

THE CURRICULUM – EDUCATIONAL PROJECT

Anton ILICA

Faculty of Educational Science, Psychology and Social Sciences
"Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad, Romania
anton.ilica@yahoo.com

Abstract: *Each individual experiences or not the change of a lifetime. In both situations, the individual's personality turns into a developing project which is constructed and deconstructed as human due to its ability to adjust to constant changes and social situations. The man's paideic evolution is marked by other peers intervention and their attempt to make him desirable for a society which continuously expresses its mentality and behaviours. Man experiences education through specialized institutions developed by the society. Man is thus constantly subjected to influences thanks to various models. In this article we try to prove that any individual evolves based on a personality development programme but also influenced by the social-cultural context and his ability to adjust.*

Keywords: *curriculum, paideia, educational ideal*

1. A Curriculum. The term „curriculum” has one of the most dramatic pedagogic destinies. The term curriculum has been adopted by pedagogical vocabulary after pedagogy became known as “education sciences”. *Pedagogy* – as education science– *methodology and didactics* are developed and evolve around the concept of *curriculum*. The semantics of this term – too easily accepted by the basic pedagogic vocabulary – still gives headaches to theoreticians and by derivation to educators. An honest answer to the question „*what is a curriculum*” would start with “in my opinion”. The *Curriculum* has become an operational concept of European pedagogy since 1950s and Romanian pedagogy started using it after 1990; pedagogues have not managed to overcome the difficulties of using the word in educational purposes not even after two decades. „Abusive use and misuse” of the term „curriculum” has not allowed it to gain sufficient scientific legitimacy so as to be included in the basic linguistic corpus of “education sciences”.

The word has been borrowed from the American pedagogy with a certain pedagogic significance. Europeans have rediscovered its Latin origins as a neutral noun with the letter *u* stressed (the one in the middle of the word) and with the plural form *curricula*. The first observation refers to the Romanian language's inability to adapt it to its language system (Romanian

is a phonetic language, we read words the way we write them. Keeping the word with double consonants and the Latin plural in (*curricula*) allows speakers to use it in strange combinations such as: curriculum, curriculae, curriculumului etc. The plural form *curricula* produces strange linguistic combinations which contain grammar errors: *curricula academic* (academic curricula), *curricula educationale* (educational curricula), *curricula profesorilor* (teachers' curricula) etc.

Secondly, the word has lost its whole and main semantic Latin flavour. Originally, it meant “*running in circle*” as a race between horse-drawn chariots in Roman circuses. Then the adjective *vitae* was added to *curriculum* (*curriculum vitae*), which means „the path of life”, namely the man's becoming from birth to death including his education. With this meaning, *curriculum vitae* identifies „lifelong learning”, with *paideia* from the Greek thinking. *Curriculum vitae* (CV) would mean man's life from birth to a certain point and in pedagogical terms, the CV would refer to an individual's overall learning experiences. Thus, *curriculum* would be almost synonym to *paideia*, as educational becoming of a harmoniously developed man; the curriculum comprises all learning and educational experiences (institutionalized or non-institutionalized) irrespective of age. The concept is regarded quite reluctantly by the Romanian epistemic and practical area of education and the author of this study shares the same opinion. However “*although there are many who consider the term curriculum to elaborate, forced, redundant and useless in the Romanian pedagogic vocabulary, it is recommendable to use it both from epistemological reasons, linked to the evolution of contemporary pedagogy, and from pragmatic reasons (the curricular development in the Euro-Atlantic area involves unity and coherence, including in conceptual terms). The effort of understanding this term along with the accompanying pedagogic ideology is rewarded by granting access to the approach, planning and application of instructive-educational models adapted to the modern world*”¹. One cannot find reasons to exclude the word from the basic pedagogic vocabulary due to its international coverage. Thus, through curriculum we shall understand two realities: **process** of training/ developing the personality (1) and **programme** of training / developing personality.

2. The Curriculum and the educational ideal. From a curricular point of view, the main question stated by pedagogues and didacticians is: how can a person be educated so as to be useful to the society, without diminishing too much the personal satisfactions of his / her existence? Each society has “ennobled” its requests towards child / teenager education by identifying a

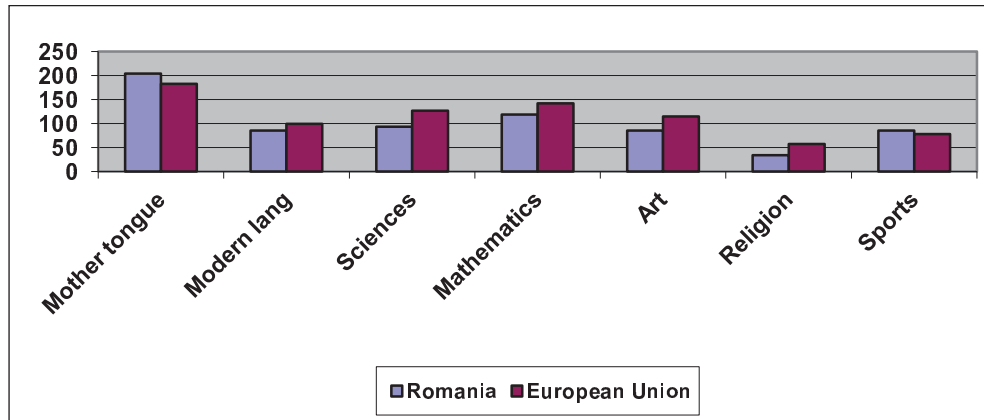
¹ D. Potolea, N. Manolescu, (2006), *Teoria curriculum-ului*, Curs pentru învățământul rural, Ministerul Educației și Cercetării, București.

curricular perspective synthesized in the educational ideal. *The educational ideal* is the reflection of a personality project (ideal, so virtual) that society (by its social interests) desires for the individuals, so as to serve its concerns for identity protection and existential security. An *educational ideal* – as a fulfilled abstraction for a personality – becomes a fundamental prerogative of the educational institutions. In schools and universities the type of personality – aimed by ideal – is configured by means of two “curricular” documents: basic and normative.

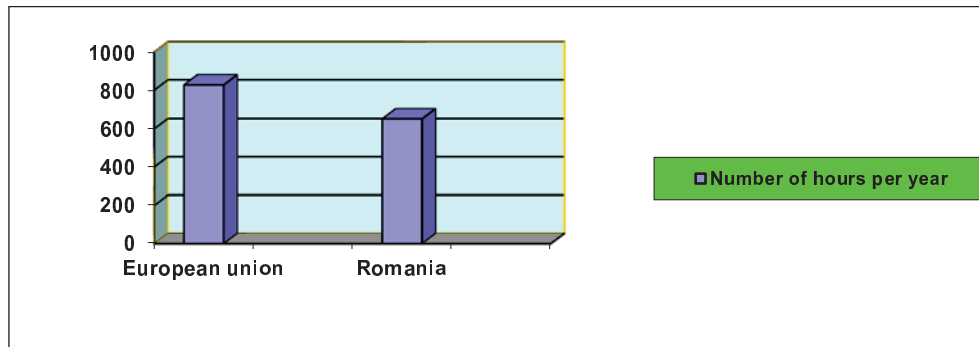
First of all, *The Curriculum* contains affective, rational, behavioural, physical, aesthetical, moral components capable of being amplified in a harmonious personality. Thus taking into consideration the fact that mathematical abilities are compulsory for fulfilling cognitive intelligence, this subject is represented from kindergarten till high school graduation, in a certain percentage. If we aim at the formation and the development of patriotic feelings, the subject *history* is contained in the *Curriculum* for so many years and hours as to configure their quality (and quantity). The diminution in the number of hours for a certain subject / its absence from the *Curriculum* is the consequence of an educational policy. For example, the lack of art education in high school education derives from the perspective of the educational policy due to which teenagers can reach the ideal aimed by the society without art education. The diminution in the number of hours of physical education expresses the perception of social and political decision-makers regarding the configuration of youth personality. This situation is represented in the number of hours assigned for psycho-motric and physical development.

This is a comparative view on an average Romanian and European *School Curriculum* design, for a 10 year old pupil:

Disciplines	European Union	Romania	+/- for our country
Mother tongue	183	204	+ 19
Modern languages	99	85	- 14
Mathematics	142	119	- 23
Nature sciences and humanities	127	93	- 34
Artistic activities	115	85	- 30
Religion and ethics	57	34	- 23
Sport	78	85	+ 7
No. of hours per study year	826, 7 hours	652 hours	- 174 hours



The comparative relation between the average number of hours per study year from our country and the European Union countries is represented in the following chart:



Second of all, *School Curricula* or *The Syllabus* detail the part of the pupil or student personality formation – development project that ensures competences suitable for the targeted domain as well as some transversal competences (computer usage, acquisition of mother tongue and modern languages, acquisition of a learning style, and if such the case of a research style). The sum of all didactic operating effects in the *School Curriculum* represents the acquisition that fulfils the aimed personality profile. Unfortunately, knowledge distilled in the subjects of school curricula has representation in prefabricated products (through the so-called alternative textbooks) with a strong hue and cognitive expressivity. Simultaneously the designers of *Curricular Programmes* do not take into account the correlation of the fields of knowledge for an integrated learning. Knowledge and abilities are autonomous, as identified by the famous “streets metaphor” (each field of knowledge walks on its own street and when it comes to a crossroad no one knows anyone) used by the pedagogue, Emil Păun.

The other curricular designs derive from the authority of the *Curriculum and Syllabus* considered absolutely compulsory. Together, they develop a ***Paideic Programme of Human Development***. They all are carried out under the auspices of an educational ideal that is the effluence of educational policies and of the configuration of social mentalities.

Historically speaking, the ideal of Greek fortresses was represented by *Kalokagathia*, meaning that a young man was educated in the spirit of *truth*, *goodness* and *beauty*, namely education aims at developing a tender heart, a mind oriented toward discovering the truth and a beautiful body capable of admiring the aesthetics of reality. This harmony was named *paideia*. In ancient republican Rome, the educational ideal was represented by the apophthegm „Mens sana in corpore sano”, linking the mind and the body through health. In other words, only in a healthy body can exist a healthy thinking. “Health” for the body and thought contains the Greek *Kalokagathia*, namely, the adjective “*healthy*” refers to the health of the relation between truth and mind, moral behaviour and respect for the body, environmental and natural beauty. The educational ideal of the Middle Ages involved formation of young virtuous people with knight dignity and respect for faith. The educational ideal of the Renaissance is represented by the universal man, by developing absolute personalities all these by rethinking the educational ideals of Latin and Greek Antiquity. Modernity motivates its educational ideal by encouraging the assimilation of eternal values (goodness, truth, beauty), of specific values (freedom, equality, legality), of personal values (courage, dignity, fraternity) as well as of certain collective views (faith and nation).

In conclusion, ***the educational ideal represents the most abstract form of curriculum that aims at developing a profile of wishful personality with a community’s aspirations.***

The curriculum agglutinates systematically the values a society believes in. A civilised society and especially a responsible one does not afford to ignore setting an *educational ideal* – that indicates its orientations toward a set of values that represent it. This society aims at bringing up the youth in the spirit of certain values capable of defining his/her personality and cultural identity. Action virtues acquire an epistemic representation within the *curriculum*. They aim at developing “ideal” personalities, desired by the *society*, passing on its cultural “genes” (traditions, values, rituals and symbolic representations) as well as forms of civilization capable of ensuring a certain standard of civilization and existential comfort. Consequently, such a *curricular project* is *point zero from where each child’s education within a certain society starts.*

National societies assume the determination of a curricular ideal. But each family cares for their child’s education, thinking about his/her future.

The statement “I want my son to be a doctor” is a projective identification of a curricular ideal. So, educational ideal can be regarded as a projected curriculum, aiming at coagulating a personality according to adults’ wishes, they being responsible for a child’s growth and education. After all, educational ideal identified in the curriculum contains supreme values that guide a community or a social organization. For the time being, the concept of curriculum, as used by educational sciences has various meanings, which derives into a certain notional ambiguity. As programme for school activities, curriculum refers to all components of educational process: plan, programmes, textbooks, strategies, evaluation, etc. Now, we use the meaning of content selection for didactic disciplines, namely syllabi and didactic programmes, actually the only normative documents. A curriculum should respond to an educational ideal, particularized to prospective configuration of social – economic reality. Educational ideal as a generation’s option remains a Sissif –like aspiration. Its determination – consequence of an educational policy – relates to the prospective requirements of a society whose configuration and dynamism are anticipated. Frequently, we deal with an education for adaptation than with an education for change.

By particularization of the desired type of personality, we mean a derivation process and paradigmatic connections:

- Paradigm of a future society;
- Paradigm of an educational ideal;
- Curricular paradigm.

In a world of constant changes, *the curriculum* ends quite quickly in conflict with the demands of the society. If in previous societies the progress was too slow and culture seemed stuck in eternal values (apparently), today, the future is approximated by the very configuration of the present. Therefore, curriculum involves not only anticipating a future it prepares the children for, but also a projection of the future.

3. Pansophia. The word “pansophia” can be translated as “universal wisdom”, being used by the philosophers of brotherhoods as one of its objectives. From a pedagogic perspective, *pansophia* is a concept that aims at a standardized and global curriculum, valid worldwide. A *pansophic curriculum* would be a projection of personality valid for any community, irrespective of its civilization, culture, geographic spreading. “Pansophic curriculum” means what the pedagogue J. A. Comenius stated almost four centuries ago, regarding the “construction” of an educational system valid in all times and applicable to “all”. („*Didactica Magna*”, 1652)

The idea of creating a European environment of superior education, by the regulation of Bologna, would be the first step in promoting *pansophia* for the time being, only on a formal, organizational level. Harmonizing education stages, as well as promoting unitary requirements for a set of

curricular programmes confirm the option for a *pansophic curriculum*. Its consequence upon national societies (for now) will lead to the development of a unitary contemporary society with loose identity borders. Border cultures – so strongly encouraged to develop under the protection of intercultural manifestations – will lead to premises for their dilution into a single, multicultural civilization (as a stage), that builds a world without national, cultural, religious differences, to a world independent of race, history, geographic area or cultural authority.

Such a pansophic “curricular project” (encouraged by the UNO, UNESCO, Amnesty International, Universal Masonic Organization) would benefit of a worldwide, unitary educational curricula standardized at global level (the idea of “globalization” and “universal village” are part of those conceptual tools that maintain such a project). It is difficult to predict communities’ reactions - even from a demi-millennial perspective – just as unpredictable as the development of a Babylonia that would divide again “languages” and nations. As a remarkable Romanian pedagogue used to say “*ideas never die forever*”² (Ion Negreț), humanity is too agitated for one to anticipate a long term evolution. *Human condition* evolves as “*a interconnection between the psychological structure and the biological structure in the social over-structure*”³, as a close relationship between all three variables (psychological, biological and social).

The new challenge regarding a humanistic and global pedagogy refers to a hypothesis: how can a man be educated so as to reach his goal in the world? But the world how is it so as to be able to prepare the individual to enjoy the satisfactions and what can it pretend from an individual?! But maybe *the world* is too loaded with uncertainties, potential threats, and an overwhelming source of unpredictable problems?! Human perfection is a Sissif – like activity because the world expresses itself in its own monotonous existential dramas (though configured by people) follows its predetermined destiny.

A global curriculum that would eliminate educational differences between people remains an aspiration of humanity itself. The metaphor of Christian sacrifice is allegorical. In those times when in the Terrestrial garden - so carefully taken care of by God – wickedness appeared, god sent His Son to give people a model of educational sacrifice. The supreme sacrifice, the

² In the volume „*Teoria generală a curriculumului educațional*” (2008), I. Negreț-Dobridor develops in comments and updates the opinions of several specialits, especially Americans, regarding the promotin of a „*global curriculum that would guide and assure a global education*”. He brings arguments for the (ideal) opportunity of global education „*to change the individual into kosmopolites and papaideumenos, namely into a citizen that possesses the huge world culture and warmlynd respectfully embraces all national cultures of this world*” (p. 350).

³ N. Mărgineanu, (1973), *Condiția umană*, Editura Științifică, București, p. 34.

homicide and then the Ascension created the premises for a change. Christianity would spread, would become *global paideia*, promoting love instead of vendetta, love instead of hatred and fraternity instead of selfishness. When human condition is threatened, a global, pansophic curriculum would reset human dignity, totally or like E. Fauré says, „*tout homme et tout l'homme*” („whole humanity and whole man).

The path between *paideia* and *pansophia* metamorphosis the human being's humanity and gives him the chance to fulfil his goals, to pass on to future generations the hope that makes man's garden look pleasant to God.

References

- Ciolan, L. (2008), *Învățarea integrată. Fundamente curriculare pentru un curriculum transdisciplinar*, Editura Polirom, Iași.
- Cristea, S. (2008), *Curriculum pedagogic*, Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, București.
- Ionescu, M., Bocoș, M. (2009), *Tratat de didactică modernă*, Editura paralela 45, Pitești.
- Ilica, A. (2013), *Discurs pedagogic contemporan*, Editura Învățătorul modern, Chișinău.
- Kelemen, G. (2013), *Pedagogie școlară și preșcolară*, Editura Universității Aurel Vlaicu, Arad.
- Mărgineanu, N. (1973), *Condiția umană*, Editura Științifică, București.
- Negreț-Dobridor, I. (2008), *Teoria generală a curriculumului educațional*, Editura Polirom, Iași.
- Niculescu, R. M. (2010), *Curriculum între continuitate și provocare*, Editura Psihomedica, Sibiu.
- Potolea, D., Manolescu, M. (2006), *Teoria curriculum-ului*, Ministerul Educației și Cercetării, București.