

ESSAY- EDUCATION IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

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Abstract: *Education ensures nobility to man dressing up the genetic heritage with cultural attires. Only education has the power to change humans and society, as stated by Rabindranath Tagore: all issues of the mankind find their main solution in education. The main function of education is to turn educational influences into competences. The paradigm of educational reforms is reflected by the following objective: to ensure a real democratization of school; to provide equal learning and training opportunities for each trainee/learner according to his/her own psycho-physical potential; to strive for equal results besides equal opportunities; to support an optimal development of personal potential. School must offer equal opportunities as an expression of the right to education and also promote a pedagogy which assigns meaning to learning.*

Key words: *education, school institution, competence, building, reform, postmodernism*

The strong core of any educational institution is created in such a manner that it would make a contribution to the development of human personality along all its stages from birth to the end of one's life. Any individual needs education in order to develop from childhood to adulthood, thus turning from a biological being into a social being. The first educational institution is the family. A family is organized according to social standards and its primary interest is the child's well-being in terms of physical and mental care, education and training for adult life. The development usually focuses on the child's inner nature [1]. Further, education is carried out in an organized manner by the school. School offers a proper environment for the development of a child, its training as social being. The entire educational process is focused on the child's development on all levels and all sides of its personality in a proper educational environment. Education is based on a curriculum adapted to the children's age from kindergarten to university.

Certain authors believe that education and school are in times of crisis; some even mention the phrase „the end of education”[2], which is only a metaphor. Education will come to an end only when humanity as species comes to an end. As long as people live on Planet Erath or other planets, education will maintain its unquestionable role in the development of human personality. The belief of any educator and trainer is that school will also continue to last under a form or another. If we want school and education to overcome difficulties and the crisis, the educational process should improve its quality, support learners in their training for life according to their abilities, interests and motivations and also support brilliant minds who approach great ideas and have the courage to go beyond limits and explore the unknown.

Education is an important mission which can be completed only in an institution with professionals, who have a goal under constant modernization and revalue of positive experiences [3]. Modern didactics has implemented student centeredness. This approach involves changing the educational process in the entire educational system. „The all-knowing magister” has become a partner in the educational act along with the trainees. The subject and object of education are in a process of continuous mobility; the teacher is not only the learner`s educational partner but also a facilitator, mediator and mentor.

Postmodern pedagogy states that learners should be treated as individuals with full rights to education, responsible and in control of their destiny, capable of accessing knowledge and training in full freedom of expression.

Society is also a partner of the educational act, the community regarded as a third party is «the third teacher », besides teachers and parents. Thus all three educational partners: society, local community and family should support school in its strategic endeavour of training future generations. It is its undeniable moral and social duty. Family, school and community train the young generation for society; the future of the entire nation depends on the seriousness and thoroughness with which the young generation is trained so as to be able to take over the prerogatives of the society`s social-cultural and economic life.

Pedagogy, an educational science has well determined goals, namely to provide education under all its aspects through a complex educational process. It is subjected to legislation and norms and relies on all what pedagogic sciences have discovered along the years in terms of educational training. Each society tends to create an ideal; current educational policies aim the development of a socially well-prepared, competent individual, who possesses enough knowledge to face the challenges of his profession. The individual has all tools that he needs to constantly access information, his

abilities are developed according to the inner nature and he has desirable attitudes and pro-social behaviours. Pedagogy has an extraordinary strength given by its ability to develop, its interdisciplinary extension [4], the open dialogue with border disciplines, and revalue of positive experiences. Born out of an interrogation on the educational phenomenon, it experiences an important development due to relevant scientific analysis, components mostly efficient: teaching-learning-evaluation. This constant development gives a better explanation of categories such as instruction, training, self-training and the nature of learning process which is under constant expansion.

Pedagogy is open to new approaches, hypothesis, suggestions and meditation, which have conferred it an epistemic dignity. Not only the openness to collaboration with other disciplines and fields but mostly its closeness to culture and society with its institutions and methodological diversity and paideic practice turn it into an educational science. The postmodern era brings some fresh air and a less rigid and canonical approach of pedagogical sciences. Teachers and professors as school servants have a vocational profession. Apart from knowledge, teachers need qualities and abilities which are based on love for children, care and altruism, patience, empathy and knowledge transmission skills. Teachers, irrespective of their teaching subject, transfer knowledge through a proper methodological register. Therefore, besides high quality theoretical training, teachers need also pedagogical training and a proactive and empathetic attitude. Specialists consider pedagogical, field related and communicative competences mandatory for teaching profession. Pedagogues offer educational theories, pragmatic instruments that teachers can successfully use with their learners. Success is measured in results and results are quantified by different means. Responsibility is shared by all factors involved in education from decision makers in educational policies and theoreticians in educational sciences to practitioners in schools and the learners` families.

School, a first rank institution, needs to reorient education towards training and especially towards the training of learners in terms of eternal axiological benchmarks: the good, the truth, the beautiful and specific values: respect for others, respect for work, responsibility, tolerance, acceptance, civic sense. etc.[5]

The education process conducted in schools comes to meet these demands: education centred on learners` skills and interests, their abilities and needs, flexible curriculum, contents adapted to real life situations, practical use of information, motivation for knowledge. Contemporary pedagogy encourages individual educational paths for each learner according to his/her skills. It also promotes objectively assessed results that would motivate the

learners' thoroughness in their field. Change towards new pedagogical paradigms that would revolutionize school is a challenge for teachers. Authentic education requires stimulating teaching strategies that engage learners in the learning process, rise their interest, make them willing to be involved in their own training, and seek for educational alternatives in and outside school [6]. The educational process from schools needs reconsideration and new, dynamic, activating, stimulating and motivating formulas should be taken into consideration. A better practical orientation of school and extracurricular activities would make the training of youth for real life more efficient. Authentic training prepares learners to face the challenges of the society they live in, favours on-the-spot adaptation to daily life changes, teaches them to approach life with optimism, seek valid solutions, approach new ideas with courage and seek professional and social fulfilment. Pedagogy plays an undeniable role among sciences. It reforms school and future teachers, brings novelty in the educational process, stimulates the teaching staff towards a thorough and updated knowledge of modern teaching methodology. Pedagogues should offer viable solutions to educational situations which are placed at crossroads. The need for education calls for a reformation of the educational system. An important pillar of this system is school and its attendants. The teachers' mission is to identify ways to increase the efficiency of school activities and to redeem prestige to school. Pedagogues must reconsider the principles of postmodern pedagogy and implement suitable strategies for the young generation. Pedagogical principles should become the starting point for educational reformation and high quality teaching.

Educational reformation experiences changes fast nowadays. It aims the change of educational policies so as to rebuild *School*, but mostly to reform teacher training according to current trends. Each society and culture has a social model that calls for specific professional and pragmatic training of individuals. Postmodern society sets as new educational vision/philosophy [7] a future oriented educational system which would consider social and individual educational needs. Then it would direct them towards the need for intense development and national and international problem solving needs. They are considered a social and cultural priority nowadays. The fundamental function of education is to change educational influences into competences. *Competence has been defined as a person's ability to meet the requirements from a certain field* [8], so competences will offer learners a social status by actively involving them in the social life as producers of goods and as social progress triggers [9]. If man were born with adult possibilities, education would no longer exist. This is one argument which favours education as essential aspect in shaping human personality to its highest peaks. Who is responsible for reaching these goals? The answer is society, school and

ultimately teachers, irrespective of the level they teach at: pre-primary school or university.

The necessity of rethinking education involves teacher reformation besides the reformation of formal and non-formal education. Teachers should be able to face present and future social challenges. *Instruction and education have been pictured since Antiquity as means by which a usually still obedient subject is trained to respond properly to any stimulus s/he might face* [10]. In modern society, knowledge was equivalent to science and was considered important as such. Encyclopaedic knowledge was real knowledge and only those who possessed it were considered highly educated. In postmodern society, knowledge becomes pragmatic, functional, useful. One learnt not only to „know” and acquire information from different fields but also “to be” and most importantly to be competent [11]. Competences (knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes) are necessary to apply what has been learnt in daily life situations. A competent individual uses productively his/her theoretical knowledge. Besides knowing and knowing how to do something it is necessary to be. *The search for a new educational order is based on scientific training which is an essential part of scientific humanism* [12]. Postmodern education has a pragmatic desideratum, adapted to the new society. Learning means putting theoretical knowledge into practice and having efficient results from a productive perspective.

A concept operated by the new philosophy of postmodern education is lifelong learning. According to the UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning, the concept stands for all *means available for people of any age, gender, social and professional background that they can use in lifelong training, with the aim of fully develop their abilities and efficient involvement in the progress of the society.* [13]

The role of education is not limited to mere instruction. School should be regarded as a centre of real, practical activities conducted together so that human personality is shaped according to social actions and changes. Educational activity is an activity with finalities and its main subjects are the teacher and the learner, the facilitator of learning and the one who learns. Both are involved in a system which consists of many outside factors: family, friends, mass-media, social environment as a whole [14]. In terms of psycho-physical and personality development, education plays a central role besides other components such as inborn heritage and social environment, because through « education and training»[15] the individual learns new behaviours [16]. Starting with skills and abilities and continuing with knowledge and intellectual operations, everything is acquired through learning. Various authors have added valuable ideas to the implication of education, highlighting

its permanent dimension: *insertion in real life, not just training for active and responsible existence* (René Maheu)[17]; the individual's possibility of becoming *the subject and instrument of his own training as much as possible by means of several forms of self-training* (Jacques Delors) [18].

New information technologies [19] already play an important part in informatics programmes used in the educational area. Marching on the idea that individuals will be able to continue their lifelong training, the goal of continuous development is to improve the attitude towards changes, the desire to be open and accept changes. The concept of lifelong learning draws attention upon the fact that educational influences should aim the wholeness of human beings. Thus we encounter the notion "integrated lifelong learning", the word "integrated" referring to the integration of all educational institutions and forms (preschool education, school education, adult education) and to the integration into a unitary system of all forms of social education (formal, non-formal and informal). Lifelong learning is a integrative process which integrates all educational influences into a coherent and convergent system. The influences are exerted upon individuals in varied and specific ways throughout their life.

Lifelong learning should therefore be understood as a way of organizing education and it bears a pragmatic character. Computers come to support lifelong educational programmes. Apart from the term lifelong learning, there are other terms that occur more and more frequently *knowledge based society, e-learning*. The concept of *knowledge based society* is the motto of borderless learning endeavours. Sometimes classical education is expensive, hard to align as approach to the pace of practical life; it wears out morally faster. Therefore alternatives are welcome and educators can enhance training programmes using *e-learning* for all those interested.

The last two decades have promoted a perennial humanistic desideratum, namely *everything for the man, client orientation, quality management*. In terms of learning relationships where each partner of the educational process is a client in relationship to others, *e-learning* is considered a way of improving the quality of the teaching act. It fully meets the requirements of adjusting the educational process to the client's needs, in this case the learner's. The eternal philosophical dispute on the *purpose of the individual and the goal of life* is very good represented in the current consumer society. The new approach aims hedonism, an easier life which is oriented towards the fulfilment of immediate needs in a short period of time and with minimal effort. Previous generations have focused on duty and therefore a new approach should be adopted that would *cancel the distance between modern teachers and postmodern students* [20]. The share of those interested in

comfort and pleasure as buyers/consumers is increasing in the last decades and can be witnessed at teenagers. It is known that learning requires sustained effort, sacrifice. These elements are considered out-dated if we observe the behaviour and attitude of new generations. Therefore, pedagogy must undergo a reformation process if it wants to achieve its goals.

The phenomenon of *e-learning* uses many comfortable methods with those who are interested in learning. Lack of teacher/learner contact, lack of group activities and its virtual character are key points for *e-learning*. However, these aspects have been considered fundamental for the learner development in classical pedagogy. Online tutoring is a differentiated educational alternative which is suitable especially for learners with exceptional intellectual giftedness. *Equality of chances* as part of *right to education* claimed by any social environment involves real learning opportunities for each individual besides access to education in a formal environment. *E-learning* is unanimously considered the solution to this desire.

Contemporary pedagogical thinking stresses out the importance of fundamental paradigms such as integration and competence.

One aspect is highlighted by the paradigm of educational reformation which has the following objective: to ensure a real democratization of school; to offer equal educational, training chances for all children according to their psycho-physiological possibilities; equal results; to enhance an optimal development of personal potential.

New pedagogical orientations refer to *inter, intra, multi and pluridisciplinary education*. The tendency is to develop educational programmes that integrate different disciplines in order to develop global abilities. Emphasis is placed on the development of competences which favour the integration of knowledge through a pedagogy which assigns meaning to learning. This type of pedagogy should also blend functional and structural activities [21]. This new approach tries to give an answer to a fundamental criticism addressed to objective-based pedagogy: division of study matters into separate (closed) objectives. Competence-based pedagogy do not focus on mere acquisition of knowledge. It starts from objectives which need to be achieved so that learners know “how to do” something at the end of the lesson, semester, school year or educational cycle. We need to take into account the risk of assimilating “savoir-faire” abilities [22] which won’t be able to handle real situations if they aren’t correctly assimilated. These abilities should be based on efficient learning which starts from the learners’ qualities and their potential.

An *inclusive school*, a school for everybody with education for all, which takes into account the features of each learner should start from the

premises that each learner is a unique personality, who learns in a certain pace and style and thus needs learning differentiation.

Here we refer to everybody in general, to all learners, including those with special needs, disabilities and to the gifted. Education for all involves access to quality education for everybody and has two general objectives:

- *Ensuring access to education for all children, irrespective of how different they are and how far they are placed in terms of personal development from what society considers normal. Participation means first of all access and then finding ways for everyone to be integrated in the structures that facilitate social and individual learning. Everyone should make a contribution and feel active. Access involves physical possibility of benefiting from educational influences offered by the society (family, school, community), ability to integrate in schools and respond favourably to its demands.*
- *quality of education refers to finding the dimensions of the process, of learning contents and quality of educational agents that would support everyone`s learning, ensure success and turn the system into an open, flexible, efficient and effective one [23].*

Gifted children, children with special skills and abilities need special attention from their teachers. The educators must take into account their mental structure which is different from other children and also their special needs. Children with high skills must be protected by specific educational measures due to their special personality (asynchronous development) as stated by the European legislation [24]. They need special attention from the pedagogical society in their integration into a coherent educational system. Lack of a proper background can lead to loss of their creative potential and can lead to alienation, failure, and school dropout as well as antisocial behaviour [25]. Therefore, gifted children must benefit from proper educational conditions, which would allow them to reveal their possibilities and use them to their own benefit but also to the benefit of the society. Wasting talents means wasting human resources. The legislation [26] promotes and support human excellence and talents in all fields: science, art, management, *leadership*[27]. A critical part refers to training specialists in *gifted education*. In the context of adherence to the European Union, the development of educational system has become a national priority. A society that respects differences of any type supports also special programmes for gifted children which encourage their personal development [28].

Curricular reformation promotes a new idea for the selection and organization of contents by a curricular approach of education. It brings about changes in one`s conception about school, about planning and organizing

learning. This new approach implements a totally different understanding of learning. Emphasis is no longer placed on contents but on competences while learning results become more important than learning goals. The new methodology of curriculum urges educators to select, use and design all stages of teaching activities according to objectives and in a balanced manner [29]. School is no longer the scene for a mere teaching-learning process, or knowledge assimilation process. It becomes an institution which ensures an overall development of learner's personality. Current programmes promote individual study and the development of originality. Learning focuses on fundamental concepts pertaining to new learning theories and is oriented towards new educations according to contemporary challenges. Foresight specialists predict a difficult and changing future for schools. They also anticipate that it is in our power to determine a desirable future as stipulated by the foresight for higher education in Romania "*in 2025 society will be centred on the individual and his needs that would become more and more complex and varied. Diversity, equality of chances, creativity, flexibility, ecological spirit and transparency will last as important values of a society in the foreseeable future.*" [30] Education as main promoter of development in a society is called to find the most appropriate solutions for the socio-cultural progress of humanity.

The target is building a better future for the mankind. The perspectives of a knowledge based society have been drafted in Lisbon in 2000 and improved in Stockholm. The perspectives support a multidimensional and multicultural society, capable of activating the economy. Therefore, youth that would perform in such a globalized and multicultural society need competences that make them capable of high performance. Only the competitive ones succeed in a knowledge based society. Only those who are capable of on the go adjustment to changes, who have general, basic and specific competences required for good professionals are able to perform well. The Romanian educational system has undergone tremendous changes in the past 20 years. The integration into the European Union has brought about new dimensions to the development and reformation of the educational system as a whole. Adherence to the European Community causes deep mentality changes in terms of education at all levels. Institutional reforms try to align to the demands of European education. These reforms involve many conceptual and factual changes which lead to the reorganization and restructure of traditional ways of thinking and acting (that still try to resist) and to the enforcement of new orientations that are not easily accepted. Reformation means sustained effort of all involved factors, either subjects of education or beneficiaries. Any change is distrusted as it implies the destabilization of a model of thinking and acting.

The reformation of education in Romania after the integration into the European Union and thus adjustment of national educational policies to the requirements of European ones has caused qualitative changes. For instance, higher education underwent an assessment process which ranked universities according to performance: education centred universities (only with undergraduate studies), education and research centred universities or education and art centred universities (with undergraduate and master programmes) and advanced research and education universities (with undergraduate, master and PhD studies). Each study programme has also been ranked based on European quality standards, designed by The European University Association. The European University Association (EUA) elaborated a network of interconnected universities, partners in educational process and deeply involved in advanced research. Assessment was conducted *“according to the quality of teaching and learning in universities, quality of scientific research, relationship with the external environment and institutional ability of reaching objectives, adapt to changes and modernism”*. The Ministry of National Education stated that this type of assessment wanted to be *„a tool in favour of universities that would help them centre their activity much better*. The positive aspect of these events is that each university has to revise its mission and its offer so as to use its resources to the benefit of the society. The mission of universities is to create economic, social and spiritual culture. On the other hand, its specific mission is to train specialists in various social fields and therefore universities should comply with local and regional labour market demands. Faculties and departments should revise their course offer according to labour market requirements and adapt curricular standards according to the National Qualifications Framework in Higher Education.

In this respect, curricula must be compatible with the standards of National Qualification Framework. When revising the curricula, special attention should be given to knowledge transfer by finding a balance between fundamental disciplines, field related and complementary disciplines as well as internships.

Thus the concerns of educational policies are oriented towards initial training without neglecting continuous, lifelong training. Social constraints call for professional training in all fields. Competitiveness on the labour market has different causes such as: restructuring, advanced employment standards, etc. Under these circumstances, professional training should be reconsidered. Students' diversity requires customization of academic system. Undergraduate studies imply initial training, which is a complex process of building a set of competences which permit learners to act flexibly and creatively in the field of their professional training. Competence is *a person's recognized ability, skills of practicing a profession and deciding upon something based on thorough*

knowledge in the field s/he acts. Competence [32] sums up a set of integrated knowledge, skills and attitudes which are necessary to the subject in the handling of situations. It involves adaptation, quick problem and project solving, proper decision making. Competence is considered a contextualization of global acquisitions at high performance level (knowledge, skills, abilities) which are used in a particular context. A competent person is authorized to conduct a certain activity due to his/her performance level in a certain field, certified by a specific authority.

The individual's adaptation to changes is needed as we live in a continuously developing society which is subjected to constant changes determined by development in science and technology. Institutions which offer education give everyone, especially adults, the possibility to continue training in their field of activity but also professional reorientation and retraining. These adjustments to their own training are essential to their reintegration in economical-social activity. Thus we notice that adult lifelong training has become a necessity of the contemporary world. It is an action of reshaping individuals according to the requirements of current society.

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Copiilor și Tinerilor Supradotați și Talentați pentru susținerea primului Program Național Gifted Education lansat în România. *IRSCA Gifted Education* înseamnă motorul educației tinerilor supradotați și talentați. Activitatea *IRSCA Gifted Education* este recunoscută de WCGTC, World Council for Gifted and Talented Children și ECHA, European Council for High Ability, cele mai înalte foruri la nivel internațional și european în domeniul educației copiilor supradotați. Legea educației tinerilor supradotați și capabili de performanță înaltă a fost adoptată pe 13 decembrie 2006.

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