

TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT FOCUSED ON LEARNING IN THE CONTEXT OF NEW CURRICULUM CONCEPTS

Rodica Mariana NICULESCU, Ph.D.,

University *Transilvania* of Brasov

rodicanic@unitbv.ro

Abstract: *This article answers where the fundamental needs of the educational reform in general and the curriculum reform, in particular. It belongs to the series of papers focused on the core concepts of the educational process while, all over the world, this process seems to be in an ongoing and never predictable reform, with common and differentiated aspects. This time, the paper approaches the teaching and evaluation as the two acts of the formal educational process that must be approached with a serious and effective focus on the learning process of the students. Firstly the paper presents the necessary distinctions among terms like educational process with its wide meaning and the formal educational process; the formal educational process and educational system. Then, the three actions of the formal educational process are analyzed: teaching, assessing and learning. The core aim is to argue why it is strongly necessary to focus both the teaching and the assessment actions on learning. This necessity is connected to future graduates' profiles. They will be put into the difficult situation to cope with a "flood" of information, received on an increasing number of communication channels, while more and more complex tasks coming from the real life are to be solved rapidly and efficiently.*

Key words: *education system; educational (education) process; teaching; learning; and assessing; instrumental competencies.*

1. Fashion in education versus genuine expertise

This paper is part of a suite of theoretical approaches of the author to the main aspects of the reforms, approaches whose themes were born and are born from my concrete relationship with the school's people.

The correct perception of the complex phenomenon of educational reform and, in particular, of curricular reform are, in my opinion, an essential condition for the effective implementation of these reforms. The reality, carefully observed through its concrete manifestations in school life (shadowing activities in the classroom within mainstream and special education, methodical activities, training future teachers and specialists in education, etc.) together with the reading of many materials related to the reform (school policy, official documents, pedagogical publications, etc.) lead to a worrying conclusion. All these reflect a vocal cacophony (as Pinar W. said in 1975) when it is about the educational reform, curriculum reform, educational process with its core actions, etc. And this incongruity is present both when the reforms are critically or supportively presented. It becomes visible an unimaginable semantic dispersion of the meanings of many basic concepts, and a false understanding of what should be essential. Many misunderstandings are covered by words/terms that have become a kind of fashion. Their use often demonstrates a superficial understanding, often determined by the only wish to “speak according to the trend”, only pretending to believe in the statements. Other times, even erroneous understanding could occur. In education, once again, it is shown that everyone has expertise. And what is really sad is that few people appear as being concern about this situation.

2. System of education and process of education

Why it became really important to know what meaning these two terms involve? It is fundamental for a very simple reason. They are to be found within a lot of official documents but while they are not precisely defined, their use is ambiguous and the readers decode the involved meanings according to each reader's previous cognitive experience. As long as the correct understanding of an official document can be fundamental for very important actions the understanding of each concept and of the relation between them becomes extremely significant.

Concepts like the *education system and educational (education) process* are two currently used terms but they hide extremely abstract concepts. The wide range of meanings involved by the use of these terms in different pages of pedagogical literature or the official educational politics documents too often is not enough taken into account. Unfortunately, the connection between the meanings of the two concepts is uncertain and often ambiguous if not even wrong.

Each country or sometimes each component of a federal state (see USA or Canada as only two examples) has a specific education system.

This approach has not the intention to present the numerous existent definitions of the two concepts. The aim is more to emphasize the existence of the core and constant aspects involved within them, aspects explicitly or implicitly presented.

Thus, the *education system* is generally seen as a specifically defined structure of institutions explicitly aiming to educate; they are hierarchically designed and host or/ and manage (including designing) the formal educational process.

The *formal educational process* consists in the educational ongoing influence, an influence designed, organized, implemented and assessed upon the children, students, and adults involved; it takes place inside of institutions with an educational priority focus (the institutions belonging to the educational system).

Metaphorically speaking, the educational process is the *physiology* (the functionality) of the body's *anatomy*, represented by the educational system of a country. That is why the definition of the formal educational process as a " sub-system of the educational system" (as we can find it in a lot of pedagogical materials) appears, in my opinion, as a misunderstanding of the yin - yang rapport between the two aspects. Without a specific structure of an educational system, the process has not a place to function where. The educational system is the forest and the educational process is the forest's life. The forest's life is a synergic effect of each tree's lives, just like the process of education, at the educational system level, is the synergic effect of the real educational complex influence produced within each educational institution. (This is a metaphor with roots in the assessment papers produced by my students).

It is important to highlight the fact that the formal educational process is strongly supported by the non-formal educational process developed within institutions that function without a priority focus on education and by the informal education process produced as an effect of the interaction of the learner at any age with the real day to day life in all its hypostases. This inter-influence is significantly diversified for each human. It is intimately determined by everything surrounding the human being and by the internal subjective factors of the "learner".

3. Operational aspects of the formal educational process seen as a learning process

The formal educational process acts through three core actions (Cristea S.,1998): teaching, learning and assessing. The connection among them is a specific one, the focus being represented by the action of learning

because teaching is done to facilitate the learning process of the learners and the assessment action aims to measure the results of the learning process but must be a learning situation itself.

In the same time, the results of the teaching action on students' learning process are an important source for the level of teacher's learning process itself.

The teaching action has also a significant number of definitions. Generally speaking, it expresses the” (http://infed.org/mobi/what-is-teaching/). The source considers this as a definition for the starters. In my opinion, it is more a definition of what understand every person in the hypostasis of a” teacher” when this one (parent, colleague, friend, specialist met occasionally, etc.) can provide for somebody else information or good practices, which attend the learner's needs for solving a life task. Yet, the concept of teaching represents mostly one of the three core actions/ operations involved in the formal educational process.

The teaching process involves communication: the flow of information from a source (represented in this context, primarily, by the teaching staff) towards the receivers (the students). The information is decoded in a unique way by each student. The student uses for this decoding his or her own already existing knowledge, and the new knowledge is assimilated within the pool of the old ones, determining an interesting process of accommodation to them. All these are steps of the learning process which is focused on a task, a request addressed by the school to be solved. (Fig. 1).

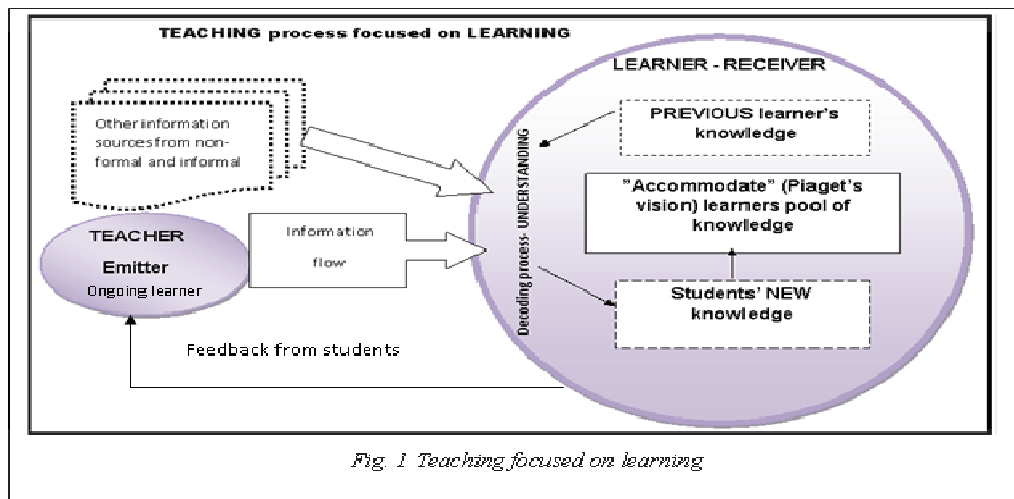


Fig. 1 Teaching focused on learning

The great secret of the effectiveness of the formal educational process consists of the adequacy of the school tasks to the genuine requests coming from the social, professional and other aspects of the real-life. (Fig. 2)

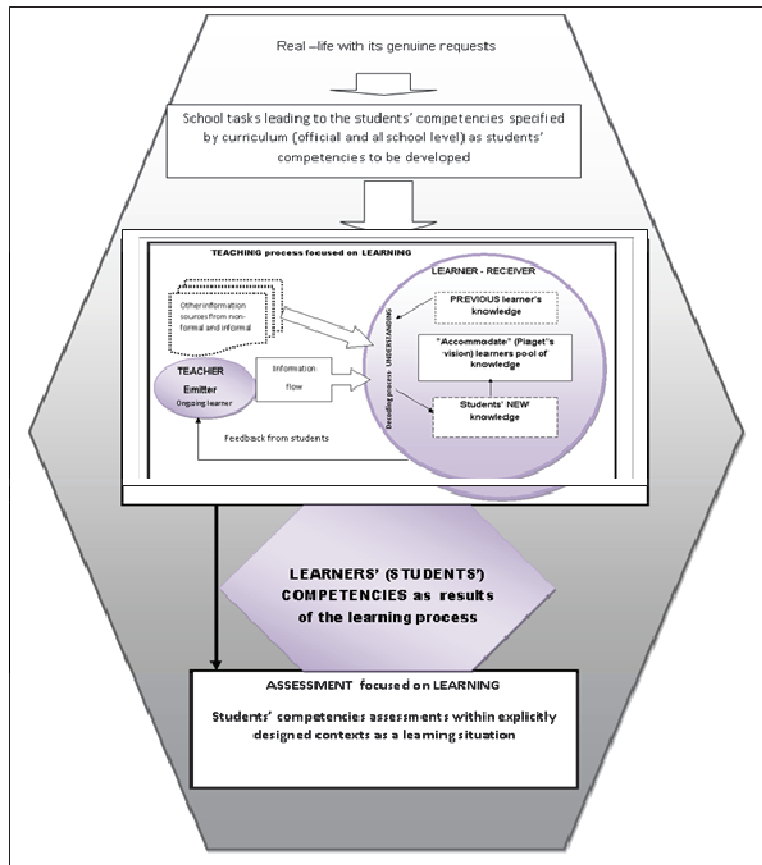


Fig. 2 Determinants of teaching process by the real-life as a condition of the educational process effectiveness

Unfortunately, this strong compatibility between the school learning tasks and real-life tasks is still a dream. This is happening in both types of educational systems with opposite philosophies. It is about the two core educational systems: one focused on knowledge and the other one focused on learning by doing.

The first philosophy of curriculum highlights as a core issue the role of knowledge understood more than stocked information even if sometimes, this truth is hidden somehow pharisaical under the banner of focusing everything on competencies. The secondly mentioned philosophy it is also about the educational systems where are considered as a priority the pragmatism and the focus on learning by doing.

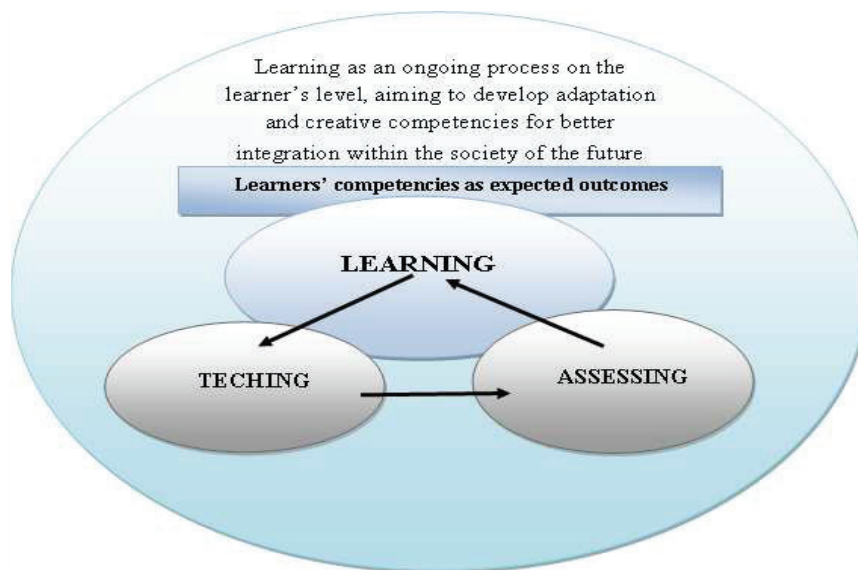
Knowledge and capacities (knowing and doing) are genuinely important but more important are their hypostases as tools put in the hands of live, concrete characters with positive attitudes, based on moral values. All these must be developed during the formal educational process, accordingly to the psychological resources of each age and using appropriate methods of

teaching and assessment for each age, aiming to create effective competences of students, capable to learn further, to develop themselves in a way to achieve all the future society requests.

The *teaching process* becomes very important but, somehow, in a different way than in the past. The teacher more than ever must become a kind of monitor of the students' information coming through a multitude of channels, even from a very early age. During early education, parents, and teachers, as partners in education, must do their best to put strong bases to what, I would call, instrumental competencies. These instrumental competencies generally expressed by speaking correctly phonetically and respecting the basics of the grammar, reading, writing, counting and using the fundamental mathematics operations, and, more recently, the fundamental use of the PC and other electronic devices necessary for information.

The *assessment process* as a core activity/ operation of the formal educational process must be convergent with the teaching process, both of them being connected in a functional way with the aims of this formal educational process. These aims are represented by the expected outcomes, designed at the very beginning of the process and expressed by the students' competencies to be developed.

The *learning as an ongoing process* on the learner's level, aims to develop adaptation and creative competencies for better integration within the society of the future. These competencies are the expected outcomes (general and specific) established by each national official curriculum, even if they are labeled in different ways. (Fig. 3).



Nowadays assessment issues are huge. First, it is extremely difficult to find compatibility between what is taught for a generation and the manner of being assessed the achievements of the same generation. The normal flow of the process within the curriculum implementation seems to be not entirely understood. A new curriculum is (or should be) designed as a whole, the three actions of the formal education process (teaching, assessing, and both focused on learning) being considered together. The implementation of a newly designed curriculum starts with the first year of the cohort and all the assessment moments involved by the new curriculum design must be applied only for the specific the students belonging to the cohort which is the subject of the reform. There were moments when the philosophy about the assessment of a new curriculum implemented at the beginning of high-school (the ninth grade in Romania) was applied to the students of the last year of the high school at the baccalaureate exam, students who passed the passed the grades of the high school, according to a different curricula philosophy. Again, unfortunately, the last decades of experience have demonstrated a low understanding of this truth.

Other concepts involved in the philosophy of assessment as an action/operation of the formal educational process have been misunderstood. A possible example could be the ~week of assessment~ introduced years ago with the specific aim to have a common time for applying the general assessment per levels. Without appropriate previous training, the teachers understood that only in that specific week they are allowed to assess. A consistent number of other examples can be found.

But what seems to be the most inappropriate aspect of assessment is the imbalance between *declaration and practice*. The declaration is that the assessment is focused on competencies, but the reality still exacerbates the assessment of knowledge (as memorized information). This is happening at least on the classroom level too often and often enough when it is about national evaluation at different levels.

4. Conclusion

The core aim of this paper is not to present results of some elaborated researches even if each debated aspect can be a subject for different researches. The aim is mostly to argue why it is strongly necessary to focus both the teaching and the assessment actions on learning. This necessity is connected to future graduates' profiles. They will be put into the difficult situation to cope with a "flood" of information, received on an increasing number of communication channels, while more and more complex tasks coming from the real life are to be solved as rapidly as possible.

As a teacher, deeply involved in the practical field, I don't assign exaggerated importance of the theoretical approaches neither in this article nor in the previous ones. I feel the need, however, to signal the role of clarity of theory as the basis for a rational, fluent, and effective practice.

References (selection)

- Anderson, J. R. & Tunney, N. M. (2014). The scholarship of teaching and learning in a physical therapy program. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 139, 61–76. doi: 10.1002/tl.20105
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/tl.20105>
- Bennett, R. (2011) 'Formative assessment: a critical review', *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy and Practice*, 18(1): 5–25.
<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228836856> Formative assessment A critical review
- Boyle, B. and Bragg, J. (2006) 'A curriculum without foundation', *British Educational Research Journal*, 32(4): 569–82.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01411920600775225>
- Cristea S. (1998) Dicționar de termeni pedagogici E.D.P. Bucuresti
- Detlef R Prozesk, (2000). Teaching and Learning. In *Community Eye Health*. 2000; 13(34): 30–31.
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1764819/> accessed 08.05.2019
- Dulfer, N., Polesel, J and Rice, S. (2012) *The impacts of high stakes testing on schools, students and their families: An educator's perspective. The Experience of Education*. Sydney: Whitlam Institute, University of Western Sydney.
<https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=214ba798-d9ff-4352-af6a-f698cfc7c082&subId=11560>
- Fry Heather, Ketteridge Steve, Marshall Stephanie, (2009). A Handbook for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, Enhancing Academic Practice Third edition Routledge.
http://biblioteca.ucv.cl/site/colecciones/manuales_u/A%20Handbook%20for%20Teaching%20and%20Learning%20in%20Higher%20Education%20Enhancing%20academic%20and%20Practice.pdf
- Hayes, D. (2010) 'The seductive charms of a cross-curricular approach', *Education 3–13: International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years Education*, 38(4): 381–7.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03004270903519238>
- Peck, C. and McDonald, M. A. (2014) 'What is a culture of evidence? How do you get one? And... should you want one?', *Teachers College Record*, 116(3): 1-27. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1020297>
- Sequeira A. H (2012).INTRODUCTION TO CONCEPTS OF

TEACHING AND LEARNING National Institute of Technology Karnataka
Surathkal, India

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/272620585> INTRODUCTION T
O CONCEPTS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Wyse D., Haywood L., Pandya J. (2016). Curriculum Reform in Assessment
and Accountability Contexts, in The SAGE Handbook of Curriculum,
Pedaogoy and Assessment, Chapter: 49.
<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/289157856> Curriculum Reform
in Assessment and Accountability Contexts