

**Edu World 2016**  
**7th International Conference**

**SECONDARY EDUCATION TEACHERS' APPROACH TO  
EVALUATION. CASE STUDY**

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**Abstract**

Lately, evaluation gets an increasingly important place in teaching. In such a context, it becomes ever more necessary to deal as carefully as possible with this field of education sciences. In this study we considered evaluation as an intrinsic component of the teacher-student relationship. The quality of evaluation influences to a great extent the very performance of the student and the confidence one's own skills. In this research we sought to reveal some aspects regarding the approach of evaluated students by a group of high school teachers (Prahova County, Romania), revealing the attitude of those who, for some time, were in the evaluator's position. This approach of evaluation is the more relevant since we are dealing with teenage students, who are in a sensitive period of their lives, have yet unclarified and unconsolidated values, with explorations of character, with moments of confusion, self doubt, risky eccentricities, with a strong desire to clarify one's own potential and to be reassured that he/she is not alone.

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**Keywords:** Evaluation; teacher; student; teacher-student relationship.

## 1. Introduction

Lately, evaluation gets an increasingly important place in teaching. As its share rises in the orientation and regulation of education, it becomes increasingly necessary to deal (as closely as possible) with the conditions in which it takes place and the effect it has on the specificity and dynamics of the relationship between evaluated and evaluator.

In this field of education sciences, some experts focus on the tools and mechanisms of evaluation, on its functions and forms but also on the criteria and standards involved (Manolescu, 2015, 2010; Cucuș, 2008). Others also invoke - in addition - the psychological effects evaluation has on students (Bocoș, Jucan, 2008; Robinson, 2015; Thompson, 2015).

Of course, all these aspects, structures, phases and processes are very important. They ensure the evaluative act is accomplished under the best possible conditions. Evaluation, however, can also be regarded relationally. In fact, it occurs within the teacher - student relationship and affects the course of its evolution.

Therefore, it becomes relevant the way (high school) teachers devise, understand and carry out student evaluation, considering students are adolescents (with all the age specific explorations, tensions, rebelliousness, misunderstandings, exaggerations and uncertainties).

The study looked at how teachers should approach the evaluated students and at the teachers' attitude in their dealings with students in general and as part of the evaluation relationship in particular.

## 2. Research Methodology

For this purpose, we used the questionnaire based survey method; we applied it during March-May 2016, to a research sample consisting of 56 subjects, teachers in high schools (urban and rural) in Prahova County. Its structure was as follows:

**Table 1.** The structure of the experimental sample composed of high school teachers

Seniority in education	Number	Percentage
0-5 years	-	-
6-10 years	8	16%
11-15 years	13	26%
16-20 years	10	20%
21-25 years	6	12%
26-30 years	4	8%
Over 31 years	9	18%
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>100%</b>

### 3. Data and Results

From the application of the questionnaire and collecting the data, we obtained the following situation:

**Table 2.** The most important feature of the teacher student relationship as perceived by high school teachers\*

Feature	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i
Percentage	8%	8%	-	46%	-	2%	30%	-	6%

\* a. courtesy; b. exigency; c. compassion; d. understanding students; e. attachment; f. authority/ imposition; g. firmness; h. detachment/ indifference; i. other answer (subjects proposed: cooperation, communication, empathy).

**Table 3.** The first thought that (almost) automatically/ instantly comes to mind for high school teachers during school evaluation\*

Option	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k
Percentage	10%	-	14%	64%	4%	-	4%	-	4%	-	-

\* not to damage students' image in front of their colleagues; b. to indulge students during their evaluation; c. be true to their own criteria; d. appreciate students' performance during evaluation as they know best, irrespective of their previous performances; e. appreciate students' performance during evaluation as they know best, irrespective of the (psychological) effect evaluation has on their state of mind; f. parents' reaction towards their children's evaluation; g. the potential high school teachers assume evaluated students have in terms of further development; h. that students do not commit fraud/ cheat; i. the emotional tension students undergo during evaluation; j. the future prospects of the student currently subjected to evaluation; k. other answer.

**Table 4.** Teachers' understanding of students during evaluation, as perceived by high school teachers\*

Option	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k
Percentage	56%	2%	2%	-	2%	6%	-	2%	18%	10%	2%

\* a. ask students for everything they know, all they are capable of presenting on the subject they are being evaluated on; b. postponing the moment of the evaluation until students are capable of satisfactory performance; c. postponing the evaluation until students offer an adequate performance in relation to teacher's expectations; d. postponing the evaluation until students perform according to the evaluator's criteria; e. postponing the evaluation until students perform according to the requirements of the school curricula; f. making concessions/ overlooking the ambiguities, confusions, errors, hesitations students manifest during evaluation; g. (always) being lenient with students during their evaluation; h. evaluating students whenever they offer for it; i. taking into consideration students' emotions at the time of their evaluation and put into their account the confusions, gaps and errors found in their performance; j. there is no understanding for students under evaluation, they must always learn; k. other answer.

### 4. Findings, Comments and Interpretations

Based on the data we obtained, we can make the following (possible) comments and interpretations:

1. When asked to opt for *the most important feature of the teacher-student relationship*, most respondents (46%) considered it to be *understanding students*. Almost half of them believed it is the most significant characteristic of their relation with their students. The next group is the one who considered *firmness* is the most important feature of their relations with the ones they teach and guide (30%). Small percentages (8% each) went to teachers who considered *kindness*, respectively *exigency* as the most important features of the didactic relationship. There were also *other answers* (6%). Some (explicitly) invoked and suggested *cooperation, communication, empathy*. Also, it is worthy to note that options such as *compassion, attachment*, on the one side, and *detachment/ indifference* on the other, did not meet any percentage points. Perhaps empathy, cooperation and communication meant - to the investigated subjects - more than indifference/ detachment, but less than compassion and attachment (if, indeed, they really took into consideration their spiritual load, in general, and the school context, in particular). Also very close were those who chose the option *authority/ imposition* (which gathered only

2%). Apparently this is not an aspect that seems to preoccupy the majority of respondents when they interact with students.

Consequently, in the perception of respondents (and perhaps in their professional conscience as well), the most suitable attitudes towards (high school) students are *understanding* and *firmness* (however complex the ratio between them might seem!)

2. Regarding *the first thought that comes to mind (almost) immediately/ by reflex at the time of evaluation*, 64% of the respondents showed they were preoccupied *with assessing as best they can students' performance at the time, irrespective of their previous performances*. It emerges that most high school teacher-subjects take into consideration, during evaluation, only what students know and/or solve. They seek not to be influenced by what (or how much) students have learned until then, by the extent to which they assimilated the (cognitive or practical) abilities required prior to the moment of the evaluation, by the (more or less) effort students made. Also, it emerges that this segment of the respondent sample separates *the current moment of evaluation* from the history, evolution and prior performances of the evaluated student. To them, the previous (educational) course of a student is not important (at least for the time they worked together and the teacher could distinguish student's approach to study/ the profile of their personality under construction). Their past may constitute, in the teacher's mind, a disturbing factor in achieving fairness in evaluation. What matters is the *hic et nunc*, the *here and now*. Whatever is beyond those limits can only alter the evaluative act and decision.

The 64% of respondents exclude the cognitive ups and downs, previous aptitudinal performances or the difficulties encountered by students until the moment of evaluation, the obstacles they surpassed until then; they do not (and should not, they believe) take into account the progresses and efforts (whenever and wherever they may be), of their motivational state (so that, if they are demotivated, they should help them that, through evaluation, to overcome this state; or, if they are motivated, to keep it up). In short, this category of high school teachers do not regard as opportune, during evaluation, the connection between the present and the past of the student who is currently under evaluation.

At a distance, with 14%, there are subjects that claim their first thought is to *stay faithful to their own criteria*. To them, what matters is faith in what they think it must be known, learned, demonstrated, solved and done. It seems that, to them, what's important are the criteria and the consistency with which they apply them/ observe them as evaluators. There is no preoccupation for the emotional state of students, for their personal history, their efforts, hesitations and assumptions during classroom interaction, for the motivation they manifested in the subject taught by the teacher.

We find it interesting that there is a small category of high school teachers - 10% - who declare that, during evaluation, they (almost instantaneously) think of the image of the person in front of them. They specify the fact that they have in mind *not to damage the prestige of students in front of their peers*. This category of respondents also take account of the fact that teenage (high school) students are very sensitive to their social image: they do not want to be put to shame, be ridiculed, they want to stand out and get attention by their 'originality' or - even - originality, and they want their value recognized. The 10% of subjects know and understand that their students go through an identity crisis and - as a consequence - they do not want to lay stress on it (worsen it). These teachers-evaluators believe that to their students a positive image (in the eyes of others) or one that matches their own expectations is (more) important to the formation and evolution of personality than an extremely rigorous evaluation, that

follows the requirements and standards of the curriculum too closely, more important than the way they performed at the given time (more or less arbitrary) of the assessment of their knowledge and competences.

It is also worthy of mentioning that such vision about evaluation and its materialization has its shortcomings/ disadvantages: even if we are preoccupied by the prestige of the students under evaluation in front of their colleagues we cannot stray too far from the criteria for passing the exams, for establishing the extent to which they have or operate acquired knowledge (as many as they might have) as per the requirements of official school documents. We understand, thus, that in evaluation we have to take into account several benchmarks: curriculum, criteria, correctness-equidistance, system's policies, the aspirations of the given school administration, the social image of the evaluated student, currently in a delicate position, rather troubled from the point of view of their self-identity, etc.

There were other options as well, each listed with a 4%: some have claimed their first thought when evaluating is *to assess students the best they can regardless of the evaluation's psychological effect on students' state of mind*; another 4% declared they automatically/ instantly considered *the potential they perceived regarding the future development of the student being evaluated at a certain point* (which means this minor category links the present of the student's evaluation to the potential they foresee in him/her, manifested into a more or less near/ distant future); another 4% revealed the first thought that comes to mind almost as if by reflex when evaluating students is *the concern for the emotional tension the student experiences at the time*. We notice there is a small category of high school teachers that does not go indifferent to the emotional charge involved by any act of human evaluation. There are also teachers (as many or few as they may be!) who think at the emotions (caused by the uncertainties, gaps, confusions and impediments of students) of those who are forced to face the complexity, hazard and constraints of evaluation.

Looking further carefully, we notice that no subject has chosen the options referring to: *indulging the student under evaluation; considering the reaction of the parents (especially those who are influential!) towards the evaluation teachers made to their children; being dominated by the suspicions of fraud, cheating* (which is, ultimately, proof of the trust they grant students, as beneficiaries of education) or to evaluate *thinking of their future*. As we can observe, we have upright teachers, professionally mature, apt to take on responsibility for what they do, without considering that current evaluations make up - one way or another, from a certain existential perspective - the experiences that support disciples in the future.

3. Regarding *the understanding of the student under evaluation*, data show that over half of the investigated teachers (56%) perceive understanding towards students as the *availability to ask them for (everything) they know, all they are capable of providing to the evaluator regarding the subject under evaluation (or the questions on the exam paper)*. They believe they manifest understanding when they do not narrow it down to the requirements, expectations, standards and strict content of the topic under evaluation, but are interested about all the evaluated students have to offer on the *subject*; in other words, understanding is when the evaluator adopts a broader vision about students' performance seeking to find whether they are indeed worthy to pass the exam or not.

Understanding in what concerns students under evaluation does not require mechanical, dry and highly exact reproduction of the contents of a test-subject, in which the student does not feel involved and

to which they do not bring any personal note or contribution. It is important to see how they approach the subject, how they lead their presentations, what the students' searches in relation to the topic are, what language they use and what solutions think to be most viable. In short, being understanding in an evaluative context represents, for most high school teachers, *the attitude of openness towards the (oral or written) conceptual-cognitive presentation of the evaluated student or towards their practical-situational abilities.*

There are, however, at a distance (leading with 18%), teachers for whom student understanding means *taking into account students' anxiety at the time of evaluation and blame on it the possible confusions, gaps and errors in their overall performance.* We note there are teachers who - regarding student understanding - put stress on the emotional state of mind of the evaluated student, which in many situations plays an important role in their ability to gather and organize their thoughts/ ideas, be clear and concise in expression (be it oral or written), in offering an original take on the test-subject.

The following category (10%) comprises (high school) teachers who believe that *there is no understanding towards students under evaluation, as their duty is to learn at all times.* It would be - we believe - of scientific and professional interest to see how this category of respondents works with their students, what is the atmosphere in their classrooms, what motivates their students and what level they - constantly - reach in their results, that is to say what sort of people enter society after graduation.

Unlike this way of treating understanding in an evaluative context, 6% of subjects considered that understanding the students under evaluation means *making concessions/ overlooking their ambiguities, confusions, errors and hesitations at the time evaluation takes place.* It seems that, in their case, they understand understanding in an extremely broad sense, which undermines the evaluative act itself. Perhaps for teachers who are sure of their students and are skilled in the theory and practice of evaluation, a certain option appears unacceptable, even fanciful.

From the collected data, it emerged that respondents do not assimilate understanding in evaluation with *postponing the moment of evaluation* (when decision rests with them alone), in case students are under-prepared, but neither with *assessing them only when they offer for it themselves.*

## 5. Conclusions

In the functioning of a school system and of school in general, evaluation became a key point and a capital concern. Apparently it went to the fore. It is not a cut and dry operation. It represents (and it always will) a field to be explored, researched. It is an unknown variable worthy of being solved, as with any other unknown variable which elicits temptation of the investigation and courage alike (when facing the expected, and especially the unexpected risks).

In our research we have departed from the (assumed) premise that any evaluation takes place within the teacher-student relationship. Apart from the inherent emotional charge, it implies a certain attitude of the evaluator during its process. The teacher may opt for maintaining the behavior they adopted in the period prior to the evaluative act or they may change it; as a consequence, they may have a consistent attitude in their relationship with students, or one adapted to the various stages of the didactic process.

We considered that, in evaluation, at least two aspects are worthy of being studied: one, that referring to the first thought that comes to mind almost instantly to teachers when they enter the role of

evaluators; the other, referring to the way they relate to the special situation their students find themselves in for a certain amount of time.

Based on the accuracy with which they know their students, on their interest for their healthy development, based on their psycho-pedagogical culture, the peculiarities of their relationship with students (throughout their entire professional career, in general, and with those currently under evaluation, in particular), on their human and teaching experience, on the depth of its understanding, the teachers-evaluators may manifest a certain understanding towards the students under evaluation or they may be indifferent and distant considering any form of understanding alters and distorts the results of their evaluation.

Our modest study (which may be continued, deepened, extended) it emerges that it is important to include the teacher student relationship into the concept and practice of evaluation. It is a significant element, the more so since we are dealing with teenage students, who are in a sensitive period of their lives, have yet unclarified and unconsolidated values, with explorations of character, with moments of confusion (sometimes even potentially compromising), with strong mimetic tendencies (usually frivolous behaviors), self doubt, risky eccentricities or prolonged loneliness.

High school students need as clear and honest as possible an attitude from the teacher - including during evaluation - to better know themselves, to clarify of their own potential, to know that they are not deserted or considered incapable and it is very important in life to offer the world what we are capable of, as far as our talent and good faith allow it.

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