

## Theoretical Approach of Evaluation & Assessment Within Educational Context

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### ABSTRACT

Modern management systems incorporate evaluation and self-assessment mechanisms to improve the quality of services and to enhance their added value in terms of the taxes spent on their operation. The same applies to the public sector educational systems at all levels (primary, secondary, tertiary). Within this context, the objectives of the professional teachers, which are complex and complex, are analyzed. They include not only the knowledge transfer but also instilling values and attitudes to pupils. This is why most teachers believe it is not a morally good idea to try to evaluate these "sensitive" systems. Thus, any legislative actions on evaluation causes intense controversy and concern in the public dialogue since it is de facto considered non-democratic and contrary to the cultural ethics of the profession of teachers. Under these circumstances, the Ministry of Education decided to apply the evaluation in two parallel steps, internal and external. In this paper we look at the effectiveness and efficiency of this strategy, along with the policies that are in place for that purpose.

**Keywords:** internal – external evaluation, self-assessment, effectiveness

### INTRODUCTION

The current sociocultural, economic and technological challenges in contemporary environments exert extreme pressure for change in educational institutions worldwide. School organization, educational content, learning environments, produced outcomes and tutors' professional development are key issues for scientific inquiries both at theoretical and applied level. In particular, fields such as the improvement of quality of educational work and the evaluation of tutor practices constitute front line priorities inside educational policies in the European and international arena.

Since the mid-90s, in most European countries, the quality and evaluation of educational work are considered as two interdependent key concepts that form together the basic pillars of any forthcoming educational reform. The evaluation of educational work is considered to be a substantive control parameter of the reliability of the education system. It is interweaved with issues such as organization, operation and results of school institutions, and also the effectiveness of instructional design and the implementation of current educational policies. In recent years, within the international area, there is indeed a significant rise towards the development of policies for the evaluation of teaching work inside school environments. This phenomenon is more intensive in countries that are characterized by decentralized and isolated structures.

In contemporary states, the above issues were encountered with a plethora of legislative initiatives. Most of these actions were discrete reformative steps that delivered poor results. Since the last decade, these actions have intensified and usually been accompanied by a series of measures and rhetoric that targeted mainly the public sector area. The outcomes of these activities, after thirty years of effort, were rather pale: lots of paper of produced material

thrown away, committees of evaluation remain inactive. Meanwhile, a broad anti-evaluation sense has been moulded in the community's collective sense.

### STATUS QUO ANTE

Evaluation in education can take many forms, amongst the different educational systems, and there are a lot of relevant articles in modern literature (see, for example Simons 1987, Barth 1990, Norris 1990, Broadfoot 1996, Solomon 1998, Ofsted 2003, Lamnias 2002, Eurydice 2004 etc.). It has been quoted that "... despite the diversity of assessment, practices can be divided into two general types of education evaluation as to the position of the organization performing the evaluation in relation to the school unit: internal and external evaluation" (Solomon, 1999). This is a basic guideline that needs to be further explained.

**External** evaluation, should be carried out by senior level management entities or independent bodies of the highest possible prestige and often has direct effects on the applicant, such as promotion or reward. The most important common form of external evaluation is the "inspection", which emerges in the early 19th century and operates since then with a lot of variations. Analytically, the main goal of external evaluation is the control of compliance to education legislation, focusing on the quality of teaching and the learning outcomes. A typical SWOT analysis (Bartol & Martin, 1991) demonstrates the advantages of this type:

- it facilitates the configuration of improvement suggestions through comparable data
- it acts as an incentive to assure the quality of educational work
- it provides criteria for the enforcement of educational legislation and indirectly an external legalization of the advancement of in-service teachers
- it is performed within a specific and limited time frame and it does not add any more work on the tutor
- it promotes the ability to compare, to some degree, different school units and tutors
- it makes it easier to identify positive and negative aspects of school units and tutors

At the same time, some serious weaknesses emerged, including:

- it engenders fear rather than self-awareness of tutors
- it often judges unfoundedly and subjectively, thus yielding to large-scale subjectivity
- it favours individualism rather than the collective spirit inside a school unit
- it moulds an often deceptive and unfair picture for the school unit

**Internal** evaluation aims at improving the quality of educational work through the activation of teachers towards a positive way of thinking. Nowadays, it is applied to almost all European countries. Among the objectives are transforming the educational unit to an ideal quality lab for developing innovations and forming novel practices. Internal assessment can take usually many forms among which the most prevalent are:

- hierarchical internal evaluation, where senior managers judge those ranking lower inside the organization
- collective internal evaluation or self-assessment, which usually applies in decentralized education systems and is based on a different approach. Specifically, self-evaluation procedures are designed, organized, monitored and assessed by agents acting inside the school unit. Self-assessment, just because it is implemented by the teachers themselves, penetrates educational realities, tailors it from inside and feeds back educational practices horizontally

As key advantages of the internal evaluation are reported:

- it activates all stakeholders and reinforces trust and reciprocity relations among them
- it gives teachers the opportunity to realize the particular circumstances of their everyday practice

- it creates conditions for initiative and innovation blooming
- it fosters co-responsibility and self-commitment
- it highlights and disseminates positive educational activities
- it identifies weaknesses and creates conditions for improvement
- it indicates certain fields of intervention
- it contributes to the improvement of educational practices and changing the school culture

In contrast, its main weaknesses include:

- The risk of establishing bureaucratic behaviour
- The possibility of internal conflict
- The painless emphasis on minor issues
- The creation of introversion tendencies inside school

It is true that the first form of evaluation was applied in a rather rigorous way a few decades ago. Then it was forgotten for a long time. On the other side, the second form (internal evaluation) is actually existent, as a mean of implicit (tacit) knowledge transfer inside the educational organization. This applies to any other organization as well. It is actually a part of informal organization knowledge management. Here lies the opportunity to drag it to the surface, making it open to access (for the stakeholders and community) and ignite a wider growing culture of evaluation, that is quite opposite to current ethics and practices.

The danger, on the other side, is that this effort can be reduced down to red-tape processes which will characterize school routine and will contribute minimally to the quality improvement. Anyone must be convinced that these interventions actually aim at changing structures and procedures inside time-stationary systems, towards the directions of autonomy - mobility, increasing thus the degrees of freedom in a democratic school. In the following section the two methods are presented in more detail.

### **THEORETICAL RAMIFICATIONS**

The variety of today's different systems of the HR<sup>1</sup> management calls for one critical arrangement: the country-wide unification of all subsidiary systems under the control of a central, personnel management authority, centered in the upper administration levels. This system (already initiated platform in Ministry of Education as <https://myschool.sch.gr><sup>2</sup>) will help the monitoring and the utilization of the personnel in a transparent way, based on the principles of meritocracy and accountability.

In this work, one can take a closer look at the specific parameters that constitute the theoretical body of the evaluation and attainment processes, in two steps. This will lead to a deeper understanding of the novel ways that will influence the relationships among tutors and the whole system track for the next years. It is obvious that a comprehensive survey, along with a field research, needs to be conducted, as soon as raw experimental data are available.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT**

Evaluation of educational work inside a school unit is a continuous dynamic process, inherently embedded in the structure of each organization that adopts to and learns from its own environment. That process involves first, the acknowledgement of the particular idiosyncratic characteristics of a school unit and second, the overall educational planning, as a

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<sup>1</sup> Shortcut for Human Resource

<sup>2</sup> The url for Panhellenic School Unit Administration Network

tool for organizing and carrying out daily duties and also preparing the unit for future challenges. Self-evaluation aims at creating an ever-lasting "culture of learning and attainment", based on production and exploitation of educational evidence from teachers themselves. It is associated with promotion and consolidation of an equally important "culture of trust", based on relationship interweaving (responsibility and cooperation are two synonyms also). Basic elements comprising this process are:

- a) collection procedures, developed by working groups and Teacher Boards (e.g. the Annual Evaluation Report)
- b) peer evaluation, developed by individual teachers, in order to regulate their feedback. The "assessment between teachers" is an informal and yet basic, in-service, internal support structure to promote relationships of trust, share experiences, develop scientific cooperation, enrich the personal file of a tutor, promote forms of self and in-service school training
- c) bottom-up evaluation, because teachers have the opportunity to evaluate educational materials, tools and procedures and evaluation reports are communicated to the upper tiers of hierarchy in order to support the bigger picture of policy making
- d) application of "action research", during the development of action plans to improve the quality of produced work
- e) foundation of in-service training as an active, integral and complementary procedure that supports the scientific and professional development of teachers.

All systems focus on self-assessment as a major procedure of the every-day school practice because it:

- mobilizes all stakeholders
- engages them in joint actions
- commits them against their own plans
- builds collaborative behaviours
- clarifies problems
- indicates fields for self-training and improvement
- feedbacks school annual scheduling and enhances effectiveness
- is not intended to control, but to improve quality in a democratic environment

Codifying aims and objectives towards quality improvement, results in:

- emerging of the autonomous school unit
- creating a culture of assessment
- strengthening cooperation and participation among members of the community
- enhancing self-awareness and the professional development of teachers
- acquiring experiences of top executives and educators in the field of the evaluation
- emergence of positive values, dissemination of good practices, pinpointing of weaknesses
- development of measures to improve the quality of school work
- shaping culture initiatives for planning actions and problem solving
- continuous feedback on the design of educational policy and establishing training and other interventions
- the complete operational management and the by - effective utilization of human resources
- the upgrading of teaching and pedagogical practices, promotion of innovation and development of support and compensation practices

In order to achieve the aforementioned aims, the employees could be asked the following questions: What is the quality of the produced work today? Where did they want to go? What

should they do in order to get there? What progress have they done? How did they benefit as individuals and as a whole from the above procedure? Was quality improved and in which sectors? Attempting to answer, the following necessities can arise:

- Systemic study and assessment of the educational work
- Report shared aims and priorities for action
- Design and implementation of jointly agreed actions
- Monitoring and evaluation of the realized educational work
- Result feedback from current project, dissemination of good practices and setting new targets

The school as a dominant, self-standing unit, must develop constant self-evaluation procedures, executed regularly within scheduled periods. The following list was the basic ingredients of these procedures:

- Programming: at the beginning of every school year, each unit takes into account the annual assessment report of the previous year and the new circumstances that may have arisen. Then it designs the plans for the year to come, its activities and projects, in order to address difficulties and weaknesses. It also defines mechanisms to establish monitoring and feedback processes. By this way, it ensures consistency and continuity in the unit operation.
- Implementation: the unit implements its educational work based on the approved curriculum. It sticks to the programming actions defined earlier.
- Review: during school year (e.g. quarterly) procedures for monitoring, formative (mid-term) assessment and feedback are applied. This type of evaluation concerns all aspects of the educational work that could be characterized as progress.
- Utilization: at the end of the school year, the school unit assesses the progress of the main work and the results of side-effect projects and activities carried out during to the initial stated schedule. Results of evaluation can be exploited during the next school year

During the self-evaluation process, sources of evidence are being gathered concerning three major domains of educational work: data, procedures and results. For each of these categories, two more levels of analysis are being studied: indicatives per sector, criteria per indicative. In the appendix, the reader can follow a typical presentation of the elements of self-evaluation and its formal impact on a generally devised index for the school identity.

#### **EXTERNAL UNBIASED**

The assessment framework of educational work that was legally activated recently (Government Gazette, 2013), takes into account modern pedagogical theories and research results, conducted inside the constructivist paradigm (Kellaghan & Stufflebeam, 2003) and related to:

- the development of young people
- the conversion of school unit to a continuously learning community through reflective dialogue and fraternal cooperation
- the roles and duties of teachers as they grow professionally, in relation to the mission of the system
- the roles of students which have to conquer deep knowledge and develop language, cognitive, social and methodological competences in the fields of science, art and technology
- the framework and procedures through which students format social, ethical, aesthetic, political and cultural attitudes and values and shape their identities accordingly

- the framework and procedures through which students realize their responsibilities and rights as team members and as citizens of a democratic state, and develop critical attitudes against the dominant models of science, art, and technology utilization

Despite the fact that assessment is considered an intrinsic part of the educational process (and therefore it can be seen in different forms in the educational systems of almost all countries in the literature and the scientific and educational community as well), many points of disagreements and debates on theoretical and practical issues remain, which by their nature are not amenable to one definitive answer. The most important of the issues concerning evaluation involve such as who, for what purpose, by whom, how, when and where, with the 'for' and 'against' assigned to the alternatives. Also there are a lot of listed options (as published in P.D.152/2013<sup>3</sup>) regarding the individual queries:

- Which are the limitations, responsibilities and roles of schools and teachers when evaluated?
- What purpose is the process of teacher evaluation being implemented for?
- Which type of assessment is the most appropriate and effective, formative or final - summative?
- Are there alternative approaches?
- How exactly is the assessment of school-units connected to remuneration and teachers' wages?
- How exactly are urban and regional schools involved into the evaluation program?
- Are parents somehow engaged to the process? And to what extend?
- Is socio-cultural context of class and relative circumstances being taken into account?
- Are second chances considered, in order to improve the initial picture of evaluation?
- Is negative judgement allowed or not?

How can all these parameters be synthesized? One way is by extending the assessment to its longitudinal coefficient. That means one can broaden criteria, test alternative approaches and activate emotional intelligence of tutors. This process is regenerative and sustainable and should contribute, combined with in-service training, to the professional development of teachers.

### **ASSESSMENT TOOLS**

Generally, there are two main streams of theory in the assessment area: the first is focused on the process-product pair and the second on the process-service one. The educational system can hardly be considered as a classical production based organization. And that is because, even in the most rational societies, education is-more than a mechanistic knowledge concentration, imposed on peoples' heads. Even in humanitarian studies, the term 'product' is considered alien to the contemporary point of view. So the process-product approach should be abandoned.

The product-service dipole seems to be more accurate and compatible with the role of education, as it is internationally meant. In that case, education involves the students that wish to acquire a specific service and the establishment (e.g. school unit) that provides for this. But the role of students does not fully cover the amount of required services, so the field of participants has to be extended. It will include all the stakeholders who are potentially beneficent from the educational services (Reavill, 1998). The search of the appropriate

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<sup>3</sup> Presidential Decree issued by the Greek Ministry of Education

stakeholders and the recording of their needs can contribute to the effective design of the whole process.

In order to move forward to specific metrics, it is important to be able to measure the degree of satisfaction from the output of every internal and/or external modular procedure which constitutes a parametric operation. To do so, one must rigorously define points of quality control inside the system. These points will depend on the type of the educational system, the granularity level (the level of in-depth detail or scrutiny), the graduation rates, the standardized test scores, etc. The satisfaction, or effectiveness, is the measurement of divergence of the actual outputs compared to the initial aims or the real demands or requirements of its users.

In general, effectiveness or productivity is a notion that relates input resources and outcomes of a system of an organization. When referring to education (Barr, 1998), the notion of effectiveness unfolds two dimensions:

- internal effectiveness, which refers to the ability of an organization to education or train its students and in accordance to “produce” graduates that are equipped with the special features and qualities this organization is working about and
- external effectiveness, when the graduates of the organization are embedded in the society (and start working with a specific level of income) in relation to the resources consumed while they were students.

The second metric, known also as investment rate, is particularly used as one factor of university ranking indices. Although the thorough measurement of educational processes presents special methodological and conceptual difficulties, due to the level of complexity of the issue, there have been proposed meticulous study models that are used especially by governmental organizations that analyze mainly the economic facet of the system, as a way to support the necessary social welfare pillars that every modern society needs. That is because in most countries education financing, mostly in the two levels (primary and secondary), remains public.

Public system funding is precisely the reason that often leads to considerable controversy in policy discussions. As long as the effect of increasing school resources on performance remains unclear and the demands on education system keep rising, the assessment models will still diverge and operate on the presumable basis of axioms which are debatable and yet controversial. Nevertheless, the need to justify every euro spent by the tax payers in the educational area will remain.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Today, it is no longer sufficient to claim “I can’t define good teaching but I know when I see it” (Danielson, 2011), because if you don’t define something then you cannot evaluate it and thus cannot improve it. At this point, discussion may advert to other fields of empiricism, not necessarily rational.

Given then, the complexity and the increased difficulty of teaching, a persistent need reveals for systematic monitoring and continuous improvement of alternative approaches, through which the teacher and the educational system can be managed successfully. In this view, the existence of an evaluation framework does not necessarily mean that something is going bad and need to be repaired, but that there are areas that may want more attention and require either a closer focus or a more susceptible pedagogic approach.

Beyond personal, scientific or trade union beliefs, that everyone is entitled to have and defend, one issue should be considered important: the unity, ethos and reliability of the teaching profession should not be set in danger, for any reason. On the contrary, different theories (that have always a political inclination) should become the reason for a constructive dialog in order to better serve the purposes of education as the most important public asset for the future of modern society.

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