

SCHOOL ASSESSMENT – THE PAST WITHIN US

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Abstract. In 2010–2012 the new assessment system was officially introduced into Estonian formal education. In order to understand how fundamental a cultural change this was for Estonian society, this study presents the discourses represented in the memoirs of the former students who got their assessment experience between the 1960s and the 1980s. The official Soviet assessment system was introduced into Estonian education in the 1950s. Although the Estonian pedagogical literature in the 1960s – 1980s was pedagogically comprehensive, the 48 recollections gathered for this study repeatedly represented discourses that can be found from the assessment norms introduced in the 1950s: counting mistakes, public humiliation, teacher’s injustice or assessment that was meant to punish for improper behaviour.

Keywords: assessment discourse, Soviet school, Estonia, thematic case – narratives, recollections

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1. Introduction

Assessment in formal education could be approached as a tool that would support learning but also as an indicator of the evaluation and motivation culture in a certain society. School in societies plays a central role in socialization throughout childhood and adolescence and therefore establishes the key norms and values of the specific culture (Holodynski and Kronast 2009). While formal education reflects, moulds and communicates certain values (Berry 2011), the assessment one experiences influences his/her perception of the feedback on one’s achievements or behaviour. The predominant assessment paradigm in the Western world has shifted from assessment of subject content to assessment of a student’s learning (Stiggins 2005). The movement started in the late 1960s and early 1970s with the push for formative as opposed to summative evaluation (Bloom, Hastings, and Madaus 1971, Burns 2002).

The paper seeks to reveal the scope and nature of change that the new assessment system brought along to Estonian culture in 2010–2012 in comparison to the assessment ideology embedded into the Soviet education. For this purpose, 48 short thematic retrospective narratives of former students, currently middle-aged, were analysed and compared to the discourses presented in Soviet decrees on assessment. It is important to note that the substantial turn in assessment did not officially take place during the political transition in the 1990s, but later. Only in 2010–2012, when the new National Curriculum was launched and adapted, schools and teachers had to turn from summative to formative assessment. This change accords with the renewed aim of Estonian schools, which the national curriculum expresses: "...support equally the intellectual, physical, moral, social and emotional development and the individual needs and interests of each child" (Riiklik Õppekava 2011:1 [National Curriculum], emphasis by the authors). Therefore, the revised aim of the assessment system is to support the learning progress of each child instead of assessing the whole class. This change is crucial as it means that the teachers should first get to know a child's abilities, provide the study plan for the child and the assessment should bring forward their individual development, provide positive motivation, and should not punish making mistakes.

Summative assessment that was the predominant assessment system in the Soviet period and in the 1990s "...was intended to help us arrive at go/no-go decisions based on the success of a final-version instructional program. In contrast, formative assessment is a process in which assessment-elicited evidence is used by teachers to adjust their ongoing instructional activities, or by students to adjust the ways they are trying to learn something. In contrast to its summative sibling, formative assessment has a powerful improvement orientation, because it is intended to stimulate ameliorative adjustments in teachers' still-malleable instructional programs or in students' current learning-tactics" (Popham 2009:5).

The Estonian school culture is conservative concerning the assessment and credits. Teachers and parents frequently but subconsciously repeat some behavioural patterns that they have previously experienced. For example, the authors of this article can recall situations, in which parents could follow the development of their child only when they could see numerical credits ('5' is 'the best'; '4' is 'good', etc.). Parents might be not able to identify the competences required to get particular credit, and even do not ask critical questions about the different abilities a child needs for accomplishing a particular task. A second phenomenon of the 'conservative' perception of assessment is that 'the best' is usually 'flawless' and thus 'good' is the result of a few 'faults' etc. Another phenomenon is that the assessment system is designed to evaluate results of the group rather than the development of an individual child. Parents are more capable of interpreting hierarchical lists where they can see their child in comparison to others, than seeing the development of their child. Teachers feel that in counting faults and compiling hierarchies they are assessing students 'objectively'—and

‘fairly’. These attitudes and perceptions were developed throughout the Soviet period.

2. Soviet assessment discourse in official decrees and in academic texts

After the Second World War the Soviet assessment system – introduced in the Soviet Union in 1936 – was established also in Estonia. For example, in 1951 the Minister of Education of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic (ESSR) confirmed the assessment norms in the disciplines of Estonian language and mathematics (Kreekman 1953). These assessment standards described the knowledge students were supposed to achieve. The preamble statement of the document discloses: “Use of unitary assessment norms should support the teaching quality of mathematics and unify requirements for students” (Kreekman 1953:192), which infers that the central ideology is unification that was also a core value in Soviet collectivism.

The chapter concerned with the “Nature of mistakes”: “Mistakes in students’ work are of different character. Some reveal the lack of knowledge in a subject area and lack of knowing the principles. Other mistakes reveal the lack of being able to accomplish certain operations or not paying attention. The first category of mistakes is of greater importance than the other. Severe mistakes were: (1) mistakes in calculation resulting from not knowing the principles and multiplication table; (2) mistakes in problem-solving (missing the arithmetic rules, choosing the incorrect rules)” (Kreekman 1953:197).

The assessment system was based on classifying the frequency of mistakes, for which a ‘mark’ was prescribed. For example, the mark of ‘3’ was given to a task with 2–4 mistakes, or 2 grave mistakes (Kreekman 1953:199). Furthermore, in order to get the highest mark, the appearance of the written work had to be excellent. In order to prescribe the assessment, this document obliged teachers to insert into tests these assignments that matched the curriculum and the textbook (Kreekman 1953:193). Hence, the unification, mistakes-oriented marks and very detailed description of various marks for different types of control forms (exercises, oral answers etc.) were prescribed. The lack of discourse of any individual progress reveals that the assessment culture accords with the ideology of collectiveness and the state – set aims of the Soviet system.

Concurrently, and typical of the Soviet system (Harro 2001), there existed a parallel value system in academic pedagogy. In 1967 Aleksander Elango (Associate Professor of Pedagogy at the University of Tartu, who had started his academic career in the Estonian Republic in the 1930s) wrote and published “Problems of Methods in Checking Students’ Knowledge”. Elango described an assessment system that had been established in Soviet Russia in the 1920s at which time Russian science was in many disciplines advanced and progressive. By using the history approach, Elango describes the educational system that is based on pupils’ creative work and reflectivity, focuses on research in psychology and

pedagogy, and relies on peer-assessment and presentations. “It was the best way to learn ...” (Elango 1967:13). Elango also describes the changes occurring between 1940 and 1950 stating that “...many teachers turned back to the tsarist regime ways and exaggerated with oral questioning, which is the easiest and convenient way of control” (Elango 1967:15).

In summary, while the Soviet Estonian normative documents focused on measuring the fulfilment on precisely prescribed task by the pupils, Elango’s book clearly introduces the approach to teachers’ assessment literacy, by creating all the complexity of the configuration of factors that should be taken into account in assessing the development of children. In contemporary pedagogical scholarship Popham (2009) presents assessment as a complex pedagogical problem, and concludes that teachers actually lack assessment literacy. Teachers with limited assessment skills turn to the easiest ways of evaluating students’ progress. Kalju Saks (1974) published a comprehensive book about assessment, in which one chapter was titled “A credit is not a tool for punishment” (Saks 1974:127–134). Saks argues that “The public attention has been pointed to the fact that some teachers use credit “1” as a modern beating stick. As in previous times, some teachers grabbed at any possible moment for the stick and beat the children, so they now grab for the class diary and deliver “1s” and censure. It is only the expression of power that has no connection to measuring knowledge or raising children ...Survey conducted among the students in several schools reveals that some teachers use assessment as a punishment. In one school 65% of the 7th-8th grade students affirmed this...” (Saks 1974:128). Saks also notes that decreasing the credits by one for poor handwriting is not acceptable, and provides the feedback given to Karl Marx for his final essay in Latin “... what a horrible handwriting,” 1 (1974:128–129). Although Saks explains the complexity of the assessment system the dominant argument is that the ideology of assessment should be one of objectivity.

Six years after Saks’ sole authored book Aleksander Elango, Juta Nurmik and Kalju Saks (1980) published their perspective on assessment, which by combining accepted argument that assessment is based on errors (Elango et al. 1980:68) with self-reflection, and the need to set individual goals (Elango, et al. 1980:61–65), mixes Soviet ideology. The authors write:

“I usually carried out the assessment by using different etalons. One of these etalons is the person who is assessed, her/his achievements. ... But sometimes the etalon consists of the achievements of other pupils. A comparison to other students might stimulate to a certain extent, but a better feeling is gained, if the assessment takes into consideration the previous results of the same pupil” (Elango, et al.1980:57).

In summary, a close reading of these books reveals that the discussion about the complexity of assessment methods and the various functions of assessment were very much present in Soviet Estonian academic discourse. Still, as Saks (1974) and Elango, et al. (1980) refer, teachers were using assessment as a means of punishment and discipline, public criticism and causing shame. Indeed, analysis

of survey data in the context of assessment based on errors revealed that teachers hardly ever encouraged or praised the students (e.g. Saks 1974:140).

Retrospectively, this gap between daily practices and current access to quite modern pedagogical thinking on assessment, reveals that normative documents from the 1950s Stalinist era (Kreekman 1953) and the overall ideological context of the time, still influenced the assessment culture two and three decades later. Whereas Estonian teachers in the 21st century are supposed to rely their value education on self-reflection (Sutrop, et al. 2013), the Soviet authoritarian regime enforced a set of compulsory rules of conduct that were introduced in 1944 and these were still practised in schools in the 1970s and 1980s.

Public shaming was one of the ideological means introduced during the Stalinist era (e.g. news about people who were deemed to be Soviet social misfits). The Stalinist era documents that regulated the school culture reflect the same ideology. For example, “rules for students” were introduced in 1945, which required that, “Each student has an obligation (art. 8): to sit still, not lean on elbows, avoid a slouch position, listen attentively to the teacher’s explanations and reports of the classmates, not to talk and deal with irrelevant matters (Kreekman 1953:60). The relevant aspect of this document is that breaking the rules was punishable. In 1952 policy document “The means of strengthening discipline at school” the Soviet Estonian Minister of Education confirmed the range of praise and punishment (Kreekman 1953:73). The key feature of the punishments was causing of shame through public criticism and humiliation. In the 1952 policy document “The means for strengthening discipline at school”, the Soviet Estonian Minister of Education confirmed the range of praise and punishment for students (Kreekman 1953:73). The key feature of the punishment was causing shame through public criticism and humiliation.

According to Holodynski and Kronast (2009) shame and pride are strong elements in Western educational systems. In the context of this study, it is important to distinguish the feeling of shame from public humiliation. For example, low grades were announced publicly at parents’ meetings (Elango et al. 1984:60–62).

3. Methodology: short thematic case –narratives

Researchers have given various meanings to the term narrative. In the context of narrative inquiry, the term refers to a discourse in which events and happenings are configured into a temporal unity by means of a plot (Polkinhorne 1995). The current study employs discourse analysis to shed light on the way people perceive assessment as a value communication. Retrospective narratives have limitations: a life story is more sensitive than social reality and people tend to recall either negative or positive emotions concerning their assessment experience. Certain events are remembered in particular ways but in analysing thematic life stories, one must remember that the recollected events are integrated into a general body

of experiences and knowledge (Kõresaar 2004:52–54). At the same time short thematic narratives entail descriptions of past assessment situations that in other ways could not be approached.

In order to understand how students perceived the assessment culture in Soviet schools, the study in 2013–2014 asked 55 practising teachers and 6 former teachers (henceforth narrators) at three types of schools (large urban, small urban, small rural) now aged 40–61 years, to provide retrospective narratives on specific episodes of their life: experience on assessment when they were students. 61 narratives were collected. To solicit suitable participants for the study the researchers applied for age and e-mail addresses of the teachers; then teachers were asked if they knew some of the former teachers who belong to the same age group. The subjects were then contacted via e-mail specifying the purpose of the study, indicating matters related to fulfilling confidentiality requirements and then asked to write up to one page about what they recall about being assessed at school. 61 former students, present practising teachers and former teachers (age 40–61), were asked to participate in the study. The sampling logic was based on theoretical saturation, whereby recruitment continued until no new discourses emerged. After each ten received narratives dominating discourses were identified until repetition occurred – public humiliation, confusion as to the assessment principles, assessment as teachers’ power game, unfairness and ideologically right and wrong questions and answers. Certain archetypes emerged when 40 narratives were collected.

Only after these discourses were defined and analysed, was the analysis of assessment regulations in 1950s until the end of Soviet era at the beginning of the 1990 carried out. In addition to the analysis of normative documents, the researchers analysed pedagogical literature on assessment that was accessible for the teachers during the Soviet period.

Most cases analysed in this study claim to be indicative of the traumatic memories of the Soviet school assessment system. This is partly due to what people remember and what they have forgot. Still, we claim that the remembrance of the traumatic assessment in a school system has a cultural influence and therefore should be perceived. As Misztal argues:

“The recovery of the past rests upon both memory’s embeddedness, which encourages us to pay attention to the influence of the present on the recovery from the past, and its embodiedness, which alerts us to the way in which our feelings and bodily sensations, generated in the previous times, help to interpret that past” (Misztal 2003:77).

The short case-narratives would not be able to draw ‘comprehensive maps’ of Soviet Estonia’s assessment culture. Rather, as memory influences our understanding of cultural codes and perceptions (Misztal 2003:78), it is important to take the influence of social remembrance into consideration concerning the influence of school assessment culture in contemporary Estonian society.

4. Public humiliation, confusion, distress and aim to satisfy others

A dominant aspect of Soviet Estonia's school assessment is evident from the analysis of policy documents and pedagogical literature: public 'humiliation' for lack of knowledge. The 'naming and shaming' also served as a means for disciplining the rest of the audience.

Confusion about what is assessed was a recurring discourse. The latter was combined with the expressed aim to 'satisfy' others (classmates, teachers, parents). The former students recall they did not often evaluate learning as acquisition of knowledge, but a means to meet the needs and expectations of their teachers and parents.

The third recurring discourse was the distress and fear of being publicly assessed and humiliated. The first school day is a day that should be festive and happy. But several respondents remembered the first school day as being distressful.

Narrator 1 (woman, 46, small rural school):

"So I started to recall what the assessment was about. Fortunately, I have put this painful childhood behind me and the memories are quite dim. I remember that learning for me was quite a bewildering activity. I did not understand how to manage my tasks in a way that would satisfy teachers. I tried to guess the formula. I came to understand that people are different and I had to meet the different ways of each of them. It was especially important in the primary classes, because I was whipped for poor results [by her parents not by the school – authors' note]. I have a vivid memory of my first day in the classroom. Our teacher asked each child to pick up a card with the name of a favourite profession. There was no picture, just a word. I could not read very well. I quickly picked out one card (I did not want anybody to know I couldn't read) with the longest word on it. I assumed it had to be something very interesting and the long word would make them think I was a good reader. After we had taken our seats the teacher wanted us to read the word and explain why we want to have this occupation in the future. I was absolutely bewildered. I had picked up a chimney sweep and the whole class got a good laugh. I somehow managed the situation, but since then I was always cautious and defiant."

Remarkable in this extract is that the narrator was 'whipped' for poor results, which refers to the fact that parents did not ask for the reasons for poor credits. Parents assumed that children earned punishment because they could do better. This attitude in the cultural tradition is not exceptional, as it appears in Estonian literature (e.g. in fictional novel "Kevade" ["Spring"], by O. Luts). The teacher did not create a secure environment for the students and appointed a task that could not be fulfilled. Yet another remarkable aspect addresses self-esteem, when the narrator wanted to show her 'better self'. As a result of the communication of these values the narrator was henceforth cautious and defiant.

The obscurity of the object and goal of assessment is also reflected in the following extract that describes the circumstance, in which "in addition to the assessment of knowledge, she [the teacher] also assessed the appearance of the

copybook”. Aesthetics can undoubtedly be an educational priority and, the narrative reflects the prioritizing of aesthetics to acquiring knowledge. The narrator perceived the assessment of aesthetics as a deviation.

Narrator 14 (woman, 49; large urban school):

“My biology teacher had a very peculiar way of assessing the assignments, because in addition to the assessment of knowledge she also assessed the appearance of the copybook. When you had filled the test using only blue pen and the test was proper and neat, you could get ‘5“minus’. In order to get ‘5’ you had to use different colours (the more the better). For that reason, our tests looked like ‘Easter eggs’ [the Estonian tradition is to use dyes to give the shells of hard-boiled eggs a colourful appearance – authors’ note] and in the end the content came second to appearance. Besides she was the teacher with whom one could negotiate about improving the test marks.”

The last remark reflects one of the prominent problems, which the narrators reveal: subjectivity and bargaining over test marks. The next thematic narrative illustrates again the confusion over what the subject of assessment was. The narrator also points out that this shocking experience gave her a lesson she never forgot. Hence, one can guess why the ideology of public degrading was sometimes regarded (and probably is regarded also currently) such an efficient training method.

No. 26 (woman 44, small urban school):

“I can remember one thing. It’s the brightest. I was in 3rd form in a small urban school of 700 students. It was in 1977. I remember being a proper and neat schoolgirl and I graduated my primary classes with honours. But I also was a restless kid, who couldn’t do my homework in springtime. The answers were correct – five boring math assignments in row. But I had been careless as to the formal requirements of the task. I hadn’t kept the top and bottom margin of four lines, had a few cross-outs and ink-stains. I will always remember the feeling, when the test was returned, and my mark and the test were shown to everybody. I was shocked – how could it be – I knew all the answers. True, it didn’t look nice. I was ashamed. I had to rewrite the test after classes. I remember that the sun was shining and the birds were singing outside. Anyway it did not happen again.”

In summary we can conclude that people recall confusion and misapprehension as to the goals of learning and to understanding what makes a good student.

5. Misuse of the power by the teacher in the classroom

Several narrators revealed the teachers’ misuse of power in class while they were assessed. The discourse of reducing marks for mistakes is repeatedly presented. In the opening of the first narrative it is stated that “the teacher was highly appreciated for her competence in the discipline, while also known for her sarcastic commentaries.” This narrative raises a question, whether being strict and sarcastic has been appreciated as a certain standard in Estonian school-culture.

Narrator 12 (woman, 49, small rural school):

“I remember one case in an Estonian lesson (teacher was appreciated and strict and known for her sarcastic remarks). I had to read a grammar exercise and fill the gaps. Unfortunately, I made a mistake already in the first gap – which was followed by a critique I can’t remember. But I do know that it made me make mistakes again and again in the second and third gap. Then the teacher commented:” Of course you do not know anything, as your mind is busy with the size of your feet and there is nothing left for the brain” (I had grown 11 cm that summer and I really did have big feet, which were a cause for my distress). The teacher’s remark annoyed the whole class, as everybody knew, how much it hurt. (It was even recalled in a class reunion years later.) After the remark I was unable to give any response. Through tears I tried to do my best but nothing good came out of it. It seemed like the whole class was holding its breath at each gap but I kept making mistakes (if I had to write ‘horse’, I would probably have missed the letter ‘h’). Of course I ended up with getting a ‘2’ and I had to come to school at 7 a.m. the next morning to fix the mark. Fortunately, by that time I had pulled myself together and easily filled all gaps 100%. When looking back, I know that the teacher should have apologized but then I was given a chance to do the task again and get another mark next to this ‘2’.”

The legitimacy of public humiliation (“of course you do not know anything, as your mind is busy with the size of your feet and there is nothing left for the brain”) that is not followed by any protest makes it clear that the degree to which the teacher’s power in the classroom is indisputable. The narrator describes the collective (class) annoyance and the great, long lasting personal hurt. While the narrator remembers the opportunity to retake the exercise ‘to fix the mark’ there is no reference to the teacher having discussed the situation nor finding the reasons for the pupil making these mistakes.

6. Assessment according to the status of parents

The practice of assessing students according to their families’ societal position and subsequent prejudices is in sharp contrast to the official ideology of a classless society in Soviet socialist republics.

Narrator 18 (woman, 50, small rural school):

“My first three school years passed in a small country-school with 15 teachers and two composite classes, which consisted of year-grades and I remember that we had 7 students in my class. Our teacher had a happy demeanour and was called ‘Pie’. Her assessment criteria were based on parents’ professions. For instance, the daughter of a local doctor could not be ignorant. The local shop-assistant’s child was the child of a “person who could do numbers” and thus couldn’t be stupid. My and our neighbour’s mothers were respectively a fishery worker and a dairy-farm worker and we could be stupid. The first thing I remember about assessment took place in front of the classroom (I will probably always remember it). I recited a poem about Lenin (it was in 1968) and did it with devotion and commitment. The teacher announced: “I can’t give you a ‘5’.

Even '4' is too much. A fishery-worker's daughter deserves a '3'. I will remember it forever, because the whole class witnessed it. A few years later I recited a poem by Betti Alver at a district poetry competition and did very well. 'Pie' was in the audience and she approached me later and said: 'I would never have believed that a fishery-worker's child could recite it this way'."

Another aspect of the misuse of assessment was revenge to a student's father. While the narrator explicitly interprets what really happened, he recalls both a feeling of insecurity as he has been making a mistake and that he did not dare to speak about the confusing situation to his father.

Narrator 9 (man, 40, large urban school):

"At first I remember one case in my primary school (deep Soviet time [authors' note – in early 1980s]). Lesson on a Saturday, our teacher was ill, substitute teacher just filled in (I wonder if she had any education [formal teacher training]) besides she had connections with the school administration. I put up my hand and gave the correct answer, because I had prepared. She hissed, "Do you think your father had done it the same way?" I was stunned. I was in year-4 and this woman was much younger than my father. But as my father was the leader of local community I somehow sensed that she had a grudge against him. Now she was taking her revenge by humiliating a young boy in front of the class. For the correct answer I received either '3' or '4'. I didn't tell my father, as I hugely respect him. I was afraid of being somehow mistaken. The teacher was always right!"

Most notable in these narratives is that although these situations are remembered as being very traumatic, the narratives concurrently reflect the perception of 'normality' or legitimacy. Only one of the 61 narratives portrayed a clear contra-position to the attitude that assessment could be used as a tool for discipline.

Narrator 10 (woman, 47, large urban school):

"It was probably in the 7th grade in 1979 and I was talking with my deskmate during the test and the teacher got angry and told us to put '1' as a mark into our registers. We did it. I remember I painted it [the number] properly and large, because this situation seemed totally absurd. I was doing very well in this subject and had practically all 5s, so this was too much. The teacher got still more angry when she saw the big '1' and because we did not complain. So we showed her what we thought of it."

7. Teachers' injustice

The sub-discourse of the misuse of power by teachers was injustice. Implicitly this sub-discourse could be followed in previous examples (e.g. assessment according to the position of parents; test not announced beforehand on the first school day etc.), but in the following narrative the discourse of injustice is the main topic, probably the trigger for recalling the memory. From the point of view of representativeness, this particular case-narrative presents a large quality of

memories, in which the former students have no doubts that there was a clear injustice they experienced. The narrative clearly opens an archetypical discourse, in which an individual who has their own well-formed understanding of their competences (drawing and art) receives negative feedback, which bruises his self-esteem. This narrative highlights the implicit discourse of his merits and talent, which was grounded on excellent credits and the result of a drawing competition.

Narrator 27 (man, 57, small urban school):

“I remembered a story about my drawing mark in the third year. I am fifty-seven now. I attended an art school and my marks in drawing had always been 5s (also in other subjects) and my work had been in an exhibition in Finland and won the second and third prize. I had handed in my portfolio on time but the teacher denied [receiving] it and I got my first ‘2’. That influenced my term mark. It was so unfair that I had a psychological trauma. Later she found the portfolio but did not change the mark. So I had my first ‘4’ on the report. Later I had several ‘4’s’ but it did not hurt the way it did then.”

This form of assessment reveals that these results are neither valid nor ensure trust in the teacher. This teacher’s explicit value communication hurt the student’s feeling of self-worth and the ongoing absence of assessment communication confuses the student’s implicit value system.

8. Wrong questions and ideological power over students in the classroom

Finally, the narratives included discourses of the ideological power that was more or less discernible at school. In an authoritarian system what one should learn is usually prescribed. The “wrong questions and wrong answers” discourse has been described in various memories about Soviet school, e.g. Aili Aarelaid recalls her personal experience while introducing her academic research on cultural trauma: “In a high-school history lesson in the 1960s, I got a fail mark because I naively confused the boundaries of public and private spheres of the Soviet society” (Aarelaid-Tart 2009:197).

Several narrators of the present study also pointed out that school assessment was ideologically bound and in addition did not support creative thinking. On the one hand there was the ideological approach – you had to learn what you were told to learn and not ask any questions. On the other hand, the political views of the teachers were sometimes more important than their qualification. The next example represents the discourse of the ‘wrong questions’, and the ideological power that was embedded in the school system as well as the discourse of public humiliation.

Narrator 19 (woman, 50, small rural school):

“I attended my community school, with 180 students, and my favourite subject was physics. For some reasons I had a question concerning salty water. And at the beginning of the lesson I asked the teacher why it was easier to swim in the salty water, why does it carry better. For the rest of the lesson I had to stand in

front of the classroom, because my 'question was provocative and not suitable for a pioneer'. The party organisation leader of the collective farm spoke to my mother wondering where this question came from."

The last sentence again corresponds to the findings from document analysis and pedagogical literature concerning the repressive practices towards parents. When we recall the narrative, in which the narrator described being whipped by her parents when she did not get good 'marks' and all the other narratives where no one of the narrators described being protected by their parents, it becomes clear that, in Soviet ideology, the parents were treated as children, from a paternalistic viewpoint.

9. Conclusions

By the year 2012 it has been normatively established that in Estonia assessment had to promote individual growth and enhance learning. These changes stress the need to explore the assessment experience of the previous generations in order to understand, how vast the cultural shift, brought about by the new assessment has been for teachers, students and the wider community. Analysis of the main discourses of the narratives revealed personal traumas caused by public humiliation, comparison with others, focusing on mistakes and using marking for punishment helped to discover that these discourses were similar to those established by the normative documents in the 1950s.

The pedagogical literature of the 1960s presented the new, contemporary western views on assessment. However, these ideas were mixed with Soviet approach to assessment and were referred to as a possibility not a rule, noted Elango and his colleagues (1980). We can conclude that the assessment practices in the Soviet school could be multi-layered and contradictory, containing both the Stalinist and the child-centred approach to assessment culture. Anyway, none of the narratives contained any hint to the formative type of assessment practices and positive support to individual achievement. We cannot confirm that it was non-existent, but it was not remembered.

The second aspect of the conclusions concerns the traumatic character of the assessment memories. Only 2 of the 61 thematic case-narratives were wholly positive. The researchers were astonished to discover already from the first ten narratives that memories about assessment aroused memories of public shame, non-transparency and unfair assessment. Still, the former students often report they were successful students, despite their traumatic memories. Therefore, we can assume that pride was obviously part of Soviet Estonia's assessment system.

The new assessment paradigm sets stage for enchanting personal development and acceptance of privacy. But as this cultural change actually takes place about 20 years later than the change in the formation of society, it illustrates how slow the cultural changes can be compared to the political ones.

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