

## **European Education: perspectives on the assessment**

I. Maciuc

**Irina Maciuc**

Reader

University of Craiova

**Abstract:** As a social practice, the assessment always existed. In its educational version has known over the years a more structured and specific development. Everywhere in the world, school life is valued, the value judgments requiring those who teach decisions and avenues for the benefit of the learners. The teacher is naturally a stimulating assessment factor, a critic and a judge of situations and people, an assessment expert. The reporting is always made at the values socially approved and the perennial values of education. The axiological competence of the teacher is important for the smooth running of the school activity.

**Keywords:** European Education, models of assessment, representative texts, perspectives on evaluation

### **1. A synthesis and multiple perspectives on assessment**

A history of ideas about assessment, how models are generated, a current or new direction of research in this area is difficult to make. It could highlight the presence of some values that bring sense to the European education. These values are associated to the processes, products and educational activities.

Facing the difficulties that stand in the way of any attempt to sort a huge amount of information, in 1997, two authors, JJ Bonniol and M. Vial published a paper that would soon become a reference work on assessment.

*Les modeles de l'evaluation. Textes fondateurs avec commentaires* (De Boeck & Larcer, SA, Paris, Bruxelles) is a compilation / collection of texts on evaluation, very well and strictly organized and presented. Somehow, the paper is yet another proof that the pedagogical discourse, education theory and the configured models for this transcend the immediate reality conditions and describe other,

“utopian”, “visionary”. Also, the paper shows that the education theory can become a vector of development of educational practices, outlining “fields” of possibilities and solutions.

The two authors acquaint us with competitive yet complementary paradigms, in light of the complex evaluation of educational practices, in a thinned “game” of involvement and distancing. The key concepts seem to be the complexity and the project. JJ Bonniol and his collaborator M. Vial prove the power of those able to rank and classify the theoretical contributions that cover the time of a quarter century of research, theory and action on assessment. The message the papers bear is that the project of an education complex and global designed accepts the oppositions and negotiation, articulates contrasts, conceptualizes a combination of contradictory elements. In essence, the work marks a genuine assumption of evaluation problems, contradictions transformation in interrogative synthesis. The meaning makes sense because you are searching for it, any meaning found is exceeded, dead, gained and lost at the same time, says M. Vial in 1997.

The representative texts extracts focus, in work, on some fundamental ideas with principle value: a) guidelines, trends, educational systems are socially, culturally determined, b) can highlight their organic growth, according to the requirements and national laws. Also, the authors say implicitly: c) the contribution presentation of a representative figure in the history of education is always the source of ideas and solutions on the basis for the critical reflection.

In Europe, the assessment understood as measurement was that option to those who, early in the last century, believed in the possibility that the value judgments are based on psychometrics and *edumetry*, on a thorough and scientific measuring of the school performances, as well as the complete verification of the pupils procurements. Docimology, prescriptive and experimental, started from the school psychology gains and focused on the notions of school failure and successful schooling. As a model of evaluation was concerned with examinations and defined as systematic study of ways of scoring, the inter and intra-individual variables of the examiners, of the subjective factors involved. The *docimology* paradigm is thus constructed on a causal diagram (after Berthelot, structural causality), i.e. “a system B is dependent on a system A, previous to him, and most often more important than it, which involves a determining relationship of vertical type).

The values in this case are those of the efficiency and profitability, according to a utilitarian conception of education. The

European *docimology* model maintained thus the illusion of the mostly external evaluator and the exams became a school obsession shared in a quantifiable and therefore manageable universe. The control was regulatory, logical, was based on hierarchy and sanctions. Therefore, was criticized and the need to change was strongly imposed in the middle of the last century. The interest of the society towards the efficient education extends from evaluating school performance to assessing the effects of education in economy, socio-cultural, quality of life.

Gradually, the assessment work will expand on the activity, conditions and processes which define the results at a given time.

More than a quarter century ago, in the 70s Europe of last century, the evaluation model through objectives, a model imported from overseas, meant the rigorous and precise formulation of objectives, “targets” to achieve, followed by organizing the course road, the anticipation of difficulties and defining of minor objectives. The aim was the acquisition of the default behavior by those evaluated, based on an algorithm that resembled an important philosophical orientation: *behaviorism (comportamentalism)*. Was a model based on control and power, on management and remediation of situations, based on reverse connection. The objectives were considered decisive in making intermediate decisions of educational strategies improvement. To evaluate means to rationalize, to optimize, to provide a functional control, to eliminate losses from the system. The assessment implies a contract, which was centered on the assumption that the student agrees with the objectives imposed by the evaluator, to carry out the tasks prescribed in a given time, but at his own pace, in a convenient and consciously accepted order. The student was thus motivated to know the goals to achieve and the transparency of the success criteria.

“The evaluation as management model” (Bonniol & Vial, 1997) is defined as: a) *evaluation by objectives*, 2) *cybernetic model of evaluation*, 3) *structuralist model*, 4) *systemic model*.

Among the models mentioned, the *cybernetic* model (Allal, Berthelot, Vial) treats the system relationships with its environment after the controller-controlled model, based on feedback. In the cybernetic approach, the systematic retroactions, designed as a link function, which must meet a goal defined before through a series of transformations, created a new vision on the time and methods of evaluation.

A possible definition sees in the evaluation a circular process, active and dynamic of improvement of training and of the pedagogical relationship (through the “back loop”), of mutual adjustment and adequacy of resources / strategies on the training situation, to the features of those evaluated, in context etc. (after JJ Bonniol, M. Vial, 1997).

The assessment for remedy highlights the transition from the idea “correcting errors is a source of learning” to the idea “the error is a sign of the necessity of learning”.

The systemic model (Bonniol, Chevaillard, Nunziante) promotes in European plan, the understanding of assessment as a whole or the evaluation of all components and relationships, said otherwise, globality, holistic vision. Relationships between the actors of evaluation are considered important, the functionality being treated as dependent on the quality of these relationships. We pass to the organized regulation in the system. The assessment of the tasks is focused on assessing situations called “problem solving”. To assess, in this case, is to verbalize the procedures necessary to accomplish the task.

We can affirm, in the context of the above, that at the end of the eighth decade of the twentieth century, a model who came from Canada uttered the concept of formative assessment, the idea of intermediary control in the regulations order “on the run”, of the necessary adjustments and the remedy of the situations less desirable. For this purpose, were defined criteria for success of the action and the product, remedial actions were organized by required returns on the material and the operations to perform, were elaborated charts and work tasks.

A model in the '80s is the model developed (and adapted) at the Academy of Aix-Marseille formative assessment. Such a model emphasizes the verbalization, formalizing the criteria, experimenting possible algorithms and adjusting the study program according to the obtained results.

The self control is accompanied by the choice of remedies found. Otherwise said, the learner gains the evaluation criteria. The formative assessment helps the student to learn, asking him to anticipate, to correctly represent his goals and to self manage his errors (JJ Bonniol, G. Nunziante).

In essence, the European model that followed the assessment understanding as a measure - and we mean the understanding of the assessment as management - promoting interiorization control values. The evaluator himself must have formed (Vial, 20010, and the power is

divided between assessor and assessed. Self control also became a shared value. The consultancy, audit, evaluation enrich the meanings of school expertise, coming from the external environment of school or university.

From the existing models at the European level, the most open to the spirit of the twenty-first century is the *constructivist model*, a model promoted by the *postmodern pedagogy*. The *cognitive constructivism* has its roots in the psychogenesis of intellectual development, of intelligence. Also, it finds its substantiation in further research of the cognitive psychology. In essence, the model starts from the thesis that the objective reality does not discover itself, but only if the individual mind processes the information gathered, through a mental construction of processing, by progressive assimilation and accommodation. Learning is contextual and the construction of knowledge is collaborative, but also motivational, *metacognitive*, attitudinal.

The *social cognitivism* completes the cognitive cognitivism, by emphasizing the social nature of knowledge.

In *constructivism*, the evaluation aims to the investigative ability, conceptual ability, problem solving ability, critical thinking ability, self evaluation ability etc. In Europe, postmodern teaching, under the constructivism influence, requires a different paradigm on teaching, learning and assessing. It's about the existential humanist paradigm on education. Thus, the education relationship, assessed E. Paun in 2002, is seen as an interaction with a symbolic size and performing dominant, a relationship in which the teacher and the student are “builders” of meanings and significances and which generates and is based on a strong cognitive but also affective investment. (..) The teacher is not working on the students, but with the students and for them, seems to be the essential message of the postmodern education guidelines. In line with the above, school must meet the requirements of the individual and, to this end, E. Peacock stresses: “We can speak of a return of the individual as an actor in the social space and a resurrection of the student as a person with his specific differential characteristics, to be maximum valued, is the dominant dimension of postmodern pedagogy”. (Paun, 2002, p. 20). The postmodern teaching sees in assessment an ongoing attendant of teaching and learning processes.

The latest European assessment model focuses on competences and has as a “symbolic tool” (M. Vial, 2009) the portfolio of skills. It focuses on situations problematization and constantly renewed discovery of meanings.

Moreover, the education portfolio was taken in the Romanian education as complete and comprehensive assessment tool. The education portfolio, which can be considered a kind of educational identity card, allows to identify the student's strengths, difficulties and drawbacks (Stoica, 2003, p.131), to determine the corrective measures before it too late.

Overall, the evaluation supports a multireferential analysis of educational processes, a synthesis of old and new approaches, descriptive, prescriptive, flexible or not, that have sought appropriate answers to social and personal development needs. The real imaginary, symbolic challenges, of an undeniably complex area as assessment can not be addressed only by a comprehensive effort of theorizing and practice application.

A post-modern criticism, transdisciplinary, discovers today situations that are found with seemingly divergent discourses about evaluation, but which the authors consider additional, finding surprising points of contact. Thus, it takes shape “a mythology”, are identified ghosts, iconic images, shielded faces, hidden meanings in the educational practices generated by each theoretical model. In the broad field of theoretical contributions, often passing from a thesis to an antithesis to avoid unconditional adherence to any of the models, to enhance the freedom of choice. Overall, the philosophical conceptions of evaluation in the past 30-40 years, JJ Bonniol and M. Vial refer to the approaches:

- Causal explanation (J. Cardinet, L. Cronbach);
- Structuralist (JJ. Bonniol, P. Bourdieu, JM. De Ketele);
- Cybernetical (L. Allal, JM. Berthelot, M. Vial);
- Systemical (JJ. Bonniol, Y. Chevaillard, G. Nunziati etc.).

Enjoys a special attention on Europe, the contributions of Linda Allai, of Ph. Perrenoud (Switzerland), JM De Kete (Belgium), because of which the concept of formative assessment has expanded the meanings and importance theoretically, and practically.

Linda Allai helped to highlight three forms of adjustment of the teaching-learning process associated with the formative assessment:

- 1) Punctual formative assessment, proactive adjustment (applies to some data subsequent to the action);
- 2) Punctual formative assessment, retroactive adjustment (remedial), a closer evaluation from the summative assessment and applies to some data from the past;
- 3) continuing formative assessment, interactive adjustment (individual adaptation: based on observation of student-professor interactions, student-student, student-task of training, the assessment thus integrating into instruction).

The theories of complex systems (systems), and of organized forms of auto organization / emergence and complex thinking underlying the attempts to promote the pedagogy hermeneutics, which includes orientation to explain, interpretation and understanding of all education, critical and creative reflection. The evaluation as a pedagogical reality and field of study and theory outlines a comprehensive hermeneutical field, where it plays and finds new meanings.

We mention that by the end of the last century is considered that the Western education is characterized by two main ways to address the educational reality, by two “Teachings”: of essence and existence (see B. Suchodolski). Bonniol and Vial also refer to two simultaneous types of records, to the following “paradigmatic lines”:

a) For the followers of a mechanistic view, everything is defined by permanence, there are everywhere norms, principles, laws and rules which we must relate to. The elements of a situation may be analytically isolated and can be defined in the frameworks of a formal logic, a rational thinking, in light of cold reason, analytical and systematical;

b) For the followers of a holistic vision, overall, constant it doesn't exist. There are only “passages”, constantly changing, evolving. Everything becomes, anything is defined by unstable, correspondent, syncretism borders. The analogical reasoning, “magic” thinking is required. (See J. Ardoino & G. Berger, L'evaluation comme interpretation, Pour nr.107, 1986, p.120-127, apud J. Bonniol, 1997).

If for the first, the generic symbol is the clock (or crystal, engine, ordinator), for the others, the generic symbol is the cloud (or vortex, smoke, faith, place, movement, text as a semnificative reality, interpreted in value, the fabric of knowledge and discourse about the object).

The status of the discourse in the first case is rational, based on argumenting, persuasion, relationship of strengths, and in the second case, on pathos, suggestion, emotion, network of meanings, intertextuality, construction of “meaning”.

For the education, the first “paradigmatic line”, “mechanistic” will mean:

- Share of the information rigidly structured, mandatory contents, obsession of unique manual, unique programa etc.;
- Prescribed information, analytically approached by all at the same pace, in a strictly determined order, fixed number of hours, the same for everyone;
- Authoritarian learning context, hierarchy prevails;
- Encouraging analytical, algorithmic thinking;
- Early labeling of the student;
- Focus on what is seen, on the observable behaviors;
- Emphasis on rules, on normative;
- Abstract knowledge, books, academic;
- Assessment of information, expertise.

The second “paradigm line”, “holistic”:

- Information is just a momentary crystallization of a stage in the infinite knowledge;
- Important become the skills: doing, knowing, being: assessment of competence is therefore essential;
- Information evolves, it trains the student in a perpetual learning process, causes changes in thinking skills: critical thinking will be so encouraged in assessment processes;
- School journeys are flexible, encourage alternatives, the multiplicity of approaches;
- The teacher and student evaluate each other as people, identity, not roles;
- Gains weight in knowing organized school holistic strategies, linear and intuitive;



- Always avoid stigma of the student, stimulate the self-esteem and the need for self achievement;
- Performance relate to their own capabilities, are identified the individual limits in order to overcome them, not to be punished;
- Education is always related to practice, to apprenticeship, in an environment as close to real life;
- The skills and attitudes are assessed (apud I. Maciuc, 2006)

Also at the end of the twentieth century, said JJ Bonniol and M. Vial, there was a net shift toward addressing evaluation as issue of meaning / significance centered on process. At the ninth decade level, moving to another episteme was still not produced, as ought the system's framework evaluation ("complex" systems study) to give way to the complex evaluation, assessment - interpretation. Otherwise said, the science is obliged to reintroduce the subjectivity, the interpretation becomes the object of knowledge required to understand the reality of the evaluation. With their exciting performances and openings made in terms of complexity theory, JJ Bonniol and M. Vial enjoyed a good reception among the specialists. A remarkable author as J. Cardinet or G. Figari, from the Pierre Mendes University in Grenoble (see *Revue Francaise of Education*, 1999, p.180) and F. Lerbet Sereni appreciate the intellectual challenge, the consistent and exciting comments, leading the way, <<the explicit choices>> of the authors. Summarizing:

The three chapters of the paper:

Evaluation as the nature;

Evaluation as the management and

Evaluation understood as issue of meaning

open perspectives on a try to develop a paper which will have in the center the complex assessment. Within each chapter of the paper is first made an overview of the field of study, following the collection of representative texts proposed, then brief comments, very relevant. Identifying "the emblematic figure" of the evaluator, emerged from the supported ideas and suggestions of complementary reading finishes each of the three parts of the paper.

The evaluation, writes JJ Bonniol in "Postscript", transforms the contradictions in questioning synthesis. The distinction between monitoring and evaluation, between balance logic and logic of

possible promotion, distinction operated clearly by the two authors, is associated with the existence of a competitive and yet complementary paradigm. It outlined the plan for a complex evaluation, which aims to support and control the evolutions and sharing of meanings in relation assessor-assessed.

Regarding the theoretical plan, changing from pedagogy of success, based on the concepts of school failure and successful schooling, to the teaching of educational situations.

Overall, the principle of globality (the components of the system are reported in whole and in each of the other components of the assessment system) and the principle of contextuality (situational-specific context in which the evaluation is undergoing) is a particular interest to the authors of Aix. The most important idea upheld and applied at the University of Aix-en Provence remains the idea of formative assessment (see also Georgette Nunziante and the coordinated experiment by JJ Bonniol in high schools in Marsill).

The critical and reflective ego is formed through formative assessment and metacognitive strategies, able to regulate their own activity of evaluation. Through the formative assessment the one who teaches endorses his assessment criteria and appreciates his own production. (A. De Peretti).

Over the years, namely in 2009, M. Vial, in many papers and position papers, in the conferences which he attended, proved the consistence of the synthesis contribution, which the University of Southern France brought to understanding the evaluation problems. The contribution of recent years proves the existence of this authentic school of thinking, shaped in the '80s in Aix-en Provence.

## **2. Other recent developments in the evaluation theory**

If in the <<behavior era>> of assessment, the formation subject is the acquisition of an observable behavior, the assessment can be thought of as mere verification of such behaviors. Taking into consideration of some indicators or some measurable criteria meant the step to cognitive psychology, which was a “black box” theory overcome, which ignores the assessed subject interiority. Recent evaluation model has as defining landmarks the following elements:

PURPOSE;  
 TOOLS (DESIGN);  
 MEASUREMENT;  
 INFORMATION (collection, organization, interpretation);  
 RATING (reference to criteria);  
 DECISION (flexible, reliable, improving) (after

George Bethell, educational consultant, expert in evaluation problems, specialist who worked effectively with authors and Romanian decision makers in reforming the Romanian system of assessment after 1990).

It considers that the assessment takes into spiral effect the following processes:

- TRIAL OF VALUE;
- CRITICAL ANALYSIS;
- ROUTINE RETROACTIONS;
- DECISION

We assign meaning to some information collected by reference to criteria and comparisons and we make a decision, making maximum resources employed (effective). G. Stohard and C. Gipps distinguish between the assessment of learning (summative assessment) and assessment for learning (evaluation of progress) (apud Stoica, 2003).

There is: a) self - evaluation (*metacognitiva* reflection, autonomous approach, self dialogue), b) hetero-evaluation and c) co-evaluation (between students or groups of students, joint reviews and reflections). In this case, the criterion is the position of the assessor. Qualitative assessment, on which we put high price today in the European Space:

- It involves observation, description, interpretation;
- Means the award of meanings, reporting to values, to descriptors;
- Quality is appreciated as a construct;
- The also the art, requires time, intellectual and emotional commitment, of the emotional intelligence. To evaluate the behavior and know better the personality of the students is recommended using a combination of methods and techniques: observation, questionnaire, case history, case study, method of objective assessing of personality, teaching sheet.

Their use, along with other tools such as tables of analysis of the behavior is made in the system, for the separation of an overall picture.

In the above context it becomes clear that not what has been acquired already counts, but the training and auto formative processes quality that are activated by the assessor.

In a Romanian adaptation, the complex assessment is not and can not be considered merely an operation or a technique, because it involves a series of operations “mental and active, intellectual, attitudinal, affective which are supposed to state:

- Contents and objectives to be evaluated;
- For what purpose and how to evaluate (perspective of the decision to assess);
- When to evaluate (early learning, during, at the end, on balance);
- How to evaluate;
- In what way the data is processed and how the information is valued;
- based on which criteria is assessed” (IT Radu, 2000, p. 13).

Defining in curriculum meaning of the concept of evaluation involves reporting to the aim of macro and micro structural, with self adjustment effects in the content and methodology and definition of some evaluation standards into three levels: minimum, average, maximum.

An adapted curriculum to meet students' different needs correspond an individual assessment - evaluation that defines the criteria from the initial “state” of the student, an assessment where the student is not related to a specific rule but to his own possibilities and knowledge.

As adapted models in Romanian education are known the full and complete assessment model, the developed and presented model by IT Radu, who supports the full involvement of all the sequences in the evaluation process of education, application resulting naturally from the design-operation-evaluation unit. (IT Radu, 1981).

In that light “the assessment should be understood as successive cycles of complex actions of finding and assessing the results, of diagnostic or analysis and screening of causes that led to these results, as well as forecasting - providing further exhibition of

the process.” (N. Oprescu, 1996, p.305). Both the continuous assessment strategy and the formative assessment present, however, advantages and disadvantages.

“That, stresses C. Cucos, the two modes should not be used in autarchic, exhaustive mode, but through joining and complementing. What is lost, possibly, through a strategy, is gain through the other”. (C. Cucos, 1996, p. 108).

To achieve under optimal conditions an assessment, objective, continual, formative, could be used an individual assessment chart for each student, or by tracking some skills-synthesis. The curve of children evolution can serve both to the current educators and the subsequent ones (Maciuc, 2006).

We think the time given for the formative assessment should be as large as possible. The remedial sequences should be strictly and rhythmically organized, depending on the results of regular tests.

The curriculum theory puts into circulation the period of development assessment, evaluation that aims primarily to improve individual, group or organization performance.

### 3. Current openings in the field

In Europe, the *portfolio* of continuing education is a tool that facilitates *the identification and formulation of skills and **personal competences***. Meanwhile, a portfolio like that includes the mode to capitalize the skills and personal abilities both during school and in the labor market insertion. It contains evidence of learning outcomes achieved in formal, non-formal and informal education.

The *portfolio* integrates also the European instruments that emphasize the learning outcomes of an individual, such as: *Euro pass, Language Passport, Diploma Supplement, Certificate Supplement, Continuous education portfolio* in electronic format (*electronic book*) will be accessible to individuals, training institutions, centers of **assessment competences gained in non-formal and informal contexts**, guidance and counseling services and employers. In the future is expected to be evaluated more base competent, including the analyzing and solving of problems, communicating, obtaining results, learning and development, prioritization and organization, perseverance and working with others.

In conclusion, in the field of selection, training and integration in activity of teachers, necessary measures are imposed to establish a real professional environment, a change of mentality in the pragmatic direction (Maciuc, 1998, P.204). *Competences – Focused – Assessment* is an important direction for future study.

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