

METHODS OF DESIGNING INTEGRATED LEARNING

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Abstract: *The article approaches learning from the perspective of formal operational criteria transferred in learning situation contexts. Thus, we have analysed learning as possibility, as social-cultural manner and as specific postmodern operation. However, learning is insufficiently adapted to a efficient educational system.*

Keywords: *learning situations, postmodern curriculum, learning strategies*

1. Postmodern education and integrated approach of learning

Postmodernism in education as existential-humanistic approach brings along a new paradigm which places the person, the individual, the pupil and actor in its centre. The International Commission for Education in the 21st century draws a few conclusions about the necessity of reconsidering the status, level and instructional role of schools and teachers. The conclusions have pointed out that schools and teachers “have lost their position of leaders in the educational training of children and have to face a new challenge: that of making school more attractive for children” [1]. If curricular reformation has as main objective the substitution of teacher’s school to the pupil’s school then we can understand better the current status of educational act, which places the real, rational and sensitive pupil in the centre of its concerns: „we can talk about a return of the individual as actor of the social background and of a resurrection of pupil as person with specific-differentiated characteristics that need reevaluation; this is the dominant dimension of postmodern pedagogy” [2].

In terms of educational policies, general curriculum of a global society tries to widen the access to education but also to increase the relevance and quality of educational acts. Thus, one should identify a relevant set of knowledge which youth needs to develop through cognitive learning processes and strategies, through skills and values which are based on the fundamental human rights. They should also benefit from experiences required by lifelong learning. The teacher becomes: „the initiator and organizer of the process but the proof of the activity’s success or failure are the pupil’s results” [3]. We notice that the interpretation of postmodern

statements in Romanian pedagogy maintains relics of modern school; the teacher is again in the foreground and traditional responsibility of success and failure is linked to performance not to personality built through quantitative mechanisms and through cognitive learning strategy.

A first conclusion should be drawn, namely that school pedagogy discusses postmodernism without understanding its meaning. The initiative character is kept but stressing out the pupil's interests and the efficiency of its actions. Teachers have to prove qualities linked to adapting to changes, development of competences, creativity in highlighting each pupil's abilities, all without benefiting from professional reconversion.

Another conclusion reflected in the framework of this pedagogic project or curricular reformation describes the theory of shape without fond or of change without modification. Other educational systems understood that "change without moral goal is change for the change's sake", and „if teachers became agents of changes with moral skills they would make a difference in the children's lives, no matter what they have acquired; they would also help children in the development of their ability to cope with changes" [4].

To sum up, an ethos of teaching staff is also necessary; it should promote responsibility, improvement and change as well as openness towards curricular act, classroom activity, stimulation of communication and collaboration with students etc. Thus, interaction remain theoretical, curricular connections are maintained in the area of reflection, transversal act becomes a happening some meet randomly while others don't.

German pedagogy insists on the intervention of highly qualified trainers, who are capable of stimulating learning; Anglo-Saxon pedagogy emphasizes the need to develop cognitive strategies adapted to the society. Meta-competences trigger openness towards learning for both teachers and students: „Postmodern pedagogy stresses out the organization of situations and contexts in such a manner that they would riot learning" [5]. In a simple rhetoric, shifting the emphasis from teacher to student in the curricular reformation cannot be done without overcoming classical, traditional strategies of approaching education. We cannot ask teachers to use postmodern educational strategies if they are not trained in this respect. The development of competences is a key term in the educational process. H. Siebert shows that it is necessary to replace the concept of qualification with that of competences, which „are achieved live" in social and professional contexts through experience. Competences are developed through the interaction of organized educational acts with informative ones; through the mixture of social influences with intentional training activities".[6]

Another idea supported by the new theories about human intelligence (Multiple Intelligence Theory– H. Gardner and emotional intelligence– D. Goleman) argues that school favours an environment where children learn and practice social behaviours and adjustment behaviours. For instance,

theoretical knowledge is not enough to develop social behaviours; one needs to develop explanatory and adjustment behaviours in relationships with pupils and other members of the teaching staff: „Teachers and educators will try to develop practically notions referring to aspects such as (interdependence, dignity, freedom, justice, rights, nonviolence, mutual respect, respect towards others, empathy, negotiation, cooperation, discovery and overcome of prejudices. Such climate cannot develop as such. Teachers need to experience real and positive communication by themselves because pupils are receptive to what their teachers are and how they live as well as to what they say or teach their pupils. Communication involves the organization of school and classroom in a way that favours for such experiences”. [7].

Daniel Goleman has analysed teaching activity in terms of emotional intelligence and has drawn the attention on the fact that the role of school should not be reduced to its rational and cognitive dimension. This dimension develops the emotional side maybe even without the teacher’s awareness. This aspect has been neglected by the curriculum and thus „school turns into a place where children grow up learning basic lessons about life, lessons that they cannot learn anywhere else” [8]. Another consequence of postmodern school emerges from this assertion, namely that teaching activity should develop the emotional side of human personality, too. This has been a constantly neglected aspect.

2. Curriculum and cultural evolution

The new curriculum stresses out what school lets you learn and understand practically. Quantitative explanations predominated in the past but today, critical theory stipulates that the role of school is no longer the development of „unitary cultural tradition” which would promote a non-critical culture, acceptance of authority and unselective dominance. Thus emphasis is placed on the development of pupils` personality regarded as socially integrated peers, who overcome the dominant tradition by cultivating „civic practice and participation” (Giroux., H. 1988) of all actors of social life.

There are also voices that argue against postmodern curriculum by using a justified criticism. A weak point consists of its lack of coherence, constant search, fragmentation, lack of pragmatic horizon and application examples. Thus, it is seen as a mere hybridization of modern curriculum through a “huge distortion of reality and a reductionist criticism of the domain” [9].

An international study conducted by pedagogues from 28 states and edited by W. Pinar (2003) started from the legitimate idea which places curriculum in „a cultural construction its significance depending on the manner educative-political tradition is built” (idem, p. 6). In terms of globalism, it is stated that: “*No curriculum can exist isolated and no*

curriculum can ignore international development" [10]. Aesthetic, sociological and political premises of postmodernism have become central curricular pillars in the USA, Canada, New Zealand, Finland and Sweden. Special attention is given to research areas in the field of arts, hermeneutics, phenomenology, political theory, theoretical and practical feminism. A new sociology of education emerges in Holland and Norway under the influence of curricular development. It focuses on the humanistic approach to pupils' needs, interests and aspirations. In Great Britain, curriculum focuses on humanistic subjects not on school subjects. There are two key questions which pedagogues seek to answer: what should children know and what should they become?, considering that the aim is the mediation between knowledge and career in the attempt to ensure social order.

3. The design of learning situations which favour the development of competences

There are numerous definitions of the term competence but in procedural terms they all share functional terms such as: „a set of resources” – cognitive, motivational, affective etc. related to knowledge, knowledge of the self, attitudes and skills, action schemes, habits that „mobilize” dynamically so as to be able to „face” problem situations in learning, problem solving, projects (Le Boterf, Paquay, Rey, Wittorsky etc.).

Models for the development of competences can be built. They are the consequence of learning activities and learning situations in which children are placed. A learning situation which favours the development of competences relies on sequential, gradual involvement of ten types of activities:

1. Facing problem situations (new and challenging);
2. Exploration of resources (available through learning);
3. Acting internally and externally
4. Interaction (for research, confrontation, analysis, understanding, etc.)
5. Reflexive activities, attitudes
6. Co-evaluative activities
7. Structuring new acquisitions
8. Integration in systems, inter- and transdisciplinary context (to practice new long-term acquisitions)
9. Activities of constructing meaning and
10. Preparation of transfer possibilities.

Obvious progress has been registered in the development of formative aspect of learning but this area remains restrained to „learning to know” and „learning to do..”. Aspects such as „learning to be” and „learning to live among others” remain at the teacher's decision.

Most teachers take into account the way pupils learn and cognitive strategies when planning learning situations. But how often do we ask

ourselves what do pupils feel about what they learn and about the learning situation?

Does the curriculum offer plenty experiences of affective learning so as to claim that school develops emotional intelligence and prosocial behaviour? It is possible that due to poor emotional stimulation or to a negative emotional stimulation, which generates discomfort (competition, summative evaluation) students look for other ways of expressing intense, mostly negative affective emotions?

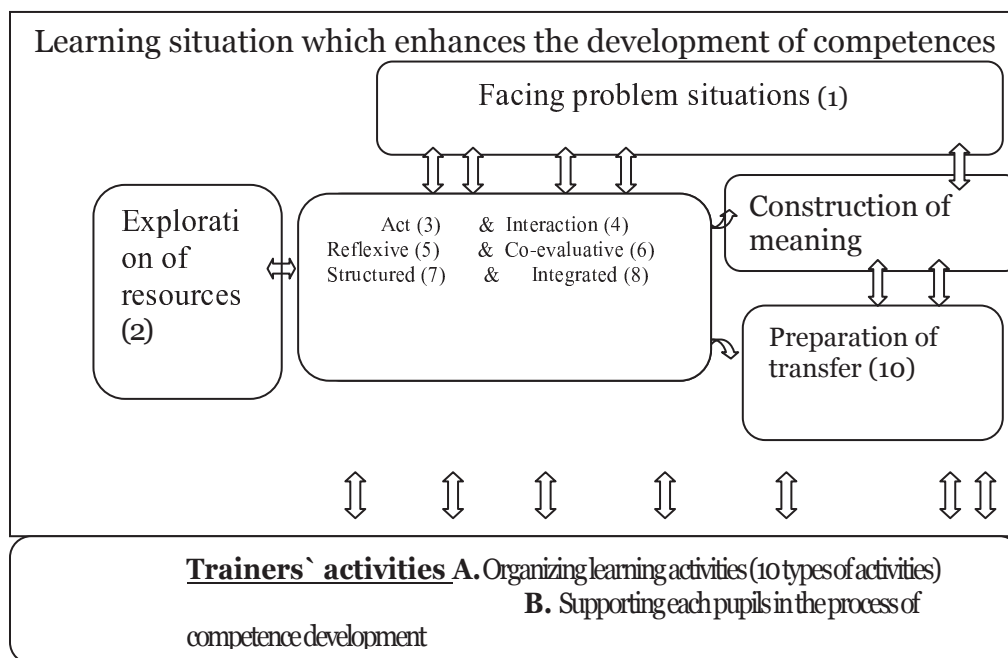


Fig. 1. Stages in learning situations

How long and how often are scheduled and organized activities for the development of affective expression and creative interaction? These rhetorical questions may be assumptions of an ascertaining study but their aim is only to support the idea that the fundamental element of school is the relationship and interactions between learning centered people; schools must shift from a competitive structure to a team-based organizational structure (R. Slavin, S. Sharan, S. Kagan, 1995).

4. Conclusions

„Educational curriculum and the content of education have periodically changed according to new values in culture and other fields – science, art, moral, religion, etc. [11]. The global approach to education has been reorganized since all human actions are analysed from at least two

perspectives. They reflect the general social dimension: „as cultural results and as interactive processes” (ibidem) which lead directly or indirectly to internalized values, to learning and training. The qualitative level of teaching-learning-evaluation style are the results of culture: culture in one’s field, psychopedagogic and methodological culture and general knowledge. In other words: „the issues and evolution of education and learning cannot be separate from the issues and evolution of culture; educational policy and educational model cannot be separated from the cultural model of a society” [12].

To conclude, since communication and culture go global, learning takes the same pathway. It becomes integrated by extending its school applicability beyond school. Learning was given up its post-aristocratic character of elite and academic type and has developed a new ontological, gnosiological and axiological basis. It also involves ideal ethical premises – of constructing a free and intelligent type of personality.

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