Discussion, dilemmas and pathways around assessment:
a societal, political and educational matter

3rd International Workshop on Curriculum Innovation and Reform
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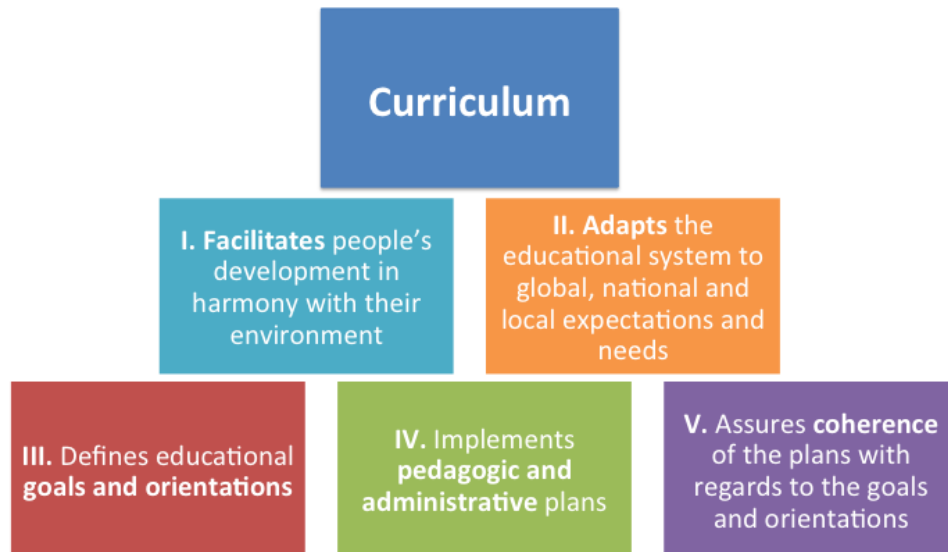**Thessaloniki, Greece**

Overview

1. Embedding assessment as a societal, political and educational matter
2. Assessment within a comprehensive vision of curriculum development, from visions to practices
3. Assessment impacts on curriculum
4. Some cases illustrating assessment dilemmas and options

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1. Embedding assessment

I. **Reflecting and sustaining the type of society envisaged and pursued**– discussion around the values of equity and quality, inclusion, cohesion, fairness and justice
II. **Informing and contributing to the development of educational polices and curriculum development changes, processes and outcomes** - political, policy and technical agreements about the why, the what and the how to teach- curriculum as a tool to sustain educational policies
III. **The visions about the learners** – piecemeal or holistic approaches; the well-being of learner made by cognitive and emotional aspects; knowledge, skills, competencies, or capabilities
IV. **Role and performance of teachers** - understanding the diversity of learners profiles and personalizing the support to each learner; assuming the role of guiders and animators of the learning processes; relating knowledge to societal development expectations and needs

2. Assessment within a comprehensive vision of curriculum development, from visions to practices

Graph 1: The Curriculum and 5 Basic Roles (Jonnaert, 2009)

Curriculum

I. Facilitates people's development in harmony with their environment

II. Adapts the educational system to global, national and local expectations and needs

III. Defines educational **goals and orientations**

IV. Implements **pedagogic and administrative** plans

V. Assures **coherence** of the plans with regards to the goals and orientations

Assessment should be part of curriculum development

Graph 2: Assessment as part of curriculum development

I. Aims, Objectives & Disciplinary Contents

III. Learning Process

II. Competencies
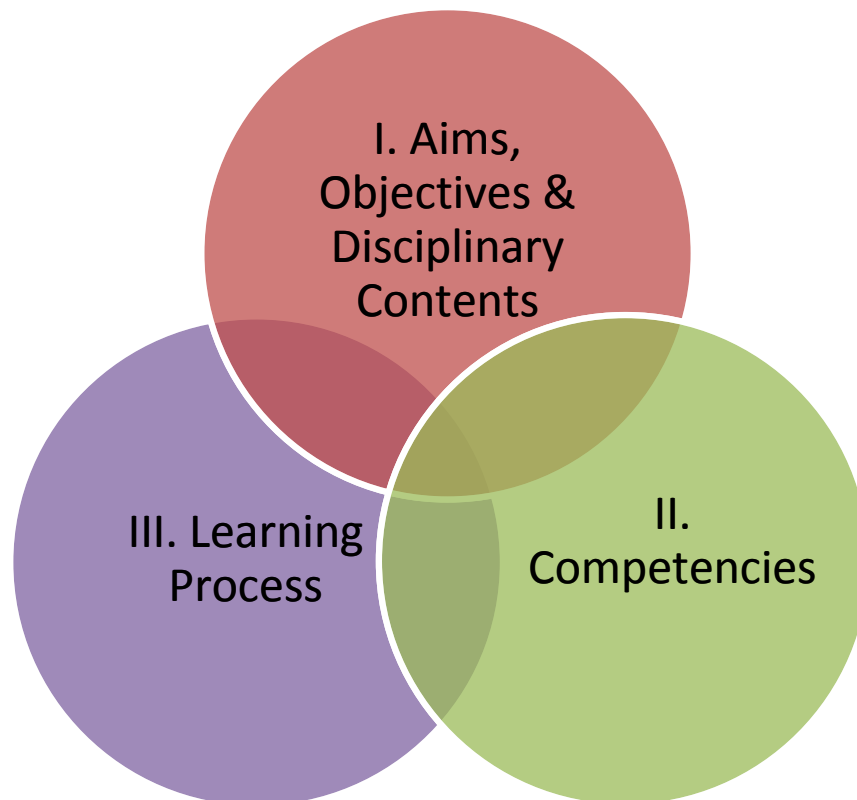
I. **Definition of the aims, objectives and disciplinary contents:**
What is important to know today?
How much knowledge is enough?
How much does workload influence learning?
Are the disciplinary contents culturally relevant for students?

II. **Definition of the competencies required in future studies, at work and in society:**
What do we understand by the meaning of competencies?
How do we know which are the most important competencies and how learning them is linked to the study of different disciplines?

A competency implies the generation, mobilization and integration of resources such as knowledge, know-how, skills, attitudes and values aiming to enable one to act effectively while facing different changing life situations.

III. **Understanding and supporting the particular learning process of each student**:
Does everyone learn in the same way?
If not, what support do different students need in order to reach the objectives?
How do we approach contents, instruction time, methods and materials, learning environments and tutorial/guidance?
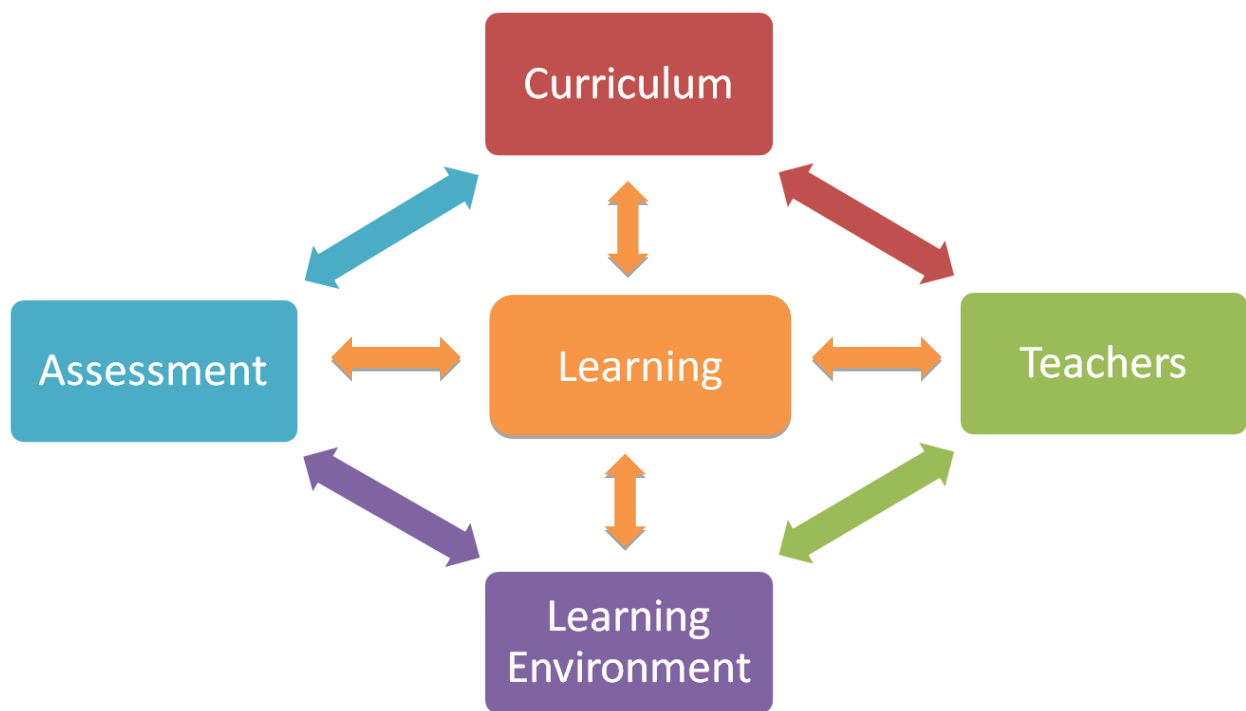How can we combine knowledge acquired in and outside the school, knowledge that is both formal and informal?

Assessment and Curriculum

Graph 3: Assessment and Curriculum
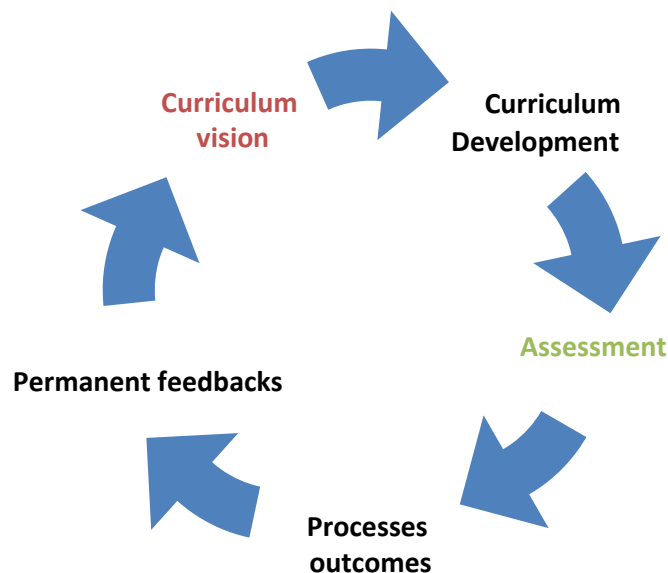
Graph 4: Assessment and Curriculum

Forms of Assessment

Formative Assessment	Summative Assessment
Assessment *for* learning	Assessment *of* learning
- Conducted by the teacher with the intent of informing the teacher and students about the gap between what students know and can do and what they are expected to know and should be able to do - Data gathered to shape subsequent learning of students - Integrated part of learning and performance - Takes place on a continuous basis - Continuum: (a) "on-the-fly"; (b) planned-for-interaction; (c) formal and embedded in curriculum (Shavelson and al 2008)	- Summary assessments of student performance – including tests and examinations and end-of-year marks - Used for promotion, certification or admission to higher levels of education - Internal use vs External use (Harlen, 2005:208)

3. Assessment impacts on Curriculum

I. **"Teaching to the test"**

Assessment is used to evaluate and select students but also to evaluate teachers and schools. Strong incentives are thus given to teachers to "teach to the test" rather than teaching the curriculum. This practice can constitute a hidden curriculum. (IBE Training Tool- Hugo Labate, 2011)

II. Assessment can foster **rote learning** and **memorization** instead of testing competencies required by the curriculum (Gipps & Stobart, 1993)

III. Assessments usually focus on the **part of the curriculum which is most measurable**. Complex competencies are not assessed. (William, 2000:105)

IV. Assessments can restrain students empowerment, creativity and critical analysis. (Xavier Roegiers, IBE COP e-forum, 2010)

Alternative Forms of Assessment

I. **Authentic Assessement**
An outcome-based form of assessement which evaluates what the student does in actual or simulated applied situations. It is a qualitative indicator of student learning.(Lombardi 2008)

II. **Classroom Assessment**
Formal and informal procedures that teachers employ in an effort to make accurate inferences about what their students know and can do. (Popham 2008)

III. **Feedback**
Information about how the student's present state of learning and performance relates to the learnng goals and standards. (Butler and Winne 1995)

IV. **Peer Assessment**
Students assess a peer's performance quantitatively, by providing a peer with scores and grades, or qualitatively, by providing the peer with written or oral feedback. (Topping 1998)

V. **Portfolio Assessment**
Students collect their own work, select pieces that are best evidence of their achievement and, finally, reflect on why they chose certain pieces over others. (Hansen, Valencia 1998)

VI. **Self-Assessment**
Process of formative assessement during which students reflect on the quality of their work, judge the degree to which it reflects explicitly stated goals or criteria and revise accordingly. (Andrade & al 2010)

Roles of Stakeholders

Graph 5: Roles of Stakeholders
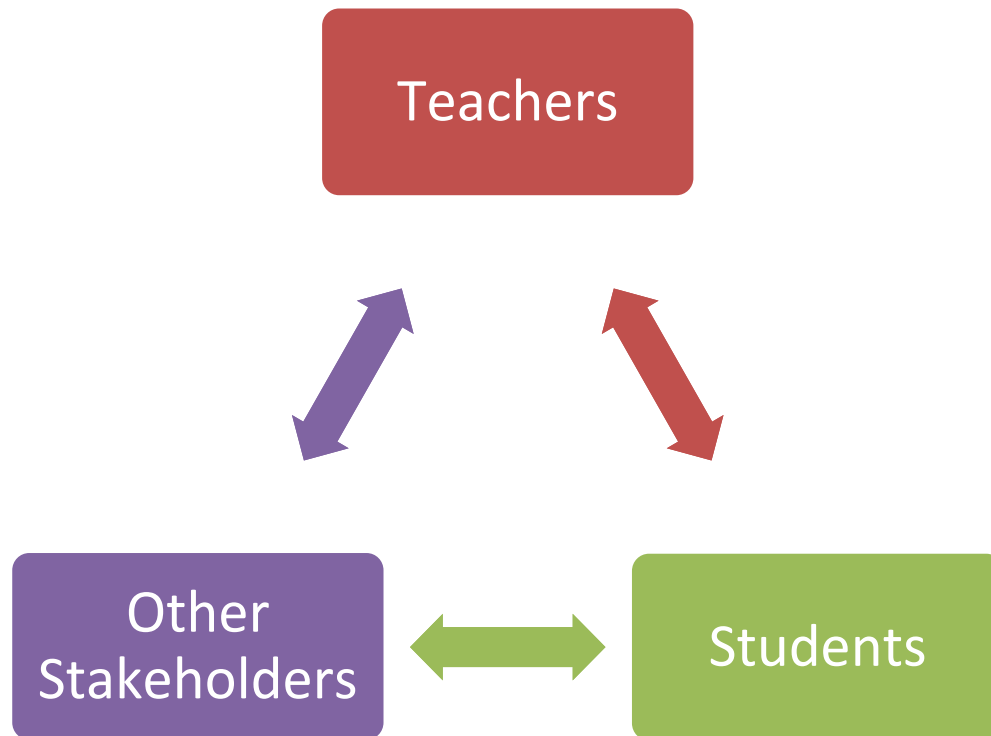
I. **Teachers**
Positive attitudes towards inclusive assessement among teachers should be fostered (EADSNE)
Assessement issues should be included in teacher training (Popham 2008:5)
Teachers should have a more collaborative position towards students (Crossouard 2007:2)
Individuals should be supported in becoming learners who are aware of their goals (European Commission 2010:6)
Teachers should be supported with flexible policies and appropriate resources (EADSNE)

II. **Students**
Assessment is a powerful force for students. It shapes identities and defines students' priorities.
Students should have a more active role in assessement processes (UNESCO 2004:73)

III. **Other Stakeholders**
School leaders should promote diverse approaches and give flexibility to teachers in order to develop a friendly environment for innovation (EADSNE)
Parents could work with teachers to set up the assessment plan (EADSNE)

Community should be concerned about assessement methods and supportive of inclusive assessement (Labate, 2010)

Assessment implementation

Graph 6: Assessment implementation
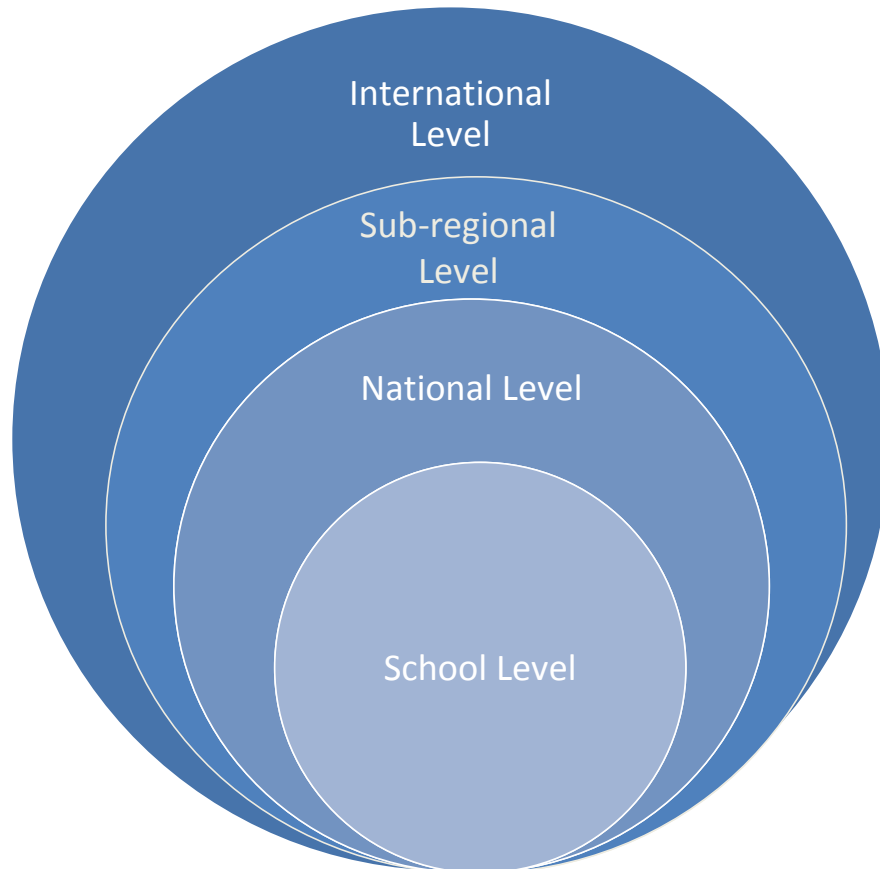
Key challenge for countries is not necessarily how to implement on-going assessment that informs teaching and learning in practice, but rather how to support this practice through policies and guidelines that promote on-going assessment.
(European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education 2007a: 40)

## 4. Some cases revealing assessment dilemmas and options

Case 1

Basic principles of Education in Finland (Halinen, 2010)

   I. Equity and quality of the education system and high quality for all are the basic principles in both education statutes and in every-day practice
  II. The focus of the whole system is in supporting good teaching and learning

III. Learning in the sense of both academic achievement and children's wellbeing and development as citizens and indivudal human beings

Graph 7: Finland

Governance and Curriculum System in Finland 2012
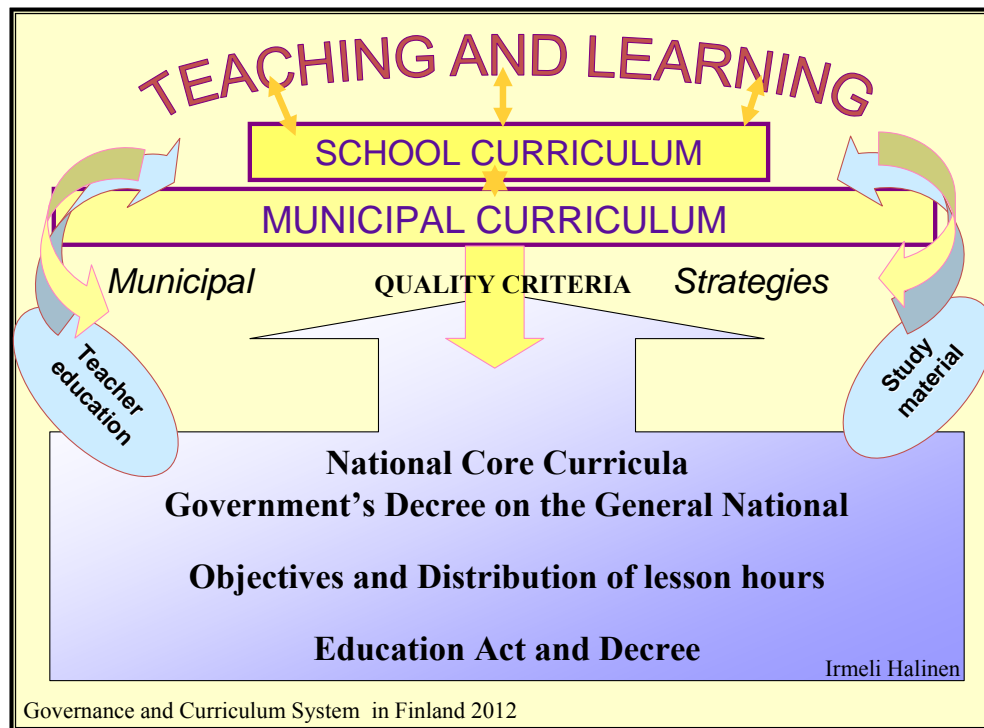
Case 2

School-based curricula in China

I. Strong movement and significant advances (from 2001 onwards) towards strengthening the role of the school in taking the responsibility of a portion of the basc education curriculum (between 18% and 24% of total class hours)

II. Placing the learner at the center of the education system with the view to foster creativity (visualized as the breakthrough in curriculum reform)

III. Changing classroom teaching, from frontal teaching transmitting knowledge and information subject-oriented and grounded on text-books, to foster the development of learners' competencies more related to the needs to economic and social development of China

The school-based curricula facing restrictions

I. Assessment is strongly related to the university entrance exam (crucially an instrument of selection) permeating the mindsets and practices of communities,
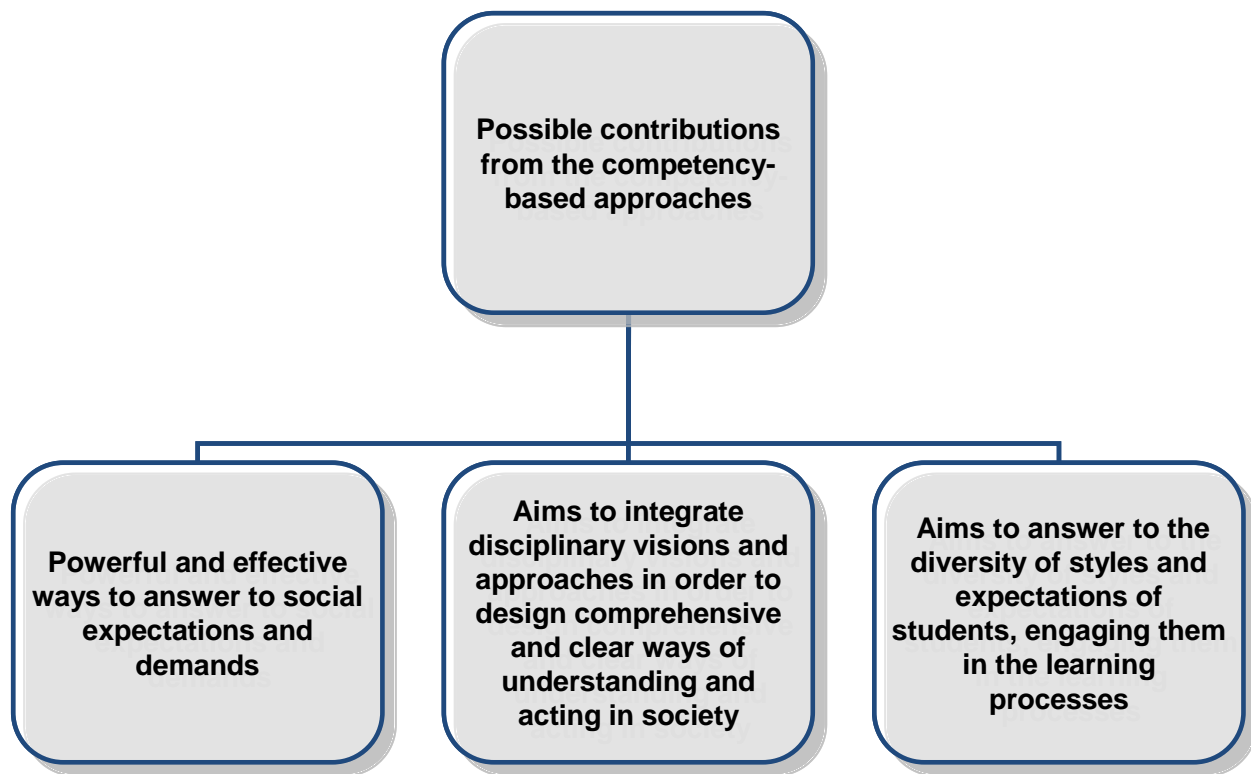
parents, principals and teachers, among others

II. Essentially assessment is not visualized as supporting the effective development of the school-based curricula, more of an external actor bearing strong influence in how teachers organize the learning process and in parents' expectations

III. While China expects to move towards basic education curriculum standards based on the notion of capabilities, the exam-oriented education system, far from being significantly revised, is hampering the democratization of educational opportunities.

Case 3

Competency based approaches

Graph 8: Competency based approaches

Possible contributions from the competency-based approaches

Powerful and effective ways to answer to social expectations and demands

Aims to integrate disciplinary visions and approaches in order to design comprehensive and clear ways of understanding and acting in society

Aims to answer to the diversity of styles and expectations of students, engaging them in the learning processes

Possible definition of competencies

I. A competency implies the generation, mobilization and integration of resources such as knowledge, know-how, skills, attitudes and values aiming to enable one to act effectively while facing different changing life situations.

II. Competencies are complex action systems "encompassing cognitive skills, attitudes and other non-cognitive components", while a skill is defined as "an ability to perform complex motor and/or cognitive acts with ease and precision and an adaptability to changing conditions." (Rychen, 2004)

Graph 9: Competency based approaches II
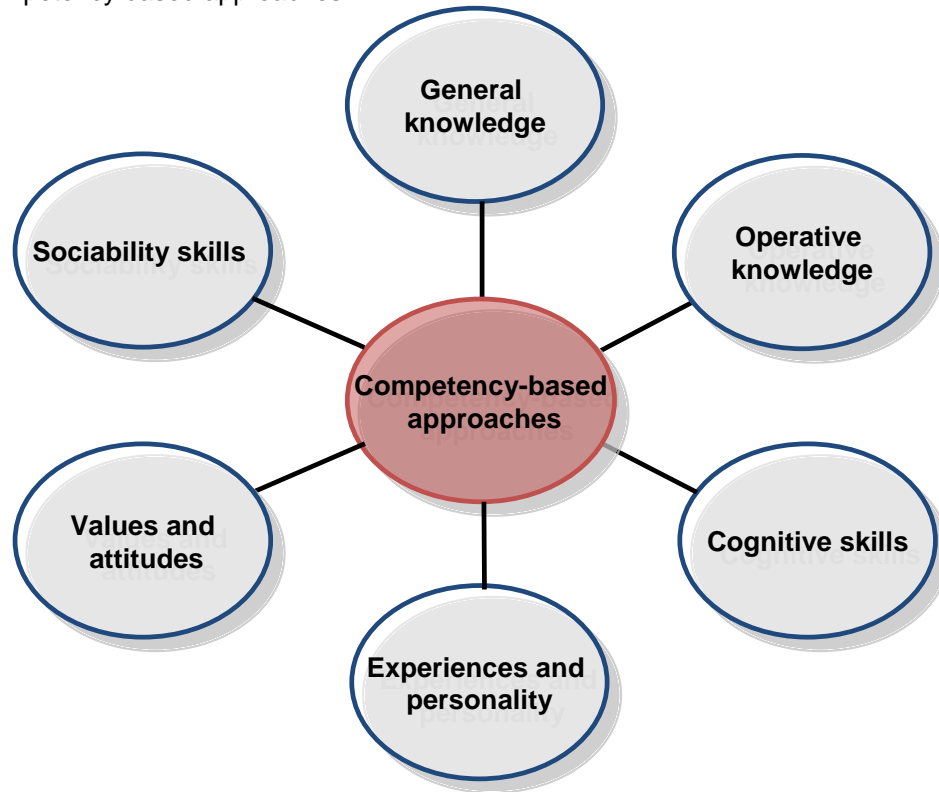
Some features of competency-based approaches

    I. In a competency based approach education, students are exposed to complex problem-situations that require the identification, mobilization and articulation of diversity of resources

    II. The regular and systematic exposition to complex situations enables the integration of new knowledge

    III. Situations constitute a required component for the development and the assessment of competencies
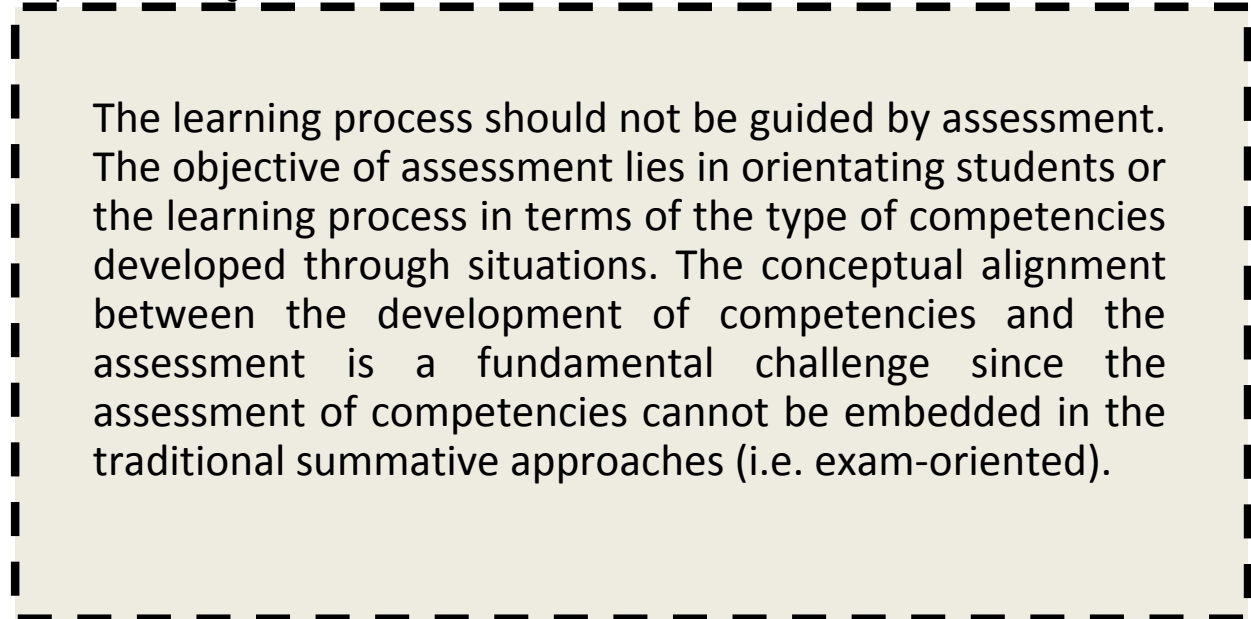
Assessing Competencies

    I. Should the assessment of competencies entail the revision of the assessment system at large?
    II. Should the development of competencies be evaluated within a tradition of formative evaluation and assessment for learning?
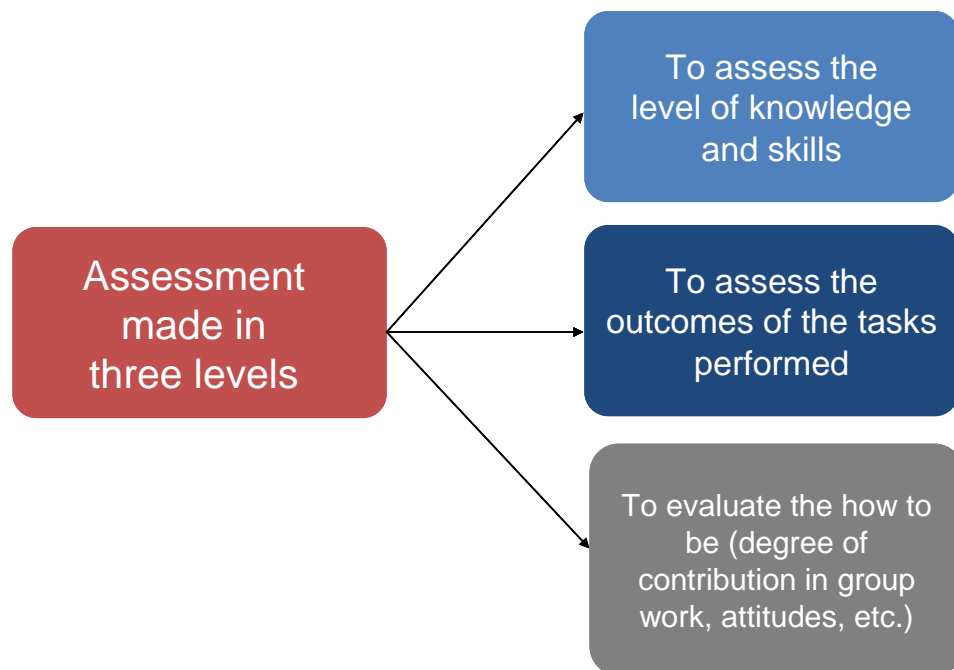   III. Are the assessment criteria and tools integrating the curriculum design and development?

IV. Does the evaluation of competencies provide evidence of the achievement of effective outcomes, and how?

Learning processes and assessment

Graph 10: Learning Processes and Assessment

The learning process should not be guided by assessment. The objective of assessment lies in orientating students or the learning process in terms of the type of competencies developed through situations. The conceptual alignment between the development of competencies and the assessment is a fundamental challenge since the assessment of competencies cannot be embedded in the traditional summative approaches (i.e. exam-oriented).

Graph 11: Assessment three levels

Assessment made in three levels

To assess the level of knowledge and skills

To assess the outcomes of the tasks performed

To evaluate the how to be (degree of contribution in group work, attitudes, etc.)

Competency-based approaches in Latin America

Six main trends

    I. Coexistence of education systems based on socio-democratic and liberal models
    II. Significant progress in the years of schooling and contested changes in school management models (i.e. decentralization)
    III. Difficulties in achieving quality and equity as going hand in hand
    IV. Significant social differences in graduation rates and learning outcomes (equity gaps)
    V. Tensions between reformism and anti-reformism, mainly from the nineties onwards
    VI. Difficulties in creating spaces and opportunities to develop and agree on proposals for change

Four main processes

    I. Mainly in the last 25 years there has been a significant process of curriculum renewal, especially in primary and secondary education (including technical and vocational education)
    II. Vigorous and dynamic education reform processes guided by the principles of equity and quality
    III. Process, often accompanied by a strong political and technical will, has contributed to the democratization of learning opportunities
    IV. Impact has been significantly lower in improving learning outcomes and the development of life and citizenship competencies among students

Six implications

    I. Reveal incoherencies and pitfalls of the education system that are viewed as the sum of disconnected parts
    II. Renew discussion about the aims and objectives of education systems involving multiple institutions and actors
    III. Motivate discussion on the challenge of achieving equity and quality
    IV. Contribute to overcome the vision of curriculum as a sum of study programmes
    V. Propose innovative ways of seeing curricular structures and the role of disciplinary contents
    VI. Support the review and redefinition of the role of teaching practices, as well as to the recognition of the need to diversify learning strategies

Five challenges

    I. Policy discussions to clarify concepts and policy options regarding competency-based approaches
    II. Competencies impacting the management and functioning of the school

    III. Learning situations as a strategy and a tool to effectively implement a competency-based approach

IV. Clarification of the relationships between resources and learning situations, and the centrality of expectations and needs of students in the conceptualization and the definition of situations

V. Changes in the profile and role of teachers as well as support for teacher professional development

Two main contributions

I. Broadening of the aims and objectives of education systems, clearly in line with the goals of Education for All (EFA) and the democratization of learning opportunities

II. Renewing the curriculum structure within an expanded basic education and overcoming progressively the differentiation between primary and lower secondary education

One Central Concern

I. strong gaps between a macro curricular structure competency-based, and disciplinary classroom developments grounded on objectives and contents

Key questions pending convincing answers

Graph 12: Assessment questions