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Continuous assessment and synthetic assessment – elements of pedagogical technique. Curriculum Case Study: Personal Development

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Abstract. The contemporary paradigm of the competence-centered curriculum associates an essential consequence at the level of the design, implementation and evaluation of school learning: the resizing of acquisitions in the form of knowledge, skills and attitudes (see Pre-university Education Law, 2023, art. 85). As a result, any finality expressed within the intended curriculum (represented by the school curriculum) in the form of the specific competence must be subjected to a pedagogical derivation approach to obtain the set of the three components. Through successive derivation steps, at a specific and operational level, the final portfolio of acquisitions will be established for each representative learning sequence (lesson), implicitly a lucid vision at the level of key contents, didactic strategies (and the methods derived from them), learning experiences and the micro-temporal resources corresponding to these resources. Like any rational human activity, the learning-teaching binomial is subject to an assessment approach, prioritized synchronously to avoid "losses" or "falling behind" and to ensure immediate optimizing interventions. Thus, an assessment will be practiced that will regulate and nurture learning in a continuous way, i.e. a formative assessment. The intention of this paper is to provide two planes of knowledge: a declarative knowledge and a procedural one. At the declarative level, a transparency of the formative evaluation is proposed, addressed both through its functions (observation-detection, adjustment-optimization, expansion-deepening), and through the forms of expression (continuous and synthetic). At the procedural level, a model-matrix is provided to ensure these evaluation approaches (continuous and synthetic), in relation to the three types of acquisitions derived from the specific competence (knowledge, skills, attitudes), within a curricular case study (Personal Development discipline)

Keywords. Formative assessment, synthetic assessment, competence



1. Title of the first section of the paper

To assess. Why? What the? When? How?

Naturally, the list of queries associated with the evaluation phenomenon can be extended. For the interest of the proposed analysis, the list is appropriately sized, moreover, it hints at a pedagogical logic in the existing sequence.

The dialectic of perspectives on assessment (in relation to school learning) positions the thematic discourse in three territories: assessment of learning, assessment as learning and assessment for learning. This referential grid regulates different answers to the previously formulated questions, as there are different epistemologies with different consequences at the level of praxis.

As a learning evaluation, the approach has precise purposes/functions: ascertaining the value of learning by referring to clear benchmarks (the formulated expectations) and with the help of a fixed referential (the quality and quantity criteria of the formulated expectations): "To evaluate means to issue judgments of value regarding the student's learning, based on criteria appropriate to the set objectives, in order to make decisions" (Potolea et al., 2005, p.4). Thus, learning assessment provides visibility into the performance and quality of learning products. If we calibrate school learning on the three dimensions present in the Romanian specialized literature (process, product, function of factors) the destinations of the evaluative analysis will also multiply: the quality of the learning products/results, the quality of the learning process, the quality of the variables involved in the learning process (implicit in obtaining the learning products).

Although, apparently, most of the time, the evaluation of the learning process is motivated only if the products do not correspond qualitatively, from a pedagogical/ didactic point of view, such an evaluation is permanently necessary, because it offers the possibility of identifying some relevant aspects for future learning situations: the compatibility of the student's dominant learning style with the morphism of content coding and with the teacher's option for certain strategies and teaching-learning experiences, the adequacy of the volume of purchases projected at the level of the student's prerequisites, the preference and state of comfort expressed by the student in the context of some different situations of assimilation and practice (in groups, in pairs, individually) etc. In other words, the evaluation of the learning process should not be supported only by the alibi of the absence of desirable learning products. In addition, "modern assessment, which promotes the transition from the notion of controlling the acquisition of knowledge to the concept of evaluating both learning results and especially the processes they involve, signifies the transition from a pedagogy of knowledge transmission to a pedagogy of acquisition knowledge and the science of becoming" (Potolea et al., 2005, p. 8).

Relocating the analysis to the territory of the learning process, in fact, also slips into the third analysis that should not be ignored: the evaluation of the various variables that condition/influence learning. Because this complex exercise of reviewing the many elements involved in obtaining learning is a key indicator of the reflective teacher, that teacher who positions his gaze on his own approaches to the design and implementation of learning, integrating in the area of "interest" its many variables (learning).

As learning, assessment offers us a particular resizing, revealing its transformative and formative nature. The assessment experience is not one that places the student in the status of receiver of the assessment practice, but is one that offers him invitations to participate in the event,



to find out what criteria are activated, what strategies and methods are applied, what explanatory or interpretive mechanisms are set in motion. In other words, a formative assessment goes beyond the level of a formative assessment, as it provides the student with opportunities for instrumentation such as understanding, anticipation and configuration of assessment scenarios, with all the assumed "ingredients": the key units/acquisitions that will be assessed, the structure, the particularities and application mechanisms of assessment methods and tools (including the scale). In this way, a superior instrumentation is formed, of a metacognitive nature, generating a special regulation, ensured by the student himself.

An assessment for learning (AfL) directs the discourse to the mechanisms by which the assessment approach becomes a source for student learning: an impetus, a dynamo and a meaning for it. We are "now" approaching the authentic meaning of a formative assessment, one that builds students' "learning to learn" skills by: placing emphasis on the process of teaching and learning, and actively involving students in that process, building students' skills for peer - and self-assessment, helping students understand their own learning, and develop appropriate strategies for "learning to learn" (OECD/CERI, 2008). For J. Popham, formative assessment is "a planned process in which obtaining evidence of student status is used a) by teachers to adapt ongoing instructional procedures or b) by students to adjust current learning tactics" (Popham, 2008, 407).

Most basically, all assessment processes that are designed to contribute to greater, deeper, or more sophisticated student learning involve collecting evidence about the current state of learning early enough so that teacher action (i.e., teaching) and student activity (i.e., learning) change in a way that causes progress towards intended goals and targets (Brown, G., 2021, p.20).

Assessment for learning is any assessment for which the first priority in its design and practice is to serve the purpose of promoting pupils' learning. It thus differs from assessment designed primarily to serve the purposes of accountability, or of ranking, or of certifying competence. An assessment activity can help learning if it provides information to be used as feedback by teachers, and by their pupils in assessing themselves and each other, to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged. Such assessment becomes 'formative assessment' when the evidence is actually used to adapt the teaching work to meet learning needs (Black et al, 2004).

As suggested by Black and Wiliam (2006), AfL is properly a set of pedagogical practices intended to improve the quality of teaching and the depth and speed of student learning. For that is certainly desirable for students to have clarity about learning goals or intentions, to have opportunities to reflect on their own and their peers' progress, to be asked questions that challenge their thinking, and to receive feedback that helps them develop around task, processes, and self-regulation (Hattie et al., 2007).

After this ideational scaffolding, the return to the initial interrogations forces a firm direction of the discourse, in order to crystallize the bridge between the proposed repertoire and that of the reader.

Why do we rate? To ascertain and promote the quality and process of learning. The "quality" attribute is operationalized into two others: effectiveness and efficiency. In this way, all three territories of assessment understanding are "covered".

What is evaluated? Updating an initial idea, that of the competency-centered curriculum paradigm, the answer to the question becomes natural: what is learned is evaluated, i.e. the



instrumentation with (specific) competencies, operationalizing: the set of knowledge, skills and attitudes derived from the specific competencies is evaluated.

When are they assessed? At the beginning (before) of the learning program (initial assessment), during the learning program (formative assessment) and at the end of the learning program (summative assessment). The essence of the initial assessment consists in a first "look" towards the future, towards the competences that need to be formed, not towards what is "already there" in the portfolio of students' instrumentation. The hard core of the initial assessment consists in making transparent (through successive derivations) the specific competencies of the new year of study and, in relation to these sets of knowledge, skills and attitudes, to select those acquisitions "already there" that facilitate the new instrumentation. It is about ensuring the curricular spiral, so that the initial assessment detects only those prerequisites that condition the acquisition/training of new knowledge, skills and attitudes. Not infrequently, this selection must be organized in relation to a second criterion: the suitability of the amount of elements initially evaluated to the time resource allocated for this evaluation. A strategy for negotiating this situation is for the initial assessment to refer only to the acquisition of some of the specific skills already covered, those that correspond to the first specific skills planned for acquisition in the new school year: "This form of assessment has the meaning of a bridge between a previous state and a future one" (Cerghit, 2002).

Date	Specific competence (code and statement)	Competence components (knowledge, skills, attitude)	Strategies/ Tools	Key contents

Figure 1. Template Initial assessment

For example, the Personal Development Discipline (Course) has established the following specific competencies for the three years of study:

Preparatory class

- 1.1. Identification of basic personal traits
- 1.2. Identification of simple personal hygiene objects and activities
- 2.1. Recognition of basic emotions in simple, familiar situations
- 2.2. Identifying the rules of communication in school activity
- 2.3. Explore the characteristics of your favorite beings and objects and simple interaction

with them

- 3.1. Identifying some routines in school activity
- 3.1. Realization of a daily program of activities, with the support of adults
- 3.3. Identifying favorite hobbies, games and activities



Class I

- 1.1. Presentation of basic personal traits, in various contexts
- 1.2. Identification of personal hygiene rules
- 2.1. Associating basic emotions with simple elements of nonverbal and paraverbal language
- 2.2. Transmitting simple verbal and non-verbal messages about one's own life experiences
- 2.3. Exploring the characteristics needed to be a good friend
- 3.1. Identifying simple work tasks in varied contexts
- 3.2. Highlighting the importance of learning for one's own person
- 3.3. Exploring familiar or favorite jobs

Class II

- 1.1. Establishing similarities and differences between oneself and others, according to simple criteria
- 1.3. Compliance with personal hygiene rules
- 2.1. Expressing basic emotions in various situations
- 2.2. Using elements of active listening
- 2.3. Exploring the skills of relating to others
- 3.1. Realization of a daily program of activities, with the support of adults
- 3.2. Presentation of the conditions (tools, people, contexts) that make learning easy or difficult.

An initial assessment carried out in class I, involves a preliminary analysis of the acquisitions (specific skills) in class II. As a result, in the annual calendar planning for the 2nd grade, the specific skills were distributed in the following sequence: 1.3., 3.1., 3.2., 1.1., 2.2., 2.1., 2.3., 3.3. Since only one hour is allocated for the initial assessment, the solution is to select only those acquisitions from the previous year that can facilitate the assimilation of the components of the first two (maximum three) specific skills that will be studied in the new school year. In this pedagogical logic, the initial assessment also becomes an assessment for learning.

At the opposite temporal "end" of the initial assessment is the summative assessment. It is a balance assessment, intended to confirm the acquisition of the tools associated with all the specific skills that constituted the learning objectives. French pedagogical literature insistently promotes the image of an evaluation with the valence and allure of a pedagogical contract. From this perspective, the evaluative experience is one that gives students the certainty that they are listened to, appreciated, encouraged, understood. An essential attribute for such an evaluation is transparency, ensured above all by "setting the criteria" (Belaire, 1999, in Manolescu, 2002, 140).

"Between" the two types/strategies of assessment presented, a third is practiced, the one that accompanies the student's learning path. Because its main purpose is to optimize learning, by ensuring spontaneous or immediate regulatory interventions, by organizing practice-consolidation experiences and by implementing deepening-extension opportunities, and all of these are „accessorized" by the informed and motivated involvement of the student, we can call as "formative" this type of assessment. A meaning that internalizes the criterion formulated by Raynal, & Rieunier (1997): „Formative evaluation aims 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 each student's cognitive difficulties and prompts the teacher to develop remedial devices" (Raynal et al., 1997, in Minder, 2011, p.320). But a meaning that tends to move away



from Minder's (2011) perspective regulated by Perrenoud's idea. For the latter, formative assessment is „regulation in the absence of anything else, which intervenes only in the last analysis, when other forms of regulation have for a time exhausted their virtues” (Perrenoud, 1998, in Minder, 2011, p 320). As a result, Minder states that „formative assessment and its corollary, moderation, are second-rate procedures that quality education should be able to avoid if it was first careful to regulate learning in real time. These corrective procedures should theoretically not intervene, unless interactive regulation has proven inoperative” (Minder, 2011, p.320).

We have preferred to use the term 'formative assessment' rather than 'ongoing assessment' for a reason to be set out below.

It is accepted that school learning amounts to equipping students with the set of knowledge, skills and attitudes associated with each specific competence in the intended curriculum of the subject of study. According to calendar planning, these specific skills are associated with appropriate time milestones: total number of hours, weeks, calendar dates. The procedure was explained previously (Petre, 2022). Within this planning approach, the „episode” of allocating a number of hours for the two macro-evaluative types/strategies must be remembered: initial and summative. Moreover, the proposed template for annual learning planning positions the two subtypes of formative assessment: continuous assessment and synthetic assessment. The time resource (the final number of active teaching hours) must be related to an official regulation existing in the National Education Law: For each discipline and field of study, the school curriculum covers 75% of teaching and assessment hours, leaving the disposition of the teaching staff 25% of the time allocated to the respective subject/field of study. This is the reason why two categories of time resources are associated with each specific competence: one for teaching-learning and assessment (including synthetic) efforts and one for „hours at the teacher's disposal”.

Specific competence (code + statement)	Total number of hours	Distribution of hours		Week / Date	Remarks
		Teaching/Learning/Assessment (Synthetic)	HTD		
		Teaching/Learning/Assessment (Synthetic)	HTD		
		Teaching/Learning/Assessment (Synthetic)	HTD		

Figure 2. Annual planning model (Petre, 2022)

The „position” of formative assessment events is easily ascertained. Continuous assessment is that which accompanies the micro-path of learning: the lesson, both during and at the end of it. Each specific competence, derived through knowledge, skills and attitudes, represents a learning challenge with the length of several lessons. Continuous assessment is practiced within and at the end of each lesson. Assessment during the lesson is equivalent to the interactive regulation proposed by Minder (2011); „Interactive regulation is totally integrated into the learning situation.



It differs from retroactive regulation (aimed at remediation) and proactive regulation (aimed at consolidation and transfer)". (Minder, 2011, p. 309).

It is not limited to a self-regulation of the student based on his information about the state of progress and embodied in diagnoses related to temporary difficulties and in their remedy, as well as in identifying personal action strategies (Minder, op. cit., p.310). It also involves active approaches to descriptive feedback provided by the teacher.

Moreover, feedback is the essence of continuous assessment associated with learning experiences during lessons. As part of formative assessment, Hattie & Timperley (2007) indicate that feedback should cover three essential questions: Where am I going (goals)?/How am I doing (strategies)?/What are the further learning possibilities (broad perspective)? They give meaning to the entire mechanism, providing learners with a clear global view of the entire learning process: the steps required to solve the task, the learning objectives, the performance criteria and standards.

Kurtz, Silverman & Draper (2005) identified some specific principles that ensure the generation of effective descriptive feedback:

1. Feedback should focus on the process of solving the task and not on making value judgments. Thus, it should be focused on behavior, not personality.
2. It must be conveyed in the form of a specific, clear and concise message, avoiding very general formulations.
3. It must be focused on disseminating information and not on giving advice.
4. It must be directed at things that can be changed, with the aim of continuously improving learning.

Descriptive feedback is therefore quintessentially formative even within an assessment situation. Brookhart (2008, p. 2) shows that a descriptive response, appropriate to the task, develops the level of comprehension and gives learners a sense of control over their own learning.

Naturally, feedback intervention during the lesson is multifunctional, intending not only to inform, regulate, optimize, but also to motivate, excite, thank. The second expression of the continuous evaluation is the one at the end of the lesson and its main role is to confirm the quality of the results formulated in the form of operational objectives, which are reached by the successive derivation of the specific competence, then, at the operational level of each derived component, the transcription is carried out in the form of an operational objective, according to the various agreed models (Petre, 2017; Petre, 2022).

The assessment at the end of the lesson must be carried out using methods and tools appropriate to the acquisition categories: knowledge, skills, attitude. A brief transparency of each category is required.

Knowledge can be factual, declarative, procedural and metacognitive (Krathwohl, D.R., 2002). They can be primarily evaluated through written assessment tests, applied at the beginning of the new school hour, with a short duration (4-5 minutes), most of the items containing homework challenges.

Skills can be cognitive, psychomotor, interactional, self-regulatory, etc., as a result, the methods and tools are diverse: written tests, practical tests, observation/observation grids, projects.

Attitudes, embodied in behaviors, can be evaluated based on the observation grid, either through external monitoring (teacher or parent) or through self-monitoring (student).



If the continuous assessment means steps to verify the students' instrumentation with the operationalized components of the specific competence at the level of each lesson (see also Petre, et al., 2019), the synthetic assessment represents this approach in relation to all the acquisitions of the specific competence (positioned, therefore, at the end of the program of learning associated with the respective competence).

Formally, the prescriptive settings associated with this continuous as well as the synthetic assessment are found in the design of the learning unit design:

The type of assessment	Week/ Data	The components (of the competency) that are assessed	Strategies/ Tools	Remarks
continuous				
synthetic				

Figure 3. Learning unit design/planning template. Types of assessment (Petre, 2022)

A useful example: pedagogical management of competence 1.3., Personal Development discipline, 2nd grade.

At the level of calendar planning, time milestones (total and distributed by activity categories):

Specific competence (code + statement)	Total number of hours	Distribution of hours (75% + 25%)		Week / Date	Remarks
1.3. Respect some personal hygiene rules	5	Teaching-Learning/Assessment (synthetic)	4	W2, W3, W4, W5	
		HTD (Hour at the teacher's disposal)	1	W6	

Figure 4. Competence 1.3 in annual planning

Following the derivation at the specific level, the following components were obtained:

<i>Specific competence (code and statement)</i>	<i>Knowledge</i>	<i>Skills</i>	<i>Attitude</i>
<i>1.3. Respect some personal hygiene rules</i>	Each student will know specific rules for each dimension of personal hygiene	Each student will follow rules specific to each dimension of personal hygiene	Each student will autonomously respect...
	Each student will know tools specific to personal hygiene rules, as well as how to use these tools	Each student will apply/use the tools specific to personal hygiene rules	

Figure 5. Competence components



Conclusions

The contemporary paradigm of the competence-centered curriculum associates an essential consequence at the level of the design, implementation and evaluation of school learning: the resizing of acquisitions in the form of knowledge, skills and attitudes (see Pre-university Education Law, 2023, art. 85). As a result, any finality expressed within the intended curriculum (represented by the school curriculum) in the form of the specific competence must be subjected to a pedagogical derivation approach to obtain the set of the three components.

The article followed the theoretical positioning of formative assessment in its morphism of continuous assessment (performed during and at the end of each lesson) and synthetic assessment (performed at the end of all learning experiences associated with a specific competence).

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