THE ROLE OF COMICS IN FACILITATING POSITIVE INTEGRATION IN THE CLASSROOM

Elena-Maria TATAR, Ph.D. Cnd.,
Babeş-Bolyai University - Faculty of Psychology and Educational
Sciences - Department of Educational Sciences, Doctoral School
"Education, Reflection, Development"
lenu_tatar@yahoo.com

Abstract: *In any field of activity, communication is the glue that fosters good understanding and healthy relationships between living beings. Referring strictly to didactic communication, it is imperative due to the fact that the educational act relies on all types of communication in order to lead to the success of the educational act which is done, as we know so well, through the activity of learning which must be done voluntarily, by the learner. In an ever-changing society, where parents are busy and find it difficult to take the time to communicate with their children, using the after-school services of schools and various organizations, it is up to the teacher to communicate effectively and to help the pupil to develop his or her intellectual, mental, physical, etc. skills. This article aims to show how we can facilitate a sense of well-being in the school environment using the comic strip technique.*

Keywords: *literacy; communication skills; comics; school wellness.*

Theoretical incursions
Communication - the individual's key to society
The success of the learning process and the results achieved depend on the methods used. Great pedagogues have pointed out that using different methods makes essential differences in the preparation of pupils, that the acquisition of new knowledge or behaviours can be achieved more easily or more difficult, depending on the methods used (Bocoş, Gavra, Marcu, 2008).
Communication is the individual's key to society. Lack of communication leads to an imminent estrangement from the group, team, society. Group means rules, reputation, purpose, teamwork. As long as there is good communication, there is maximum return. Interpersonal communication is vital because it can be an effective

means of solving problems through the functions it performs: understanding and knowledge, conscious relationship with others, influence and persuasion (Bocos, Gavra, Marcu, 2008).

Quality of education and quality of life closely linked to education reforms

Current employment trends in the labor market are to move away from relying on the qualifications obtained by candidates for particular jobs, with companies creating their own training programs for the skills required. People are migrating to areas where profit thrives economically, so we need to train individuals capable of entering the workforce. Thus, the focus must be on quality education for all, which meets the needs of the individual on the one hand and the demands of society on the other (LEN 1/2011, Art.3, Idealul educațional).

In order to meet today's demands, the education system has had to resort to a series of reforms to adapt schools to a new age, where much more is required of the graduate than just specialization. The current reforms put the focus on a learner-centered curriculum. The focus is on the needs of learners for further success, and attempts are being made to adopt standards and assessment procedures that will enable them to succeed in a professional and personal field. The emphasis is no longer on acquiring and storing information, but on what the learner can apply what they have learnt in the future. (Egerău et al, 2022)

The need for communication skills training

A teacher who focuses on developing skills for each pupil in the class according to their profile, and not just for pupils with a high capacity to absorb knowledge, will look at the subject they teach differently and succeed in planting skills in their pupils that will be useful throughout their lives. This is not achieved in the short term, but is completed at the end of each cycle of education. We, as teachers, need to change our traditional perception and move 'subject teaching' into a set of contexts that really support the learner to form key competences, learning to make inter- and trans-disciplinary openings (Torkos, Coșarbă, 2023). For learning beyond the textbook to be beneficial, and for the future adult to be able to integrate into society, in a future job, with the help of the skills formed in school, the teacher must be the pupil's role model and partner in learning, showing curiosity and openness towards the pupils, exploring with them to seek answers to questions and solutions to problem situations all the time.

The notion of communication competence has evolved to encompass increasingly broad areas of knowledge. The Council of Europe considers that there are six components of communication competence: linguistic competence, socio-linguistic competence, discourse competence, socio-cultural competence, strategic competence and

social competence (Bocoş, 2002.)
In order to facilitate the positive integration of pupils in the school environment, the teacher must use a series of teaching strategies to make the pupil feel that he/she is an integral part of the group, to have the courage to express him/herself, to participate actively in the proposed activities and to be able to successfully carry out the tasks given.

Recent perspective
Using comics in the classroom as a method to promote active participation
The comic strip technique could not be simply defined, so there are several interpretations in its definition; while the Cambridge dictionary defines it as "a series of amusing drawings of small size, with an insert of text, often published in a newspaper", Professor Dr. Mircea Deacă, in the article "But what are comic strips?", says about them: "Comics are definitely a mixed, blended or borderline genre. The genre in question contains part literature, part cinema and part fine art". There are several definitions of this technique, as it is not a common term and not within everyone's reach, so there is no consensus in defining comics (Deaca, 2011).
Comics, used as a teaching method or procedure, can be seen as organized learning, because by using this technique the teacher encourages, but at the same time guides the student to use it to create something new, to externalize some feelings or feelings by associating them with fictional characters/imagination. Certainly, education using this technique is an experimental one, which helps to develop self-confidence.
Comics in school can be used in several organized activities taking place both inside the classroom/school environment and outside the school, where pupils can be creative, communicate more freely with each other, establish other relationships and then illustrate them with the characters they have drawn. We can use the comic strip technique in visual arts and practical skills classes, but with great success we can also use it in personal development or Romanian language and literature classes to put the stories created by the pupils into images, thus bringing them to life and creating a feeling of well-being and satisfaction by creating a different and original project.
Comic book education can express a different form of school learning through the curriculum than we are used to in the classroom. Using this technique, we will not sit with text and notebook in front of us, students will be encouraged to give free rein to their imagination, to collaborate actively with their peers, to express themselves, so they will be able to communicate with each other, making original

creations, but they will also be able to communicate their feelings and feelings, to communicate actively with the teacher.

We believe that the comic strip technique can be the link that produces the development of communication skills through an education in a good mood. We believe that, in order to achieve the desired results, the teacher must use the best teaching strategies, even if the way of teaching is different. The comic strip technique will enable pupils to communicate their feelings, feelings, desires, knowledge, etc. in a completely different way from what is proposed in the school curriculum, and they will be able to perceive this kind of expression/communication as a game, which a competent teacher will know how to enhance and which will lead to the achievement of the proposed operational objectives, in our case the development of communication skills and facilitating positive integration in the classroom.

Facilitating positive pupil integration in the classroom through the use of comics

Comics are part of the category of multimodal texts. Multimodal text contains two or more ways of communication: visual, linguistic, audio, spatial, gestural, involving interference between word, image, sound, movement and gesture. By using multimodal text in communication classes and beyond, we want to facilitate both the development of literacy and communication skills and create a positive mood and atmosphere for students in school. Because of this, some of the modal texts are already in the school textbooks, and pupils learn through cooperation in writing some of them (e.g. the poster). In the paper "Developing reading competence through multimodal texts", Aurelia Domnițeanu, from the perspective of PIRLS and PISA, explains the importance of developing reading competence in pupils through the use of multimodal texts, with comics being used mainly by 5th grade pupils. She concludes on this subject as follows: "Multimodal texts are worthy of attention because of their attractiveness and their prevalence in pupils' lives, and their share in the educational approach will certainly increase, because, as Monica Halaszi says, "since we are born, we read the messages on people's faces, we read colors. All this is reading" (www.lav2013.cnlr)

Research methodology
Objectives of the study
Due to the fast pace of the 21st century and the development of technology, the school and therefore the teacher must implement a series of teaching strategies that facilitate the development of learners and their positive integration in school. The present research aims to

test comic strips in the classroom at the developmental curriculum cycle, i.e. grade 3, for the positive integration of learners in the classroom. Through dyad work and collaboration between students we aim to achieve a positive mood in the classroom.

Hypothesis
The use of worksheets based on the comic strip technique and valuing content of a socio-emotional nature will lead to the positive integration of third grade pupils in the classroom.

Methods and tools used in the research
In the first stage of the research, the real situation of the class that was subjected to the experiment was analyzed before applying the worksheets based on the comic strip technique. In this stage a questionnaire "The EPOCH Measure of Adolescent Well-being Margaret L. Kern, Lisbeth Benson, Elizabeth A. Steinberg, Laurence Steinberg University of Pennsylvania and Temple University" was administered to third-grade students on aspects concerning their well-being in the class they are in and the degree of integration in the class, as well as their relationships with peers and teachers in the class. This stage was necessary because before applying the intervention it is necessary to know exactly the correct, clear and real situation of the class in order to prepare and develop the right tools adapted to the level we want to reach.
A specific test was administered to determine classroom well-being based on seven main types of items that were tracked:
      - Group membership
      - Group cohesion
      - Self-esteem
      - Confidence in own strengths
      - Determination to solve the proposed tasks
      - Awareness of the need to learn
      - Relating to classroom teachers
The collected results were analyzed to facilitate the preparation of future activities that were prepared and used to carry out the science experiment, in order to positively integrate the students into the classroom and create a sense of well-being within the group.
The worksheets with elements based on the comic strip technique were used for two weeks in the third grade with 20 students, following the steps, structure and characteristics of the method mentioned above.

Research sample
To test the hypotheses, 20 third grade students from the Theological Baptist High School of Arad will be included in the research. The

school in which the student's study is considered to be an "average" and "good" school. All students were assessed in the ascertainment and post-test phase.

Description of the contingency plan
The formative experiment took place during two weeks of school. Students in the experimental group solved worksheets based on the comic strip technique, working in dyads and in groups of five students, cooperatively solving the worksheets and tasks. The tasks were different, with students having to complete lines based on the proposed drawings, to draw some fragments of texts studied in the Roman language and literature classes or based on compositions or role plays written by them.
The learning situations have been created with the aim to produce a change in students' behavior, to induce a feeling of well-being in the school environment and especially in the class they belong to. "...., the particularities of learning from the point of view of learning situations lead to behavioral changes in students in several ways: as interference situations - a permanent process through which the student is taught to learn and how to learn; as performance reporting through which students are motivated and prioritized; by experiencing interaction, communication, practice experiences that are predetermined by teachers and by the relative stability that shows that the behavioral change produced by learning is lasting". (Roman, Balaș, 2014).
In order to develop the students' belonging to the group, they were divided into groups of five and, based on the reading of the book "Asterix and the Tour of Gaul", they were given work tasks; these consisted of role-playing and dramatization. The teamwork gave them a better understanding of how valuable their qualities are and that everyone is different, but by working together they achieved good results.
Another assignment the students received was worksheets based on the comic strip technique. The task was to fill in the bubbles and cartridges left unfilled within six or eight boxes representing a sequence in the lives of comic strip characters. This task was auspicious as the students killed in dyads, they had the opportunity to create their chosen character's lines, identifying with the character and expressing in this way some feelings they may have repressed before.
At the end of the intervention, students were again administered "The EPOCH Measure of Adolescent Well-being Margaret L. Kern, Lisbeth Benson, Elizabeth A. Steinberg, Laurence Steinberg University of Pennsylvania and Temple University" questionnaire and then we compared the students' results at the beginning of the experiment with the final results to confirm the experimental hypotheses.

Research results

The research activities were carried out in class during the school day, using worksheets based on the comic strip technique. At the beginning of the experiment, the students' degree of integration was tested using a questionnaire "The EPOCH Measure of Adolescent Well-being Margaret L. Kern, Lisbeth Benson, Elizabeth A. Steinberg, Laurence Steinberg University of Pennsylvania and Temple University", the scores received were processed and analyzed in statistical software. Data collection took place over two weeks.

The questionnaire "The EPOCH Measure of Adolescent Well-being Margaret L. Kern, Lisbeth Benson, Elizabeth A. Steinberg, Laurence Steinberg University of Pennsylvania and Temple University" was structured based on seven main types of items that were tracked: group membership, group cohesion, self-esteem, confidence in one's own strengths, determination to solve tasks, awareness of the need to learn, and relating to classroom teachers. The answers to the questions are according to the degree of satisfaction, ranging from not at all agreeing with the statement to total agreement.

Twenty students, 8 girls and 12 boys from the developmental curriculum, grade 3, were interviewed. Some limitations were related to their understanding of terms that are not common to some third graders, but which were explained to them with tact and patience.

The main objective of the research was to find out the degree of integration of students in the developmental curriculum cycle, i.e. grade 3, in the class they are in. Participants were chosen from a single class to test how each of them felt in the same school environment.

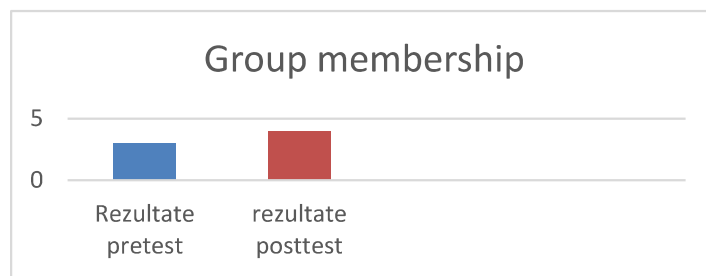The analysis shows the following results:

Figure 1
Group membership

Regarding group cohesion we received the following answers:

My class works well together

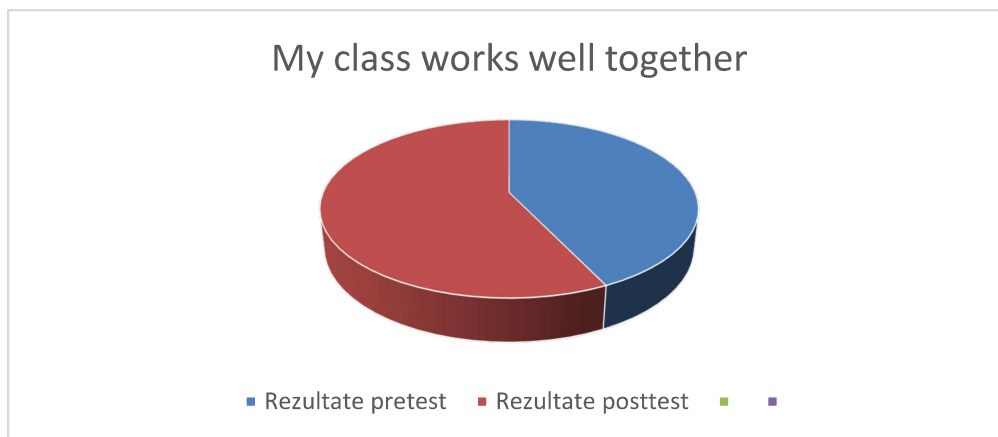■ Rezultate pretest   ■ Rezultate posttest   ■   ■

Figure 2
Group cohesion

We wanted to see how the students also related to themselves before the experiment took place. The results showed us that there is still some work to be done in this area too, but unlike the girls, the boys have higher self-esteem.
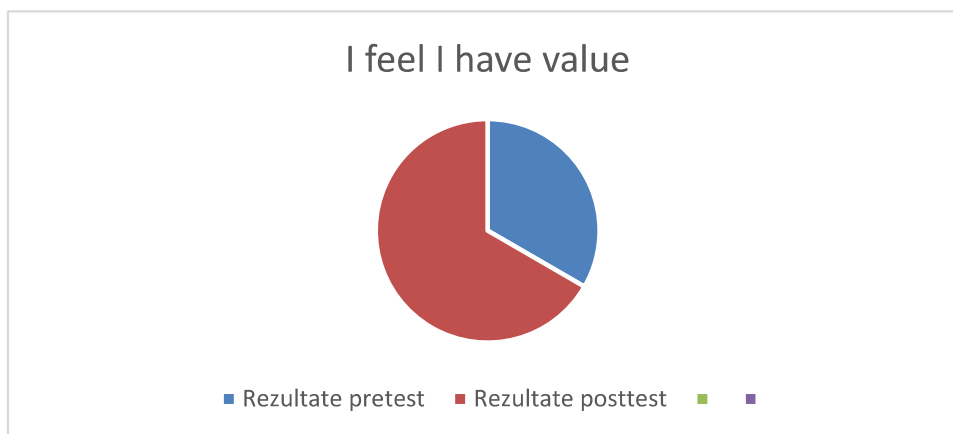
I feel I have value

■ Rezultate pretest   ■ Rezultate posttest   ■   ■

Figure 3
Self-esteem

In terms of self-confidence, it was found that students are confident even when faced with unforeseen situations, but have trouble staying calm when faced with difficult situations.
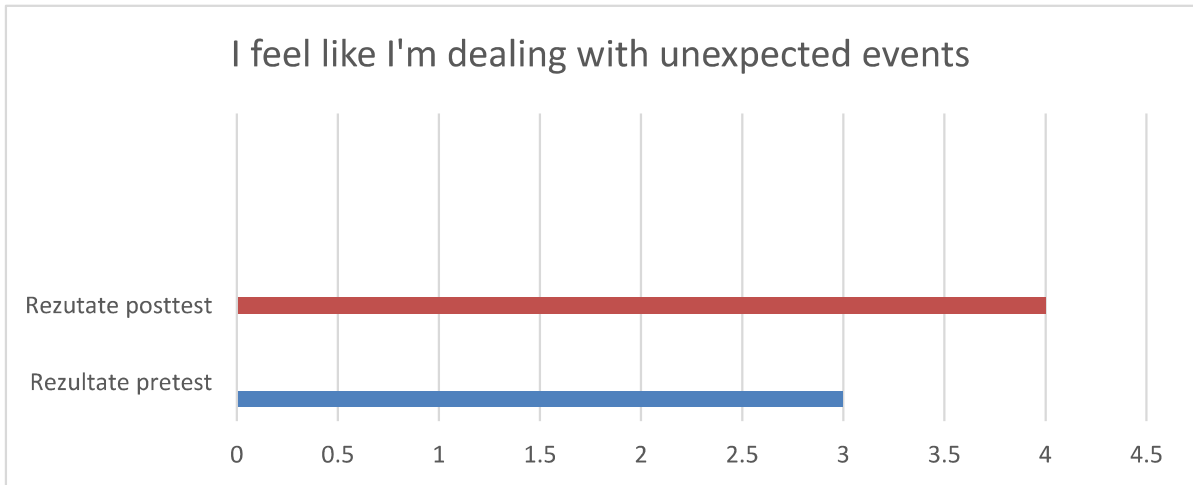
Figure 4
Confidence in own strengths

A fifth element tested with the questionnaire was to see how determined they were to solve the tasks they were given. Here it was found that girls are more conscientious than boys, but they also participate in solving tasks.
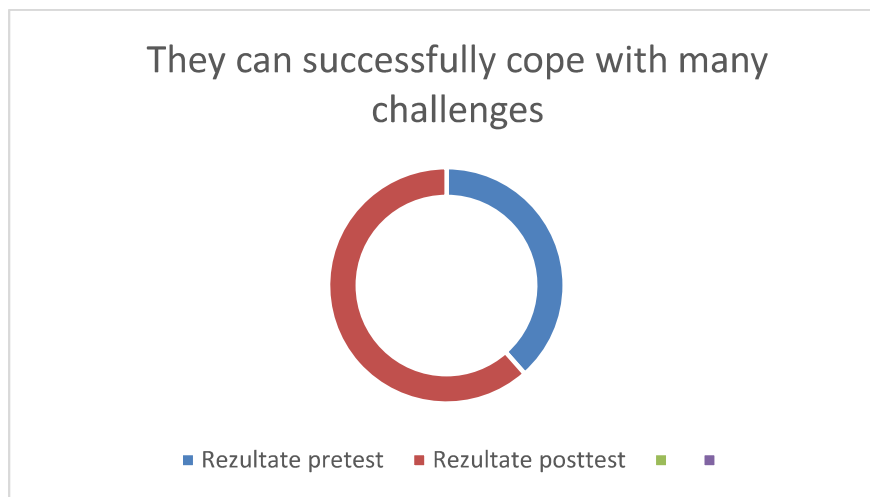

Figure 5
Determination to solve the proposed tasks

Another very important element in our research was to see how aware they are of the need to learn, whether they like the learning activities they have in class and whether they are aware that the learning activity is a preparation for their future. It was gratifying to see that the third graders are aware that they are learning for themselves.
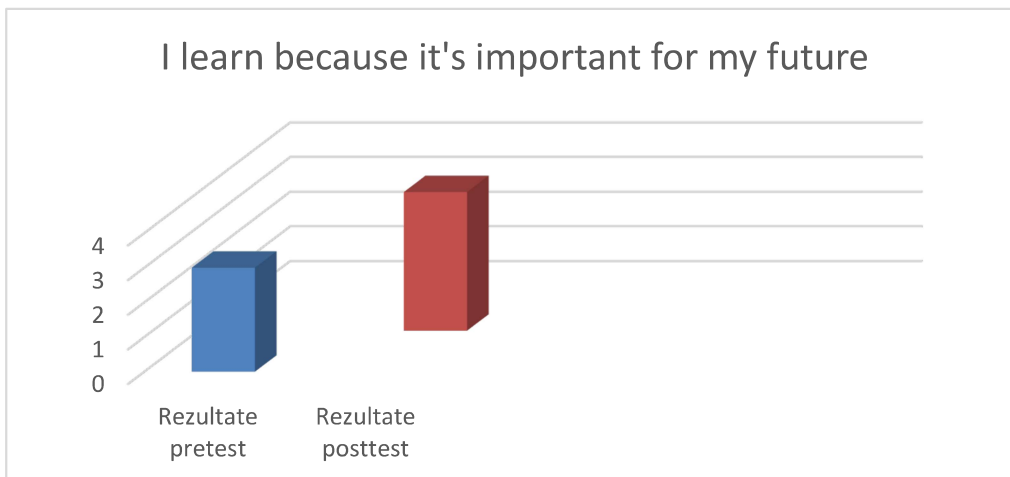
Figure no. 6
Awareness of the need to learn

At the end of the questionnaire, we wanted to see how they relate to the teachers in their class and whether they are aware of the moral and intellectual support the teacher gives them. With one exception we found that students know that they are supported by their teachers and that they put credit in each of them.
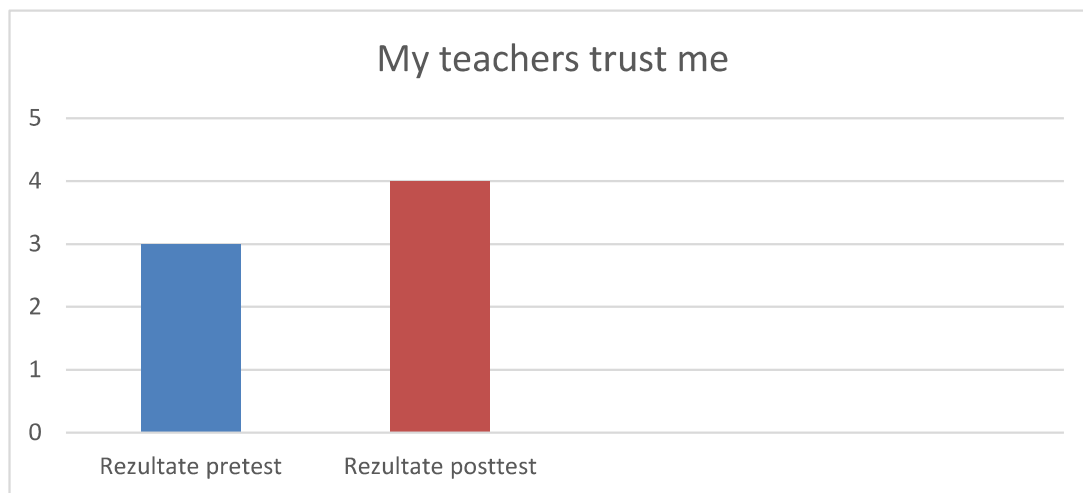

Figure 7
Reporting to classroom teachers

In the second stage of the experiment, during two weeks, in the Romanian language and literature and A.V.A.P. classes, students were given work tasks to solve either in dyads or in groups. The tasks consisted of worksheets based on the comic strip technique.
At the end of the two weeks the questionnaire "The EPOCH Measure of Adolescent Well-being Margaret L. Kern, Lisbeth Benson, Elizabeth A. Steinberg, Laurence Steinberg University of Pennsylvania and

Temple University" was administered again. We found that there were rewarding changes in students' well-being in the school environment and empathy for classmates, with students appreciating teamwork that led to greater unity and trust in their peers.

Conclusions
In order for students to have the required training profile at the end of the developmental curriculum cycle, grade 4, the teacher must use various teaching methods and strategies, actively involve them in learning and in their own training. Non-formal education gives pupils the opportunity to develop values, skills and competences that are different from those developed within the formal education structure. "The teacher who facilitates non-formal activities needs to be more flexible, adaptable and quick-witted, as well as enthusiastic. " (Roman, Coşarbă, 2020)
In the article and the research, I have presented above I have come to the following conclusions:
        - The use of the comic strip technique has brought added value to the Roman language and literature classes;
        - Working in dyads and small groups students understood their belonging to the group;
        - Group cohesion was formed when students had to solve tasks outlined in worksheets based on the comic strip technique;
        - The worksheets based on the comic strip technique were designed to make pupils more responsive to each other's needs and aware of their creativity.
One rewarding thing was that pupils were aware from the start that they were learning for their future, but also that teachers were invested and confident in their ability. By focusing on their learning power, creativity, drive, students become more involved in their own education.

Future discussions
Following the analysis of the research we have done; we would like to implement an optional program based on the comic strip technique in the classroom next school year to develop communication and literacy skills in 4th grade students. "Non-formal activities are designed by teachers, based on educational purposes, formative and informative knowledge, characterized by flexibility, having the quality of optional or optional activities" (Roman, Coşarbă, 2020).

Refrences
Bocoş, M., Gavra, R., Marcu, S.,(2008), Comunicarea şi managementul conflictului, Editura Paralela 45, Piteşti.

Bocoș, M.-D. (coord.). (2016). *Dicționar praxiologic de pedagogie.*
    Pitești: Editura
                    Paralela 45.
Bocoș, M., Jucan, D. (2010). Fundamentele pedagogiei. Teoria și
    metodologia
curriculum-ului. Repere și instrumente didactice pentru formarea
    profesorilor. Ed. a II-a. Pitești: Editura Paralela 45.
Bocoș M. (2002). Instruire interactivă. Repere pentru relecție și
    acțiune. Cluj-Napoca: Editura Presa Universitară Clujeană.
Chiș, V. (2005). Pedagogia contemporană. Pedagogia pentru
    competențe, Cluj-Napoca: Ed. Casa Cărții de Știință.
Coșarbă, E. M., Roman, A. F., (2020). The Motivation of Primary
    School Teachers regarding Non-Formal Activities. European
    Proceedings of Social and Behavioural Sciences, 104.
Deaca V. Mircea, Revista Cultura nr. 330, 30 iunie 2011
Dignath, C., Büttner, G., & Langfeldt, H. P. (2008). How can primary
    school students learn self-regulated learning strategies most
    effectively? A meta-analysis on self-regulation training
    programmes. Educational Research Review, 3, 101–129.
Dughi, T., Roman, Alina Felicia, (2012), Dimensiuni psihologice ale
    învățării, Editura Universității "Aurel Vlaicu"din Arad.
Egerău, A. M., Coșarbă, E. M., Torkos, H. (2022). The value of formal
    education in the personal development of primary school
    pupils, 10.24250/jpe/1/2022/AME/EC/HT. Journal Plus
    Education, 30(1), 34-52.
Grăjdeanu, Mihai-Ionuț, (2022), Comics Didactic. Literatura română în
    benzi desenate, Editura Didactica Publishing House
Roman, A., Balaș, E., (2014). Proiectarea situațiilor de învățare
    școlară, Editura Eikon, Cluj Napoca
Torkos, H., & Coșarbă, E. M. (2023). Outdoor education as an
    interface between traditional and modern learning approaches: a
    curriculum-based analysis at core curriculum stage in romania.
    Journal plus education/educația plus, *34*(2).