

## SCHOOL EVALUATION – SOME CURRENT ISSUES

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### **Abstract**

In the context of the changes registered at the level of education in general and practical pedagogy, in particular, a series of new emphases in school assessment is also registered. Some of the questions that this material tries to answer are: What new elements are registered in the practical space of school evaluation? How do teachers today use formative assessment in the classroom and encourage the use of metacognitive skills that support learning? What is test anxiety and how does formative assessment help reduce it?

**Keywords:** *school assessment, formative assessment, metacognitive skills, test anxiety.*

### **Competency assessment or 'the end of competence'?**

The characteristics of the current school impose a series of new emphases at the level of the entire educational process, with all its components: from the goals pursued (see the key competences and the profile of the graduate by school levels), to the contents that support them (adapted to the needs and interests of the students), to the materials and means given to new technologies, to didactic teaching strategies focused on supporting visible, authentic, effective learning, to ways of diversifying feedback etc.

An observation about a particular shift encountered at the social level is presented in Tom Nichols's work, *The End of Competence. The Discrediting of Experts and the Campaign Against Traditional Knowledge* (2019), in which the author presents the risks that arise from "exposure to information in the age of technology that it fuels a narcissistic and misguided intellectual egalitarianism that negatively affects any kind of debate." But, along with the Internet (which encourages ordinary people to think they are experts), the author adds another factor fueling this process of "discrediting experts" - educational institutions; specifically colleges and universities. They compete and focus on providing the best possible conditions to students, meeting their demands, always giving them the right and above all giving them very

high marks; students thus have the belief that they are truly competent and end up putting "a sign of equality between their training and that of teachers" (idem) or experts in various fields. A different assessment forms a false image of the real competences of the students who end up not having the ability to recognize the real experts and the competences that define them. The author of the aforementioned work warns that this phenomenon presents "a real danger for the stability and survival of modern democracy in the information age." (idem)

In this context, it is imperative to re-anchor and revise the benchmarks of school assessment so that it truly pursues its goals; also, it is necessary to adapt assessment practices to the idea of student-centered education, so also assessment centered on students' needs.

The focus on the grade or "grade culture" needs to be transformed into a culture of assessment characterized by coherence and consistency, an assessment that supports authentic learning. Therefore, there is a need to change the vision of this action - students will be supported to understand that it is not only the grade or the passing of an exam that matters, but that much more valuable is the entire learning process which is extremely complex, subtle and valuable and supports its entire formation and transformation. Also, such an assessment will support continuous learning over time and help build a growth mindset that will yield positive results both personally and professionally.

### ***Assessment and test anxiety***

In the case of high-stakes tests, such as national high school entrance exams and baccalaureate exams, students feel increased pressure and stress. This stress, maintained most of the time by parents and teachers, leaves its mark on the learning process, assimilation of knowledge during the exam preparation stage and has an impact on the student's results/performance during the exam. This is test or exam anxiety which is defined as "students' tendency to perceive evaluative situations in which their performance will be judged (such as a high-stakes exam) as highly threatening." (Chappell, 2005). Studies show that, in general, girls are more affected by exam assessment than boys (Harris &all, 2019). A level of anxiety before an assessment is a normal and common fact, which can have a mobilizing effect, but when it exceeds certain thresholds, it "interferes with the ability to access knowledge from memory and has an impact on students' performance" (idem).

Test anxiety manifests itself quite pronounced in the case of some students and has a number of causes such as the fear of failure, the history of test results, but also biological causes such as those that lead to the excessive release of the stress hormone (adrenaline); in this case, the anxiety felt by those tested/examined leads to difficulties or even the impossibility of

concentrating on the test. Also, students' expectations, negative thinking about the test can also trigger anxiety.

Another important factor is the lack of rigorous preparation of students, which greatly increases test anxiety which can be determined mainly by poor study skills, thus lack of competence to learn to learn, work avoidance and procrastination. In this context, we mention studies (Theobald, M. Et all 2022) which demonstrate that some students have high exam anxiety "not because of constraints on their working memory capacity at the time of the exam, but because they had a poor preparation for the exam before, perhaps as a result of exam anxiety. So, we should not only focus on what happens during testing, but especially on what happens during the study that prepares the test. The authors of the aforementioned study believe that these students "actually become more aware of their gaps, which causes them even greater anxiety." Thus, "test-anxious students need to acquire strategies to help them effectively acquire new knowledge and avoid repeated failure...interventions aimed at reducing test anxiety shortly before or during assessment situations may do not have the expected impact, because they cannot compensate for knowledge deficits." (idem)

But any target that the school, the teachers, the students propose involves stress. So, "we have to try to minimize this component, but eliminating all sources of stress from school is impossible." (Iliescu, 2023)

Reducing test anxiety can be achieved through multiple techniques and strategies: from teachers removing unnecessary stress in classrooms, to developing social and emotional resilience skills, the ability to learn to learn, to taking responsibility for constant and consistent training of students in all stages of training. The competence to learn to learn is built over time and can also be assessed by reference to the milestones proposed in the Graduate Training Profile (2023); more precisely, it is evaluated: "the formulation of realistic learning objectives and plans based on personal, school and professional aspirations; identifying and applying effective learning strategies and techniques; taking responsibility for one's own learning, monitoring personal progress and self-regulation in individual or group learning activities; analyzing the possibilities of personal development." (*Training profile for the 10th grade. 2023*)

### ***Formative assessment/ Formative assessment - Assessment as learning***

A decisive role in learning and supporting students in forming their skills is played by formative assessment and formative assessment with a role in supporting learning. "The purpose of the formative evaluation is to inform the student and the teaching staff about the degree of

achievement of the objectives. It ensures the spotting, updating, identification and analysis of the cognitive difficulties of each student, and encourages the teacher to develop remedial devices" (Raynal and Rieunier, 2014) It is done with small steps, the teacher calling on the observation of the students, the identification of the difficulties that they encounter them in learning, identifying the causes that determined the difficulties, identifying learning rhythms, etc. according to which improvement decisions are made.

Compared to summative assessment, formative assessment is more versatile and characterized by flexibility, offering the teacher the opportunity to collect data on the students' performance level; based on this data, the teacher will propose individualized learning remedial plans, differentiated activities and will monitor the students' learning progress.

If the formative assessment involves the involvement of the teacher in the process of regulating and supporting the students' learning (by regulating their own teaching strategies, by making the contents accessible, by returning to them according to the needs of the students, through constructive feedback provided to the students, etc.), the formative assessment, as a form of the formative assessment, focuses on the involvement and activity of students in managing their own learning, by identifying their own errors, by understanding the plans to recover the gaps, by being aware of the targets to be achieved, by mobilizing and planning the involvement in their own learning, etc. In order to support the students' learning, a set of strategies is proposed, known in the specialized literature as forming the formative assessment cycle (Wiliam, 2011) which provides consistent benchmarks for teachers in carrying out their current occupations.

### ***Strategies Features***

- „Clarification and understanding of learning intentions and criteria for success; students are helped to understand what their classroom learning experience will consist of and how their success will be measured. More specifically, students understand what they need to know, - students are more likely to take ownership of their learning when they truly understand the learning targets and success criteria.
- Discussions, questions, and assignments that provide evidence of student learning, the development of effective classroom instructional strategies that allow for measurement of success.
- Providing feedback that supports student progress Teachers must work with students to provide them with the information; they need to better understand problems and solutions.

- Activating students as learning resources for each other. Engaging students with each other in discussions and working groups can help improve student learning; they encourage students to reflect critically on their own work. This reflection fosters greater depth of learning cultivating an environment where critical thinking and peer learning flourish.
- Activating students as owners of their own learning. Teaching students to monitor and regulate their learning increases the rate of learning, it promotes a growth mindset, where potential is not fixed but developed through effort and learning from mistakes.“ (idem)

### ***How do we evaluate the competences?***

A competence is primarily identified by autonomy; the need for support from the teacher shows that, in fact, the competence is not yet formed; there is still a need for understanding, the effort to practice, to mobilize and integrate declarative,

A competence is primarily identified by autonomy; the need for support from the teacher shows that, in fact, the competence is not yet formed; there is still a need for understanding, the effort to practice, to mobilize and integrate declarative, procedural, strategic or meta-knowledge etc.; there is also a need to practice transfer in new contexts, autonomy and responsibility. But first it is fundamental to know what the learning outcomes are. That is why it is so important to clearly establish the evaluation standards, which are then made known to the students; these represent fundamental benchmarks for their knowledge of the image of success. According to John Hattie's latest book, *Visible Learning – The Sequel* (2023), assessment (performed by the teacher) and especially self-assessment (performed by the student) are all the more effective as they relate to the clear picture of success (a detailed one on what students need to know and do). A quality self-assessment presupposes "self-management of errors, mastering the processes of anticipation and action planning" in the following stages.

Clearly establishing the learning outcomes is also very useful for the teacher in designing the activity. As is known, backward planning is one of the strategies that capitalize on the evaluation elements to build the didactic approach. More precisely, in building the learning unit, one starts from the expected results (established in detail), and this approach supports the selection of the most suitable resources and learning activities that will support their achievement. (Ești & Posteuca, 2014)

The way assessment is thought about greatly influences the learning process; the teacher actually gives the student a picture of learning, indicating what the expected results are, what he needs to know, know how to do, what he needs to focus on, etc.

Self-assessment helps the student a lot to learn about their own climbing. "Self-evaluation is, from a life-preparation perspective, an indispensable approach to participation, construction and empowerment, but it is an approach that must be explicitly taught and learned, at the double level of its self-correction and self- adjustment. The procedure of "mutual evaluation" (two students evaluate each other) can facilitate this learning, as well as that of "co-evaluation".» (Minter, 2011 apud. Manolescu, 2022 )

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The way in which assessment is thought about greatly influences the learning process; the teacher actually gives the student a picture of learning, indicating what the expected results are, what he needs to know, know how to do, what he needs to focus on, etc. Therefore, assessment also influences the learning process in this way.

*In **conclusion***, an authentic assessment involves a good knowledge of the details of the the goals of the assessment, what is sought through the assessment. ("who wants to evaluate everything, evaluates nothing"); clear delineation of the learning outcomes to be assessed is an important aspect in this approach. The evaluator must take into account quantitative as well as qualitative criteria, orient himself on the basis of clear evaluation standards (the evaluation standards "represent the details of the learning standards and specify the level of performance for the expected learning results, stipulated in school programs." (Manolescu, 2022)

Students are involved in the assessment process, becoming aware and understanding the idea of competence (what it means to be competent), becoming co-responsible for their own assessment and learning. I also understand the idea that assessment should not only be seen as examination, but also as an integral process of supporting learning. (Jeder, 2020, Jeder, 2020)

The transition is now being made from evaluative activity to evaluation in action, in progress, and from the culture of evaluation seen as a control and examination activity, to a culture of evaluation understood as part and support of learning.

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