THE IMPACT OF THE REFERENTIAL ON THE USED LANGUAGE IN THE REPORTS OF THE ASSESSMENT LEARNING RESULTS OF PRIMARY EDUCATION PUPILS

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Abstract

In literature of specialty there are few studies addressed to the modalities of carrying out the assessment reports. This study presents on scientific level the impact of the referentialon the used language in the assessment reports.

Through research project we proposed as objectives: to study the language used by teachers in primary education when filling in the reports of assessment pupils results based on the evaluative referent; the understanding of the importance of pupils learning activity as a result of the analysis of drafting style of the assessment reports; identifying the role of prior learning observationin projecting development programs for primary school pupils learning.

The basic method of our study was the analyze of school documents. Thus, we have reviewed several reports of assessment of pupils results, referring to the used language, to the style adopted by the assessor according to the referent's report. The results of the research have identified four main directions, which have a major role in describing the prior learning: the referential of the assessment report, pupils, the assessor and the administrators – the empowered institutions to organize the assessments. Each of these directions presents several subdomains debated in the initiated study.

The obtained results are beneficial to the responsible institutions for school assessment, but also to the assessor teachers, to improve the evaluative practices.

The research also identifies the main areas of development that would present a real support for the efficacity of the achievement methods of the assessment report.

Keywords: impact, referential, the language and the style of writing of he report, assessment report, prior learning assessment.

Introduction

Currently, the importance of the rethinking of the assessment process from the perspective of reflection upon pupils' school results is emphasized more and more. Thus, a change of paradigm in assessment is discussed, moving from measuring the pupils' results to a real assessment (Stoica 2001).

If a measurement is expressed in marks, grades, an appreciation is expressed in words. According to this belief, in the Romanian education system there have been developed working tools that favour the qualitative assessment

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rather than quantitative assessment: for the eighth grade - grading criteria, and for primary school - performance descriptors:

"If the previous techniques, corresponding to other assessing paradigms, were centered on "DIY (do – it - yourself)", on the "Technique of goals operationalization", the pedagogy of competence promotes the "Technique of qualitative description" of the learning process and product" (Manolescu 2015).

For the purpose of modern evaluation, the assessment represents a location in the sphere of communication that is finalized and concreted through a speech that offers an argument in response to a question assigned to a value. "The assessment is an act of reading" of an observable reality (Hadji 1989).

Referring to the levels of schooling, we find that in the primary school the referential is well-defined and designed by the presence of performance descriptors, but also by the educational documents that have changed the assessing paradigm for primary school, as a result of the actions taken in 1998/1999.

"The primary schooling is in a privileged position compared to other levels of education. At this level a referential has been elaborated and it is operational and according to this one there is organized both the learning activity and the evaluation one" (Manolescu 2015).

In this regard, there are important both the developed National Curriculum and the performance descriptors that have a role in organizing the learning-assessment process based on skills, thus achieving a shift to an appreciative approach to the detriment of measurement in the assessing act (Stoica 2003).

The appreciative approach is achieved by reference to a "referential". It can be *"an ensemble of elements connected within a system and having landmark status"* (Dragulanescu, et al 2014).

The referential helps us understand the factors according to which a pupil is assessed or his school result is appreciated, having the role to diagnose and to decide the ameliorative measures that have to be taken. Thus, the assessment experts or the specialized institutions develop referential feedback on the pupils' results. These represent criteria or statements which describe pupils' performance, according to which the assessors are issuing judgments. These values represent performance classes, efficiency levels or other descriptive structures (Lisievici 2002).

The studies regarding the results achieved by pupils in National Evaluation Exams provide a consistent base of information about pupils' school performance needed to work out a methodology for the design, implementation and analysis of educational assessment.

The Education Law 01/2011 provides information about the development ways of the National Evaluation at the end of the preschool, second and fourth grades.

"At the end of the preschool grade, based on a methodology developed by

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the Ministry of Education and Research of Youth and Sports, the teacher in charge writes an assessing report of the physical, socio-emotional, cognitive, language and communication development, as well as the development of learning capacities and attitudes "(National Education Law 2011).

"At the end of class II, each school organizes and conducts the evaluation of the basic skills: writing - reading and mathematics, based on a methodology developed by the Ministry of Education and Research of Youth and Sports. The assessment results and the individualized plans are communicated to the parents and are placed as documents in the pupil's educational portfolio." (National Education Law 2011).

"At the end of class IV, Ministry of Education and Research of Youth and Sports carries out, by samples, a national assessment of basic skills acquired in the primary school, modeled after international tests for diagnosis of the education system at the primary level." (The National Education Law 2011).

Currently, the evaluation was subject to a process of modernization, because it no longer has a summative character, but a formative one; it is performed at the end of an educational cycle and aims to design an individualized learning plan which captures the improvement, adjustment and betterment of pupils' learning process.

The evaluation no longer has the role of ranking pupils. Thus, the language used in the Assessing Report will not include comparative assessments between pupils on the level of knowledge assimilation. The assessing teachers will refer to knowledge, as well as to skills and abilities, setting the fulfillment of each standard needed to promote the following classes.

Meeting these standards is determined by the results obtained by pupils at the initial evaluations. These results help teachers design their teaching approach.

In the research project, we proposed as objectives:

1. Studying the language used by primary education teachers in completion of the assessment reports of pupils' performance based on the evaluative referent.
2. The understanding of the importance of pupils' learning activity as a result of analyzing the drafting style used in the assessing reports.
3. Identifying the role of observation of prior learning in designing of development programs for primary school pupils' learning.

We have identified as general hypothesis of the research project:

If there is analyzed the writing style of the assessing reports, then the teachers can better understand pupils' learning activity and realize the role of observation of prior learning in the designing of development programs for primary school pupils' learning.

From this general hypothesis derive the following specific hypotheses:

1. If the general criteria by which assessing teachers describe pupils' learning outcomes in the assessment reports are identified, then we

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can better understand the learning activity of pupils in primary education.

2. If the main ways of describing the prior learning are analyzed, then designing steps of development programs for primary school pupils' learning can be initiated.

The methodology

The Sample

The research batch was represented by 195 preschool pupils, 150 of second grade and 188 of fourth grade. Batch members come from 5 urban schools and 3 rural schools.

Methods

The method used was the analysis of school documents, investigating the language in the assessment reports according to the evaluative referential. There have been analyzed 195 assessing reports of preschool pupils' activities, 150 reports of pupils from second grade and 188 reports of pupils from the fourth grade.

There were also analyzed 133 assessing reports at the Dolj county level and 66 reports from school units, reports that have been submitted within the methodological committees.

Results of the research

Textually analyzing assessing-teachers' remarks, we have identified three general criteria by which they describe pupils' learning process: report recipients, describing pupils' learning process and the assessment language.

Thus, we will refer to each of these themes.

The recipients of the assessment report

Although not a criterion specified in the assessing methodology, however, teachers adopt different writing styles adapted to those the assessment report is intended for. The referential of the assessment report influences the writing styles of the evaluative assessments. There were identified three types of people targeted by the report: pupils, assessing teachers and test administrators.

The pupils

Some assessors consider that the pupil's individual study, along with his class participation, influence the responses' speed and integration in the lesson's development. Often, we noticed that when the assessment reports are addressed to the pupils, the assessor identifies learning's positive aspects, which he highlights and summarizes the critical ones.

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For example, an assessor found that "The pupil not only records the data in tables, he presents ways to correlate them and of creative use." Also, assessments about the successful assimilation of knowledge at an advanced level as a result of motivation and self-determination for learning are made.

Some comments have been developed to help the pupil to progress in learning. For example, another assessor explains how the pupil will be involved in learning, objectively and promptly, to avoid falling behind. This type of comment is a support for both pupil and teacher. Thus, the pupil learns how to study, and the teacher understands the pupil's process of previous learning, which has focused less on its practical actions in order to assimilate knowledge and skills.

The assessing teachers

Some reports were made frequently using specialty terms, as though they were addressed to assessment experts. To understand the terminology and the used expressions, the reader requires an advanced level of training in the theory and the methodology of the assessment. In most cases, this mode of expression has offered to the teachers reading the report the guarantee that the author is an expert in assessment content and has identified whether learning has occurred.

Many assessors specify whether the assessment targets were met reporting every objective to the pupil. This assessor's report can come in various forms, most often a list of objectives is developed that informs the reader whether the objectives have been achieved or not, in the learning process.

The test administrators

The reports addressed to test administrators showed pupils' learning results as providing proof elements in order to meet the educational policy. There are presented both data on assessment test results and an analysis of the pupil's entire educational endeavor highlighting the clear progress that occurred as a result of compliance to educational directives.

These references emphasize to the reader the idea that there was a systematic and complex process that supported the pupil's learning.

Pupils learning description

Examining the ways in which the assessors have written about assessment, we found three main themes: learning as experience, learning in different contexts and learning in different areas.

Is learning experience?

A major premise of prior learning assessment is that credit is given for learning and not for experience (Fiddler, Marienau and Whitaker 2006). Experience in itself does not give rise to learning, but how experience affects the results and applies these insights that provide the foundation for learning (Keeton, Sheckley and Griggs 2002).

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The evaluators' assessments showed that pupils' learning modalities are not influenced by their experience. Thus, it was shown that this concept is much more complex than experience-based learning. In some cases, learning was not separated from the pupil's experience: "Outcomes of learning are determined by the experience of learning and the practical one." meaning experiences are the gateways towards learning. These types of assessments do not make a clear distinction between experience and knowledge acquired, and the learning involves experiences.

In other cases, the learning was identified with the experience, as if learning can not be achieved without experience. Most often, in this respect, learning is more procedural, focusing on the practical work of the pupil. Some types of learning are in an interdependent relationship with experience, learning description is impossible to create without describing the experience. For example, to attain performances also in the study of arts, the pupil's portfolio includes his experiences, describes the expectations and demonstrates the learning. In these cases, the assessment language uses an experimental terminology (demonstrated, shown, for example) as captures of the relationship between learning and the experiences context.

Knowledge areas (Keeton, Sheckley, Griggs 2002) can provide different ways to describe learning. For example, declarative knowledge would require an assessment of vocabulary, theories and principles of a topic. In contrast, the procedural knowledge needs a different type of assessment.

Learning in different contexts

In learning's description there have been identified different styles in accordance with the context in which the learning was acquired. The description differs whether learning is based on performance or personal experience.

The description of performance-based learning uses proceedings and methods for learning description. For example: "The learning style is based on a thorough demonstration of the working stages, which pupils then show "; in Fine Arts expressions such as, "presents interest for the look of the paper"; "approaching the issues of general interest" describes a performance-based learning. Thus, language and culture of the performance determines the ways in which assessors wrote the evaluation report.

Assessors' writing about pupils' experience-based learning focuses on developing their skills. Often, assessors list the tasks they had to fulfill and the skills attained by them. Example of such supplements: "The pupil understood the achievement stages of the project, respecting the need for training, allocation of tasks within the working group, respected the working timeframe and properly managed the material resources."

The contents are different depending on how the pupil acquired learning. Each is a narrative style based on how assessors described the proceeding of learning acquiring. Choosing the vocabulary, details, pictures and other matters

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are indications of the assessment reports based on different learning contexts. The reader of these reports can obtain information about the context in which the learning took place.

Learning reported to different areas

Assessors writing styles change depending on the pupils' learning area. There have been identified many area-specific words, but also their content.

Thus, we can say that the assessment styles belong to the learning area. For example, at Romanian language and literature "The awareness of the poetic rhythm conducts to the enrichment of pupils' imagination and language expressiveness". At Civic Education an assessor finds out that "The pupil has demonstrated an advanced understanding of emotions that underlie the debate. These emotions are represented by the following behaviors..... ". The emotions that the pupil has lived are described from different perspectives and how morality interacts with legal prospects and various social values.

In this case, words and phrases are representative of a particular area.

The assessment language

We identified different styles of vocabulary and expression of the assessors. Differences in expression between reviewers were determined by the specific used terminology. Many evaluators have used addressing terminology for a particular group, which is not understood by the general public. They used terms belonging to their own culture, to a specific discipline, to the educational and institutional area.

Discussions

The results of this study are of particular importance for practice. The existence of the assessment reports required by the education institutions at county and national level, in addition to the criteria assessments, require the completion of an analysis of progress or regress in learning. The assessments are narrative structured, but there are styles and attitudes of the assessors that influence the evaluative approach.

Even if there is not an assessment report for each class, as required by the education system, evaluative assessments are written by teachers after applying summative evaluation tests. These reports appreciate the learning results obtained by pupils, but also adopt a specialized language to assess as fair as possible pupils' learning performance. The assessors have certain considerations, attitudes towards pupils' learning, determining the difference in learning.

People targeted by the assessment report are very important. The purpose of the evaluation report is primarily to define the public it is addressed to.

For example, when the report was addressed to pupils and parents, it had a qualitative form. When the report was addressed to colleagues from the methodical commission the learning process was justified, supported by

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examples. When the report was addressed to the school inspectorate, there have been made references in general terms to emphasize that the assessment took place.

The purpose of the report must clearly define who the audience is. If it is part of the learning process of the pupil, then the pupil is the audience. If it is addressed to colleagues, to the methodical commission, then the goal is to justify pupils learning in relation to the educational policies. If it is addressed to an institution (school or school inspectorate), then it must respect certain rules of report forming.

The language used by assessors influenced the understanding of pupils' learning activity. The assessment also determined different aspects: from identifying pupils' learning difficulties, to the development of the assessors' skills, to the improvement of the assessment criteria contained in the report.

A significant difference in how the assessors registered pupils' learning was the expression style used in observation. In some reports the pupil is the observer or is using his view to justify the learning action.

In contrast, some assessors imprint a personal form to the way the assessment is done, expressing their views. Some of the comments focused on pupil's learning, others have referred to the contextual circumstances that led to learning.

The reports providing the most complex information are those combining the styles of writing, in which the observations are combined with the analysis of pupils' learning results.

When reports were addressed to institutional authority, the assessors tried to justify the pupils' results and learning acquisitions, to prove a higher level of training. In this case, there are some reports that were completed efficiently when assessors provided information about pupils' learning, illustrating in this way their professional skills level.

If the purpose of the report is to describe pupil learning, then the evaluator's style to assess pupil learning provides the referent a picture of pupil learning with reference to the types of learning and the knowledge and skills he achieved.

The referent of the evaluation report is the one that shapes the style of writing the assessment report. Thus, there may be several description of pupil learning. For example, information which formed the basis for building learning description may be different from those that prompted the development of some procedural structures. Understanding how learning is described in the assessment report, we can identify the critical points that affect pupil learning.

Conclusion

The language styles used in the writing of the reports influenced the understanding of pupils' learning and the requirements of institutional authorities.

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It is the culture that impacts the report writing style. The culture of the study discipline, institution, the environment in which the pupil has acquired the knowledge has an impact on the style used in the description of learning. Expressions used to describe learning are based on the assessor's culture. There have been identified strategic or procedural differences in the description of the learning types.

The assessor's role is to drive the pupil's learning toward his forming necessity, to design a development program that will assist in the observation of learning within a given context. It is necessary for teachers to insist on prior learning assessment of pupils. Based on these results, the assessors reorganize the pupil's learning activity by referring to the situational context.

Open issues

The present study has outlined some questions that further research may be based upon: What are the best practices for writing assessment reports about pupils' learning and observations' recording? How can language be effectively used to describe pupils' learning as best as possible? How can the level of knowledge of evaluated pupils be appreciated as correctly as possible and in the situation of the appliance of the complementary methods in which assessors analyze the pupils' documents: portfolios, projects, etc.?

Based on the research performed we outline two open issues:

1. Identification of the means by which, based on this study, we can improve the writing of the assessment report of pupils' achievements.
2. The development of research initiated by applying questionnaires to the assessors, but also by analyzing the assessment reports that correspond to other schooling levels.

Thus, the future research studies will help us to better understand pupils' learning assessing practices and processes that the evaluators conduct to assess their learning.

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