EVALUATION IN THE STEP BY STEP EDUCATIONAL ALTERNATIVE - ACTION- RESEARCH-

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ABSTRACT. This study aims at valorising the theoretical and practical premises of evaluation in general and of the Step by Step educational alternative in particular.

The hypothesis from which we departed focuses on the idea according to which the evaluative strategies specific to the Step by Step educational alternative constitute motivating and mobilising factors for learning.

By means of our study we aimed at detecting the strengths, the weaknesses, the evaluative strategies specific to the Step by Step alternative and the determination of the emotional impact of the various evaluative strategies at the level of the pupils.

Key words: *Step by Step educational alternative, evaluation, alternative evaluation methods*

INHALT. Dieses Studium hat als Zweck die Walorifizierung der teoretischen und praktischen Vorraussetzung, im Allgemeinen und in der alternativen Erziehung Step by Step. Die Hyposthese von der man ausgeht, beruht auf die Idee gemäß dem, die Bewertungen und Strategien die man anwendet spezifisch der alternativen Erziehung Step by Step sind, sie bilden motivations Faktoren und mobilisieren das Lernen.

Durch den Einfluss unseres Studiums haben wir uns vorgenommen, die starken und schwachen Punkte heraus zu finden, die Strategien für die spezifische Bewertung in der Alternative Step by Step, so wie auch die Determination auf den afektiven Impakt der verschiedenen Strategien der Bewertung von Schülern.

Schlüsselwörter: *Alternative Erziehung Step by Step, Bewertung, alternative Methoden zur Bewertung*

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Foreword

Evaluation is an essential component of the instruction and education activity, as it provides information about the pupils' school progress, the faculty member's performance quality and the efficiency of the instructive-educative process. The most important addressee of the educational actions is of course the pupil, to whom evaluation / reevaluation provides the opportunity of knowing the level of performance obtained as compared to the one expected by him, by school and by the family.

In order to guarantee the success of the Step by Step alternative it is very important to use authentic, interactive and interdisciplinary evaluation methods, as a warranty of the fact that teaching and evaluation are complementary and that the acquired skills provide a good adaptation of the pupil to the current requirements.

An authentic evaluation must :
- ✓ highlight each pupil's successes rather than failures ;
- ✓ have an adjusting role, in order to know what, how and how much to teach ;
- ✓ be multidimensional, focussing on the social, emotional and cognitive course ;
- ✓ include an active, cooperating reflection between teachers and parents, teachers and pupils ;
- ✓ underline the importance of studying ;
- ✓ further success and optimal study for all pupils ;
- ✓ be clearly understood by all pupils.

Evaluation characteristics in the step by step alternative

Without neglecting the importance of the traditional evaluation methods, the Step by Step programme pays greater attention to the alternative/ complementary evaluation methods. In order to obtain a verisimilar, clear and representative image of each pupil, of his/her progresses and capabilities, evaluation must be continuous, comprehensive and carried out during all the classroom activities.

Irrespective of the method of evaluation used, it has to be stimulating. It must not inhibit the pupils, demotivate them ; on the contrary, it should encourage them and stimulate them to get trained more and better. In order to meet these requirements, evaluation must be designed and presented to the pupils as a joint interest, necessary and natural preoccupation.

This important component of the instructive-educative process must be understood as a manner of improving teaching and learning, of eliminating failure and of making constant progresses in the pupil's training.

The modern orientations in evaluation stress the necessity of discovering what knowledge, habits and skills the pupils possess during and at the end of the instruction rather than of detecting what they do not know. It is very important to help the pupils overcome their fears. In this respect, we need to provide an environment of trust and safety, departing from what the pupil can do better, from the premise that he has the right to make errors as well and also to be encouraged and helped by the schoolmaster.

The pupil must be listened to patiently, let express himself/herself, reveal himself/herself, utter his/her opinion, act. He must be accepted as is, helped to be himself/herself, let manifest his/her personality and own value, find his/her own way while developing his/her inclinations, preoccupations and interests.

In order to be able to make decisions for the children's education, the exact evaluation of what the pupils learns is crucial. In order to obtain an exact, correct and representative image of the capabilities and progress of a pupil, the evaluation process has to be continuous, solid and carried out during all the classroom activities.

The Step by Step programme for the elementary grades furthers a manner of evaluation that combines a variety of techniques and enables the teachers to share the pupils' progress with the parents.

Study aim and methodology

We started from the hypothesis according to which ***the evaluative strategies specific to the Step by Step alternative constitute motivating and mobilising factors in the activity of the pupils who attend the alternative-specific programme.***

One of the priorities of our investigating approach was the detection of the strengths, the weaknesses, the evaluative strategies specific to the Step by Step alternative and the determination of the emotional impact of the various evaluative strategies at the level of the pupils.

Theoretically speaking, we wish to grasp the implications that the alternative strategies of evaluation have upon the personality under shaping of the child that spends most of his/her time in the educational framework, where both learning, as a process, and the assessment of the school yield are utterly important. From the applicative point of view, we set examples of alternative methods of evaluation that favour the learning process and the individualisation of the school performances.

In the practice of educational research, a frequently seen method is the utilisation of the collective samples – group of pupils, group of faculty members. The investigations carried out in the educational context by groups of pupils, are deemed to provide the representativeness of the work groups, thanks to which the conclusions of the investigations made can be generalised.

The former sample - 18 subjects (pupils) includes the pupils of the 3rd B Step by Step form within the Bistriţa 'Ştefan cel Mare' Elementary & Primary School. The group is balanced (9 girls and 9 boys).

The later sample - 10 subjects (faculty members) includes the schoolmistresses that manage the activity of the Step by Step grades within the Bistriţa 'Ştefan cel Mare' Elementary & Primary School.

Within the practical-applicative research concerning the specificity of evaluation in the Step by Step educational alternative we used the questionnaire-based inquiry method.

Results obtained

a. The results obtained at the questionnaire applied to the pupils
1. *If you were to draw up the agenda of the day yourself, what would the four centres that you'd choose be ?*

At this question, the four centres chosen by the pupils are set out in Fig. 1:
➢ Arts, Mathematics, Reading, Writing → 8 pupils
➢ Arts, Constructions, Sciences, Reading → 4 pupils
➢ Mathematics, Sciences, Social Studies, Constructions → 3 pupils
➢ Reading, Writing, Social Studies, Arts → 2 pupils
➢ Arts, Constructions, Social Studies, Sciences → 1 pupil.

Fig. 1. The agenda of the day suggested by the pupils
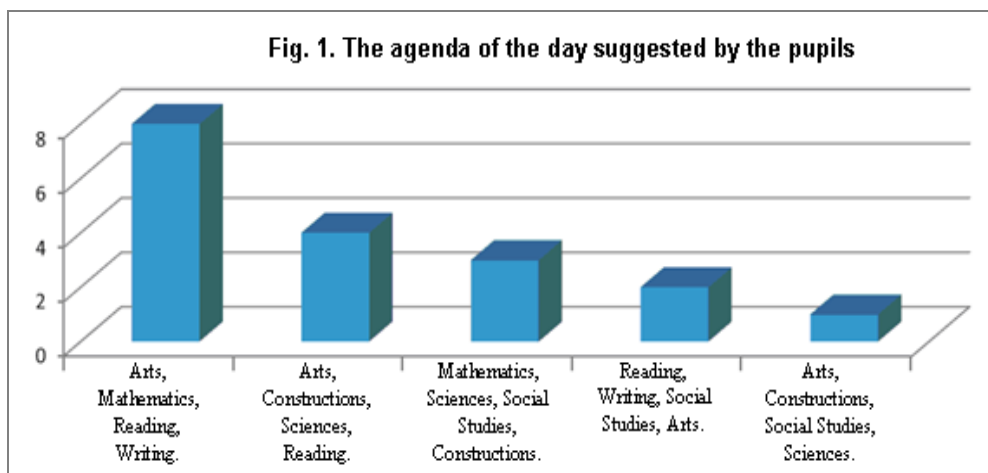
2. Which one of the activities specific to our daily programme do you like best ? Please number them up in the preferences order by using the numbers from 1 to 6.

□ *The morning meeting*
□ *The activity of each centre*
□ *The result presentation at the author's chair*
□ *The works presentation and analysis*
□ *The complementary activities*
□ *The recreational games*

The activity chosen by the most pupils as top priority was according to Fig. 2, namely *The activity of each centre* (11 pupils), followed by *The morning meeting* (9 pupils).

The following activities, in the order of the pupils' preferences, were : *The recreational games* (8 pupils), *The works presentation and analysis* (7 pupils), *The works presentation from the author's chair* (7 pupils) and *The complementary activities* (5 pupils).

Fig. 2. Activities specific to the daily programme
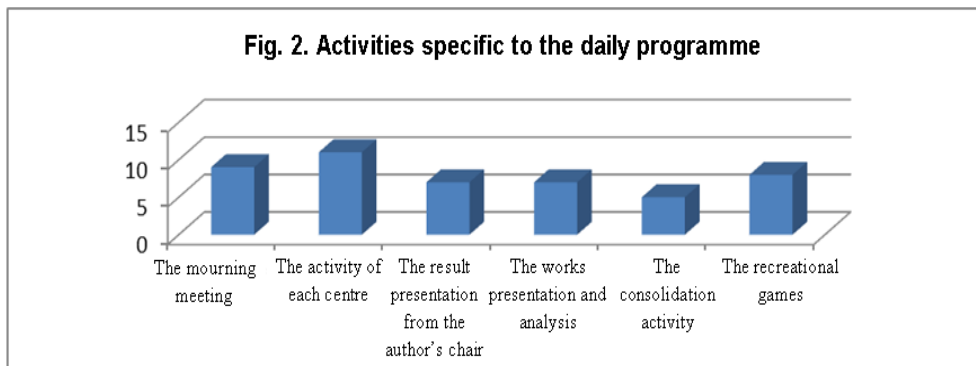
3. What knowledge testing methods do you prefer ? Please number them up in the preferences order by using the numbers from 1 to 5.

□ *Test*
□ *Portfolio*
□ *Works presentation from the author's chair*
□ *Topic study*
□ *Essay*

At item 3, the testing method preferred by the most pupils was the *Topic study* (10 pupils), and *portfolio* ranked second (9 pupils). The next testing methods, according to the pupils' preferences order, were : *the works presentation at the author's chair* (7 pupils), *test* (6 pupils) and *essay* (2 pupils).

Fig. 3. Preferred testing method
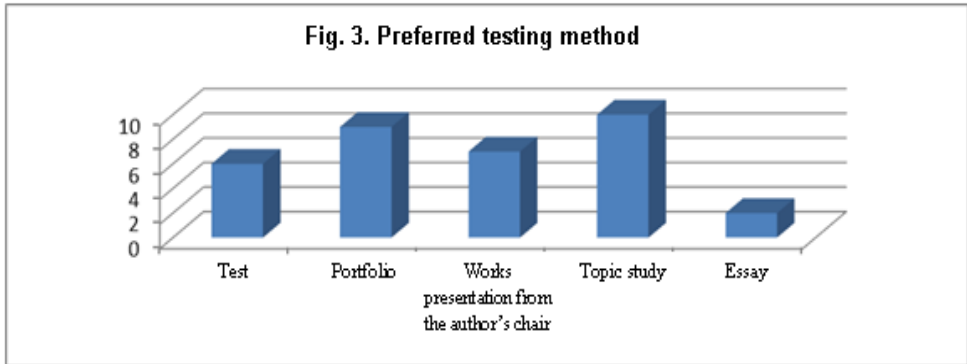
4. How much do you get involved in searching information for performing a topic study ?
□ *very much*
□ *a lot*
□ *a little*
□ *not at all*

At this question, 10 pupils said that they got involved very much in searching information for performing a topic study, 5 pupils got involved a lot, 2 pupils got involved a little bit and 1 pupil admitted not getting involved at all (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4. Pupils' involvement in searching information
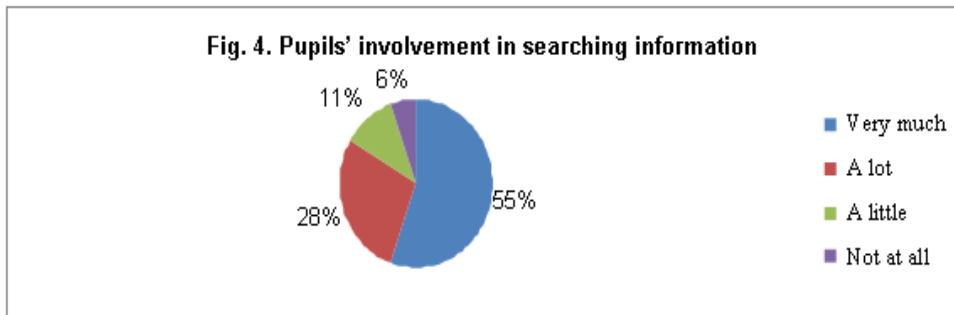
5. If you were a schoolmaster / schoolmistress, how would you prefer to check up your pupils' knowledge ? Why ?
At this question, 7 pupils answered that if they had been schoolmasters, they would have preferred to check up their pupils' knowledge by discussions about the works made at the activity centres, because they could remedy their mistakes on the spot. 6 pupils chose the Topic Study as a knowledge checking

method, because they like to search for information and to make drawings. 10 pupils would prefer to check up the pupils' portfolios, because they say many things about what a pupil knows and can and how tidy and gifted for drawing he/she is. Only 4 pupils chose the test, because it is looked through quickly and shows what the pupil knows.

Fig. 5. Preferred method of evaluation

- Free talking
- Topic study
- Portofolio
- Test
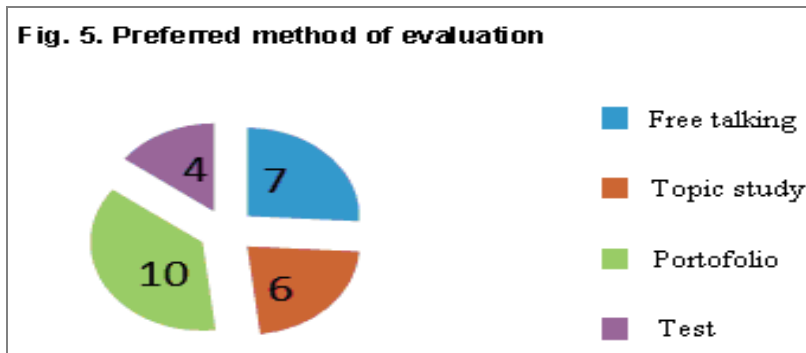
After analysing the data obtained by the questionnaire application one may say that pupils prefer the inter-disciplinary approach of learning, that they have initiatives and that they prefer interactive activities or those based on creativity and investigation.

In conclusion, for the pupils from the Step by Step alternative, evaluation does not represent an inhibiting factor, but a means of asserting the acquired knowledge, of correcting the mistakes and an occasion to be appreciated by the faculty members and the other mates.

b. The results obtained at the questionnaire applied to the primary school techers

1. What methods, techniques and strategies of evaluation do you use in the didactic activity ? Please number them up in the preferences order by using the numbers from 1 to 6.

□ Test
□ Topic study evaluation
□ Portfolio
□ Oral answering
□ Essay
□ Project
□ R.A.I. method
□ 3-2-1 technique

At item 1, most faculty members chose *portfolio* (7 faculty members), then the *topic study* (6 faculty members), *test* (5 faculty members), *project* (5 faculty members), *oral answering* (4 faculty members), *essay* (2 faculty members), *the R.A.I. method* (2 faculty members) and *the 3-2-1 technique* (2 faculty members).
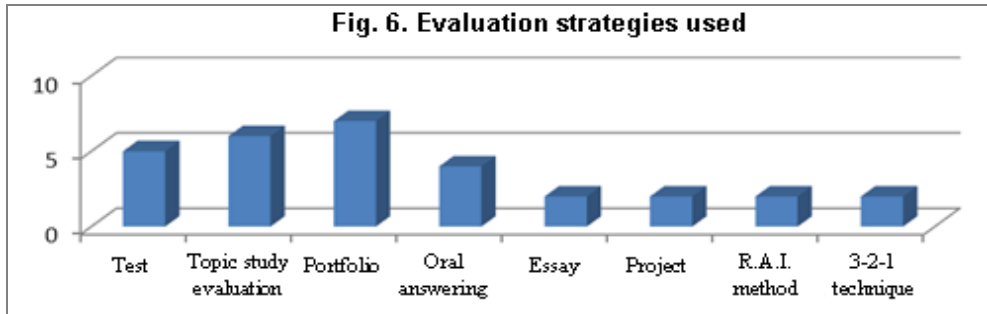
Test Topic study Portfolio Oral answering Essay Project R.A.I. method 3-2-1 technique

2. Which one of the following aspects do you stress in elaborating the evaluative strategies ? Please number them up in the preferences order by using the numbers from 1 to 4.
   □ *knowledge accumulation*
   □ *skill shaping*
   □ *the creative utilisation of the information for solving problems*
   □ *causing links detection*
The aspect considered to be the most important in elaborating the evaluative strategies, which 8 faculty members out of 10 chose, is skill shaping. The creative utilisation of the information for solving problems is the next important aspect chosen by 6 faculty members, then the causing links detection (4 faculty members) and knowledge accumulation (2 faculty members).

3. Evaluation can be mostly released from tensions and from the emotionally negative tonus, becoming motivating and not stressing for the pupil by using the methods below. Please number them up in the preferences order by using the numbers from 1 to 7.
   □ *Self-evaluation*
   □ *Portfolio*
   □ *Written testing*
   □ *Systematic observation*
   □ *Oral testing*
   □ *Investigation*
   □ *Project*

At item 3, the method deemed to be the most motivating for the pupil is *the systematic observation* (8 faculty members), followed by *self-evaluation* (6 faculty members), *portfolio* (6 faculty members), *project* (5 faculty members), *written testing* (4 faculty members), *investigation* (3 faculty members) and *oral testing* (3 faculty members).

Fig. 7. Pupil-motivating methods of evaluation
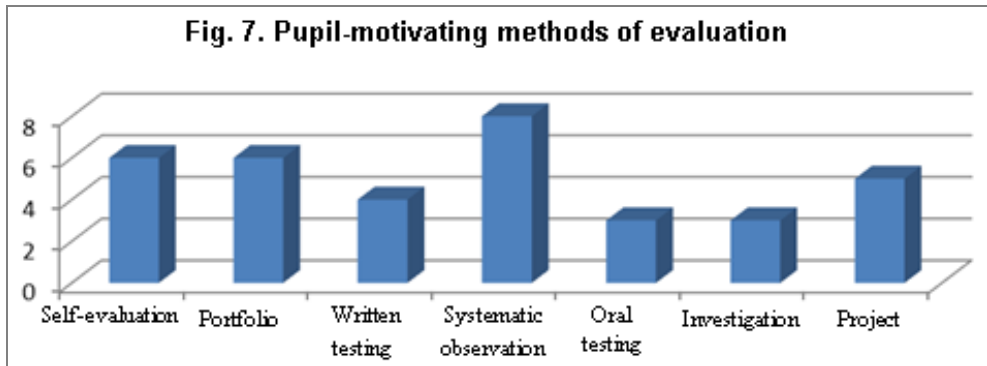
4. What are the advantages of using portfolio as a method of evaluation ?
In the faculty members' opinion, the advantages of using portfolio were the following :
- to include in the evaluation act certain products of the pupil's activity which normally are not envisaged ;
- to respect each pupil's own working rhythm, while stimulating his active involvement in the work tasks ;
- to develop the self-evaluation capacity ;
- to release the pupils from the tensions and the emotionally negative tonus that accompany the traditional forms of evaluation.
5. When they make mistakes, your pupils see in that :
□ *an occasion of asking for help*
□ *a failure*
□ *a positive experience for learning*
□ *a reason to be sanctioned*
The offered answers envisaged two variants, namely : the pupils see in that *an occasion of asking for help* – it is the variant chosen by 5 faculty members ; and the fact that the mistakes are for the pupils *positive experiences for learning* – 5 faculty members.
Please note that no faculty member thinks that the pupils see mistakes as failures or reasons to be sanctioned.

6. Does systematic observation represent an evaluation method by means of which relevant information as to the pupils' performances can be gathered ? Why ?

The faculty members agreed on that and supported the idea that systematic observation was a method of evaluation by means of which relevant information about the pupils' performances can be gathered, because :

- it provides data on the pupils' performances from the viewpoint of their capacity of acting and relating, of their competence and skills ;

- it is carried out in familiar contexts, where the pupils have several opportunities of proving their knowledge and skills than within the pencil-paper kind of tests ;

- it does not stress only the pupil's ability of communicating with the faculty member (the latter one being the one who records and interprets the pupil's typical behaviour or other performances).

After analysing the data obtained by applying the questionnaire to the 10 faculty members that work in the Step by Step alternative one may say that they regard evaluation as a manner of improving teaching and learning, of eliminating failure and of making constant progress in the pupil's training and that upon selecting the evaluative strategies they take their inspiration from a variety of situations, they involve the pupil in the process and use open, cumulative, continuous forms.

Conclusions

After applying and interpreting the questionnaires of the two samples and as a result of the discussions had with the faculty members working at the grades that guide themselves to the specific Step by Step methodology, we can draw the following conclusions :

- In the didactic process one should always take into account everything that the pupil has and needs in order to manifest and develop himself/ herself as harmoniously as possible. This idea must become a real education principle, which any faculty member must assimilate and observe.
- No measuring instrument can either be deemed to be universally valid for all goals and contents or can provide a comprehensive account of the pupils' changes and results.
- The faculty members use a variety of continuous evaluation strategies, avoiding prejudices and labelling, encouraging the pupils to become capable of judging their own work and their mates'.
- The specific didactic approach analyses the information gathered, individually or in a team, in order to assess and plan the next steps of the child's individual progress.

- The information linked to the pupils' progress is systematically notified to the parents and, jointly with the faculty members, it generates solutions for the existing preoccupations and creates individual goals on the short and long run.
- Unlike traditional school education, where the race for obtaining good honours is fed by the way in which the schoolmaster reserves the grades or the honours of the pupils who do better than others or learn faster than others, the Step by Step alternative constantly monitors the pupils' personal progress and awareness, while acknowledging the mistakes and endowing them with specific self-correction techniques.
- *The evaluation strategies specific to the Step by Step alternative infer intrinsic positive motivations for learning*, seeing that teaching is individualised and the pupil relates to his/her own evolution. These elements estrange pupils from real learning and focus them on the results in themselves, ignoring the importance of what has been learnt and their role in life.
- The selection and the application of the strategies appropriate to each pupil and to each learning experience result in solving with pleasure work tasks adequate to his/her own level, in integration and inter-relating.
- The integrated approach of learning and the utilisation of the alternative methods of evaluation stimulate the creation of a relationship of collaboration, trust and mutual respect between the schoolmaster and the pupils, on the one hand, and among pupils, on the other.
- The utilisation of the complementary methods of evaluation encourage the creation of a pleasant, relaxing learning climate, the pupils being evaluated in their ordinary learning environment, by contextualised tasks (project and portfolio elaboration), which at the same time are training tasks and evaluation tests.
- Evaluation is oriented toward what pupils know and can do rather than toward what they do not know or cannot do. Nowadays one may hardly assert that a pupil is good and another one is bad. Each pupil has certain capabilities that another one does not, he/she has a certain type of dominant intelligence, which, once acknowledged by the faculty member, has only beneficial effects on the pupil's activity.

The main limit of the study is linked to the utilisation of a reduced sample and instrument set, which cannot be deemed as representative for the Step by Step alternative in Romania. The results are valid for the educational facility where the study was carried out.

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