

The Formal Process of School Self-Evaluation as an Opportunity for Creative Collective Action for Teachers' Improvement

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Abstract: Recent¹ attempts to implement educational evaluation, which has for a long time been inactive in Greece, were based on an intention to secure the consent of teachers, focusing on a collective form of self-evaluation of schools. Scientific data substantiate the fact that, despite institutional constraints, such self-evaluation procedures, when used creatively, are converted into a peer training opportunity, which entails reflection processes, as well as the opportunity for good teaching practices to be exchanged. In this paper we present an analysis of the way in which a public high school was involved in the process, the resistance developed, as well as a critical review of the results which occurred regarding the development of collective action and individual self-improvement. The basic conclusion of this research is that the subjects do have opportunities to develop resistance to power strategies, opportunities that actually allow them to lend a new meaning to their resistance, not through sterile refusal or rejection, but through creative implementation of imposed policies.

Key words: self-evaluation, resistance, creative application, reflection, self-improvement

1. Introduction

Educational evaluation is an institution that remains inactive in Greece, despite the fact that it has been included in a number of legislative texts since the 1980's and the 1990's in accordance with European and international tendencies in educational policy at the same period. However, this prolific legislation has been in effect rendered inactive mainly due to — among other things — the reactions of teachers, who regarded all government attempts to establish a system for their evaluation with reservation, as the previous institution of school inspectors had caused them traumatic experiences. These attempts were reactivated in the 2010s with a clear intention of the central government to secure the consent of teachers for its implementation, focusing not on individual teacher evaluation but on collective self-evaluation of schools, a process quite different, which is substantiated by scientific data.

Indeed, research conducted at national and international level (Bagakis et al., 2007) has shown that, despite some institutional constraints regarding both the conception of the project and the use of the results, schools self-evaluation procedures, when used creatively by teachers, are converted into a peer training opportunity, which

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¹ A new Educational Law (N.3848/2010) — as well as a number of supplementary legislative texts passed from 2010 to 2013 — addressed various educational issues, with Educational Evaluation being one of the main foci of the wider educational reform it aspired to initiate.

entails reflection and self-improvement processes, as well as the opportunity for good teaching practices to be exchanged (Tsakiris, 2007). In accordance with the “enactment theory” (Maguire, 2002), it is deduced that an institutionalized process may be turned into a field of self-activity with training benefits for the subjects.

In this paper, we intend to present an analysis of the way in which a public high school of the prefecture of Corinthia was involved in the school self-evaluation process during two school years (2013–2014 and 2014–2015), the resistance developed by teachers, as well as a critical review of the unpredictable results which occurred regarding both the development of collective action and the individual self-improvement of teachers. This paper is based on the logic of a case study with an ethnographic orientation, since its writer participated in the school self-evaluation process as a member of the teaching staff, while at the same time recording its process through calendar notes, observation keys and informal interviews.

The basic conclusion of this research attempt is that the subjects — namely teachers — do have opportunities to develop resistance to power strategies (Crozier & Friedberg, 1980), opportunities that actually allow them to lend a new meaning to their resistance, not through sterile refusal or rejection, but through creative implementation of imposed policies.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Educational Evaluation in Legislative Texts: from the School Inspector to School Self-Evaluation

As mentioned above, the School Inspector, the state official mainly responsible for conducting Educational Evaluation since the first decades of the 20th century (1934), is blamed over time - and not unjustly - for the poor implementation of Educational Evaluation in Greece even today. The administrative, supervisory and consulting work of the Inspector was carried out with a small number of “surprise” visits to the classroom and it was reduced to monitoring the teaching procedure, so that it could be established whether the teacher used “appropriate” teaching methods and followed certain guidelines. The inspection focused mainly on the teacher’s status based not only on professional, measurable criteria, such as teaching qualifications and pedagogical conduct, but also personal characteristics, such as conscientiousness, moral quality and character, behavior, social attitudes and political beliefs. The fact that school inspectors were not only scientific and pedagogical counselors but also administrative officers, who had the authority to write evaluation reports on teachers, strengthened their power, while their attitude towards teachers was usually cold, arrogant and authoritarian. In the face of the inspector, the teachers did not see a mentor, but felt the state control over their work and the threat of negative consequences in their professional development (Andreou & Papakonstantinou, 1994).

General criticism against the anti-pedagogical function of the inspectors in combination with pressure exercised by Teachers’ Trade Unions and the reformist tendencies calling for the democratization of education that prevailed during the 1970’s led to the abolition of inspectors by a new educational Law (N.1304/1982) and the introduction of the institution of School Counselor, whose duties concentrated on the scientific and pedagogical guidance of teachers. In a supplementary legislative text (Presidential Decree 214/1984) the duties of school counselors are described in detail as including responsibilities related to the evaluation of educational work and teachers; the actual wording² of the legislative text, however, reveals a clear intention to discourage counselors

² “[Counselors] monitor the lesson and discuss with the teacher ways to better organize and improve teaching. They take any initiatives they deem necessary for the improvement of teaching, including practical teaching suggestions (Article 6). At the end of the school year: a) in collaboration with the teachers they evaluate the results of what has been planned and programmed during the

from exercising any kind of control on the teachers and the educational process. As part of the same effort to relieve Educational Evaluation of any negative connotations, the next Educational Law (N.1566/1985) makes a clear distinction between Educational Evaluation and Teacher Evaluation, a distinction still found in all relevant legislative texts to this day with the emphasis falling on the former instead of on the latter (Kassotakis, 2011).

However, the legislative framework regarding Educational Evaluation remained virtually inactive, due to the reactions of pressure groups (teachers and their Trade Union representatives) that were skeptical of the new legislation for fear of re-establishing the inspectors. Thus, from the one extreme of the suffocating ideological control and the authoritarian exercise of the power of inspectors, Greek education went straight to the other extreme of total lack of any form of Educational Evaluation throughout the 1980's (Kassotakis, 1992).

In the 1990's, new laws regarding Educational Evaluation were passed but still remained unimplemented. Law N.2043/1992 on the Supervision and Administration of Education explicitly introduces Educational Evaluation on a school level, while the supplementary Presidential Decree 320/1993 defines the criteria, process, content and instruments of Evaluation. In a later Law (N.2525/1997), the obligation of the School Principal to prepare an evaluation report for the entire school is mentioned, without further clarifications on the procedure. The new element in this law is the provision for the creation of a Body of Permanent Evaluators, who would be responsible for the evaluation of both the teachers' work and the school's overall performance. The supplementary Presidential Decree 140/1998 stipulates that a necessary condition for new teachers being permanently appointed in the Greek educational system is an evaluation report of their pedagogical and didactic competence compiled by the school principal, the school counselor and the Body of Permanent Evaluators. This law and other supplementary legislative texts³ that followed to specify its provisions provoked such strong reactions from the Teachers' Trade Unions that once again their implementation was suspended (Zouganeli et al., no date) From all of the above mentioned provisions, the only thing that applies today in practice is an evaluation report for all newly appointed teachers, written by the school principal at the end of the second year of their service, to verify their tenure.

In the next educational law, which was passed in 2002 (N.2986/2002), Educational Evaluation is assigned to two national educational institutions, both of which are responsible for implementing educational policy and report to the Ministry of Education; namely educational evaluation on the school level is assigned to the Centre of Educational Research (KEE), while teachers' evaluation is assigned to the Pedagogical Institute (III). The Body of Permanent Evaluators is abolished and teachers' evaluation is referred to as special procedure in which teachers may participate on a voluntary basis in cases of tenure or professional development. In this legislative text the term "Self-Evaluation" is introduced for the first time, referring to procedures of collective evaluation of the school performance in the form of Teachers' Meetings. At the beginning of the school year, all teachers working in the school should set some educational goals to be achieved, and they should reconvene at the end of the school year in order to evaluate the results of their efforts, producing a written report. As there have been no supplementary legislative texts elaborating on specific procedures and rendering them mandatory, this law has been loosely⁴ applied in schools all over Greece.

school year and b) they submit to the Minister a summary report evaluating the work done in their area of responsibility, pointing out problems and proposing measures (Article 13).

³ Minister's Decree D2 / 1938 / 26-2-1998 on "Evaluation of the educational work and the teachers" an Presidential Decree 140/1998

⁴ The Teachers' Meeting at the beginning the school year does take place with the aim of forward planning of school activities and assigning extracurricular duties to members of the teaching staff. There is another Teachers' Meeting at the end of the school year

The process of educational evaluation was reactivated in the second decade of the new millennium with a new educational law⁵, passed in 2010 (N.3848/2010) in an effort for parallel implementation of both the individual evaluation of teachers and the evaluation of the school unit. As regards the individual evaluation of teachers, Presidential Decree 152/2013 defines the people responsible for it (the school Principal reports on the administrative parameters and the school Counselor reports on the pedagogical parameters of each teacher's performance), its procedures (arranged visits of the counselor to the class, followed by a guiding discussion with a teacher but also an evaluation report) and its criteria, which relate to the teacher's pedagogical and scientific qualifications, ability to communicate with students and form a positive pedagogical atmosphere, lesson planning and teaching methods, student evaluation and extra-curricular duties. As regards the self-evaluation of the school unit, there is a number of legislative texts describing in detail the process of its implementation and stressing the fact that it is mandatory, connecting active engagement of all teachers in the process with individual evaluation and prospects of personal professional development. In summary, the process includes (a) the evaluation of the educational work so far (b) the planning of improvement actions (c) the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of these actions and (c) the evaluation of their results. Written reports on planning, implementing and evaluating of all actions are to be prepared by the principal and the teachers in collaboration with the school counselor and are to be communicated to students and parents through the schools' official websites, as well as be submitted to the Centre of Educational Research (N. 3848/10. 32)

From all the legislative provisions described above, the individual teachers' evaluation process has yet to be implemented. However, the self-evaluation process of the school unit was implemented during the school years 2013-14 and 2014-15. Ever since various government changes and other socio-economic crises have led to the whole process being abandoned.

2.2 The legislative rhetoric of Educational Evaluation

In the previous historical review of legislative texts, which tried to summarize attempts to implement educational evaluation in Greece, we can discern specific dimensions of the legislative rhetoric in the state's attempt to legitimize the evaluation process in teachers' consciousness and secure their consent to it.

First of all, it is attempted — something that had already started in the 1980's (N.2525/1985) — to differentiate the individual evaluation of each teacher from the evaluation of the overall educational work on a school level. The former, which may arouse in teachers the negative memories of inspection, is identified in their consciousness with punitive external evaluation. On the contrary, the latter is described with terms, such as “internal evaluation” or “self-evaluation”, which is supposed “to see right through educational reality, inspect it from inside and offer feedback on educational practices, helping to improve the quality of educational work, precisely because it follows procedures that are planned, organized, monitored and evaluated by members of the school community, that is by the teachers themselves”⁶.

The emphasis on improving the education provided in public schools and the quality upgrade of all factors of

which only deals with promoting or failing students according to their yearly performance, their exam results and number on absences.

⁵ This law was followed by a number of supplementary legislative texts, regarding the individual evaluation of teachers (Presidential Decree 152/2013) as well as the self-evaluation process of the school unit (Ministerial Decree 614, τ.β'/5-03-13 and Directives Γ1/30972/05 -03-13 and Γ1/190089/10-12-13). After a two-years pilot implementation in a restricted number of random schools all over Greece, it was put in effect as mandatory for all schools in the school year 2013-14 (Directive Γ1/190089/10-12-13).

⁶ Ministry of Education & Institution of Educational Policy, Educational Evaluation in Secondary Education, The Procedure of Self-Evaluation of the School Unit, Volume I, Basic Framework, Dec. 2012.

the educational process (teachers, practices, administration) is another dimension that is highlighted in all legislative texts on evaluation from 1993 to 2013. In order to achieve this goal, the results of educational efforts are analyzed, any deviations from the intended objectives are identified and the causes are sought, in order to make the necessary corrective interventions.

In fact, as the task of evaluating the results and planning corrective interventions is assigned to the Body of Teachers, it is projected as the intention of the central educational administration to highlight the autonomy and to respect the individuality of each school unit. Specifically, in the supplementary directives sent to schools from the Ministry, it is stressed that through the process of self-evaluation the intention of the state is “to highlight the school unit as the main body responsible for planning, implementing and evaluating educational work” (Directive Γ1/37100/31-03-2010) “in order to strengthen the school unit and the actors that comprise it (teachers, students, parents), who combine forces in order to achieve a more efficient organization, administration and management of the school unit” (Directive C1/30972/05-03-13) .

However, apart from the promotion of the autonomy of the school unit as a collective organization, even the Heading of Law 3848/2010 (“*Upgrading the role of the teacher*”) reveals the intention of the Ministry to focus on individual teacher evaluation, as it tries to highlight the value and effort of each teacher separately. This intention refers directly to previous legislative texts that placed more emphasis on the individual evaluation of the teacher investing it, in any case, with a rhetoric that emphasized the idea of self-improvement and professional development.

Very revealing are the excerpts from the Presidential Decree 320/1993.2.3, according to which “teacher evaluation contributes to the improvement of educational work in general and, more specifically, it helps teachers to reinforce their self-awareness in terms of their scientific background, pedagogical training and didactic aptitude and to form a well-founded image for their professional performance [...] In addition, teachers’ evaluation aims at providing teachers themselves with the satisfaction that derives from the recognition of their efforts and motivates them to seek opportunities for professional development, so as to serve in higher positions as education executives. Finally, the systematic analysis and study of the evaluation elements of the teachers' work functions as a feedback mechanism for their constant training at regional and national level”.

Overall, the attempt to legitimize educational evaluation in the consciousness of teachers, in order for them to accept individual evaluation, becomes evident in the rhetoric adopted in all relevant legislation, which focuses on the concepts of teachers’ self-improvement for the benefit of their students and of their own scientific and professional development.

2.3 From Legislative Rhetoric to Educational Reality

The critique that can be made against this rhetoric of political discourse can be based exactly on the fact that it embellishes the imposed procedures, in order to legitimize them in the consciousness of the subjects — namely the teachers — and to secure their consent, concealing their negative parameters, such as the intensification of a negative competitiveness between teachers and schools, the burden on teachers’ workload and, in general, the increase of bureaucracy that can be detrimental to effective pedagogical process. Weber was pessimistic about the growing bureaucratization of society, which requires more rationalization and instrumental treatment of social issues. He was talking about the iron cage of bureaucracy from which even educational institutions could not escape, as demands for the commercialization of knowledge, for control and for accountability would be at the expense of intellectual values and academic freedom (as referred to in Murphy, 2009). However, what appears to

be an open topic for discussion is what form of accountability is desirable, in order to distinguish between functional and dysfunctional bureaucracy.

Habermas uses the term “emancipatory rationality” (as referred to in Broadfoot & Black, 2004), which is associated with a form of functional bureaucracy that focuses on human resources for self-realization and creativity and does not obliterate values and freedom. A key conclusion of scientific research, after all, is that a useful feedback is one that supports self-determination and generates feelings of competence, rather than one that is perceived as an exercise of supervision or control. Ideally, then, the rhetoric of the political discourse on school autonomy and teacher self-improvement should be made a reality by teachers themselves, so that evaluation can function as a mechanism of individual empowerment and as incentive to improve the quality of education through self-awareness and cooperation.

This can happen if the teacher acts “*as a critical, complex and troublesome agent*” (Vongalis - Macrow, 2007) within the education system, who perceives policies not as something stationery but as something that is constantly in a process of “becoming”. Policies do not say exactly what needs to be done but create conditions in which the range of available options, in terms of practices, objectives and results, can variate — it may be limited but it may even be expanded. The response to them must be framed within a creative social action. Thus, we are talking about the “*secondary adjustment*” (Ball, 2006) in the involvement of teachers with a policy. This means that teachers create through a repertoire of individual and collective strategies — sometimes “contained” sometimes “disruptive” — an empirically rich substratum in the implementation of policies (Ball, 2006).

So, one can discover the existence of a considerable amount of interpretation and creativity being possible in the implementation of policies, without totally eliminating the concept of power of course. Power, however, is perceived in the sense given to it by Foucault (2005), as if it may have a productive role in social relations. In this sense, the teacher, as a member and agent of the educational organization, is not only a recipient of orders and a subordinate of the power exercised from above, but one of the partners in the power relations that develop within the school organization. Each of these partners has a different degree of power, but none of them is completely defenseless.

Every teacher, therefore, is perceived not only as an object/recipient of policies but as a subject/implementer of them. Thus, any policy is not perceived as being imposed by the central government but as being implemented or exercised by the teachers. The exercise of politics by the teachers is defined as a creative process of interpretation and reframing of what is recorded in the various legislative texts (laws - decrees - directives), a process of “translation” of texts and transformation of abstract policy into concrete practices that are part of each school (Maguire, Ball et al., 2010). In this sense, the teachers cannot and do not remain inactive towards policies. Since they cannot drastically overturn them, they have the choice to interpret them and apply them critically and effectively to the extent that the circumstances and goals of their own school, the potential and needs of their students and themselves allow them to so (Tsakiri, 2007).

3. The Implementation of the Formal Process of School Self-Evaluation as an Opportunity for Creative Collective Action for Teachers' Improvement

The afore-mentioned theoretical observations seem to have been verified in practice by the way the school self-assessment process was carried out in Velo Lyceum⁷ (where I used to work during the two years of its formal,

⁷ Lyceum (Λύκειο) is the Upper Secondary Educational Degree (Senior High School) in the Greek System. It is aimed for students

mandatory implementation and in which I actively participated) and by the results that emerged from it.

The Lyceum of Velo is an average Lyceum of about 200 students and 20 teachers, situated in a provincial town in the prefecture of Corinth, Peloponnese, with a positive atmosphere between teachers and students, without particular problems of delinquency or conflicts. It also happened to have, at the time, a body of teachers with increased formal qualifications and a strong interest in participating in training activities and implementing alternative teaching techniques.

3.1 Phase I : School Self-Evaluation Report

During the first phase of the whole process (school year 2013–2014) the participation of all teachers was mandatory, as made clear by the relevant directives. The participation of each teacher in the synthesis of an all-inclusive evaluation report of the schools assets and weaknesses was being directly related to the individual teacher evaluation, which was about to follow, as an incentive to ensure teachers' involvement in the project or as a means of "pressure" — as referred to by certain teachers holding positions as elected Teachers' Trade Union representatives.

The teachers worked in groups in order to collect and record quantitative data on a number of indicators described in the guiding material⁸ sent to schools by the ministry. Thus, questionnaires were prepared for parents, students and teachers that combined closed and open questions, from which quantitative data were collected; but there were also some micro-interviews of teachers, which allowed them to freely express their views and feelings, which were recorded and gave a qualitative dimension to the original research. As expected, most of the problems that were identified had to do with the school's infrastructure and financial resources, while no problems were mentioned regarding relationships between members of the school community. These results, however, should be treated with caution, as similar scientific data have been collected in other self-assessment processes, revealing the tendency of participants to depict an idealized image of their school and to hide deeper issues of social relations or didactic deficiencies (Bagakis, Demertzis et al., 2007).

3.2 Phase II: Designing and Implementing Action Plans

The second phase of the implementation of a certain action plan to address some of the school weaknesses started the following school year (2014–2015). As the weaknesses concerning the school's infrastructure and financial resources were completely out of the teachers' hands to deal with, it was decided to focus on the Development of Teaching and Pedagogical Practices, which was the area of scientific interest for some of us, as well as an active part of everyday school life, which never ceases to be in need of improvement. Thus, it was proposed to develop an Action Plan for the coordinated implementation of innovative teaching techniques and exchange of good practices, in order to benefit from each other's experience and ideas. So, some groups were formed by teachers who volunteered to work together for the production of teaching materials and the

between the ages 15 to 18, it lasts 3 years and leads to Tertiary Education (University) through the Panhellenic Entrance Exams. It is optional but almost all graduates of Gymnasium (Γυμνάσιο, Junior High School) choose to continue studying in Lyceum and participate in the Final Exams.

⁸ Indicators to be considered included: School buildings, infrastructure and financial resources, Organization and coordination of school life, Management and utilization of means and resources, School staff, Utilization, support and development of human resources, Development and implementation of teaching, pedagogical and student assessment practices, School Relationships (among students, teacher-student, teacher-parents) and collaborations with educational, social institutions, Training programs and innovations, student support and compensatory interventions, Student attendance, Student achievements and progress, Individual and social development of students, Ministry of Education & Institution of Educational Policy, Educational Evaluation in Secondary Education, The Procedure of Self-Evaluation of the School Unit, Volume I, Basic Framework, Dec. 2012.

implementation of innovative activities inside and outside the classroom. The basic idea was that during these activities there would be a teacher monitoring the lesson, who would afterwards discuss with the teacher presenting it, so that both of them could exchange experiences and views and then share their observations with the rest of the teachers, aiming at the overall improvement of the quality of teaching in the school.

It should be noted, however, that some teachers were less willing to participate in the second phase of the process due to the workload that it added to their existing teaching and extracurricular tasks. The objections expressed focused also on the fact that the proposed activities would interrupt with the teaching process, delaying the progress with the subject material to be covered, given that in Lyceum the tight observance of the schedule and the purpose of success in the final exams take precedence over any other school activity. Moreover, there were those who expressed ideological objections to the implementation of the evaluation, being more actively involved in the Teachers' Trade Union. Finally, the general ambiguity of the central government's intentions to continue with the implementation of the individual teacher evaluation, which had been announced the previous year, increased the reluctance of some teachers, who did not consider it necessary to make the extra effort required to actually implement the Action Plan.

The change in government that took place in the meantime led to the total abandonment of the project by the new Administration and relieved the schools from any obligation to submit a final evaluation report of the results of the Action Plan. The teachers who had already been involved in the process, however, continued the activities until the end of the school year, as the experience had begun to create a general positive feeling.

Being free of any formal and mandatory procedures to be carried out and concentrating on the effective training and collaborative direction that we wanted to give to the project, we tried to combine two practices that are generally related to the process of self-evaluation: peer observation and action research. The former is an informal, but basic, in-school support structure for the promotion of mutual trust, the exchange of experiences and the development of scientific collaborations. The latter is a method of research that was ideal in the situations, as we were at the same time subjects and researchers, aiming at the promotion of forms of self-education and in-school training.

At the level of design and implementation, we drew our inspiration from the study of a similar project that had taken place some 10 years before in a small group of Greek schools participating in the European program "Carpe Vitam: Leadership for Learning", under the supervision of Cambridge professor, John MacBeath⁹. The main characteristics of this program that made it an attractive model for us were "the focus on learning" which puts teachers in a position to see themselves as students and to adopt this attitude of life — as MacBeath notes in the book's preface — as well as the simple methodology proposed, that did not require time and expertise — which we did not have — for the use of complex research tools and the coordination of time-consuming meetings.

So, we simply continued to exchange visits to each other's classes, whenever our schedules allowed it, without disturbing the curriculum and the coverage of the subject material, which is a top priority issue in Lyceum, and to monitor the way each of us presented their lessons, as well as the way the students responded, by completing a simple observation sheet. At the end of the observation, there was a short discussion between the "observing" and the "observed" teacher, while both of them had to record their impressions in a short report. These observation sheets and the reports were the meagre scientific data of our small research but the experiential

⁹ The whole project and scientific observations are reported in a book written by the team of Greek professors running the project: Bagakis G., Demertzi K., Stamatis Th. (2007), *A school is learning. Self-Evaluation and School Improvement* as part of the International Program Carpe Vitam. Leadership for Learning, Athens, Livanis publications.

and emotional data we collected was far richer and we still carry them with us today.

3.3 Results: Benefits

Regarding the purpose of promotion of self-education and in-school training, we all benefited from the ideas of our colleagues. Those who acted as observers were able to see something different than what they used to do in the classroom, to get ideas, to compare their own attitude with that of their colleagues and to offer them some positive feedback. The imaginative ideas of some colleagues who used group activities and role-plays were revealing, but even more revealing were the cases of traditional, frontal teaching that was also successful in attracting student attention and interest, mostly thanks to the sharpness of the presentation and the overall personality of the teacher.

“The topic of the lesson was Sociological Imagination. The teacher used the method of dramatization. Specifically, she asked two students to play the roles of Jason and Medea from the known tragedy of Euripides. Through this dramatization she managed to initiate a discussion about stereotypes and unfounded social prejudice, which should be rejected, and propose the use of sociological imagination for the interpretation of human behavior based on objective sociological observations. I had no idea that we can teach such concepts to young children!!!”

(extract from an observer's report)

Moreover, in terms of Teachers' Individual Evaluation, we were all given the opportunity to familiarize ourselves with the presence of an observer in the class, as well as becoming more aware of certain parameters of teaching that can be subjected to positive or negative criticism. At the same time, the whole procedure was experienced in a friendly, non-threatening setting and the discussion that followed allowed us to honestly admit that we all have our weaknesses, in areas such as classroom management, which is usually one of the most frustrating and demotivating problems for teachers.

“Admittedly, at first I felt a little embarrassed, because I was anxious about how I would look to you. I soon realized that you came to the class with a genuine interest and not just to “evaluate” me and, therefore, I felt at ease. At the same time, your entire posture, the fact that you sat at the desk like a little schoolgirl, ready to listen, really helped me. Suddenly I forgot about you — I don't mean it in a degrading sense — but somehow you integrated into the classroom, somehow you aligned with the children, somehow you disappeared; but at the same time you were there ... and that was exactly what relieved me; that I was not alone, I had my colleague by my side. I was looking forward to your well-meant remarks, which would come out from an on-site research and not reach me through curricula, decrees or directives, sent by people who had never seen me before.”

(extract from an observed teacher's report)

In our case, the process of school self-evaluation was carried out in two phases which were quite different: phase one was implemented in accordance with the legislation and the formal directives and under the stress of possible negative consequences in case of not complying to them; the process met the requirements of the administration while the results were as expected. In the second phase, however, when the teachers involved kept working voluntarily on a project that they actually designed and realized themselves, free from the threat of an impending personal evaluation, the benefits multiplied and produced quite obvious and widely accepted results. The following report summarizes them:

“During the implementation of school self-evaluation, we decided to observe classes of colleagues. My participation in this process was very useful and constructive, as I became familiar with the feeling of our

lessons being monitored and I was relieved of stress. I engaged in a process of reflection and self-criticism, as I was encouraged to reflect and reconsider my teaching methods. Watching colleagues teach, I picked up on some good practices, new ideas and innovative elements that I intend to use in my lessons. Finally, we all exchanged useful views and ideas about teaching methods and lesson planning, while the comments of the colleagues who attended my classes encouraged me and gave me positive feedback. I must note, however, that the whole process was effective, interesting and enjoyable, because it was free of the stress of punitive evaluation, it was the result of voluntary participation and it contained the element of intimacy that connects fellow teachers”

(extract from the final report of a participant)

4. Conclusions

The overall assessment of the process verifies the initial theoretical assumptions about the ability of teachers to creatively implement imposed policies. The political and legislative rhetoric which tries to connect formal teacher evaluation with school autonomy and the improvement of the quality of teaching is usually perceived by them as hypocritical. However, it is not impossible for them to assume an active and creative role in the implementation of policies, in a way that allows them to relieve themselves of both the sense of suffocating control over their work and the constant questioning of their professional competence and conscientiousness.

As for the actual process of evaluation, most participants experienced it as a “simulation” of the presence of an evaluator in the lesson. However, on the whole, they expressed positive feelings about the experience of being observed while teaching. They, also, emphasized on the need for guidance and support in their work, from an external counselor, who does not approach them in a controlling and critical mood, though. The entire process motivated the teachers as they agreed upon, designed and implemented it themselves, without emphasis on mandatory practices but with an intention to highlight their initiatives and — why not — to “reward” each other for what they themselves valued as a significant effort.

Finally, a number of objectives for in-school, peer training were satisfactorily met during the project, according to the participants. These are some direct and explicit training objectives related to the teaching practices, which showed a great variety (from traditional frontal teaching to innovative applications that combined ICT and collaborative learning processes) but also objectives related to familiarizing teachers with the methodology of scientific research (questionnaires and data analysis) and even with new technologies (wiki). The most positive part of the entire experience was, of course, the opportunity created for the teachers to discuss and share views and concerns, to admit to facing the same fears and insecurities and to offer both practical advice and psychological support to each other, which contributed to the essential process of self-reflection and self-awareness.

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