The king is dead! Long live the king!

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Abstract
A generation “against” or an impatient generation, who knows how to ask many questions but has no time to listen to the full answers, the students today are trying to attract energies that can take them out of the unknown, routine and boredom without too much effort. Therefore, as a teacher, the only way is to be close to them in order to know them, understand them and help them in their still chaotic way to find themselves and to select the most efficient ways, procedures and strategies that can lead them to their goals. From the point of view of informational technologies, the e-mail, long forgotten because of the last minute novelties, has always been at hand, and we tried to transform it into an efficient evaluation instrument, of the teaching learning activities and of personal competencies. The way in which all the methodological fields of outlining an evaluative strategy have been carried out, the results obtained on a personal and professional level, in the communication relationship and self-knowledge, the barriers and their way of solving things represent the subject of this paper.

Keywords: E-Mail, Evaluative Techniques, Emotional Factors, Informational Strategies, Competencies

Introduction
A generation “against” or an impatient generation, who knows how to ask many questions but has no time to listen to the full answers, the students today are trying to attract energies that can take them out of the unknown, routine and boredom without too much effort. Therefore, as a teacher, the only way is to be close to them in order to know them, understand them and help them in their still chaotic way to find themselves and to select the most efficient ways, procedures and strategies to do that.

Because most of the time they think that they hold the absolute truth, and they have more energy than the ones necessary for an usual activity, they cannot adapt to the classic rhythms of teaching/forming and when they are in the position of being evaluated, they are suspicious about the incorrectness of the appreciation of their competencies which makes them want something completely different. This is why we tried to find an efficient evaluation way that can involve them personally, and be modern enough to please them.

Although there is social media and the most sophisticated informational technologies like blogs, micro-blogs, social networks and the ones of work collaboration known under the name Web 2.0 are in trends; our students come to the university with a lower level of digital skills than the world wide trends. The student knows to work on Yahoo Messenger, to perform simple searches on Google, maybe work in Microsoft Word and PowerPoint.

The UNESCO and ISE statistics carried out in 2008 reveal the real situation of using ICT in schools which gives us the possibility of finding some answers for out questions. For example,
89.7% of the teachers claim that there are enough computers for students, but only 50% of the teachers declare that schools ensure the necessary number of computers for the activity of 50% of the students who use the computers in the informatics lab and 28.1% of them, in class. The individual use by the students of a personal laptop is an unrealistic situation for the socio-economic conditions in Romania. Nevertheless, over 80% consider it necessary to provide a laptop for each student for facilitating the use, the possibility of personalizing the working space etc. Insufficient equipments is one of the realities of our schools, which is why we can talk with a certain scepticism about efficient instruction within the 21st century without involving informational technologies.

The barriers in using ICT in the didactic activity have proven to be: the lack of access to technology (hardware) 16.2%, the lack of available funds for buying technology 22.1%, resistance inside the school 25.0%, lack of connections (internet, broadband etc) 23.5%, the lack of some proper contents / software for the teachers 30.9%, the lack of IT support in school which can be used efficiently 19.1%.

In the first year of study, the students attended a class called “Information and Communication Technology” which was very helpful when they needed. When asked at the beginning of the semester about the working means they prefer in the student – teacher relationship, the students have chosen the e-mail both for evaluation and counselling. The students haven’t chosen platforms or group addresses because these are usually used for informal discussion about formal subjects and e-mail involves much more confidentiality. From the point of view of informational technologies, the e-mail, long forgotten because of the last minute novelties, has always been at hand, and we tried to transform it into a into an efficient evaluation instrument, of the teaching learning activities and of personal competencies. In other words, The King is dead! Long live the King!

Methodological alternatives

Being an essential component of the curricular management, the evaluation of the professional – scientifically performances of the students is part of the coherent and interdependent succession of the main actions that form the projecting – teaching – learning – evaluating process and it became part of the pedagogic evaluation system of the educational processes and structures. The results have always been a relevant source of information for the evaluation of the curriculum, of the pedagogic activity of the teachers, of the efficiency of the teaching – learning process, of the functioning of the academic structures and have been made part of the procedures of collegial, monitoring and periodic evaluation analysis of the study schedules, representing a synthetic indicator of the learning results. (Apostol, 2003, Stoica, 2001). For us, the evaluation represented measuring / checking the students’ acquisitions, the interpretation and appreciation of the results based on some unitary and objective criteria, the adaptation of the educational decision of adjustment and efficiency of the instructive – educational process. The types of results expected were:

- **accumulated knowledge** (concepts, definitions, phenomena, products, laws, principles, theories);
- **intellectual capacities** (reasoning, divergent thinking, argumentation and interpretation power, interdependence in thinking, creativity); (Manolescu, 2006),
- **acting capacities**, of using the knowledge (skills, abilities, competencies);
- **personality features** (attitudes, behaviours) (Albulescu and Albulescu, 2003) finally being appreciated according to some performance standards or performance descriptors, according to the aimed at goals, the level of the year, the possibilities of each student, the existent level at the beginning of the instruction process.
Through all these, the student found out about the expectations and the evaluation criteria of
the performances and as a teacher, I could adjust my didactic steps within the limits imposed by
these standards which allowed the highlight of the progress made (Meyer, 2004).

The exercise of the evaluation under this form started at the beginning of the semester at the
level of the 1st and 2nd years of the Faculty of Sociology and Psychology, the Department of
Educational Sciences. The students have been divided in micro – groups of 5 members and each
group has chosen a leader. Their formation was made:

- through counting until 5 (all the numbers 2, for example, formed the micro – group no 2,
  all the numbers 4, the micro group no 4)
- according to literary preferences
- according to the year, month and date of birth
- according to famous couples and characters (for fun)
- titles of some novels and their authors
- renaissance painters and famous paintings.

The groups have changed their leaders within a three weeks term, so that each member got to
be a leader within a semester. For more special activities, the basic micro – group received another
member, so that all members could get involved better in working on stations, a very used method
within the teaching – learning process in the seminar type classes.

The formal leader has not always been the same with the informal leader but, working together,
they learned to complete each other, to help each other, to give to Cesar what belongs to Cesar.
His tasks consisted of:

- checking if the support materials, the bibliographies, the slides, the pps reach the
  members of his micro-group in time and are complete
- to keep notes of the level of self evaluation of each member and of the evaluation of each
  paper, essay, slide, pps, summary, reading file, docimology test etc. By each member of
  the group so that the final evaluation was the sum of the self evaluations and the 5
  evaluations done by each member of the group
- a permanent connection with the class holder (through email) and transmitting all the
  information regarding support materials, supplementary information with text, visual or
  audio – visual support and of the situations of evaluations and self – evaluations
- retransmitting all the instructions in detail regarding performing tasks, for the safety of
  observing the working algorithms and avoiding methodological mistakes.

To be sure that the evaluation will not be subjective, positively or negatively, according to
friendships or antipathies, rivalries or unloyal competitions, each member of the study year
received a literary nominal symbol (Bela, Cerebel, Ronaldo, Sofia, Riga) and a graphic one which
he kept regardless of the micro-group he was part of, a symbol agreed upon together with the
teacher, and which reflected, if possible, a special characteristic of his personality. For example, at
the class of Game Psycho pedagogy, besides current evaluation, the students had to write two
thematic papers and a collection of games (only 10 games) in a special imagistic, audio, kinetic,
ergonomic and most importantly attractive presentation, interesting for the age level of the
children it was made for. The materials have been self evaluated (Stan, 2000) and sent through
email to the group leaders who also sent them to the members of their group to be evaluated
(together with the settled performance criteria), and then, to the other leaders that acted in the same
way. The results obtained and processed by the leaders were sent to the teacher who added his
grade and decided the final one. Both the self evaluation and the evaluations of the others were
accompanied by arguments according to the performance criteria previously settled. The best
paper was suggested to be presented from the Writer’s or Creator’s Chair for a public reward of
the student’s efforts.
For maintaining the interest, we also applied the technique of forecasting the results in similar tests.

**Discussions**

At the applied tests we evaluated:

- the completeness and correctness of the knowledge, the scientific or artistic character of the paper
- the logic coherence, the fluency, the expressivity, the augmenting force
- the capacity of operating with the assimilated knowledge in intellectual complex activities
- the capacity of practically applying, in different contexts, the knowledge acquired
- the capacity of analysis, personal interpretation, originality, creativity
- the degree of assimilating speciality language and the capacity of communication
- the novelty and actuality of the bibliography used
- the diversity of the used informative materials
- originality
- interpretation level.

At the performance criteria mention above we also added criteria regarding *attitude and motivation aspects* of the students’ activities like: consciousness, interest for individual study, active participation to seminars, classes frequency etc (Stoica and Mihail, 2006). As objective items we used:

- Items with dual choice – with YES/NO, true/false, correct/incorrect answers.
- Pair type items – which requested setting correspondences/associations between elements placed on two columns.
- Items with multiple choices – which requested the choice of a correct answer / optimal alternative from a list of solutions / alternatives.

Among the semi objective ones, we used:

- Items with a short answer – expression, word, number, symbol etc.
- Items of filling in – incomplete sentence which involves filling in blank spaces with 1-2 words that are part of the given context.
- Structured questions – more subquestiones connected through a common element.

Among the subjective ones, we used:

- Solving problems (problem situations) which evaluated elements of convergent and divergent thinking, complex mental operations (analysis, synthesis, evaluation, transfer).
- Items of essay type – requested the students to build a free answer according to a set of given requirements – structured / semi structurated essay, free essay (not structured) (Chis, 2005, Radu, 2000, Stoica, 2003).

**Results**

At the end of the evaluation period, after the appreciation differences between the students and teacher decreased because of the exercise of observing the performance criteria, regardless of the person in discussion, but, most importantly, after the students finally accepted, step by step that they are not that *invincible* as far as information and competencies are concerned, the positive effects of our intervention were soon to be noticed.

The students themselves admitted that:

- they learned to thoroughly think about things and then have an opinion
- they practiced correctly applying some evaluation algorithms and felt the responsibility of a well done thing
• the responsibility exercise made them grow and taught them to take seriously any task as insignificant as it may be, because it is the only way to make progress
• the presence in the „Writer’s chair”, self-appreciation and the appreciation of other colleagues, the observance of some compulsory rules for everyone, with the online revelation of the values of appreciation created moments of positive emotions in which each and everyone on them felt valued
• the students understood that correctness of each of them depends on the social values of appreciating work
• the opinion of the other about them matters a lot even if they braved for a long time that they do not care about what other people think about them
• within these activities, they learned what it means to be fair – play, to be consequent and to openly admit the strengths of their colleagues, by being happy about them.

Conclusions

The exercise of the evaluation revealed among its positive elements and the existence of some temporary barriers: if the steps of the evaluation algorithm are not clearly settled, the method becomes macrophage – it takes a lot of time to evaluate each paper of the group members and the personal paper (each member of the group has to correct 5 papers with his own). The evaluation time was reduced when we established the temporal parameters for each sample and step of the evaluation (a settled hour for sending the email):
• of the information by the teacher;
• of the results of the evaluation and self-evaluation by the student
• of the final results obtained from the average of the grades given by the colleagues, his own grade and the grades given by the teacher
• comments regarding the quality and originality of the products carried out

Each course/seminar ended with the well known Notes which consisted either of two questions like:
• What did you most like in the activity carried out within this course?
• What bothered you and what didn’t you like in the activity performed?

Or tasks like:
• Make at least one suggestion regarding the way of developing of the next course with the theme ... (the support materials and selective bibliographies will be sent through email in attached file!!!)
• Give one to the following marks – Insufficient, Sufficient, Good, Very good, Excellent - to the activities carried out during this course/seminar and give arguments for your choice!
• Find the appropriate word to characterize the activity carried out at this course/seminar!
• Sent a thought to the holder of this course!

The answers to each of these were sent by email, with a deadline, the day before the next course/seminar. According to all these, we made all the necessary changes in the content, interactive activities, organization forms, teaching – learning strategies etc. We received the most interesting answers to this question:
• What meant for you using this type of evaluation in which electronic mail was involved?
  o I think it was the most appropriate way to experience the apprenticeship of evaluation on my own skin. Until I wasn’t correct with myself, the evaluation of the others could not be done within the real parameters.
  o I understood what it means to be impartial when you appreciate somebody else’s work and I felt the bitter taste of the value judgements done by my colleagues
regarding my own skills. It was a cold shower for my ego but it taught me that it is difficult to reach the truth and it is even more difficult to keep it.

- It was an excellent exercise for the future teacher in me. At the beginning I thought it was a bit complicated, time consuming, but I grew to really enjoying it. And I loved the discretion with which the teacher imposed something to me, which, in the end, I considered to be the best alternative for what we did in class at that time.

- He made from a forgotten thing, a pertinent and finally efficient evaluation instrument that we learned easily and liked because it made us know who we really are and use our informatics knowledge.

Considering all the arguments presented, this form of evaluation could become a method in itself if we elucidate all its elements. Blind evaluation, the existence of performance criteria and the structure of the interpersonal teacher – student relationships will favour positive behaviours and self-control building step by step a sense of reality and making the need for valuing more permanent.

References