

## **Information about the action**

**Title : « Evaluate differently : Evaluation by a contract of confidence (EBCC) »**

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**Classes involved : 3rd year in secondary school (4ème )**

**Subject : Arts, Spanish (LV2), French, History-Geography-Civics, Mathematics, Physics, Biology, Technology**

**Writing : may 2007**

### **Summary :**

The project is in line with André Antibi's researches you can find in a book called "La Constante Macabre".( the Macabre Constant)

This University teacher in Paul Sabatier ( Toulouse) starts from a simple review : whatever the pupils'level in a class, marks are always divided in three groups with a third of good marks, a third of average marks and a third of bad marks. André Antibi explains this distribution by a tradition imposed by this society, and very much anchored in education. This evaluation turns into selection.

In order to change this demotivating situation for pupils who don't see their efforts rewarded, he proposes to implement a contract of confidence between the pupils and the teacher. Briefly, this contract consists in giving precisely all the elements the pupils need to revise for the evaluation, in working on these elements during the lessons (test included), and in preparing the test thanks to a questioning session.

To implement this experimentation (EBCC) in a secondary school, it implies many subjects to be involved. This was done in a 4<sup>ème</sup> (3rd year in secondary school) with pupils in needs and not at ease with the traditional way of evaluation. This generalization must help estimate the positive and negative effects in terms of pupils' motivation, investment in their work, improvements in their knowledge and relationship between teachers and pupils.

This project will consist in trying the EBCC systematically or on an ad hoc basis for some teachers, in this class, and also in other classes. It must help estimate the impact of this contract on the pupils' attitude evolution concerning evaluation and compare the advantages and disadvantages of the 2 systems.

**Key-words :**

<b>STRUCTURES</b>	<b>DEVICES</b>	<b>THEMES</b>	<b>SUBJECTS</b>
Upper secondary school	Educational diversification	Evaluation School difficulties	Arts Civics French History, Geography Interdisciplinarity Modern Languages Mathematics Physics, Chemistry Biology Technology

## **Intermediate writing about the action**

### **« Evaluate differently : Evaluation By Contract of Confidence »**

**NANCY-METZ academy**  
**Collège Jean Moulin REVIGNY-SUR-ORNAIN**

#### **I/ Origins of the project**

Our decision to test a new form of evaluation, Evaluation by a contract of confidence (EBCC), came from André Antibî's works on this subject in a book called "La constante macabre<sup>1</sup>".

One part of the teaching staff who had already thought about evaluation in a previous project accepted to take part in this new way of evaluating pupils. It changes our day to day practices in this field.

[www3.ac-nancy-metz.fr/pasi/article.php?id\\_article=86](http://www3.ac-nancy-metz.fr/pasi/article.php?id_article=86)

The interest we had for this project came from three main ideas :

- Mr. Antibî's works, even if they start to be taken into consideration, are not widely spread among teachers yet. Not because they're not interesting enough but just because teachers don't know anything about them ;
- To our knowledge, the impact of the EBCC was never tested as widely as we intended to do, with a full team of teachers to see the effects on a whole class ;
- The teaching staff gathers literary, scientific and artistic subjects.

#### **II/ Implementation**

The implementation started in June 2006, to be ready at the beginning of the next school year 2006/2007. We constituted a team of teachers willing to use the EBCC in class. The subjects involved were: Arts, Spanish, French, History and Geography, A technology teacher and an English teacher who were interested in the EBCC didn't want to get involved in such a demanding project because they were retiring at the end of the school year.

We first talked about the class and after consultation we decided to work with the 4<sup>ème</sup> (3rd year in our school) because many pupils were in needs and were facing difficulties with the traditionnal way of evaluating. This selection was done to help evaluate the results of the EBCC in our respective subjects.

The teachers had a total freedom to implement this new form of evaluation to make it the more objective as possible : Some decided to use it partially with this class and eventually with other classes. Others decided to use it only with this class and not in their other classes. And the rest of the teachers decided to use it in all their classes. These different choices gave us precious information about the difficulty to partially implement the EBCC.

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<sup>1</sup> André ANTIBI, *La Constante Macabre*, éd. Math'Adore, 2003.

### **III/ What is the EBCC ?**

The Evaluation by a contract of confidence (EBCC) has one main goal : put an end to what Mr. Antibi called the "Constante macabre". According to this Mathematic teacher, in a class, whatever its global value, and whatever the teaching quality, the teacher always tends to split up the marks of an evaluation into three groups more or less equivalent in numbers, with one third of « good pupils », one third of « average pupils » and one third of « bad pupils »: This distribution is called the "Constante macabre". This system, widely used for a long time, tends to turn the original evaluation, which should assess the acquisition of knowledge and skills into a selection which aims at bringing out the most capable pupils ready to adapt to the highest demands. According to him, this system is mainly responsible for the feeling of failure and exclusion that many pupils have, even though they originally got involved into the work they had to do.

The EBCC, which aims at getting rid of the Constante macabre, lies on three simple principles :

- A very precise description of the program of the evaluation,
- A questioning session just before the evaluation,
- A test to avoid a few traps which could distort the EBCC.

To be more precise :

1. The precise description of the evaluation : One week before the test, The teacher gives the chapters for revision but he also gives a list of precise knowledge or already seen questions (lessons, exercices). He tells the pupils that the evaluation will mainly be on these elements but that there will also be a question or an exercise which will not be in the list (4 points out of 20). This question is part of the chapters they have to revise for the evaluation.
2. The questioning session must help the pupils who have not understood some parts of the program. They can ask for more explanations.
3. The content : It must not be too long in order not to place some pupils at a disadvantage, the writing rules must be clear from the beginning of the year on and the teachers cannot be more demanding during the correction, the 4 point question must be accessible to everyone.

### **IV/ Measure the numbered impact.**

The team wants to highlight the fact that the demands were the same as the previous years for this class.

For the whole class, we noticed that the average mark in 4<sup>ème</sup> was 1,6 points higher than the average mark in 5<sup>ème</sup> and that all pupils gained between 0,5 and 3,5 points on their average mark. Most pupils (15 out of 20) had their average mark go up 1 or 2 points. This progression cannot only be the result of the EBCC, but we noticed their results were better than in 5<sup>ème</sup> with this new form of evaluation : + 2,7 in French, + 2,35 points in Arts, + 1 in History and Geography and in Biology, + 0,7 en Maths. Spanish could not be taken into account as it was their first year.

We can be a little more precise as 8 pupils already had the same teachers in 5<sup>ème</sup> in Arts, Mathematics, French, History-Geography and Biology. For this sample group, we only took these 5 subjects into account. The results were 1,84 points higher than the previous year, for the same period.

With the same teachers, in a higher level, these 8 pupils saw their average marks increase : +4 points in French, 2,25 points in Arts, 2 points in History-Geography, 1 point in Biology and 0,5 point in Mathematics.

### **V/ Effects on the pupils**

It is usually quite difficult to evaluate the psychological impact of a new method on a class, but in the case of the EBCC, reactions were quite numerous and precise.

At first, many colleagues noticed that the results were not as high as they expected and felt some pupils, even some classes, were not supporting the new system of evaluation.

After giving many thoughts and insisting on using the EBCC, we concluded that their attitude came from a long term destabilization caused by the teacher's expectancies and the previous form of evaluation. Many pupils had the impression that there was a too wide discrepancy between what they had learned and what was asked during the evaluation, and therefore they stopped getting involved in their work.

Some questions during the lessons were significant in terms of mistrust : « There won't be anything else in the test ? Really? », « Will you only ask that ? ».

After being reassured about our demarche not being occasional, the pupils gave us more reliable results concerning the impact of EBCC on their school work.

In terms of gross results, there was a marked improvements for many pupils, but indisputably, it was not as profitable for pupils in great needs. Some got better results at the beginning of the year but it didn't last long. The reasons for that :

- A devaluated representation of work which is indispensable whatever the evaluation,
- Conditions at home which don't help revisions. The questioning session is not enough for them,
- Other great difficulties (mastering the language, calculation, understanding the meaning of,...).

On the one hand, it is necessary to remind you that the EBCC is a good tool to evaluate what pupils have learned but it cannot fill their gaps in knowledge or give them good marks if they did nothing to deserve them.

On the other hand, most teachers noticed that this system had a positive impact on pupils with learning difficulties and even on good pupils.

In our class, many pupils had learning difficulties and we did an anonymous survey right after an History evaluation in December 2006. The question was simple : « What sort of evaluation do you prefer, this one or the previous one ? ». Out of 21 pupils, 20 answered they preferred the EBCC. They were also asked to justify their answer in one or two lines. Some of their answers were really meaningful :

- « We know what we have to learn, so we revise the most important parts of the lesson » : This answer was recurrent and testified for their difficulties to identify clearly what was essential and what was not during their revisions. This led the pupils to give up on their revisions when seeing the huge amount of elements to learn.
- « We don't learn what's useless for the evaluation » : This is in line with what they said previously. Many pupils are conscious that they learn things that are not useful for the evaluation. All these minor elements could only be found in a "tricky" question asked by the teacher.
- « We know what we're going to have so it's easier to write during the evaluation » : It's an other difficulty for pupils who have problems to express

clearly what they want to say. They usually panic when they don't know how to link a question to the lesson they revised.

This survey was done in 5 classes at the same time of the year and 108 pupils out of 119 said they preferred the EBCC. Among the few pupils who declared they preferred the other form of evaluation, the reason they put forward was that "the evaluation wouldn't be hard enough". This statement reveals a notion of selection thanks to evaluation, much anchored in the pupils' minds. They need to feel part of the three traditional groups they are used to : the "good" the "average" and the "bad". We must make clear that this is not only the reaction of very good pupils as 26 out of 27 pupils in an excellent class said they preferred the EBCC. Reading the justifications, we can understand that these pupils are less stressed out before the evaluation and can concentrate on the most important elements of the lesson. The pressure when you want to be the best is usually worse on successful pupils than on those with learning difficulties.

To be even more accurate on the impact of this system we proposed an anonymous questionnaire in March 2007 to 118 pupils from 5 different classes. It was about the effects of the use of the EBCC on their school behaviour (see *Annex 1*). We noticed that 90 percent of the pupils were in favor of this system and it emphasized four points :

- More than 80% of the pupils improved their marks,
- 70% of the pupils feel they learnt their lesson more efficiently,
- 78% of the pupils trusted the teacher more,
- 72 % of the pupils were more self confident
- The impression for most pupils that their work is finally rewarded.

## **VI/ The teachers' opinion**

### 1/ The different EBCCs

According to our colleagues, the EBCC took different forms while respecting three main principles( announcing the curriculum, questioning session, building the evaluation).

Most colleagues used the EBCC in all their classes for all their evaluations. This form of evaluation doesn't work on an irregular basis for pupils lose the benefits of their recovered trust in the teacher.

Two types of questions were asked during these evaluation: questions in the list of revision and out of the list of revision. We noticed a great coherence in the questions asked as for a mark out of 20 the 18/2 and the 20/0 were mainly used. For only one teacher we had 14/6, 15/5 or 16/4. It is quite interesting to notice that teachers integrated the fact that an evaluation which would give more than a third of the points to questions out of the list of revision wouldn't really respect the principles of an EBCC. In that case pupils would consider their efforts unnecessary. The teachers decided it was not a problem to give up all the questions out of the list of revision.

In Arts, the teacher proposed short and easy evaluations resting on definitions. Pupils had one week to revise. The questioning session was turned into an oral revision session to understand the notions better and see some details. The teacher emphasized the interest of this evaluation for all subjects saying that « pupils must learn to reproduce before they can produce ».

In Spanish, the same exercices were proposed in class and during the evaluations to see how pupils learnt and to check their attention in class and to have a precise restitution of knowledge.

In French the EBCC took different forms :

- Questions about the comprehension of a text. This was done orally in the first period and then the pupils had to write the answers in the second period.  
The advantages of this system : The pupils are on an equal footing concerning the learning of knowledge. They all participate in the wording of the answers just before the writing. Their participation and their attention is much better as they know they will be evaluated. Therefore they can concentrate on the formulation of their answers to improve their writing.
- In case of an essay, an evaluation file on the subject can be distributed to the pupils and commented upon before the test, or they can work on the outline in class.  
The preparation time is longer but the correction is much shorter as it is simplified..
- For the spelling system, the tests are about precise rules and they are added to the dictation marks.
- For the grammar tests, they are systematically about exercises and notions previously studied in class. It allows to spot the pupils who really worked.
- For biography researches and vocabulary the pupils are given a questionnaire and the tests only concerns this questionnaire.

In History and Geography, the document and the questions that went with it were studied in class before the test. 10 days before pupils wrote the precise list of revision and the questioning session was done 2 days before the test maximum. In 3<sup>ème</sup>, the preparation for the argued paragraph (Brevet des collèges : GCSE) was first done by drawing a common outline in class with the pupils before the first test, and secondly by giving them the topic of the next evaluation so they had time to prepare their outline at home. They could therefore use it in class. The third step was to give them the topic so they could prepare the outline at home but this time they couldn't take it with them during the evaluation. This progressive technique helps the pupils feel more comfortable when confronted to this type of exercise. They can focus on the writing of their ideas.

In Mathematics, revisions are precise( theorems, exercises) but the questioning session is only done when the pupils ask for it as they rarely ask questions.

## 2/ Results

According to the teachers, the EBCC is not difficult to implement but it asks for some flexibility and for some calling into question not to keep on thinking as before in terms of evaluation.

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these conditions, therefore they decided that there was no need to revise and that the questioning sessions were useless. Results were obviously very bad for these pupils and they finally realized that only work was rewarded by the EBCC. Another precise example : after the first History and Geography test in 4<sup>ème</sup> the results were much better than previously and some pupils really improved their results. The teacher noticed that the following test was very bad. Questionned about this fact, pupils said they had better marks because the test was easier and there was no need to work. After this event, pupils started to improve their results again because they were aware of the importance of their work, but some pupils in needs just let go and stopped working completely as they realized the EBCC was no miracle, but was based on their work. We will see a little bit further how to adapt the EBCC to pupils with great learning difficulties.

Self-confidence is our main concern and is a very positive aspect of the EBCC. The pupil doesn't feel he will fail again because he can't do anything about it or he can't control it. This regained confidence encourages the pupils to listen and to participate more often to get explanations.

Another positive aspect is the trust they put in the teachers. Now, they know what the teachers expect and this helps them not to be stressed out before the evaluation.

This system is part of the Common Socle of Knowledge and Skills defined in 2006.

Concerning the pupils' autonomy, here are the elements we noticed

"know the learning process, one's strong and weak points" .

The paragraph about attitudes is in line with EBCC: "motivation, self-confidence, will to succeed and improve are fundamental attitudes. Everyone must have :

- the will to take responsibility for oneself, to use one's intellectual and physical faculties"

### 3/ Some points of improvement

- One of the main difficulties consists in elaborating the evaluation paper.

None of our colleagues made the common mistakes we evoked earlier on (too long evaluations for instance). They would bring us back to the « Constante macabre » but some adjustments seem necessary.

First, we must be vigilant when we write the questions to be as close as possible to the words and expressions used in the lessons. Indeed, all pupils don't have the same vocabulary at their disposal and one term could deeply disorient them. For example, « identify the writing year for a text » is not, for some pupils, synonym of « when was the text written ? ». Therefore, we must always keep in mind that a large number of pupils don't master the French language. We must not stop enriching the pupils' vocabulary but we must make sure the new terms are explained beforehand during the lessons.

A question presented in a grid during the lesson can disorient the pupils if you ask them the same question as a text during the evaluation. This type of exercise is not forbidden, but the pupils must be informed during the questioning session so he can get more information about it.

The evaluation must be done upstream of the lesson and clearly presented to the pupils. We would even be ready to say that the evaluation should be prepared before the lesson and should serve as a basis for the lesson.

- The EBCC cannot be used on an irregular basis.

After we talked with the teachers, it appeared that most pupils were confused when the EBCC was not used regularly because they considered the contract of confidence was not respected. This feeling leads to different negative attitudes :

- They only work for the evaluations by EBCC,



- They feel the EBCC is slightly different but doesn't ask for a real change of attitude (involvement, precise revisions...) and we lose the benefits of this system.

Rather than using it irregularly, we think that the distribution of points concerning the questions in and out of the syllabus should be relaxed.

- The questioning session raises some problems.

Some teachers only see their class once a week, so they have to give the revision list two weeks before the test and we all know that pupils never revise a test two weeks in advance, therefore they don't have any questions to ask their teacher.

Some teachers organize this session if the pupils ask for it, but pupils, most of the time, never ask for more information.

Nevertheless, this session constitutes one of the three main points in the EBCC for it gives precisions and information to pupils who don't have someone to help them at home.

- The way we give the revision programme to pupils must be studied closely.

It's usually read out by the teachers and written up by the pupils who can make mistakes or given as a photocopy that can be lost by the pupils and that doesn't help them be autonomous. That's why the questioning session is important as it can correct the different mistakes that appear in some pupils' revision programme.

Another problem is the way we present this programme : How can we make it clear for everyone ? Should we follow the lessons ? Should we separate the lessons from the exercises or the documents ? Should we give what is more important first ? (and will bring more points) ?

The last solution seems to be the best as we noticed that pupils tend to revise what is simple in the lesson. This is not always the most important part of the lesson and will not give them many points in the test.

- It is important to inform the parents about the EBCC and not only the pupils.

The mark cannot be read as it used to be, and this must be explained to the parents. We could even replace marks by percentages or graphs. They would not tell the pupil's rank in the class but they would give his situation regarding the skills and the knowledge to acquires. For example, 18/20 doesn't mean you're excellent but only that you acquired 90% of the knowledge for this evaluation. 10/20 means that half of the knowledge are acquired but half are not. This evaluation tells you precisely what you understood and what is left to understand. The results are not distorted by elements beyond the pupils' control (documents not studied in class, difficult questions in the way they are written, length of the test...) and they help focusing on what the pupils didn't understand.

- The EBCC asks for some important thinking when it comes to evaluate logical reasoning.

For scientific subjects or experimentations, the teachers explains a demarche from precise exercises. If you give the same exercises during the test it's difficult to evaluate specifically what is memorization and what is logical reasoning. If we stick to the EBCC, we could imagine the same demarche but using another example for the evaluation.

- The EBCC is not very efficient for pupils with great learning difficulties.

These pupils have stopped all efforts for a long time and have noone at home to help them and to make them react. In that case we must help the pupils understand the benefits of e

#### 4/ Going forward

- It seems very important to inform the people concerned by the EBCC. They must know and understand what type of evaluation it is for it to be successful and to make them adhere to it.

The introduction must be done at the beginning of the year and the Contract must be signed by the teacher, the pupil and his parents. This can be done individually by each teacher using the EBCC, but obviously, there should only be one contract for all subjects in one class.

This is not to exclude a clear and targeted presentation for parents and colleagues that will use the EBCC.

For the parents, a document presenting what the EBCC is and is not would be desirable (see *Annex 3*).

For the colleagues, a detailed document seems necessary. (see *Annex 4*) in order to make the implementation of this system very clear, for when you speak about the three main principles of the EBCC, they all feel they are already doing it when it's not the case at all.

- Bringing into line the presentation of the revisions seems desirable too.

Some pupils, in the younger classes, don't write very fast nor very clearly and in that case a small revision paper handed out by the teacher is the best idea to put everybody on an equal footing and avoid taking too much time during the lesson just to write the revision programme. The idea can also be to link the family to the revisions. Parents have to sign the revision paper before the questioning session.

Teachers must agree on a way of presenting things to make the essential points clear (bold letters for example).

Common instructions for the test would help the pupils work more serenely.

Every teacher obviously gives the pupils what he expects from them, but bringing into line the demands of the educational team would be positive as it would give the pupils landmarks. Pupils would see that whatever the subjects, teachers have common demands. This could be done partially (presenting the test paper, the writing of answers, marking the spelling mistakes with bonus points...).

- We must try to improve the impact of the EBCC on pupils with great learning difficulties.

In their case, we must make sure they actually revised for the test. For that purpose, we must inform all the people taking care of them and give them the revision programme (parents, teachers who have them during their study-time..).

To put them back on track and make them self confident we could even give them the test for their revision, so they realize that their work can be rewarded and that they can succeed when they put some efforts in.

We must not push these examples too far as the idea is not to lower our demands and offer the pupils good marks. The test, given in advance for the pupil in needs, is only a chance for him to understand that his work will be rewarded in the future, but that we don't expect less than from his classmates.

- The questioning session must be proposed to the pupils in order to make them feel that the following evaluation will evaluate what they learnt and will not put them in a weak position compared to classmates that would be helped at home.

To be more efficient, we can ask the pupils to write down the problems they have. If some parents help their children revise, we can ask them to make their son or daughter write all the problems they face during their revision. For pupils who don't have anyone at home, we must ask the people in charge for their revision to inform us of their difficulties. It should be done before the questioning session so the teacher can add an extra explanation session.. We could imagine the possibility of adding two or three lines at the bottom of the revision paper with : « What poses a problem. » ou « What I didn't understand correctly ».

For subjects with few hours, we can think of a questioning session just before the test if there is not much to deal with.

## **VII/ To conclude**

Most teachers that used the EBCC are satisfied and intend to keep on using it.

They underline the fact that this form of evaluation changes our vision and can be an efficient way to put some pupils with learning difficulties back on track.

Spreading the use of the EBCC to the whole school seems a good thing to them. They feel it is possible, but it demands for some calling into questions. We must stop seeing the evaluation as we always did. Meeting people and explaining what the EBCC is, is necessary.