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Prace Naukowe. Pedagogika 11, 67-82

2002

PRACE NAUKOWE Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogicznej w Częstochowie
SERIA: Pedagogika z. XI, 2002

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Abstract

In this article, we treat the assessment of knowledge as a component in the functioning of the learning institution as well as in the education system as a whole. We attempt to interpret the effects that the examination and assessment of knowledge have on the pupil. These effects are not always unequivocal or positive. The key question we pose addresses motivation for learning, specifically the notion of grades as a motivation for learning. In seeking systemic answers, we begin with the viewpoint that one cannot expect all pupils to have an internal interest in all school subjects; nevertheless, they still have to study them. As a consequence, various questions arise, especially in regard to the assertion that, in dealing with learning motivation, internal motivation should be preferred over external motivation. In our interpretation, grades should not be viewed solely as external motivation. Grades can, indeed, act as internal motivation for learning and acquiring knowledge. We strive for the retributory principle of fairness in assessment and in regard to the assessment criteria, while emphasizing that the teacher should be aware of the various circumstances that influence motivation for learning, the learning process itself, and the child's demonstrated level of knowledge. But such circumstances, we believe, should not be included among the criteria used in assessing the pupil. The teacher can use other motivational factors in the classroom to help give the pupil a positive motivation to learn.

Key Terms:

marks, grades, assessment, grading; the school and the school system; internal motivation and external motivation; the structure of subjectivity; narcissism

Assessment and Motivation for Learning

Educators are often caught between numerous potentially contradictory obligations, to paraphrase Apple. Solving one set of problems can cause others to increase (Apple, 1992). „Schools are, indeed, part of the economic, political, and cultural arenas. Each of these makes demands that are never fully met. The various dynamics of these arenas interact with each other in the everyday life of the school. And, of course, one does not always support the other. It is important to recognize this difficulty. We must not assume that simple statements about the situation will provide the kind of help we need to understand real life" (35). Our understanding of the system is further complicated by the fact that, even as we consider objective social reality, we must also consider the individual, specifically the level of the objective effects caused or reinforced by the learning institution on the individual's personality structure. „Simple statements" in ideological discourse can, therefore, neglect either the social or individual dimensions of the problem. Even worse is when we engage in

a scientific discussion about values apart from any consideration of the facts, to influence our convictions or the convictions of others. In such a case, „the power of the word derives not from its meaning and correlation to the reference, ... but from its value charge" (Gnamuš, 1988, 86).

The issue of assessment also relates to the school system in all the aspects just mentioned, so it must be treated on both the social and individual levels, and first of all, perhaps, as a component in the functioning of the learning institution and in the entire education system. Here the role of assessment is crucial, even though some of its consequences may not be seen as unequivocally positive for individuals. The realization that assessment may have certain undesirable consequences — and these cannot be objectively removed or ignored despite established safeguards — leads to a range of questions that we must try to answer professionally. We must also try to determine why the stable functioning of the education system does not permit such quick solutions as, for example, abolishing or replacing knowledge assessment altogether.

Let us try to see what this means in regard to assessment itself. Assessment is an important element of selection in the education system. In this sense, it is also a factor in the reproduction of societal relationships. But any solution that sees only a negative element in assessment (from the standpoint of the individual participant) neglects the progressive function of assessment, which enables the individual to move up the ladder of social power. If, in dealing with the problem of assessment, we look only at its negative aspect, the question we might ask would be: How, through the process of assessment itself, might we compensate for deficiencies that result from an underprivileged environment of socialization? If, instead, we look at the positive aspect, we might ask: How should one create conditions so that, within the education process, underprivileged pupils can more fully be guaranteed equal opportunities and fairness in assessment? Instead of rules that require the teacher to assess only the level of acquired knowledge and skills foreseen by the study program (or that he/she at least approaches this aim), rules of assessment would be set up that include in the mark not only knowledge but also *circumstances* such as the pupil's diligence, class participation, degree of effort, specific learning difficulties, and so on.[i]

At first glance, this approach seems to be even fairer to the child, since it takes into account the circumstances from which the child has come. With such an approach, it is, of course, debatable whether the unit measurements for the assessment of acquired knowledge and skills (henceforward: „assessment of knowledge" — *authors' note*), which are typical for state-level external examinations, should be used for pupils who come from various socialization environments and widely divergent educational backgrounds. But just as we recognize that through the assessment of knowledge schools significantly reproduce social inequities, so, too, we must ask whether an assessment that explicitly includes criteria based on *circumstances* as part of the mark — as we have just described — truly leads to a reduction of social inequality and to the child's greater benefit or whether such a notion only obscures the problem momentarily, removing it from the discussion, thus enabling the system to function non-transparently and irrationally.

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[i] Compare Kodelja 2000, 15. In a note, the author presents the official rules of assessment in France, which require the teacher to „assess only the level of acquired knowledge and skills foreseen in the study program and not the pupil's diligence, classroom participation, degree of effort, specific learning difficulties, and so on. The grade should also be independent of the pupil's sex, nationality, social origin, more or less pleasant character, attractive or unattractive appearance, and so on."

Moreover, we must ask whether such information about the child, conceptualized in just this way, does not, in fact, help preserve social relationships and, above all, keep the underprivileged pupil in an underprivileged status? Why does this happen? Sooner or later, and especially as the pupil moves up the education ladder, it is impossible to escape a coming to terms with the sobering fact of hard reality," as it becomes clear that the pupil's level of demonstrated knowledge, as well as the assessment of that knowledge, is crucial for individual success in the education system. Anyone who does not agree with this will have to prove that it is possible to set up evaluative standards that guarantee the principle of fairness while explicitly assessing something more than just the level of acquired knowledge and skills. To put the question more simply: What, then, should count: knowledge or circumstances? And if both, then how should they count, in what degree, and to what extent?

The issues are vast and complex. There are many simple statements that seem to dictate quick solutions. The questions concerning what should be assessed — knowledge or the pupil as a whole — and should circumstances be explicitly written into the mark pose a dilemma that demands serious conceptual engagement. There are many other such dilemmas as well. Here, we will seek various ways to resolve them within the parameters of an apparently marginal topic, though it is one that, in our opinion, strikes at the heart of the differing views about assessment. We are speaking about the issues surrounding the topic of interest and motivation for learning, and more precisely, the issue of grades as a motivation for learning.

The School as an Institution and the „Realistic Viewpoint"

Pedagogical and psychological theory offers us a range of explanations for learning motivation. A meaningful starting point suggests two things are of exceptional importance in learning: „the valuing of the individual subject and interest in it" (Peklaj 2000, 142). With this statement, agreement in the analyses of learning motivation practically comes to an end.

Most professionals agree that, when we speak about motivation for learning, we need to give precedence to internal rather than external motivation. Schunk and Pintrich define it thus: „internal motivation relates to an activity that we do for its own sake" (Schunk, Pintrich 1996, 257 – 258). If the goal of the learning process is internal motivation in the sense of learning for the sake of knowledge itself, thenit is necessary that the pupil's demonstrated qualitative knowledge also show his or her autonomous interest in knowledge. On the other hand, research has shown that rewards (external motivation) have a positive influence on motivation for certain activities (274). It has also been shown that varying the level of rewards according to the level on which the child solves a given problem leads to greater skills, motivation, and personal effectiveness (276). This speaks in favor of grades as external motivation. But grades can also have a negative effect on internal motivation; that is, they can contribute to a decrease in internal motivation if the external motivation (the reward) is later terminated. According to the hypothesis of the theory of overjustification, it can even be true that if someone is internally motivated to do work and is then put into circumstances where the activity appears to be a means to a specific end, then the internal motivation decreases (274 – 275). If we were to put this

finding in absolute terms, it would lead to abolishing grades. But at the same time, Schunk and Pintrich note that „there are many pupils in school who have low internal motivation, and one of the teacher's important goals is to raise their motivation" (277). To this, we might add that the findings of research conducted in controlled experimental conditions and that presupposed a certain amount of internal motivation cannot simply be transferred to the classroom. In the school setting, where the work is determined by many different and distinct activities, it is unrealistic to expect all pupils to have equal internal motivation for all subjects or to assume that internal motivation in any given pupil will be constant. There will be at least some pupils who, in certain subjects and activities, have no internal motivation at all for the work. Thus, Peklaj, speaking about self-regulation in learning, observes: „Whether or not all pupils develop a great interest for all subjects, when it comes to self-regulation, what is more important is the realistic viewpoint that they will have to study even those subjects that do not interest them if they want to achieve their goals" (Peklaj 2000, 142). Given this — and despite findings that external motivation can negatively influence internal motivation — it is logical for schools to use grades as external motivation. Grades and assessment are what the teacher uses — regardless of the individual circumstances of the pupil — to motivate learning and the acquisition of qualitative knowledge **relatively effectively** (presuming that assessment is set up as a coherent system, that it is carried out consistently, and that it complies with the principle of fairness). Indeed, acquired qualitative knowledge does not necessarily imply the individual's autonomous interest in that knowledge. Schools should not expect or demand internal motivation from every pupil for all subjects and activities in its curriculum; otherwise, it could be criticized for being not only unrealistic but also totalitarian. Schools should try to spark its pupils' autonomous interest in knowledge but knowledge for the sake of knowledge cannot be set as the only goal, superior to all others. Nor should it take precedence over the goal of the pupil actually acquiring qualitative knowledge.

In this regard, we need to analyze the supposition that a child has positive internal motivation on entering the school, but numerical grades transform this motivation into external, often negative motivation. Connected with this is the idea that respect for internal motivation should lead to the abolition of assessment as a form of external coercion to learn. Thus, we are no longer dealing simply with the assertion that the evaluation of the individual subject and interest in the subject are important for learning, but rather this assertion represents a much more generalized opinion on the issue of motivation. Such an approach compels us to view internal motivation as having a positive value while external motivation is marked with a negative value. Underlying this position is the tacit but unambiguous assumption (sometimes even stated explicitly) that assessment and grades can be equated with external motivation. We see this in the proposition just mentioned, namely, that the child enters school internally motivated but grades change this internal motivation into external, often negative motivation.

Such assumptions lead us to the discourse where two unquestioned identities function in opposition. On the one hand, assessment and grades are identified with external motivation, while on the other, standing in opposition to and legitimizing this identification, is an equation between internal interest and knowledge. When one assumes that the child enters school already internally motivated — which, according to the fundamental aims of the learning institution, would mean that he or she is motivated specifically to acquire knowledge — the task of the school becomes simple: it need only enhance an already

existing internal interest in knowledge or make sure that it does not evaporate due to wrong working methods or approaches. When we equate knowledge with internal motivation and grades with negatively valued external motivation, the legitimate difference between internal and external motivation becomes an ideological discourse that prevents us from understanding the relationships between motivation, knowledge, and assessment as anything other than through the unquestioned identities just mentioned. This approach is unfortunate because it leads to an unrealistic understanding of the function of learning institutions (especially if these unquestioned assumptions become the basis for building systemic solutions in the school system).

Awareness of the complexity of such issues can be found in psychological and pedagogical theory. Peklaj cautions that we must take into consideration the realistic viewpoint when attempting to conceptualize the way learning institutions function. In defining the term „interest," she writes: „'Interest' refers to an internal positive orientation toward particular content and a desire to become familiar with this content" (Peklaj 2000, 142). Peklaj also warns that, in the school setting, it is a completely illusory to expect all pupils to have an internal interest in all subjects, although it is an objective fact that they will have to study them, whether or not they desire to. To this we might add that, even with pupils who at any given moment show a conspicuous interest in a given subject, one might ask about the reasons that created this interest. The answer to this question will be even more important in discussing the motivation of pupils who have no interest in certain subjects.

If it is important for the learning institution to adopt the realistic viewpoint — that pupils must study even subjects that do not interest them in order to achieve their goals — then this tells us that, in a learning institution, interest cannot be the consequence of merely autonomous desire, since it is conditioned by school work and the goals of the school as a whole. But the school with all its goals — the school as something „external," which we enter and whose goals are not influenced by the pupil in any decisive way — is not the only reason why it is necessary to assume heteronomy in what constitutes the pupil's interest in learning. We must ask ourselves to what extent is desire truly and completely unconditioned, „condition-free," and therefore autonomous. On the one hand, what we call internal interest might be stimulated by a desire for understanding and knowledge, a yearning on the part of the pupil to get involved in a particular intellectual field. On the other hand, this desire — to the extent that it is something the pupil experiences as internal interest — could also be the consequence of the pupil's relationship to a teacher, or of the parents' interest in certain subjects, or of identification with a classmate's desire, etc.

Grades Can Start to Act as Internal Motivation

With pupils who do have an autonomous desire for a particular subject (or for „school" in general) that spurs them to work and study, we can say, conditionally, that the motivational role of the teacher may be of less importance. But it is of crucial importance with those pupils who do not have such autonomous interest in schoolwork or in the content of a particular subject. The teacher is an external motivational factor (in objective terms, „external motivation") who functions for pupils as an internal reason for learning („internal motivation") through a relationship of transference, i.e., identification with the teacher (out of a desire to be worthy in the teacher's eyes).

Something similar can be said about the role of assessment and grades. Grades are an external motivational factor that functions as internal motivation for a variety of reasons. They offer proof to the pupil of his or her own success; they are a condition for advancement; they are a means for a pupil to prove him/herself in front of others (teachers, parents, classmates, etc.); and so on.

The above analysis shows that, even as we understand „interest" to mean „internal positive orientation" (as stated in the definition: „'interest' refers to an internal positive orientation toward particular content and a desire to become familiar with this content"), we must analyze the notion of „interest" as the outcome of a certain process and not as some a priori, naturally occurring internal state. Consequently, reasons for an „internal positive orientation," cannot be solely „internal." That is, in the context of a school setting they cannot, by definition, be solely the consequence of the pupil's autonomous desire for knowledge. A variety of reasons might explain an „internal positive orientation" toward certain content or a particular subject that leads to an internal desire to acquire knowledge. For example, an internal motivation might be the result of the pupil's relationship with the teacher — which, then, would be the result of an external motivational factor. In regard to causes, interest is, as a rule, the result of internal (already established and internalized) motivational factors and of external ones. It would, then, be unwarranted if we understand the concept of interest to mean only a positive orientation that has been internal from the very outset (as something natural). „Interest" refers, as well, to an orientation toward an object, for instance, a particular school subject, that is conditioned by external factors (the teacher, parents, grades, success), including a desire to know and to learn that is mediated by these external factors. Although the reasons for the motivation may be external — **a key point** for this conceptualization of motivation or interest — the result of these external factors may be the creation of a desire for knowledge and, along with this, an internal positive orientation toward knowledge. External motivations, then — or external factors, in general — should not be assigned an a priori negative or positive value.

Learning, Desire, and Obligation

To summarize so far, the above analysis of learning motivation begins with the flawed thinking that students entering school are internally motivated to learn; competition for grades leads to learning for the sake of grades; children become externally motivated to learn, and that is bad. The analysis finds further that putting undue emphasis on „internal motivation" for learning conceals and overlooks a „realistic viewpoint" on learning and motivation. Distinguishing between internal and external motivation is not so simple that one can dismiss it with a wave of the hand. More flawed thinking says students are already internally motivated to learn; all the school has to do is encourage this; as an even more binding commitment, pupils must be internally motivated and we must create conditions in the classroom which help the child learn for the sake of knowledge alone.

As mentioned previously, we never have an identical interest in every subject; what is more, even in regard to a single subject we show varying interest, depending on the specific material involved. Therefore, the school setting cannot avoid external motivation in the sense that external factors create and maintain interest in the acquisition of knowledge and so give rise to the desire for knowledge, that is, internal motivation. There is no need to

prove that changes in these external factors effects changes in the pupil's internal motivation for learning.

On the other hand, it is not likely that learning could be the result of only „internal motivation" if we reduce the meaning of internal motivation to mere desire (for knowledge). Herbart pointedly tells us this: „Otherwise, it is a well-known pedagogical rule that the teacher has to strive to waken pupils' interest in what the teacher teaches. But this rule is usually given and understood in the sense that learning is the aim and interest is the means used to achieve it. I have changed this relationship. Learning should serve to create interest" (Herbart 1919, p. 111). Therefore, learning will act as an external factor for the pupil. But something that is initially „external" can have the power to generate interest.

Interest may in this case be understood as an „internal" desire for knowledge. But it is not only that. In the school setting, that is, in an institution based on knowledge, a pupil must address the question of how to master knowledge in which he or she has little or no interest. It is logical, then, and often even necessary, that the school, in order to realize its basic objectives, must also rely on a sense of obligation. If the school imposes obligations on the pupil „externally," he or she will be able to learn out of an „internal" sense of obligation, resulting in knowledge that would not have been acquired if the instruction had been based solely on the pupil's desire for knowledge. It can also be the case that a pupil does indeed have an interest in knowledge, but — perhaps because the acquisition of knowledge demands investment in energy and work — he or she will learn only if learning and knowledge become an obligation rather than because of an existing desire for knowledge. An interest in knowledge and learning is the result of complex process in which, from the point of view of the pupil as a subject, external and internal causes are very often undivided. Internal factors act simultaneously with external ones. Herbart's reversal of the relationships between learning, goals, and interest puts the teacher in a position in which he or she is aware that learning itself often cannot be achieved directly, without mediation, and there is, therefore, no reason to renounce a kind of teaching that the pupil may initially feel as external pressure. Along with Herbart, we can say, „There is no knowledge without learning," but the aim is knowledge, and learning is the means that generates an interest „that must last a lifetime."

Given the fact that assessment and grades can be reasons behind a motivation to learn, the problem of internal and external motivation is even more complicated than we have been able to demonstrate so far. Grades are not freestanding, wholly independent phenomena that have a self-evident, unequivocal impact. The effect of assessment and grades derives from the interdependence of at least three factors: the teacher's act of grading; the pupil as a subject who interprets this act and the grades he or she receives; and the social context in which the assessment takes place, i.e., the predominant ideological network that most often includes, as well, fundamental systemic solutions in this field. Since public schools (in contrast to private schools, at least in principle) cannot renounce results that are both expected by the state and demanded by the parents, it would be difficult to abandon assessment and grades, inasmuch as grades are an expression — and an evaluation — of the pupil's work, i.e., of these results.

In regard to the impact that assessment and grades have on the pupil, the most essential question is: how does the pupil understand grades, and how are grades, as the result of his or her work, internalized?

Even Assuming Pupils Learn for the Sake of Knowledge Alone, Assessment of Demonstrated Knowledge Is Needed

In current professional discussions, one quite often hears the complaint that *pupils learn for the sake of grades rather than knowledge.* If we equate knowledge with positive-valued internal motivation and see grades as a form of negative-valued external motivation, then it immediately becomes clear that the situation should be reversed: *pupils should learn for the sake of knowledge, not grades.* Since grades, as the evaluation of knowledge, can generate a desire for no evaluation, which can form the nucleus for establishing an ideology in which grades are something negative, an idea that is given (professional) legitimacy through the equation of grades and external motivation, which is always assigned a negative value. If it were possible to achieve a situation in which pupils learn for the sake of knowledge alone, would the assessment of knowlege then become obsolete? The problem, of course, is that the teacher would still have to evaluate the results of the pupil's work. But that raises the crucial question, again, how will the pupil understand, accept, and „own" the assessment of knowledge and the grades he or she receives?

How grades are understood is a result of the joint effect of the three factors mentioned above. But here we will concentrate on the role of the pupil as a source of the meaning of assessment and grades. The pupil — the way he or she interprets things — *is* the answer to the question about what kind of assessment would motivate learning and, above all, how. Within the pupil there is a split between internal and external motivation, i.e., between autonomous and heteronomous reasons for behavior. Grades are undoubtedly also something completely external for the pupil, since the teacher is the one who assigns the grades, which, as an assessment of knowledge, are the formal „externalization" of knowledge. Nevertheless, the pupil has a legitimate desire to know the extent and nature of his or her knowledge, the results of his or her work, etc. So there is no paradox if the pupil is divided in his or her attitude toward grades and is a subject of the conflicting desires for knowledge to be evaluated and for it not to be evaluated. It is also logical that the pupil's desire to learn is formed in regard to grades and not only in a direct relationship to knowledge — and this is not only because of the utilitarian aspect of grading. Grades are the evaluation of demonstrated knowledge, but they are also very often understood by the pupil as the evaluation of acquired knowledge. At the same time, they represent closure in the process of learning and acquiring knowledge. This closure is tangible, something that can be achieved and, therefore, a legitimate goal for the pupil. Attempts to invalidate the act of learning for the sake of grades because there are different ways to reach the same positive end — knowledge — are, therefore, questionable. For if in theory we permit only learning for the sake of knowledge itself and stigmatize learning for the sake of grades, then we renounce grades as a indirect motivational factor in learning — one that, from the pupil's point of view, is an „internal motive power."

Even if the pupil functions in an entirely utilitarian way and intentionally studies only in order to get good grades, this self-serving goal would still put him or her in a process of learning. In such a situation, the teacher and the structural decisions of the school system become factors that can critically influence the quality of the acquired knowledge. Efforts to attain quality in knowledge will depend on the quality of the teacher's instruction and on

the teacher's definition of good grades, which is extremely important in determining how to verify and assess knowledge. If, to get good grades, it is necessary to demonstrate various and higher taxonomic levels of knowledge, the pupil will attempt to do precisely this — i.e., acquire qualitative knowledge in order to get the grade, which is his or her immediate aim, even though the *quality of the knowledge* is not a direct internal motivation, but an external one. Internally, what motivates the pupil are *good grades*. It is in just this case — when pupils learn for the sake of grades alone and not to gain knowledge — that it becomes all the more important how assessment criteria are established and what levels of knowledge are incorporated into tests. Therefore, learning for grades and learning for knowledge itself — which both can result in qualitative knowledge — cannot be evaluated according to the purpose or motive for learning as though learning for grades is of lesser value because it supposedly reduces knowledge, which is in itself a value, to the level of bare means.

What Should Be Included in the Assessment Criteria?

From the point of view of the pupil interpreting his or her grades, the teacher's method of assessment is certainly important. In the field of ethics there is a saying: the important thing is whether the pupil considers the grade to be fair or unfair. But what is fair for the pupil? Kodelja cites empirical educational research showing that

> „...for pupils who participated in this research, fairness refers to the way their teachers grade them and treat them. The grade is fair if it is in accordance with the retributory principle of «fairness», which in our case means: equal grades are given for equal demonstrated knowledge. Whatever goes against this principle is not fair. It does not matter if the grade is too high or too low. Both are wrong. ... Secondly, pupils consider it unfair when a teacher uses negative grades as a means of disciplining a particular pupil or the whole class; gives better pupils higher marks than they deserve just because they are diligent; uses insulting remarks to humiliate a pupil who received a bad grad; and so on. Pupils, then, consider wrong such things as a negative grade that is the consequence not of a lack of knowledge but of behavior, unequal treatment of better and worse pupils, and disrespect for a pupil's personal dignity in the assessment"
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> (Kodelja 2000, 15).

Given such empirical research, one can conclude that grades, as a motivational factor in learning, will motivate pupils positively if they get the same grade for the same demonstrated knowledge. Even a bad grade can motivate a pupil to learn if it is fair, that is, if the grade is neither too high nor too low for the demonstrated knowledge.

Otherwise, pupils can react negatively if the work they invest is not successful, and this is true, too, as far as motivation is concerned. From our point of view, the explicit inclusion in the grade of circumstances other than demonstrated knowledge motivates a child only in the short term; in the long term, such inclusion is questionable, to say the least. Whatever grades he or she gets, the child compares him- or herself with the other children. On the basis of various feedback — and not only the so-called comprehensive grade — a child

creates a picture of his or her knowledge and position in comparison with other pupils. Therefore, the grade that includes, for instance, invested effort, might even serve to decrease a pupil's motivation. Šimenc, for example, warns that it is questionable to include „interest, diligence and attitude toward the learning material" in compiling a grade:

> „How is a teacher supposed to assess pupils' attitude to the material without encouraging them to express enthusiasm for things that do not interest them? And how can the teacher pretend to assess knowledge if he or she is actually assessing pupils? If the teacher grades the pupil according to whether the pupil likes the subject, then the pupil will pretend to like the subject. To the extent that the pupil is encouraged to achieve better grades, this kind of assessment can encourage hypocrisy. The teacher naturally strives to interest the pupil in the subject, but it is not clear how it is possible to grade interest objectively. This becomes even more questionable if we consider that interest in a subject is often structurally connected to the pupil's relationship of transference toward the teacher and, therefore, feelings of interest (or lack of interest or even dislike) toward the teacher. Nor is it clear that it should be a school objective to get the pupils to be greatly interested in everything that they learn at school. To put it another way: The school's objective is certainly to encourage interest, but it would probably not be right to demand it. ... This seems to be linked to the problems surrounding the assessment of emotional components: When the school wishes to grade the formation of the emotional side of personality, then it comes dangerously close to manipulating pupils. The school takes away the freedom (as well as the dignity) that pupils should have and sets itself a task doomed to failure. For it wishes to make a conscious goal something that essentially involves the teacher's and pupil's unconscious"
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> (Šimenc 2000, p.45).

In both final marks and as the pupil moves up the educational ladder, he or she will have to confront, on the one hand, the consequences of a notion of fairness in assessment that explicitly includes factors such as interest, diligence, attitude toward the learning material, objective opportunities for work, and the circumstances in which the pupil lives, and, on the other hand, the reality of his or her demonstrated knowledge.

In saying this we do not deny that, in the classroom, we must be aware of the various circumstances that influence a child's motivation for learning, the learning process itself, and the demonstrated level of knowledge. We mean to say only that such circumstances should not be included among the criteria in grading. Of course, we must not ignore the issue of circumstances. In the classroom, the teacher has available other motivational factors — e.g., the study content, the teacher's relationship with and treatment of the pupils, and methods of working individually with pupils — which take into consideration circumstances and which can positively motivate pupils to learn. Moreover, precisely when the teacher's assessment, based on established criteria that include various levels and the quality of knowledge, indicates in some comparable way the pupil's demonstrated knowledge, a basis is established for dealing with problems arising from various circumstances, as well as with what could be defined as the school's other formative and educational tasks. There is no question that we must take into consideration the differences

among pupils, usually involving socialization. The only question is whether there is enough of a cogent rationale, in regard to fairness and motivation for learning, to include *circumstances* among the assessment criteria. Further, from a teacher's point of view, when other circumstances must be included in the grade, the teacher is often put in a situation in which he or she cannot define, at least conditionally, the transparent criteria for grading. Therefore, neither teachers nor pupils know what it is the study program demands of them.

The Perception of Grades and the Narcissistic Personality Structure

One can even say that grades that explicitly represent the quality of demonstrated knowledge have a retroactive formative effect. The principle of fairness (equal grades for equal knowledge) presupposes a personality structure, a form of subjectivity, that is able to distinguish between social rules, external laws (or in this case, externally established assessment criteria), and the „self" with its own internal law, „the voice of conscience." This personality structure makes autonomy in judgment possible and enables the voice of conscience to function as an autonomous source of obligation. A pupil's internal division makes it possible for him or her to establish a distance from the grade as a result of his or her learning and knowledge and to view it as a mirror of reality. Therefore, both good and bad grades can be internalized. A pupil can view even a bad grade as a result that, because it is bad, becomes a reason to learn. Such a perspective, says Riesman, „affirms to the child that what matters is what he can accomplish, not how nice his smile is or how cooperative his attitude may be" (Riesman 1967, 59). One very important consequence of this viewpoint is that children will internalize the standards set by schools that are followed unambiguously and consistently. Such a relationship between the school and the pupil ensures that the pupil — because of the solidity and immutability of the standards — will have a sense of security (ibid.) and, we might add, fairness.

In actuality, the problems of grading are somewhat more complex. As the already-discussed research indicates, at the level of consciousness — i.e., when the pupil in principle, and not in relation to a specific grade, defines what a fair grade means — most pupils will apply a retributory principle of fairness when it comes to assessing knowledge. But when they receive a grade in a particular subject, they do not all necessarily act according to this principle. Again, it is possible to imagine an exception to the above rule, when, even though the (bad) grade meets the established criteria for the acquired level of knowledge, the pupil might have difficulties in the way he or she perceives the grade. Let us take, for example, a pupil with a narcissistic personality structure who most of the time cannot accept a bad grade for what it is, even if the grade is fair according to the defined criteria.

A brief survey of the phenomenology of the narcissistic subject structure can elucidate the problem. The narcissistic subject will see in grades only something external, as nothing but a means of his or her own affirmation. For this kind of pupil, grades will be a tool of manipulation that can be used to exploit other people, and above all, the teacher. At the same time, the narcissistic pupil will be completely dependent on the teacher's acknowledgment and admiration, hence, ultimately, on good grades. Such subjects can see

themselves — their own learning and knowledge — only through the direct effect their grades have on their parents, teachers, peers, and classmates. Simply put, their sense of themselves is dependent solely on the admiration of others at any given moment. In pathological forms, the narcissistic personality is radically divided. On the one hand, he or she is susceptible to superego demands „to excel among others, to play the role of the strong, cynical, and successful wiseguy without any excessive illusions, but at the same time even the least ridicule or some similar social 'slip' can trigger a fall into traumatic depression" (Žižek 1987, 115). For a personality controlled by a pathological fear of any kind of failure, a grade will be felt as unfair even if it is given equally to all with equal demonstrated knowledge.

Only a good grade is acceptable for the narcissistic subject. To the extent that this kind of subject structure characterizes the actual situation, the demand for good grades will create problems for both the teachers and the education system. And pupils are not the only ones who demand success and good grades from teachers, regardless of the effort invested. Parents do, too. Should we make allowances for these demands? Allowances for the unrealistic viewpoint and demands for success at any price, which lead to a loss of reality — even as we search for systemic solutions?

Narcissistic subjects, we might note, are completely externalized, and any competition for grades might be expected to strengthen this personality structure. This might give us a rationale for subversively seeking a solution outside of the fair assessment of demonstrated levels of knowledge. But even the narcissistic subject can serve as an example showing that, when we talk about assessment, matters are hardly simple.

The rationale might go something like this: Such a personality does not see the grade as a mirror; grades are not a shared framework of reality; the only important thing is that his or her grade is better than the others' grades. What is more, since such a subject views the grade as a tool to influence others, it is hardly clear that a demand for good grades will lead to learning and the acquisition of knowledge. Quite the opposite: this demand will lead the narcissistic subject into a fruitless competition for grades. But this reasoning holds true only at the first stage, i.e., if we assume the impossible, namely, the nonfunctioning of the teacher and the school in general, as instances that represent the social demand and thus establish the internal reality of the subject.

The reasoning falls apart because clearly established assessment criteria will require the pupil to learn indirectly — precisely out of a desire to get a good mark, to be the best — even when he or she, as a subject, reflects this *criteria as such* differently. The problem that emerges with the narcissistic subject has to do, then, with the teacher and the teacher's conception of assessment. Again, we should try to answer this question not by abandoning assessment and criticizing competition for grades, but by looking at what actually happens in the classroom. What sort of knowledge should the teacher examine? If, in order to get „ood grades it is necessary to demonstrate various kinds of knowledge at higher taxonomic levels, then the pupil will, of course, have to demonstrate just this sort of qualitative knowledge. In this sense, insistence on getting good grades can, through the creation of transference with the teacher (as an essentially secondary-by-product state), establish structure and re-value manipulative motivation for the sake of grades as internal motivation for the sake of knowledge. Or, on the contrary, if a teacher requires only superficial knowledge or does not comply with the demand for fairness in grading the pupil's demonstrated level of knowledge, the narcissistic subject will most likely remain trapped in a vicious circle of using grades as manipulation.

In other words, the demand for good grades is not in itself a given, but rather the consequence of the fact that in the education system grades exist objectively as a measure of the reality of demonstrated knowledge and, therefore, of success. Hence, good grades are demanded of everyone, including the narcissistic subject. Because the narcissistic subject by definition sees grades as a tool, it becomes all the more crucial whether or not the teacher makes allowances when faced with demands for good grades (at any price). If the system and the teacher do not make allowances when pupils and their parents demand good grades regardless of the demonstrated level of knowledge — that is, when the subject knows in advance that there is no chance of manipulating the teacher — then, perhaps surprisingly, it is precisely the narcissistic personality structure that needs to have grades in the education system as a condition for learning and acquiring qualitative knowledge. But only if the teacher truly establishes good grades as something that presupposes qualitative knowledge, i.e., if good grades, based on tests of knowledge, require the pupil to demonstrate higher levels of knowledge, as well. On the one hand, the narcissistic subject will submit to the standard of good grades because other people (teachers, classmates, etc.) view good grades not just as high numbers, but as success. Only in this way can the pupil affirm him- or herself in front of others. On the other hand, the pupil's own relationship of transference with the teacher will lead him or her to the same goal, and so, in this case, he or she will be internally motivated to get good grades and not just a certain number.

In this sense, the comprehensive grade, which the teacher gives without any clearly defined criteria, does not help the pupil see the limits of his or her manipulation of others and so leaves the pupil spinning in a narcissistic circle of subjectivity. This apparent way out of the competition for grades only reinforces the narcissistic structure, because the subject rationalizes his or her weakness and gaps in knowledge as due to other circumstances, which, in a social sense, make it possible for the subject to manipulate others and to shine.

Complementarity as the Foundation for Establishing Systemic Solutions

Let us look for a moment at so-called descriptive assessment. It is based on the rationale that in the numerical assessment of knowledge and the assessment of the pupil's achievement alone, external incentives for learning are placed in the foreground. As a result, teachers have less opportunity in their assessment to take into consideration such things as the learning process as a whole, the understanding of various terms and relationships, the application of knowledge, abilities in generalization, the durability of knowledge, and so on. Considering the current awareness of the importance of internal learning incentives at the lower grades of primary school, countries have often introduced descriptive evaluation of learner achievement at the beginning level of school. Such a policy assumes, then, a radical division between internal motivation as something positive for learning and external motivation as something negative. We have already presented here an argument that opposes the establishment of such a dichotomy. Even so, our argument is not opposed to the introduction of descriptive evaluation so long as it takes into consideration the various presuppositions we have discussed that demand answers and safeguards.

The concept of descriptive assessment, moreover, presumes that the individual progress of the pupil will be evaluated. Along with requiring descriptive assessment, there is, built into the school system, encouragement for teachers to provide individual treatment to pupils, which is of exceptional importance when children first enter the school system. But descriptive assessment, so conceived, brings with it a problem in that it tries to avoid the consequences associated with numerical grades, and it does this by making sure that the description does not have all the same characteristics as the grade. The rationale is that the teacher should not categorize the pupils and should not compare them with each other; the teacher should compare the individual pupil only to his or her previous level. This means the teacher should, for every unit of learning content, describe the knowledge of each pupil separately on the basis of the teacher's observations and various forms of testing, without comparing the pupil to others. The teacher should compare the pupil with his or her previous level and potential, as well as with the goals and criteria of the minimum required knowledge, which must be defined. To the degree that the idea of descriptive assessment prevents or at least hampers the possibility of a *direct* comparison of knowledge among pupils (it may be compared indirectly) in their early years of school, we could say it is trying to do a good deed in advance: to cancel out, or rather, try to cancel out in advance the impact that grades have in their comparability. The weakness of this approach is that in descriptive assessment we compare the child only to him- or herself and describe the pupil's progress according to his or her previous stage. As a result, the parents might not know how their child is doing in comparison with other children. And there is a need for them to know. If they want to ensure that their child receives individual help in learning, they will have to become acquainted with and understand the theoretical basis of descriptive assessment — but for most parents, of course, this is impossible. Thus, parents are excluded from the assessment of their children's progress. What is more, they are forced to accept as progress whatever the teacher tells them is progress.

Along with this, it is important to note that descriptive assessment, as something rather free and undefined, can easily devolve into value judgments, and this can stigmatize children even more than the kind of categorization we were trying to avoid by abolishing numerical grades. In numerical grading, an insufficient grade means (at the level of denotation) that the child has not mastered the required knowledge in a particular subject or subject field. With value judgments, we convey to the child that he or she may well have tried but was not successful (such a comment can quickly translate into the idea that the pupil did not succeed because he or she was stupid, lazy, etc.). This, then, is something more than the simple information that the child did not master the subject content: it is information that describes the child's personal qualities, perhaps even qualities that are not susceptible to influence.

In this regard, we might look at Bernstein (1999), whose treatment of the question of assessment is based on the distinction between explicit and implicit pedagogy. According to Bernstein, in explicit pedagogy there exists an „objective" network for the assessment of pupils that is shaped by clear standards and precise measurement procedures. Usually, this kind of assessment is standardized, thus providing a direct way for schools to compare their successes and failures with each other. A profile of the pupil is formed by looking at his or her grades. Each pupil knows where he or she is, and so do teachers and parents. Because the profile is objective, it is more difficult for parents to question it. There are, of course, subjective elements even with this kind of assessment, but they are hidden by the obvious objectivity of the network of standards and procedures.

In implicit pedagogy, there is no such network. Because assessment procedures are numerous and wide-ranging, they are not obvious and so are more difficult to judge precisely. This makes comparisons of both pupils and schools difficult, but at the same time it paradoxically intensifies competition, since implicit pedagogy is based on the progress not of the group but of the individual. We should stress, too, that in explicit pedagogy, where there exists an apparently objective assessment network, this network operates selectively based on the dispositions of the child that are important for the teacher's characterization of the child. Motivation and interest are important in both pedagogies, but their significance and consequences vary. In explicit pedagogy, the child's behavior is oriented toward the teacher: attentiveness and cooperation with the teacher are important, as are perseverance and conscientiousness. In implicit pedagogy, however, because the theory involves interpretation, diagnosis, and evaluation, other kinds of behavior and dispositions on the part of the child become important, as well. The teacher's attention is directed toward the whole child, the totality of what the child does or does not do. This can lead to the formation of opposing views, since it is not necessary that the parents agree with the teacher's view of the child and consider the dispositions and procedures assessed by the teacher to be incomplete, coerced, or vague. In such a case, the child's behavior will of course be evaluated on the basis of opposing standards.

In explicit pedagogy, moreover, we are dealing with the assessment of specific skills and with grading the child's motivation and attitudes about work where assessment is expressed in short, uniform, and nonexplicit judgments. In implicit pedagogy, as we have noted, these condensed, nonexplicit, public judgments will most likely be replaced by something resembling a dossier that categorizes the child's internal processes and attitudes linked to external behavior. The connection between internal and external will probably be made explicit. Therefore, the school will have to address the issue of confidentiality in the protection of personal data and the right to privacy (Bernstein 1999, 59 – 79).

From what we have written it should be clear, we believe, that there exist various legitimate professional views on assessment. It makes no sense to ignore the differences between them, to be blind to their existence or their significant influence on the systemic solutions that derive from them. Any discussion of different approaches demands a professional and well-argued comparison of the pros and cons of each theoretical position. Arguments that address the objections put forward by opposing positions establish the coherence of the theory. But it is obvious that no theory or theoretical paradigm can pretend to be absolute or the „Truth with a capital T" or can capture „the whole" of the issues, which, in our case, concern the professional discussion of assessment. When searching for systemic solutions, it can be professionally productive if we try to look at opposite and divergent proposals to see whether they can complement each other.

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