Reflection Report

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1. CBC, CBE, and CBA as a System

At the beginning of my teaching career, I worked as an English teacher in a public school, where the focus was primarily on content rather than outcomes. Later, when I joined the Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (NIS), I was introduced to the concept of the competency-based approach. It was there that I began to deeply understand the interdependence of curriculum, teaching, and assessment. A pivotal moment came when I transitioned into a trainer role and facilitated a training programme aimed at implementing the full CBC–CBE–CBA model. During this training, it became evident that many teachers (as I once had) struggled to align assessment tasks with higher-order learning outcomes. Often, teachers relied on linguistically accurate but cognitively low-level tasks, which led to a mismatch between our goals and our tools. For example, one speaking task asked students to “describe their school day.” Although grammatically appropriate, the task did not require reasoning or personal judgement. This led to critical reflection: Were we assessing what really mattered? Were our assessments pushing learners to apply knowledge, reason, and create? We revised the task to: “Propose one improvement to your school schedule and justify your opinion.” The new version required students to express a position, use justification and argumentation, and apply academic vocabulary. It was assessed using a rubric with criteria for critical thinking, coherence, and language accuracy. This experience highlighted the importance of alignment among learning outcomes, instruction, and assessment in driving meaningful learning. I now view CBC, CBE, and CBA as a single, coherent system that must

be intentionally designed, regularly reviewed, and built around learner voice and real-world application.

2. Curriculum Development and Learning Goals

As a trainer in criterion-referenced assessment at NIS, I supported teachers in developing learning objectives, activities, and assessments aligned with the principles of competency-based education. A key focus of our work was ensuring that learning goals were specific, measurable, and aligned with real-world tasks. In one training session, we examined a task where students were asked to create an informational leaflet on an environmental issue. While the stated objective — “students can create an informational text with a call to action” — was technically accurate, the learning activities lacked authenticity and relevance. Students' drafts reflected this disconnect: generic phrases, mechanical structure, and minimal ownership. Our analysis showed that students struggled not only with text structure and genre features, but also with understanding the purpose and audience. This raised an important point about the alignment between learning goals and the design of instruction and assessment. Together with the teachers, we redesigned the task by integrating sample analysis, discussion of genre features, peer collaboration, guided drafting, and opportunities for formative feedback. We also revised the learning outcomes using the SMART framework to ensure they reflected observable behaviours and appropriate cognitive challenge. One strength of the revised project was that it enhanced student engagement. Learners showed more confidence in applying genre conventions and articulating their messages. One area for improvement was the time allocated for modelling. Some students still relied on templates and checklists, suggesting a need for more explicit instruction in evaluative criteria and scaffolded practice. Another issue was that many teachers, myself included earlier in my practice, tended to confuse learning activities with learning outcomes. For instance, goals like “make a poster” appeared in planning documents, with little clarity on the expected learning progression. Addressing this required revisiting Bloom’s taxonomy, discussing the difference between task format and learning intention, and reflecting on assumptions about meaningful learning. By the end of the training, many participants recognised that designing a competency-based curriculum is a nonlinear, iterative process that demands pedagogical clarity, learner-centred design, and flexibility. Through guided reflection, hands-on planning, and critique of existing tasks, I supported teachers in designing authentic, aligned, and outcomes-focused learning experiences.

3. Assessment Quality: Validity, Reliability, and Fairness

In my role as a trainer, I frequently ask teachers to consider whether their assessments truly measure the intended competencies — and I apply the same standard to my own work. One task we analysed during training involved a formative speaking activity where students were asked to talk about their favourite movie. Although engaging, it did not align with the stated outcome ("to justify an opinion"), and instead produced descriptive responses. We revised the task to: "Choose a film that you believe deserves an award and explain why." This version required students to present an opinion, offer justification, and use evidence — thereby increasing the task's construct validity. However, this adjustment led to further reflection: How consistent was our scoring? Were our descriptors clear enough? Were teachers prepared for inter-rater variability? These questions highlighted issues of reliability. We addressed these during training by refining rubric descriptors, facilitating inter-rater calibration, and stressing the importance of moderation. Vague phrases like "uses good vocabulary" were replaced with measurable language such use specific topic related vocabulary. Fairness was another critical focus. I encouraged teachers to evaluate how the design of tasks might disadvantage learners due to linguistic complexity, cultural bias, or special educational needs. I consistently prompted teachers to ask: "Who might struggle with this task, and why?" This reflective question has become a cornerstone of our shared assessment practices.

4. Grading and Standard Setting

Although I have not been directly involved in the statistical process of setting cut-off scores, I fully understand their essential role in a competency-based assessment system. In such systems, well-defined and evidence-informed thresholds act as critical reference points to determine whether a student has achieved the minimum acceptable level of performance, requires targeted support, or has reached a level of mastery. These thresholds help ensure that interpretations of results are transparent, consistent across classrooms, and aligned with predefined learning objectives — all of which are central to fairness and accountability. In the NIS network, where I worked as a trainer, cut-off scores are developed and approved at the central level by assessment experts and curriculum specialists. They are aligned with performance descriptors and curriculum standards and are consistent across schools to support equity. Although I was not part of the central standard-setting team, my role included supporting teachers in implementing these standards during the design and review of summative assessments. This included ensuring that tasks matched the expected difficulty level, providing guidance on interpreting results, and facilitating reflective discussions on borderline cases. In training sessions, I also encouraged teachers to communicate performance levels clearly to students and parents, and to provide qualitative feedback alongside numeric scores — even in summative contexts. In my experience, this practice enhances learner understanding, promotes growth mindset, and reduces the perception of

grades as final judgments. Integrating feedback helps ensure that assessment remains not only a tool for measurement but also a driver for continued learning and improvement. Moreover, I emphasised that cut-off scores must be criterion-referenced — aligned with learning standards rather than norm-referenced distributions — to preserve the validity and equity of decisions based on assessment results. Through this lens, I guided teachers to shift their focus from “how many passed” to “who achieved the learning goals and who needs support,” thus reinforcing a truly learner-centred culture.

5. Use of Rubrics

In my work as a trainer, I emphasise the use of rubrics not only as assessment tools but as learning instruments. However, I noticed during training that many teachers used rubrics superficially. For example, in one writing task, teachers focused predominantly on grammar, neglecting other important criteria such as structure, register, and vocabulary. This observation raised a key question: Have we effectively trained teachers to apply rubrics holistically? To address this, I led moderation sessions where teachers practised blind scoring, analysed student samples, and collaboratively revised descriptors. We replaced vague statements with criterion-referenced, observable indicators. I also introduced the practice of co-constructing rubrics with students, which I now advocate in my training. Initially, some teachers were sceptical about this approach, concerned that involving students might reduce academic rigour or lead to unclear expectations. However, they were often surprised by the positive outcomes. Students became more engaged, asked meaningful questions about success criteria, and began to use rubrics not only for evaluation but also for planning, monitoring, and revising their work. Rubrics also proved useful beyond assessment settings. Teachers started integrating rubrics into the planning stage of lessons, using them to structure project-based activities, guide student self-assessment, and provide targeted formative feedback throughout the learning process. This transformation shifted the role of rubrics from summative instruments to dynamic learning tools. Moreover, I highlighted that for rubrics to be effective, they must be aligned with learning objectives and designed with clarity and developmental progression in mind. We discussed the importance of using student-friendly language, sharing rubrics in advance, and embedding them in both formative and summative contexts. In follow-up feedback, several teachers reported greater confidence in using rubrics for peer and self-assessment, and a stronger connection between their grading practices and instructional goals. These experiences helped both me and the teachers I worked with to reconceptualise rubrics as transparent frameworks that support fairness, learner agency, and instructional coherence. An effective rubric is not a standalone scoring sheet — it is a pedagogical bridge between teaching, learning, and assessment.

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