

# How to Read Assessment Criteria when Dealing with Culturally Diverse Pupils? An Analysis based on a Spanish context

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## Abstract

The role of educational organization by levels and measures of standardization in education systems is to evaluate the quality of education and school performance. This is disrupted when different educational models coexist in schools because of immigration. This article provides a set of educational situations and approaches for improving the understanding of the problem and proposes alternatives that help the development of institutions and educational practice. The factors that keep the criteria of international standardization rules are determined as well as the keys for their improvement are provided. The method followed is the analysis of the results obtained in previous studies conducted between 2008 and 2012 in Spanish schools with groups of immigrant pupils from different educational systems. Analyses support the conclusion that in schools appear different situations involving social, psychological and cultural issues, which do not work with optimal results applying these measures. The study proposes schools to identify the previous educational experiences of pupils carried from their origin contexts and to adjust them to the new system by raising activities to improve pupil attitudes toward other systems, meeting the initial demands of the different groups, as well as getting to know psycho educational needs that are raised at school.

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## **¿Cómo leer los criterios de evaluación cuando se trata de alumnos de diversas culturas? Un análisis basado en el contexto español.**

### **Resumen**

El papel de la organización educativa por niveles y de las medidas de estandarización de los sistemas educativos es poder evaluar la calidad de la enseñanza y el rendimiento escolar. Esto se ve interrumpido cuando en las escuelas coexisten diferentes modelos educativos debido a la inmigración. En este artículo se proporciona un conjunto de situaciones y planteamientos educativos para mejorar la comprensión del problema y proponer alternativas que ayuden al desarrollo de las instituciones y la práctica educativa. Se determina los factores que se mantienen en los estándares y criterios internacionales de normalización y se proporciona las claves para mejorarlos. El método seguido es el análisis de los resultados obtenidos en estudios previos llevados a cabo entre 2008 y 2012 en algunas escuelas navarras con alumnos inmigrantes provenientes de diferentes sistemas educativos. Los análisis apoyan la conclusión de que en las escuelas se afrontan situaciones que involucran temas sociales, psicológicos y culturales que hace que estas medidas no funcionen con resultados óptimos. El estudio propone que las escuelas se esfuercen por identificar las experiencias educativas previas de los alumnos, realizadas en sus contextos de origen, y que determinen cómo ajustarlos al nuevo sistema, así como satisfacer las demandas iniciales de los diferentes grupos y las necesidades psicoeducativas que se plantean en la escuela

**Palabras clave:** niveles educativos, agrupamientos de nivel, inmigración escolar, medidas de estandarización, procesos inclusivos.

### **Introduction: Diverse contexts facing uniformity in education.**

Migration, both cross-national and country internal, is a consequence of the evolution of the global capitalist order. The concentration of capital and uneven development worldwide pushes the world's population together, into more developed areas. This has a variety of consequences for civil society, and also for the reorganisation of development plans (De Lucas & Nair, 1999), while raises new challenges about:

- How to deal with environmental problems;
- How to achieve balance in the creation of new forms of urbanity;

- How to mix people with different life styles, cultural values and religions; and
- How to enable different cultures to coexist, live together, understand each other, and continue to develop.

On the other hand, it is understood that an education system aims to organize the learning of citizens according to global economic and political objectives. This involves measuring the structure and organization models of education. With the creation of UNESCO in 1946, the process of government involvement in the formation of its citizens has become international. The idea of education system reaches the organizational form of teaching, curriculum and institutions to achieve these goals. In other words, countries are called to ensure a educational inclusion of citizens who for one reason or another are left out of the system (Unicef & CES, 2006).

But despite the internationalization of the objectives, education systems show severe differences in teaching and learning from one country to another, and ways of responding to the needs of certain groups including (Prats & Raventós, 2005) the fact that in classrooms with pupils from diverse cultures these differences become more apparent.

What can be done with pupils who are left out of the education system? What happens with those who do not meet the competencies required by the international standards of education? This poses a great challenge to get pupils to identify citizens of contemporary Europe to whom the education system cannot be left out.

The demand for more competent citizens to navigate in global social, economic, political and educational arenas, and the varying contextual behaviours and experiences, lead to the marginalisation of individuals, or citizens, for one reason or another. This also happens with strategies for an international assessment of quality. As a consequence of the modern order, which promotes uniformity, *Diversity* is not on the agenda for success. Thus, except in the world of arts, *Diversity* is considered a theoretical, rather than a practical value. On a parallel, cultural freedom, while being essential for human development, a condition of progress, and an instrument to support participatory democracy and political stability, is usually approached as a problematic issue, while tolerance, social cohesion, and peaceful coexistence, are lost along the way because of the economic crisis.

Furthermore, educational spaces that are culturally diverse show that education systems which immigrant pupils from beyond the borders of their countries interweave in the host school spaces. This perspective offers a comparative analysis about how pupils understand education as well as the possibility to determine the factors that can influence school life and how they relate to their academic and social goals.

Moreover, the coexistence of educational systems in the same school space, carried by different human groups, makes the variable standardization of education to have an increased impact on school performance. That is, a recipe or a single model does

not work for all pupils in a context where the educational experiences of different groups respond to transnational system models.

Citizens need to be prepared for the wide world, but individuals' identity, behaviour, options to transcend, are shaped in a context of local forces, local expectations, options and possibilities, which have been acquired by learning in different educational systems. Because of their academic results, pupils will be undermined and / or limited historically, due to racial, class, gender, ethical, religious, political, economic, social, cultural, linguistic, inequalities. Different cultures, languages, customs, traditions, life expectations, attitudes towards life, coexist in our world. Meanwhile, the scarcity of spaces for socialization turns schools into the appropriate places for communication, participation, cooperation, mutual understanding, respect, and friendship... This creates demands for inclusion and inclusive educational systems in a favourable school environment based on teamwork, and positioned to prepare pupils to share social rules, social customs, and social behavior (Belletich, 2011). This involves developing educational strategies that overcome the limitations imposed by the educational systems, moving towards more open educational interventions.

In addition, education is considered a great equalizer, within a framework of democracy and civic participation. That is why schooling today needs to focus on conditions for participation in a learning society set in a framework of *social justice and equality of opportunities*, a context of interdependence, mobility of cultures, cooperation and interaction as part of the global exchange (Bolívar, 2007). A good education for all must be geared to overcoming social and individual deficits and drawbacks. But what is the best way to deal with diversity, to develop an easy flow of cultural interaction and provide a better guarantee for fulfilling individual expectations? What is the best way to organise schools in which inclusiveness is combined with quality? Can we move forward while evaluation is based on common standards?

The propose of this paper is to present an analysis of the political, social and educational issues involved in the evaluation of the systems of education. The starting point is the discussion of the results of two empirical studies conducted in schools in Navarra, Spain between 2008 and 2011, and the impact of the parameters with which are evaluated the international education systems.

The first section discusses the relevance of the indicators used to measure the quality and their impact on the education of heterogeneous groups. The second section discusses the measures of attention to diversity implemented by local governments in Spain and their relevance or not for integration objectives. The third section is a discussion of the evaluation system for pupils and their grouping levels as ethnocentric curriculum approach, without attention to the diversity of systems and models. Finally, the fourth section presents a suggested set of criteria identified to assess national education systems from guiding international perspectives.

## **1. Quality and equity in education systems: Universal indicators under debate**

One of the basic principles of school education in most countries is the guarantee of *quality of education* for all pupils, whatever their conditions or circumstances. However, how can we understand quality education in terms of national and international parameters? Should we be thinking in terms of ethnocentric measure agreements of quality made in a specific context and reality according to accepted social values and educational aims which are transferred to diverse realities? What is the meaning of quality for countries of the southern hemisphere, such as Chile, for example, where education operates under the quality parameters of the PISA program?

Equity leans towards the guarantee of equal opportunities, school inclusion and non-discrimination. However, is evaluation not perhaps discriminatory by definition? Are we not practising punitive discrimination when we use standards and indicators to decide who does and who doesn't fit a required profile and to what level?

If school education is conceived as learning for life, why are pupils classified by how far they have progressed towards acquiring certain skills, using a closed grading system? Who dictates that educational progress should be measured by set grades without taking into account individual learning paces and styles? At which point should we stop advancing any further with a topic that has awakened pupils' interest, and drop it, in order to carry on to the next stage or grade? When there is no fitting of the new into the old, is there no feasible way of going deeper into what has been learnt and contrasting it with pupils' different experiences of life and ways of dealing with reality?

An educational system in which quality is measured by universal parameters and indicators is unlikely to provide any guarantee of flexibility when it comes to adapting educational intervention or schooling to collective diversity. The diversity of schoolchildren's aptitudes, interests, expectations and needs, is rooted in personal and collective processes linked to profiles, cultural values, changing societies, and the very real demands that people have to face in order to interact positively with their environment. Yet the principle of flexibility is relegated in favour of the political pursuit of national and international uniformity of educational processes often determined by economic demands.

When, on the basis of external or internal summative evaluations, we look for partially biased ways of interlinking pupils' individual effort and motivation, without taking into account the psychological, social and cultural issues that might be affecting them, we are placing educational processes under pressure to achieve, in fixed, closed periods of time, outcomes that are supposed to demonstrate the acquisition of certain skills, and yet are based on a playful and unreal image of ways of understanding educational action. By way of comparison, it is as if one were to try to judge the memory capacity of three-year-old children by their ability to memorize

and retain long lists of countries and capitals, and associate the results with an understanding of world geography.

Similarly, education standards and indicators tell us nothing about effective equality between men and women, quality grounded precisely on the ability of both sexes, under equal conditions, to live up to the social roles expected of us. If indicators are applied equally to both sexes, irrespective of the circumstances and demands placed on each, is there any real guarantee of how equality will manifest itself? What about the various social roles and tasks traditionally and currently assigned to boys and girls in the society in which it is their lot to live? What about roles that are grounded in the very organisation of society and that differentiate the circumstances in which different people have to face life?

Acknowledgement of a change of outlook in the approach to evaluation nowadays, means that aspects of education other than the strictly academic (including school organisation, classroom organisation, media and resources planning, etc) need to be evaluated. When it comes to interpreting performance outcomes, the evaluation of these other aspects allows us to capture school education at least partially in its strictly dynamic sense: education depends not only on the profiles of the subjects but also on the context in which they have to develop (Belletich, 2011).

Education system assessment should move towards an overall, integral evaluation that also evaluates the context surrounding the school reality. But is it right to evaluate the various elements of the system separately without trying to detect the articulations between them? From an overall, articulated perspective of the educational reality, is it possible to reinterpret the results obtained as national and international indicators? Is it possible to write up partial evaluation reports, without taking into account the principle of the integrality of education?

From the point of view of the educational goals set out in various international legislative provisions, the idea that the supreme goal of education is to enable pupils to achieve full personality and skills development, forces us to deal with a notion of assessment that can be sustained by two express purposes: a) Evaluation to verify pupils' successful acquisition of externally imposed basic skills by a certain age and after completing a certain school grade; b) Evaluation to verify the acquisition of minimal cultural requirements, which means relying on the verification of the handling of cultural contents. In both cases, the summative evaluation approach is accompanied by key formative elements.

Moreover, what are we actually evaluating? Is it evaluated the extent to which pupils' skills have developed through given subject content (reading comprehension, numeracy skills, reality inferral resulting from critical attitudes, etc)? Or is it evaluated the handling of curricular content in which culture is expressed in terms of grades of schooling and discipline areas (such as second or third grade of maths; or written language in literary composition)? In both cases, despite the fact that international valuation efforts point towards the first type of evaluation approach, the proposed indicators are not in their standardised form totally removed from the second type.

We might likewise ask ourselves if such an evaluation would or would not promote pupils' personality and skills development, depending on whether, or not, it is accompanied by respect for personal rhythms, individual and collective processes, and the cultural world vision of the parties involved in the educational space of schools and society.

In its teleological sense, education deals with the development of values that society considers important enough to reproduce and promote. Thus, tolerance, respect, responsibility, and peace, for example, appear linked to social requirements. However, this is barely, if at all, reflected in national and international assessment data. Is there perhaps no purpose in evaluating at least pupils' progress in the acquisition of social skills? Are socially competent school kids not a guarantee that society will develop in harmony?

The Spanish Education Act of 2006 (LOE), assigns to education the task of "developing pupils" capacity to control their own learning, rely on their own aptitudes and knowledge, enhance their creativity, personal initiative and spirit of enterprise (LOE, Art. 2; paragraph 1f). We might nevertheless ask ourselves how the type of assessment that makes its diagnosis based on common standards serves that purpose. How can pupils control their learning and rely on their own capabilities, in the face of a system grounded on external evaluation, whereby processes are marked by closed external directionality?

## **2. Attention to diversity in individual and school profiles**

One element that does not appear to be clearly identified, acknowledged and given in consideration in evaluations, is the linguistic element. The intent to inculcate respect for and acknowledgement of linguistic diversity in educational spaces, raises the question of what orientation to take in our training. What sense is there in training our pupils to respect and acknowledge linguistic diversity, if the practical applications of that respect are not articulated in the tools used in the evaluation process? The issue of linguistic diversity, moreover, appears closely tied to that of cultural diversity. Language is used to express the thoughts, world visions, expectations and dreams of school agents. Any evaluation that ignores the differences that lie therein will produce results that are biased and only partially meaningful.

Thus, for example, in multicultural classrooms it is not the same thing to ask an Oriental pupil for a *critical analysis* of Kafka's "metamorphosis" as it is to ask a pupil of Latin origin. Both will have read the book and both will have understood the didactic evaluation contract "*critical analysis*" in its literal sense. Yet, the point from which and towards which those analyses are focused, will vary because of the linguistic diversity between the two and their past educational experiences: *the same contract apprehended in their contexts of origin, when extrapolated to the host context, will give rise to different communications, despite having started from similar*

*components*. Lack of uniformity once again gives rise to casuistry. What parameters, or indicators, therefore, can be sufficiently objective when evaluating internal processes expressed in the materiality of a language affected by cultural differences?

In the same way, education systems strive to enable all pupils, whatever their origin, to communicate in the official language(s). In the case of Spain, one of the goals set for education is "those pupils should be able to communicate in one or more foreign languages" (LOE, Art. 2; paragraph 1j). However, in evaluation terms, what do we mean by "able"? Does ability extend to the realms of world visions and experiences? How can things and situations be made to mean the same to different groups? Is it enough to verify the material handling of the language in linear constructions, or grammatical structures? What happens when the expression of the handling of the language is extended to the handling of other aspects of education: understanding of the curriculum, assimilation of the educational model, pupils' validation of the didactic contract? These considerations are to be borne in mind when setting the parameters for the evaluation of linguistic skills. We should therefore begin by identifying which skills are required and which belong to the context of cultural diversity.

To break from imbalances and dichotomies evolving in parallel with, and bearing the signs of the times, we need multicultural education, which, with regard to linguistic issues, considers the pedagogical principles that enable consonance rather than dissonance between school and society, infusing dynamics into the process rather than hindering it. Such principles appear related to educational and social skills which, according to Muñoz (2001 / 2006) include among others: \*Fomenting and strengthening in schools and society in general, the human values of equality, tolerance, diversity, cooperation and shared social responsibility; \*Recognition of the individual right of each pupil to receive the best differentiated education, taking special care with the formation of his/her personal identity; \*Positive recognition of diverse cultures and languages and of the need for them to be present and nurtured in schools.

The strictly academic part of the intellectual work surrounding educational processes in schools is of a different order. The responsibility of schools to foment in their pupils the acquisition of intellectual habits, techniques of work and knowledge that form part of local and world cultural baggage (scientific, technical, humanistic, historic and artistic), leads us on to the subject of which disciplines and contents are to be taught.

Demands with respect to what pupils should have learnt and mastered by the time they leave school, depend on social requirements in the immediate period and in the post school period of the future. However, these are changing requirements, and new educational methods and materials are being designed to allow this goal to be accomplished. In this context, the means used to overcome difficulties in meeting minimum curricular requirements, tend to take the form of compensatory measures



to make up for differences, with little attention to the diversity within and proceeding from personal processes influenced by psychological, social and cultural factors.

Research conducted by Zufiaurre and Belletich (2008) and confirmed by Belletich (2011) with immigrant pupils at different stages in the settling in process, found evidence to show that self-image, motivation to learn, and confidence in the possibility of becoming a regular part of the system, were negatively influenced by external evaluation requirements in which the same minimum school standards were set for all.

Thus, support measures, such as: *grouping* pupils with learning difficulties *by ability levels* to work towards the acquisition of basic skills and concepts, do not appear in themselves sufficient. Repetition of the same contents, under the umbrella of an adapted curriculum and extra hours of work, will not guarantee their assimilation by special groups. A study conducted by Lacasta, Lizeaga, et al (2008) on pupils with learning difficulties in the area of Mathematics, states that mere academic reinforcement within an organisational framework of *groupings by ability levels*, does not appear effective in improving learning outcomes, but rather other issues relating to the apprehension of the didactic contract come into play alongside other personal, social and cultural factors, and need to be taken into account when implementing compensatory measures to address learning difficulties.

By guaranteeing the right conditions to facilitate the positive impact of personal factors such as the building of a high level of positive self-esteem, it is possible to obtain positive results in terms of inclusion and create a favourable dynamic for learning, as noted by Durá and Garaigordobil (2006, 50):

“High self-esteem in adolescents of both sexes from 14 to 17 years of age makes them more likely to develop cooperative behaviour, socially appropriate habits (especially in boys), a sense of happiness, high stress tolerance ..., high ability to adapt to change (especially in boys), high social intelligence, social integration and a high capacity for team work ...”.

No evaluation can properly capture the real meaning of educational processes unless it fosters an atmosphere of respect towards individual and group diversity among the subjects involved, and meets the need for *inclusive practices* in schools. If, as well as culturally, *inclusion* is addressed in a wider sense, that is, through the inclusion of pupils with special needs requiring assessment, recognition, respect and attention, there is a most pressing need to create the right conditions for an inclusive school, which, according to Muntaner (2006), include: \*Teachers working in collaboration; \*A common curriculum with attention to diversity; \*A variety of teaching-learning strategies; \*Working from experience and acquired knowledge; \*Internally coherent school organisation; \*Collaboration between school and family.

Attention to these issues will increase the possibilities for pupils to improve their school performance through the feedback gained from positive self-esteem.

According to Booth and Ainscow (2007, 15): "*At times too little attention has been given to the potential for school cultures to support or undermine developments in teaching and learning*". It is in schools that changes in educational policies and practices can be driven. The same authors (Booth and Ainscow, 2007, 16), insist on the possibility of achieving inclusive school cultures by: "*creating a secure, accepting, collaborating, stimulating community in which everyone is valued, as the foundation of the highest achievements of all pupils*".

When it comes to assessment issues, the political dimension is also important, because it could ensure that any assessment process would derive from an inclusive process. The *practical dimension*, meanwhile, will regulate both classroom and out-of-school activities, which should be designed to motivate all pupils by mediating their assessment and selfassessment experiences outside the school environment.

### **3. Points to be analysed when proceeding to the reading of assessment criteria**

When it comes to thinking about the meaning and purpose of an assessment, the *first point* to be taken into consideration is that, at international level, learning is seen as a lifelong process. These calls for education systems capable of organizing the type of teaching that can make this possible. From Infant Education right up to adult learning programs, during or after the individual's working life, inside or outside the education system, there is a view that supports the idea that everybody should be able to go through life continually acquiring, updating and extending abilities, knowledge, skills and competencies for their personal and professional development.

A basic education should be the successful acquisition of the skills required to learn for themselves and be able to adapt to the learning environments that society has to offer. Nevertheless, an analysis of *level tests* in mathematical and language skills (1) given to Latin American immigrant pupils newly enrolled in six schools (Zufiaurre & Belletich, 2009) produced the following conclusions:

- The requirement level for the tests was: curricular-global (subject content focused); specific (aimed at measuring mathematical or linguistic cognition); local (focused on mutually disjointed topics) and generic (questions presented in sets).
- The tests had a globalised rather than progressive structure, counter to the standard criterion in Latin American schools, where content tends to be structured progressively by levels, that is, by specific grades corresponding to specific areas of the discipline.
- The bias of the tests was towards "Mechanization vs. Initiative". This was evident in the type of tasks required of the pupils: algorithmic or interpretative tasks, problem solving; non-critical reading comprehension; writing assignments focusing on form rather than content, etc.

If this is the nature of the approach to assessment in schools, as materialized in fairly high profile tests, and if the apparent aim is to exhaust the stages of education in a set of school grades structured by levels, what is the point of lifelong learning? And how far down in the list of priorities does this leave the development of personal and social skills to accompany the individual right through life? Where is the objective reflected in national and international assessment criteria?

A *second aspect* of the analysis to be made of these assessments is all that refers to the social and curricular environment. The curricular context covers the selection of objectives, basic skills, contents, teaching methods and assessment criteria. All these components of the curricular context that have to do with the way teaching is organized, are marked by a way of understanding education and its teleology. And the model that emerges is extensible to different countries, irrespective of their individual characteristics and level of development. Hence, the pedagogical criteria upon which the curriculum is organised may be to some extent hidden or blurred by the afore-mentioned elements.

Within the context of the assessment of culturally diverse groups, this observation enables us to explain the origin of the confrontation between the pedagogical criteria with which the children began their socialization at school and initiated their schooling processes, and the criteria they are expected to meet and that appear to be necessary in the host culture.

In a study of secondary school pupils (15 years, at the end of the stage of compulsory secondary) (2) from six state schools in Navarra, all of whom were attending external social and educational support programs, it was found that none of the schools in which they were enrolled, had taken into account the consequences of the social environment and school curriculum of the pupils' home countries. Instead, universal implantation of the education system of the host country had been taken for granted. (Belletich and Zufiaurre, 2009).

In the same study, analysis of the tests put to these pupils during the adaptation period: level tests for new pupils, produced the following findings:

- Tests were pitched to the age of the pupil rather than the subjects being studied.
- Tests were designed for key stages that did not correspond to key stages or level of skills required in the pupils' countries of origin.
- Objectives were largely typical of summative assessment: what they knew and how much they knew. Little attention was given to context or formative criteria.
- Pupils were unaware of the contract implicit in the assessment based on these tests.

This information, applied to assessment as part of the curriculum, provides an aesthetic/professional profile of the teachers who direct educational processes (especially in the 12-16 year old stage). It is not based on principles of inclusivity supported by an attitude and disposition towards integrated, comprehensive joint action that might bring teaching closer to the pupils who receive it. (Zufiaurre, 1996).

This being a compulsory, basic stage of education: (in Spain serving pupils from ages 6 to 16 and divided into Primary and Secondary compulsory education), when dealing with immigrant pupils, it is vitally important to have an awareness of the role played by resources when confronting the reality of the specific stressful situations with which the pupils are faced. New immigrants will not only have to face the stress of all the social and educational demands of their new life, but also that of the contrast between the pedagogical criteria of their countries of origin and those they find in the host society, especially in relation to the way in which the educational and curricular model is appropriated (Belletich & Zufiaurre, 2008). When assessment processes are undertaken, care must be taken to update the necessary resources, in order to guarantee a profile of set indicators. The question we would ask, is whether real attention is being given to the development of resilience resources to help pupils deal with the intercultural conflict that faces them in assessments.

In the study carried out by Zufiaurre and Belletich (2009), direct observation of pupils taking tests in various subjects showed the following results: *82% exhibited a poor level of participation during the test when it came to asking questions to clear up doubts, despite being expressly invited to do so if necessary; 70% appeared nervous and tense during the test. The resources needed to work out the problem were procedural techniques: 65% set about working the questions out with a pencil, while 30% noted in the margin: "I have not been taught how to do this". 40% asked at the end if they would be given "a second chance".*

A *third issue* to be analysed is the *quality criterion* applied in assessments, through which an attempt is made to ensure a minimum degree of efficiency, structure, and effectiveness in the running of schools, that is, the necessary framework of internal coherence and attention to potential needs while trying to maintain a balance between political and institutional management. However, when these criteria are made effective in curricula and education programs, evidence emerges of the failure or shortcomings of the quality systems, which bear no relation to what is actually being done with the pupils. The teleology of education is thus compromised, because it leads to box-ticking (curricular projects, content development levels, subject mastery levels, customer satisfaction, etc.). Parents are known to be quite demanding customers, especially with respect to their children passing, but pupil customers have nowhere to express their complaints. They are expected to overcome "school failure" through the means the school provides for all. This presents a challenge to innovate and take a fresh approach to pupil assessment.

In Spain, the III National Plan of Action for Social Inclusion is set within the framework of the European social inclusion strategy (VV.AA., 2009). Its proposed aim in the

educational environment is to “*provide quality of education*” for all citizens in effective equality of opportunities adapted to individual needs, while counting on the collaboration of all components and institutions in the educational community and society in general”. In the text, the *meaning of quality* is related to inclusivity objectives, and others such as: developments and innovations, performance assurance and progressive evolution.

An OECD report, (OECD, 2008), which supplies information regarding *approaches to quality of education* in different countries, insists on the need for efforts to improve tools, that is, educational practices, but also on the need to provide schools with the necessary resources to implement innovations in different countries. The OECD report to which we refer, ratifies the intention of governments to aim for education system growth, in both size and quality. Reports also indicate that secondary education is moving increasingly towards universality in almost all OECD countries.

This can be understood as relating to the ambitions of various governments under the OECD umbrella. However, education system growth in both size and quality must be weighed against available public funding. Education budgets are limited, and education figures primarily as a public enterprise. As a public good, under the auspices of the public sphere, any additional demand on schooling includes cultural diversity in classrooms, the intake and gradual incorporation of diverse school groups, or heterogeneity of approaches to education among school agents (teachers, parents/families, pupils, society).

We might therefore ask ourselves if assessment, as a tool in its current form, promotes or detects quality of education, and if educational funding, including the funding of assessment resources, has been sufficient to cover the recent and current “extra demands” on schools, and those they will be expected to meet in the future.

Furthermore, when it is a question of making a more efficient investment in education, education needs to “reinvent itself” in order to yield a positive cost-benefit ratio. The findings of the PISA (VV.AA. – PISA, 2006) report, have also revealed that the intercountry relationship between investment in education and learning outcomes is, in the best of cases, only moderately positive. This suggests that money is a necessary prior requirement, but it is neither enough nor sufficient to ensure a quality improvement in learning.

Among the criteria adopted by different countries when making financial investment in education, we find: compensation between the hours spent in the classroom, years of schooling, teacher working hours, class group size (a representative measure), and teachers’ salaries. This part of the report is of relevance to our research, because it provides an indicator of the diversity of secondary education policy options. This partially explains why there is no simple relationship to be seen between how much is spent on education in general, and the benefit to pupils.

A *fourth issue* of relevance to our analysis is the meaningfulness of the interpretation of assessment data.

The issue at hand, is the continuous overall assessment of learning processes, taking into account achievement in all academic areas. Nevertheless, when it comes to the consideration of assessment criteria, it is not clear how to capture indicators that will allow process assessment, all the more when the assessment involves complex processes related not only with disciplinary content, but also cultural, psychological and social content, in which there is an interaction of expectations, life circumstances, approaches to education, different readings of aims and tools, etc.

When a pupil's progression from one stage to the next, depends on his/her scores on indicators of a "sufficient maturity level", it is wise to begin by asking what is meant by maturity. If maturity means that a certain level of education corresponds to a certain level of skills, when a pupil reaches that skills level, he or she is "mature". In this case we would be talking about the kind of maturity that goes with grade level requirements. We would at the same time be establishing a link between resources and efficiency, because each grade level would include a series of means and resources aimed at pupils' achieving the required skills.

If, however, maturity is taken to mean that by a certain age, optimal results must have been achieved over a set period of time, we would be talking of time-related maturity judged by external criteria. Maturity in this case, would be measured in terms of the resource-effectiveness ratio, because the aim is that resources should yield the maximum benefit using interval-based performance analysis. Either of these interpretations of maturity, would measure resources rather than progress towards the achievement of educational goals.

If, on the other hand, it suggests *flexibility* in the treatment of pupils who fail to achieve an objective in one of the different subject areas, notwithstanding the limitations imposed by non-interference in the pupils' possibilities of making the best use of the new school year, compliance with process would result in time lags (repeating the year, for example) subject to specific plans for reinforcement and basic skills recovery. Does the acquisition of skills therefore depend on reinforcement? And what other external factors come into play?

Standard assessment practice is that pupils and their families will be informed of the results, and that the information will result in positive performance change. But how do pupils and their families interpret the reports they are given? Do they see them as an accurate reflection of their level of training, skills, and achievement? The general framework of assessment in the education system bases assessments on diagnostic forecasts. This being the case, and using the current Spanish education Law, LOE (2006), as an example, the purpose of assessment is: \*To improve quality and equity in education; \*To guide educational policy; \*To increase the transparency and effectiveness of the education system, \*To provide data on rates of achievement of improvement targets set by education authorities; \*To provide data on progress in achieving Spanish and European education targets, and to obtain data on the fulfillment of the commitment to meet the educational demands of Spanish society and targets set by the European Union.

Thus, section 2 of the LOE adds: "the purpose described in the section above can not be used to justify the use of educational assessment scores, in any of the Spanish regions, for the assessment of individual pupils or to produce school league tables" (LOE, Art. 140: section 1). Under this approach, assessment becomes a tool in the hands of the system and national and International policy makers. It is not a tool with which to revise teaching practices in order to adapt them to the pupil, or to execute processes. Nor it is a control mechanism geared to the purpose or meaning given to education. Rather, it is a means of defining the type of education and type of school to serve the established model of society.

This, however, raises interesting issues with regard to the attention given to the immigrant community. How, for example, do culturally diverse communities apprehend and incorporate national and European education parameters into their own readings and visions of reality? How can education policy be oriented towards improving quality and equity in education, if these two issues are judged according to macro objectives that are alien to the pupils? We might deduce that they do not represent the same thing.

In the field /context of immigration, schools are *inclusive* when their environment includes everybody. This means encouraging collective participation (democratic schools), and acknowledging diversity of origin, culture, or skills (personal identity). And this needs to be applied in all aspects of the curriculum, assessment included. In order to live this in schools with all pupils, boys and girls, overcoming cultural differences, we need an intercultural school environment, aware and critical Banks, in Muñoz (2001 / 2006). The achievement of an inclusive school will therefore depend on various factors, including assessment, and others such as: \*Staff values and attitudes. School staff works with democratic values, attitudes, and school values and norms. The school has certain norms and values that legitimize cultural and ethnic diversity; \*System control strategies. The valuation and assessment procedures used by the school promote equality between the different groups; \*Multicultural curricular approach, the curriculum and teaching materials are geared to multicultural perspectives that are diverse in their concepts, application and problems; \*Attention to linguistic diversity as formulated and valued in schools; \*Effective ways of teaching and styles of motivation oriented towards different groups; \*Gradual sensitization of all concerned towards multiculturalism, while also developing skills of analysis and criticism to identify problems with racism or assimilationism that may arise in schools. The idea would be to plan action to help solve these situations.

The questions arising here and now are: Does assessment lead to exclusion? Is there a place for positive discrimination in assessment processes? Are we evaluating skills or knowledge? And according to what or whom are we evaluating? Does the assessment environment refer to processes or determine tools? What kind of inclusivity objectives can justify assessment on the basis of sameness rather than the value of difference?

Item	Aspect	Issues
<i>First aspect</i>	If we view learning as a lifelong process, our education systems need to organise the kind of teaching that will make it possible.	Is the aspect "Continuing life long learning" captured in national and international assessment criteria?
<i>Second aspect</i>	In the social and curricular context, assessment is associated with intercultural conflict, which arises when educational experiences contrast with the assessment.	From the assessment point of view, is there any attention to the development of resilience skills as a way to deal with intercultural conflict?
<i>Third aspect</i>	The quality criterion used to ensure a minimum of efficient, structured and effective school functioning, finds support in a balance between political and institutional management.	Is assessment in its current form a tool to promote quality in education or to diagnose it? Does educational funding, including the funding of assessment resources, enable us to meet the "extra demands" that have been and continue to be placed upon schools? Will it enable us to do so in the future?
<i>Fourth aspect</i>	The meaning conferred on the assessment of educational processes as part of the organization of countries.	Assessment can lead to exclusion. Is there a place for positive discrimination in assessment processes? Are we evaluating skills or knowledge? According to what or to whom are we evaluating? Does the assessment environment refer to processes or determine tools? What kind of inclusivity objectives can justify assessment on the basis of sameness rather than the value of difference?

Table 01: Aspects of Analysis for the reading of assessment criteria

#### **4. Analysis of criteria for the assessment of education systems in national and international education indicators**

The Assessment Institute of the Spanish Ministry of Education, Policy and Sport published a report in *Apuntes* (December, 2008, 14<sup>th</sup> summary report), in which national and international education indicators are presented. According to this report, it is the responsibility of the Institute to create and develop a national system of education indicators, geared to the reality of Spain, the reality of international assessments, and to the production and analysis of international indicators. This is organized under the framework of Spain's participation in the OECD, INES (International Indicators of Education Systems) project for the production and



analysis of "quantitative indicators to allow cross-country comparison" (Apuntes, 14, 2008, 1), referred by the Assessment Institute of the Spanish Ministry of Education, Social Policy and Sport (2008).

The data collected by the INES are consistent with those published annually by the OECD (2012) in its two versions: "*Education at a glance*"; and "*Panorama de la Educación*". Therefore, in order to address the four aspects described in the section above, it will be worth indicating how these aspects are included in the data collected by the INES in that *edition*.

#### **4.1. First aspect: Continuous life long learning and assessment. National and International assessment criteria: do these cover "continuous lifelong learning"? In this respect we are able to observe that:**

a) The ongoing process of producing a national system of education indicators organized by stages does include indicators that collect data relating to this issue. Thus, for example, in the last stage of the process, which took place in 2007, we find an update of what are considered to be the 15 priority indicators relating to the PISA study 2006 (VV.AA. – PISA, 2006), (VV.AA. – Apuntes, 17, 2008, 2), (OECD, 2012, 2013). Some of the data given by these indicators, reveal an interest in: - continuous education: - the education level of the population between the ages of 25 and 64, - school enrollment rates in the various grades and stages, - participation of the adult population in education activities, or continuous training, - the early drop out rate, - secondary and tertiary graduation rates.

b) There is no parameter in the statistics to indicate whether or not these indicators are linked with a paradigmatic change in *continuous education*, or whether the various collectives see any need for or purpose in remaining in continuous education in order to achieve social integration or gain entry to the labour market. It would therefore be worthwhile referring these data to the immigrant community, when drawing up educational guidelines for the post-school stage.

c) The assessment of "*continuous education*" collects indicators of growth over the period 2000-2006 and in the piece of data for Spain, the percentage of women with higher education has grown more than that of men. Nevertheless, it would be useful to investigate whether the same trend is repeated in the immigrant population, since we might discover evidence of a shift away from the gender paradigm in immigrant populations, which has its origins in environments where the reality is the other way round, that is, where men take priority in higher education and women are relegated to child rearing.

**4.2. Second aspect: *Assessment in the social and curricular context*. How is this included in the system of indicators presented by the Spanish Assessment Institute and INES-OECD? What is the framework under which social context and curriculum indicators are presented? Continuing with the analysis of the INES Report, it can be seen that (VV.AA. – PISA, 2006), (Ministry of Education, Social Policy and Sport, 2008):**

a) Attention to social and curricular context defines the very organization of the indicators. In fact, the Spanish system of indicators is similar to that of the majority of countries, to that of the OECD - INES project, and to that of the European Quality Indicators Project. It is divided into two main areas: *External Indicators* (of context), and *Internal Indicators* of the education system itself. The area of the education system includes indicators of its various components, that is, school enrollment, resources, education processes and outcomes.

b) The organization of the indicators by areas, establishes an operative but not relational model of the components included in the organization scheme. There are no indicators to vehiculate the linking of the two contexts, nor any data to illustrate the way in which they interact. Thus, it is not easy to establish *a posteriori* the relationships between the various components. It is hard to estimate the weight of the social, educational and cultural context in school processes, and therefore impossible to take correct measures or decisions based on the results obtained.

c) The social context of immigrant pupils figures in one of the indicators as a statistic indicating the number of foreign pupils and their geographical distribution. But the design has no correlation parameters to explain, for example, the tendencies of immigrant families in relation to their children's education; or their criteria for choosing a school; the willingness of schools to accept them and provide support programmes to that end; variance in organizational structure and in programming based on the percentage of immigrant pupil in schools, etc. All this information would enable us to weigh up the dimensions that this variance can take in school organizations, school integration measures, the addressing of compensatory needs, etc.

**4.3. Third aspect: *Quality assurance*: What parameters are used as quality indicators? What is the orientation of the quality efforts measured by the indicators.**

Data published in the report issued by the Assessment Institute concerning the history of the project for a state system of indicators taking into account European indicators (Key European education statistics) and those of the OECD show that: to provide relevant data to education authorities, institutional participation bodies, agents involved in the education process and citizens in general "regarding the level

of quality and equity achieved by the education system”, constitutes a tool to achieve the assessment goal; in order to describe the reality of education: “education indicators are developed as a tool to describe and understand the educational reality of the country”; decision making as an understanding of the national reality “enables precise goal definition and the adoption of policies to achieve these goals” (VV.AA. – Apuntes, 17, 2008, 2), (OECD, 2008).

But all at the same time, the selection of criteria and sources, the idea of quality is confirmed by several facts:

- the criteria for the selection and development of the indicators refer to relevance, immediacy, technical robustness, viability, duration and consensus-based selection.
- the data sources rely on various national insitutional levels for educational statistics.
- the process indicators, opinion-based indicators, and performance test scores, are developed by the Institute using data obtained from assessment studies.

The quality data targeted and captured by the system of assessment indicators will refer to invested resources. These data provide the guidelines for the assessment of quality based on public funds invested in education, global GDP rates, expenditure per pupil, and evolving trends. The data describe growth trends in comparative terms for the period 2005 to 2008.

Quality in these data appears to be oriented around public funding and the outcomes of resource used. Nevertheless, the data that can be obtained from quality indicators will always be of interest for the information they provide about opportunity conditions in terms of the means to which pupils, immigrant or otherwise, have access, and the measures that can be taken to make the “equal opportunities” premise viable. Thus, from research perspectives, optimally used resources can generate: educational innovations, updates and reviews of the guidelines for educational intervention, enable the improvement of control systems and the subsequent development of indicators geared towards greater suitability and accuracy.

#### **4.4. Fourth aspect: The meaning of assessment from the point of view of the educational processes in national systems: What is being assessed in pupils? What role is being assigned to disciplines and skills? Do we have indicators to capture issues relating to how subjects deal with educational processes?**

The state system of education indicators, as stated in the *14th report published by the Assessment Institute*, characterizes pupil assessment in relation to (VV.AA. – Apuntes,

17, 2008, 2), (OECD, 2008): \*the collection of data regarding the development of key skills, as agreed at state level, and within the framework of European standards. Hence, of the 15 priority indicators included in the state system, some refer to data on: - pupils' key skills, as stated in PISA 2006 on Science, Reading and Maths; - suitability rates in compulsory education: - percentage of pupils between the ages of 8 and 15 enrolled in the year corresponding to their age; - percentage of pupils repeating the year; and all at the same time, to set up an evaluation of school performance as a basic standard of comparison **to give a comparative orientation** to the analysis of cross-country evaluation outcomes, what it does, in fact, is assign importance to the current international context and trends.

Taking these issues into account, and given that immigration is a reality worldwide, it is important and in the general interest that the system of indicators should include comparative data on ways of articulating the proposals of the various groups with assessment propositions. Thus, rather than determining attained levels of performance (where several factors come into play, including different education system structures and differences in key areas of school programming between the various countries of origin), what now needs to be developed are concurrent indicators to show in what way and from what perspectives we can develop the right tools with which to address external assessment; or how we can integrate results and the repercussions of the results in subsequent processes inside and outside the school environment. Here, therefore, *psychological and social factors* will gain major importance.

## Notes

(1): In our research we refer to "Level tests" proofs for newcomers pupils: Three different types were used for Mathematics, Language and English. Only one of the six schools took the decision about an integrated system of evaluation in order to measure cognitive skills and abilities: Weschler, D. (2005) / WISCH IV – Scale of intelligence Weschler for pupils IV, TEA Editions. Madrid.

(2): The sample of pupils from foreign origin involved at the stage of compulsory secondary (12 to 16 years), from which we chose 65 pupils (15 of age), adjusted to a selection criteria: Latinamerican pupils, no longer than two years living in Pamplona, and not having taken part in specific previous support programmes at school.

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