

THE EVALUATION AS A MEANS OF REINFORCING LEARNING - A THEORETICAL APPROACH

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Abstract: *The process of evaluation, as a part of the personal development path towards becoming all we can be, can be considered as a moment to reflect on the quality of the accumulations, as a look at the achievements and the failures, as a starting point in developing an optimal strategy that leads the student to success. In order to have such a perspective on the assessment, both the teacher and the student must take into account several factors. This article proposes a theoretical account of the factors involved in optimizing the relationship between learning and assessment, a decisive relationship in achieving success in school and an efficient learning.*

Keywords: *evaluation, teacher, student, efficient learning.*

Introduction

What can we do to remove the barriers which sooner or later will lead us to failure? Nothing more than following a systematic sequence in our efforts. Which are the steps to follow? We can not give a recipe for steps that we should follow, but we can define some directions of development, namely: the ability to choose challenging objectives; a total confidence in achieving the objective that we have set; gaining the ability to maintain balance; the need to make a continuous effort; ability to react positively to failure.

The ability to react positively to failure is perhaps the most precious of the qualities that would be good to be gained. Of course many will continue to seek "secrets" perhaps "shortcuts" on the road towards reaching the goal. However, you can not achieve success without paying a price for it. Watching those trying to "cheat" and ultimately abandon, you can not help to think about, as a teacher, on what wonderful results could have been obtained

if they had only tried to invest in their activities courage, confidence and why not, the stubbornness of a child who wants to learn to ride bicycles.

Maybe it's time for a change in the way we think and participate in the realization of children's personal development path from the moment they enter the school gates. In this complex process of education, the evaluation should not turn into the judge of anyone, but instead should become a true system for giving the individual support points along the way.

Assessment and self-assessment in a bi-univocal relation

The evaluation concept transforms at both macro-structural and micro-structural level. In the educational process we are not only interested in conducting the evaluation but also in the training and the development of student self-assessment capacity. So the educational goals include a new set of skills, unlike traditional attributes centered on transmitting information and subsequently the assessment on the level of assimilation of the submitted information.

Analyzing the concept of evaluation, Genevieve Meyer (2000) states that no assessment is in itself absolutely pure or perfect. The perfection of any assessment derives from its suitability to the objectives for which it is made. Therefore, the first question that arises is not what we evaluate or how to evaluate, but why we evaluate. And the answer to it depends on the answers to the questions: what?, when?, how?, through which means? on what basis?, etc. "(as cited Crenguța Oprea, 2003)

The assessment introduces a rule value, evolving under the influence of pedagogy by objectives, in two directions:

1. a summative one that focuses on the results of the group of students, reflecting their performances;
2. and another formative, analyzing the complex situations, the study approaches and the different learning processes;

The evaluation conditions the class dynamic in such a manner so that we can say that there is no effective learning without assessment. It works within the classroom using specific tools for analyzing the progress of the student both as a group and individually. Extending to the components of the educational system, it aims to describe and analyze them in order to reveal their effectiveness, for assessing the degree of achievement of objectives and to detect various expected and unexpected effects. The evaluation process is not limited to the training activity but is part of a general concern regarding also the functioning of institutions dealing with the efficient educational programs and school projects.

The educational phenomenon gains increasingly richer evaluative means, widening its scope. In this respect, analyzing the evaluative practices,

Ion T. Radu notes that "the assessment of school performance is increasingly understood not as an action to control – sanction, limited to verification and scoring, but as a process that intertwines with the other processes of teaching, exercising the essential formative function, reflected in informing and helping in decisions making process in order to improve the overall activity." (I.T. Radu, 2000, p. 42)

From one continent to another, the assessment has the same objective: improving education, but the context and the targeted audience determines the development of different concepts.

"A meaningful, objective and fair assessment can not ignore the learning opportunities offered by training" (as cited Crenguța Oprea, 2003). It considers whether the contents have been defined in accordance with the objectives, if an analysis of students needs was performed and to what extent the training processes stimulated and encouraged learning. In this regard it should be noted that "the way the evaluation is conducted is influencing the training process and the learning activity" and the results of the activity can be evaluated relating them to the content or the standard curriculum, to the statistical norm of the group (average grade) or to the local, national or international standards, to the individual norm (to self) or to the objective (criteria evaluation).

The students need to assess themselves, to compare the level reached in relation to the benchmarks and operational objectives (evaluation) and to impose their own training program. Students need to know themselves, which has multiple implications on a motivational and attitudinal level.

Through the information it provides, the self-evaluation plays an essential role in forming the image of the pupil from the perspective of a valor judgment transmitted by the teacher-evaluator. For the assessment to be felt by the student as having a formative effect, with reference to its different capacities depending on the progress made and the difficulties he has to overcome, it is very helpful to train and exercise the capacity of self-assessment of students.

As the professor who is leading the process, the students who are in a learning situation need some reference points to define their role, task, nature and direction of their activity, helping them to realize their progress and gains, to develop their own work discipline, to relate at a personal level to the learning requirements. All this in order to allow students to gradually take their development in their own hands.

The objective, fair, responsible, competent evaluation should develop (form) students' self-assessment abilities (self-control and self-evaluation). This goal is achieved when students are aware of the quantity and quality of their knowledge, of the level and performances achieved, of the intellectual and

professional capabilities, proven in the evaluation. The assessment must be accompanied by the feedback phenomenon, which, where appropriate, provides the necessary corrections.

Before granting the marks it is necessary to state what is mediocre and what is unsatisfactory in their oral, written or practical replies. It is not recommended to bargain with the student on the mark he will be given. It may, however, require the consultation of the school group (sometimes even the student) regarding the mark that should be given. This can be an "exercise" of self-control, self-assessment and self-grading. Of course, the teacher is invested to grant the mark, to manifest the leading and responsible role in the evaluation. Only so the students can realize the result of their training. Objectivity, fairness and understanding the validity of the mark develops the ability of self-assessment, of self-regulating.

Self-evaluation can go from verbal self-assessment to self-grading, more or less supervised by the teacher.

Praise, motivation, encouragement - factors of academic progress

Pursuing the assessment of knowledge, capacities, attitudes (practical, social, scientific) and interests, the alternative evaluation methods are aimed at systematic observation of student behavior through: protocol / observation guide / control inventories, evaluation sheets, scale classification, pedagogical characterization sheet (at the end of the cycle). The need for these alternative methods of evaluation is justified in terms of educational objectives which can not be measured by traditional methods (written, oral, practical) because it is necessary to evaluate not only the assimilation of information taught, but also the attitude and the behavior of students.

The knowledge, abilities, skills, developed in students are observable through the behavior manifested by them. Student behavior is always motivated by an age-specific need. In addition to attention to the verbal and nonverbal message, it is needed to allow the necessary time for listening to the students. This enables a better understanding of their needs and accordingly develops experiences that allows for achieving and capitalizing the performances.

The response messages given to pupils as a result of the desired behavior can take the form of praise, approvals or disapprovals, a touch on the shoulder, a handshake, a smile. It is very important when assessing the student's efforts to avoid judgments because they express more the values and ideas of the teacher rather than the student. An effort is required to remove messages like "good", "great", "excellent", replacing them with sentences that express an encouraging message such as: "knowing you, I am sure you will

succeed," "your idea was very good", "you really worked hard", "look how you progressed."(Botis, A., 2004, p.58)

Encouragement implies a valuation and unconditional acceptance of students; it requires emphasizing the positive aspects of their behavior, repeated expression of confidence so that they can reach, in turn, to trust themselves. Encouragement focuses on the child's ability to be responsible for his achievements and contributions, teaching them to assess their own progress, take personal decisions, to appreciate their efforts and others, to enjoy their success and others.

The praise given to each student must be one of constructive nature, such becoming an valuable encouragement. In the effective use of praise is important to highlight precisely those elements that are certainly successful, to recall the progress made. In its use attention should be given to the frequency, because it can also become daunting, distorting the image about themselves. It is recommended to be used in combination with encouragement, developing students' self-evaluative abilities.

Evaluation as a means of strengthening learning

Conducting a formative assessment that supports learning, that aims to provide each individual with information about the learning progress and the opportunity to monitor their own progress in learning and turn the evaluated in the evaluator of its own actions, becomes in this context a formative character, allowing the adjustment of training using the student. The evaluation should be so designed as to stimulate and motivate them to learn, to monitor their own evolution in learning, their progress, but also the difficulties and shortcomings.

Using the term "strengthening" holds both pedagogical and psychological connotations, being considered a complex activity, including nuanced activities and operations of repetition and systematization, of stimulating by progress recognition, but also the disapprobation of failure, of unsatisfactory results. Achieving adequate verification of student actions, has strengthening effects on learning, on their knowledge and skills, by helping them to fill the gaps, by reviewing errors.

The assessment is a means of developing and changing students' attitude towards school activity. Using an "arsenal" of actions specific to the evaluative process enables student attitudes that in turn play a major role in school performance. Paying special attention to the assessments issued on students and knowing that they tend to become what is expected of them, confirming expectations facilitates stimulation of students and shaping a positive image of themselves. Therefore, the appreciation also extends to the sphere of interpersonal relationships.

The relationship between the assessment procedures and school performance is manifested in the transformation of external motivation, appraisals received from teachers and others in internal motivation as an energizing growing factor of student activities. The degree of motivating students towards learning, represents a sustained effort, intense activities that cause internalization of external requirements so that they become the driving force that propels from inside the students learning conduct.

For a real motivation to learn through evaluative actions, we can follow suggestions such as:

Explain! Recent studies show that students are less interested in the assessment because they do not understand what to do or what they should do. Teachers should give more time explaining to students what is expected of them, what objective is aimed by carrying out an evaluation activity. In the educational process the teachers' enthusiasm is transmitted to the student, which will probably become more interested in the subject. Students who are unsure on what is going to be realized or know less on what they are supposed to do, will not get very good results.

Reward! Students who do not have a consolidated set of intrinsic motivation to learn can be helped by extrinsic motivation - reward (psychological or material). Students are tempted to repeat behaviors that were rewarded. The reward can be symbolic and marks the level reached by the student through this behavior / response.

Humanize your actions and behaviors! Students are more motivated to communicate with teachers who are more "humane" and who seem to care about them, their interests and goals. Such a personalization of the teacher-student relationship helps them to perceive teachers as persons close to them, not as authoritarian and unpleasant figures.

Involve students in the assessment! One of the major factors in motivation is to involve students in their own learning process. Students love to feel useful (as do the adults, for that matter). Choose a few students to help (select bibliography, setting topics for assessment, preparing the hall, arranging materials etc). These activities will greatly enhance the self-esteem of students and will also enhance the motivation for success. Use every opportunity to get help from students and be thankful for it.

Use positive emotions to increase productivity and motivation! Students get better results when learning is "accompanied" by positive emotions. Use humor when appropriate, but do not overdo it. Determine your emotional relationship both between you and the students and among colleagues.

Consequently, the positive feedback generates positive feelings that stimulates and supports the student activity in order to obtain better school

performance, while the negative ones have discouraging effects, which often generates anxiety, loss of confidence in their own abilities and facilitates failure.

The inefficiency of negative “reinforcements” has been demonstrated by research conducted by B.F. Skinner, who demonstrated that improving a situation does not involve punishment of error (e.g. it does not make a student more hardworking by punishing laziness, more braver by punishing cowardice) because negative reinforcements develop superficial, false behavior, and inactivity and failure favor the tendency to cheat and generate revulsion toward school. Thus, it is considered that the repetition with more likely chances of a behavior assumes that it was accompanied by a state of satisfaction.

This theory proposed by B.F. Skinner deserves to be respected, in order to encourage students towards learning by an evaluative act. This however, does not mean giving no negative reinforcements or unfavorable appraisals, but requires a careful use of positive and negative reinforcements balanced in relation to the actual situation. For a reliable accountability of students for learning through assessment it is recommended to observe the following:

1. Harnessing the full potential of the educational assessment as a means of positive reinforcement
2. Considering indifference incompatible with fostering students' progress
3. Permanent use of positive strengthening, always highlighting the progress achieved, especially for shy students who have experienced failure
4. Elimination of negative strengthening as a prediction of future poor results
5. Positive and negative reinforcement should not be the expression of a cold intellectual attitude

In school practice the evaluation methods and techniques were improved in order to achieve an effective correlation between teaching-learning-assessment and to achieve the proposed goal of developing an autonomous, free and creative personality.

Traditional methods of evaluation, designed for striking a balance between oral written and practical tests, constitute the main and dominant elements of the evaluative act. Starting from this objective reality, the modern evaluation strategies seek to emphasize the evaluative dimension of evaluative action that provides sufficient and varied opportunities for students to demonstrate what they know (the ensemble of knowledge) and especially, what they can do (skills, abilities).

The constant concern of practitioners in the field of education to find and exploit new techniques and evaluation procedures, especially for

measuring those objectives related to the affective domain, harder to measure by conventional methods of evaluation, has resulted in the identification and use of assessment methods and tools which can be a real alternative to conventional methods of testing and evaluation.

Traditional methods are important, especially when the teacher achieves a balance between oral, written and practical tests and their proportion will continue to dominate in the evaluative actions. There are however a number of educational objectives- especially those related to the affective domain – that decisively contribute to the development of student's personality and that can not be measured using conventional methods. The solution is not, obviously, giving up these goals, but finding new techniques to evaluate them.

"Unlike traditional methods - states Professor Ion T. Radu (2000, pp. 223-224) - which carry out the evaluation of school results obtained on a limited time and usually with a greater or lesser, but still defined area of content– the alternative methods of assessment have at least two characteristics:

1 on the one hand enables the assessment of the results closely linked with teaching/learning, often along with it;

2 on the other hand they concern school results obtained on a longer period, aimed at the development of abilities, skills and especially changes in terms of interests, attitudes, related to the learning activity."

Overall, the evaluation is perceived as a control-sanction activity and induces stress to students. But the role of assessment in teaching practice is not to penalize, but to improve the learning experience, to enhance and correct the learning outcomes. To assess is not the same with granting a mark! Scoring is a component of the assessment but not every evaluation is completed with a qualification or a mark. The purpose of evaluation is to support learning by helping students to focus their learning activities, developing their self-assessment capability, stimulating and motivating students.

The evaluation should be seen as a learning experience; to be an enjoyable activity, so the students want to be again evaluated.

How can an evaluative activity be enjoyable for students?

The answers to this question and ways of implementation are multiple and depend on the individual imagination and creativity. Some possibilities might be:

- Using interactive methods, to harness the human disposition to game, submitting assignments with a playful, attractive coloratura and stimulating creativity, in order to maintain students' intellectual and physical effort. I. Negreț stated that "*playful and creative learning, like sport and creative work, seem to be real human forms of learning and working. Playful learning*

has incredible effects, just because learning through the law of minimum effort has become the most common form of learning".

- diversifying the methods and techniques used, combining traditional assessment methods and tools with complementary and active assets, to avoid routine and monotony in order to enable each student to choose their own learning and assessment method that fits best;
- actively involving students in the assessment process, transforming the student from evaluated to evaluator of his own performance or that of his colleagues

The main alternative or complementary methods of evaluation, whose formative potential support the individualization of the education act by supporting the student, usable in the classroom during teachers work, are as follows: *systematic observation of the activity and behavior of the students, investigation, project, portfolio, conceptual maps, R.A.I. method, self-assessment techniques, reflective journal, 3-2-1 technique, etc.*

Conclusion

Involving students in assessing their own results has beneficial effects on several levels: the teacher obtains confirmation of its assessments of students according to their results; student acts as a subject of pedagogical action by participating in his formation; it helps students to appreciate the results and understand the efforts needed to achieve the agreed goals; it cultivates the inner motivation and a positive, responsible attitude towards learning, towards their own activity.

Self-regulation by the students of their own learning is a result of the evaluation and encompasses motivational and strategic issues, techniques and strategies used to increase learning efficiency, because evaluation is a process inextricably linked to the teaching and learning process. In the most common cases, students who show motivation for learning are distinguished by interest in the acquisition of knowledge, the desire to take risks, preference for school challenges and the belief that errors are part of learning and that the skills they possess can be improved by putting on a sustained effort.

The evaluation should be a process that generates competition with self and not with the others, and teachers need to assess any progress, regardless of its size. This mobilizes students compared to issuing excessive goals that determine discouraging and stressful effects among students.

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