same approach and attitudes when they offer support students to improve their attainments.

*"We do tracking all the time. We track at what level reading child is, for example. And then we set and analyze what we can do as teachers to help children if they are underachieving. We try to match the needs of different children. We have targets groups as well. So we identify certain children and do with them what is needed. We are very focus on our target groups. Teacher or teaching assistance work with them, and that is really helpful."*

(Female teacher, 5-10 years of work experience)

Second group of answers is about official support from OFSTED. However, teachers told that they got national supportive programmes which are not harmonized and adjusted with the whole education context. The main change which OFSTED did was changing head teachers



and school management. In some cases that really led to improvement levels of students' attainment but in others, didn't.

*"In the past, Ofsted sent report, and then the school become very monitored, lot of people came from outside, often happed change of leadership. Usually they get new head teacher, there was a lot of initiation things put into that school. The individual class teacher was under big pressure. But I think that teachers are not involved in dialog. And they still judge teachers, teachers are still very judged from the outside. You can't evaluate school without taking it in its context. Schools been judged without taking environment into account."*

(Female teacher, 11-20 years of work experience)

Some answers showed that teachers felt exhausted and squeezed. They are tired of constant pressures to achieve the high levels of students' attainment. Some of them said they had no power to change low students' attainment.

*"As teacher I could not do a lot. The individual class teacher is very exhausted in that situation. All teachers want to do better. I try and workout, do the best, hope the best. But it isn't very much individual thing; you are part of a school community. So really is important that the school leadership decide what to school should to do. Decision has to come from the school leadership, where they want to school go, school vision."*

(Female teacher, 5-10 years of work experience)

On the other side are teachers who do not pay any attention to reaching the standards. They do not find official levels of students' attainment as very important part of their work. They pointed out that they concentrate their work to help each student to develop her/his potential as much as possible. They try to encourage holistic development of a student, not to lead their work to gain high results on SAT.

*"We are in quite a difficult situation because we are rapidly trying to improve the standards, which is hard to do when you don't believe in the way that standards are being measured. It is a quite difficult personally, because we want to our children to achieve those standards but what I value as a standard is not what will be assessed. We got very difficult situation. Ultimately, what we are doing is not going. For example, if our math level is low, we teach more and more math. But, it doesn't work. More and more the same doesn't work. What we do is taking a different approach when we try to teach our children to be effective learners, whatever they learn. What we hope that will have the impact on standards."*

(Female teacher, 5-10 years of work experience)

Some teachers do not have trust in levels of students' attainment. They find those levels too rigid and focused only on a partial progress in students' work.

*"Well, not achieving defined standards is not problem for me. Those levels are so rigid. I mean, you have two children who are the same ages, but their possibilities are different. What with children who are on higher level than is expected? Should we limit them? The level should always go on, it is a progression. So, you look at its skills to help develop of this child."*

(Female teacher, 11-20 years of work experience)

### **Who and how helps teachers if they have problems to reach the required standards?**

Having spoken with teachers about their reactions if students are underachieving, they were asked if teachers had help and support in cases that their school did not meet the required standards. The answers again reflected the important role of colleagues, the whole school's community as well the Local Education Authority.

Teachers said that they usually help each other and discuss together the problem and try to encourage students to improve their progress.

*“For me personally, colleagues help a lot. And how it is very useful to go and watch others’ people practice. Maybe, when I think I am not very good at that, I call my colleague and ask “Can I come and see what do you do?. Watching, learning and talking about that! And that is value, which is professional dialogue, when teachers are learning together. That need be valued by management.”*

(Female teacher, 11-20 years of work experience)

In a situation when a child has some serious health problem, teachers consult or invite a specialist to train them to work in such a situation (educational psychologist, specific learning difficulties teachers, etc).

*“We get some children who have some difficulties or don’t make a progress which they should make. In which case, we call special education needs coordinator (SENCO). She helps with anyone who has special needs. She comes two days a week and works with teaching assistance to deliver any special program that anyone needs.”*

(Female teacher, 21+ years of work experience)

Also, teachers emphasised that counsellors and advisers from LEA have important role if a school doesn't meet the required standards. The LEA (Local Education Authority) historically has been providing support. Some schools have been in an Intensive supporting program for a few years. Some schools, beside the LEA, have the school improvement partner, who usually comes into the school and works with head teachers and teachers. Teachers shared their experience on this kind of help.

*“Also, we have school improvement partner. We have one free visit a year, and for others we have to pay. We have one partner who meets with head teacher and maybe some from leadership team on occasion and he discuss what have been done, all paper work, all data, looks for pupil progress and achievement, sets targets for the school in agreement with head teacher. Then we share that with all staff to work at those targets.”*

(Female teacher, 5-10 years of work experience)

### **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

The process of standardization of education is one of the characteristics of education system worldwide (Dejl & Robertson, 2017; Leismann, 2009). The official levels of students' attainment are defined by the government and Ministry of Education. Those levels represent expected pupils' knowledge, competence and skills at a certain age. People who work with students and who are expected to lead children to the higher levels of attainment are teachers. Therefore this study is concentrated on the teachers' views and opinions about the

idea of increasing standards in education by introducing official levels of students' attainment. What teachers think of the curriculum, subject matter, teaching, learning and assessing has a great influence on classroom practice.

The research about teachers' views and opinions about the national levels of students' attainment in England showed some disadvantages of the approach based on standardized assessment tests. The interviewed teachers pointed out that focusing only on English and Mathematics contributed to many creative subjects being squeezed out from the curriculum. Thus children possessing great potential and skills which do not relate to the testing area are faced with difficulties. The emphasis on the core subjects, means there is less opportunity for appreciating students' abilities such cooperation, group work, social and emotional successful reactions. Also, it is important to take into account the progress of the child whose abilities do not allow him/her to reach the required levels.

Teachers involved in this research agree that it is necessary to have educational standards. However, difficulties arise when education is judged just on students' attainment - without taking into consideration the context of the educational environment. Hence teachers do not accept validity of Primary schools league table - they find it wrong to use this snap shoot from one day for judging whether the school is good or not. Although teachers believe that some kind of measurements and educational standards are needed, they consider them to be less important than developing team work skills, teaching community, support, teaching and learning strategies and upgrading through their career.

The findings relating to the official support for schools reflect different teachers' attitudes about this topic. Some teachers claim that although they were involved in the LEA's programme there was no benefit from it: neither student's attainments were better nor teachers were satisfied with the provided kind of support. On the other hand, there were teachers from different schools who thought that counsellors from the LEA helped them a lot to improve their work and students' results.

We finish this paper discussing about what we can learn from English experience. Studying in depth another country's certain educational issues provide a basis for comparison with, as well as enriched understanding of our own country. As an outsider it is impossible to be sure the teachers' judgments about their educational system are valid (Mortimore, 2010). However, we consider the findings of this research truly important for education in Serbia and that there are some important lessons which policy makers as well as teachers can learn from English experience. One of them is that school should be seen as a community of teachers and students. They need to feel to belong there, because otherwise, they are not devoted and they do not give their best. That kind of school culture promotes learning as value. Such an attitude leads to a shared responsibility for students' progress, in which everybody has his/her part to play. Teachers emphasized they give support to children right from the school start - they don't wait that students become underachieving.

Another significant issue could be inappropriate publishing and ranking schools based on the SATs results, especially in the context of the *final/graduation exam* and their presentation and interpretation in the media in Serbia. Children and their parents have all rights to know what is going on in the school: if the child is making a progress, which area he/she is particularly good at, where he/she needs help and support. But, all these topics should be interpreted in the specific context which involves a child's social and family background, his/her abilities and

competencies, as well as a child's wishes and aspirations. At the same time, insisting on one-day testing could lead to unfair and consequently incorrect results of the levels of students' attainment. For some students the experience of testing is highly stressful and they cannot show their full potential. Other students are not used to tests so they don't know the right way to solve tasks. On the other hand, some teachers additionally prepared students for testing, so the results which achieved aren't valid and comparable.

Emphasis on the importance of teachers' assessing shows that the key of improving educational results is in helping the teachers to develop their competencies. Only a teacher who feels as a competent professional can lead students to better results. Although in modern society the stress is on measurements, and it is easier to measure results in Mathematics than Art, each child has a right to be respected because of her/his qualities and efforts. Great number of teachers agree that they should offer all children a chance to develop their own capacities. Apart from the basic skills in numeracy and literacy, there are wide fields of possibilities to be developed and acknowledged as important.

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