CREATIVE APPROACHES TO THE UNDERGRADUATE TEACHING METHODOLOGY

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Abstract: The contemporary society is characterized by changing the evaluation criterion of the very level of development of various countries. Thus, countries such as Japan, the USA, and Germany are now leading the global hierarchy due to their ability to innovate at the high tech level. 'The human implications of changing the criterion of development are dramatic, because, in order to innovate at the high tech level, there is no need for a creative elite, but a creative mass' (N. Radu). Under these circumstances, the issue of cultivating creativity arises in entirely new terms. The social progress is unthinkable without the creative activity of those who produce material and spiritual values. Therefore, one of the major goals of the contemporary education, with the best chances of ensuring the progress of the society, is the cultivation of the creative spirit, an essential dimension of the human personality profile of today's society. Creativity is considered 'the highest form of human activity'. Therefore, it is understandable the specialists' constant concern for proper delineation of the meaning of creativity in terms of the contemporary society, both in general and in particular, in school activities.

Keywords:to adapt/adjust, deliberation, suppleness of the solution, curiosity, vocational branches, promotion of the elite, autonomous thinking.

1. **Introduction**

Education, like any other human activity, through its intentionality, has an outcome which, due to the terms it is formulated in, targets the formation of the human personality profile. The educational outcomes are reflected mostly in models of personality, types and human profiles and are best expressed by what is called *educational ideal*. 'The educational ideal of the Romanian school consists of the free, integral and

harmonious development of the human individuality, in the formation of the autonomous and creative personality'(Law of National Education no. 85/1995, article 3). Expressed in pedagogical terms, 'the educational ideal expresses the image of the human personality, at the highest level, according to the requirements of a society established in a certain space and time; it is the model requested by the society, one that summarizes the society's maximal requirements of the model.' (N. Oprescu, 1996, p. 89).

In the new educational content curriculum, namely in the educational programmes, the objectives are the first component of their structure. All can and should be brought under the heading of 'capabilities', suggesting that their formation takes place through the contribution of all the components of the educational process (teaching, learning and evaluation) and of the specific offer of each school subject. This is further proof of the involvement special didactics in achieving the aims of education.

2. **New indicators in formulating the outcome of the undergraduate education**

The ideas expressed above could lead to the finding that the contemporary society does not need 'encyclopaedists', but *educated specialists*, who have mostly competences and intellectual capacities which enable them to respond to the major commands of today's society and, especially of the future one.

Such competences and capabilities are cultivated, to varying degrees, by all subjects, as they are thus a fundamental object of study of all special didactics, among which the social sciences and humanities are at the forefront. One can speak neither about subjects that are more 'formative' than others, nor about their differentiation in terms of the competences and the skills they practice.

These formative valences, which are strictly necessary for the formation of young personalities in the spirit of the contemporary society's demands, have already been suggested and argued when these features were analyzed and commented on. Here they are concentrated in synthetic formulations with wide openings, leaving the possibility to see what each subject can bring in particular, finally materializing in outcome specific to each subject:

a) *The capability to adapt/adjust (readapt/readjust) to the extremely dynamic situations, which are inevitable,* makes professional mobility to become a prerequisite for the social and professional integration and reintegration of the individual.Adapting to the specific requests of a society at a given historical moment necessarily imply the ability to transfer information (which thus does not remain isolated, suspended, as an end in itself) and to use it in new, varied situations. And the correlation and integration of the information in new structures and systems are real solutions for the training of the skills and capacities

of adjustment and readjustment to the new situations imposed by society. All the subjects offer such situations, and the educational programmes highlight them in specific formulations.

b) *The capability to apply*, to use in new, real situations, the new acquisitions. Such a capacity also facilitates the formation of the competences involved in the adaptation and re-adaptation, depending on the degree of mobility of the real phenomena and processes studied. In the educational process, no matter how great the satisfactions provided in the act of knowing are, nothing is learned, however, only for the pleasure, for the sake of knowing; moreover, all the acquisitions made in the form of various kinds of information become a good conquered through the learner's own effort only in the process of application, of their use in real situations, thus bringing a qualitative and quantitative increase in meeting the established objective. Any new acquisition, especially if it is obtained through the learner's own effort, finds its field of application in various new situations. In addition, this 'field' should be established even in the formulation of the operational objectives for each lesson, in a way that takes into consideration their insertion into students' behaviour.

c) *The capability to learn by their own means* – the science of learning; in other words, 'learning to learn' – for permanent education. Such a capabilityis closely connected, in general, to the communication skills, the scope of training being integrated in almost all the spheres of knowledge, of learning. The formulation of such capabilitiesand techniques (tools) of learning occurs in one form or another, in various ways, according to the specific field, in all curricula, starting with the primary school. By extension, in a concentric manner, they are retaken to an increasingly more efficient level during the whole period of schooling, at all subjects. Moreover, they are found at an appropriate level and in specific shapes and dimensions even during learning, of lifelong learning.

Here are some capabilities that can also be increased starting from the offering specific to each subject. First, it is necessary the formulation of some appropriate operational objectives, which through the use of appropriate teaching technologies turn these objectives into stable behaviour, which will be fulcrums for the students on their way to continuous learning. They will become setting objectives for the entire course of learning.

1) *The ability to perceive oral messages* expressed in the most simple and direct way; with a tendency to minimize it, it can be expressed as: *to know how to listen*, to understand and live the transmitted info; *to know how to grasp* the global (whole) meaning of a short heard message (mini dialog), a description of people, objects, actions etc.; *to know how to react appropriately* to different types of messages, etc. Of course, the great diversity of areas, of sources, of major themes, of subjects etc.

transmitted orally implies a corresponding specific receiving; it implies an immediate proper mental processing. And these operations are different from one broadcast source to another, from one subject to another. The diversity of the contents transmitted orally requires special training for their reception depending on the specific features of each message. It is the teacher's mission to engage students on how to listen to a certain message, according to both its content and the ways and channels through which it is communicated through the spoken word. Because, an oral message from, for example, the curricular area of 'Mathematics and Natural Sciences' is received differently from one belonging to the area of 'Language and Communication' or 'Man and society'. Even within the same discipline there are situations when both the oral emission and the oral reception show some specific notes that the 'listeners' have to identify in order to practice their ability to receive those messages.

2) *The ability of speaking* involves an exercise of mentally building (formulation of) some messages or sequences and to reproduce them in a free oral expression. It also requires the science of integrating the acquisition of vocabulary in own (original) statements. The circumstances in which a human personality is put in a position to express themselves orally and freely in the contemporary society are extremely diverse, from the composition and communication of programs, i.e. their logical and coherent argumentation, to the participation in 'negotiations' which involves making both some questions to obtain the desired response and the responses of the participants in the dialogue in order to be successful. It's an irrefutable truth that people who have greater capacity to express themselves orally, freely, are likely to be more successful in their actions. And the 'learning' of this ability is ensured by specifically exploiting each subject.

3) *The ability to perceive written messages* such as printed materials; bluntly speaking, it is the 'science' to read and understand the meaning of the printed messages. These messages are very spread despite the 'invasion' of audiovisual, of the very attractive means of mass information; their boom is proven by the lately increase in the number of the publishing houses, editorial offices of media outlets, through the increased circulation of books, magazines, newspapers etc.

Reading is an indispensable way of receiving a huge, immeasurable volume of information. Understanding and using in a formative way the messages transmitted via the graphic signs is a complex endeavour, with implications in the formation of some skills and capabilities engaged effectively and productively in the communication process. Therefore, teaching pupils to learn through the intercession of the book, the textbook, means teachers teach them how to use a book, how to understand the essential content of the printing text, because 'there is a real gap between knowing how to read and knowing how to

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learn, knowing how to explore the reading, to use appropriately this special means that is the printed text' (B. Schwartz, 1976, p. 157).

We might say that reading is a true instrument of the learning activity. For it to truly become operative, he who possesses it will have to be able to use it in the very different conditions offered by the printed world. The reality the book portrays takes a variety of forms and ways of expression, in terms of both content and manner of expression. This reality is reflected properly in courses, textbooks and other written (printed) works depending on how they are different. Therefore, the initiation of pupils and students in effective learning techniques, through the intercession of the book must be ensured according to the expression, the specific language used in each separate subject. Even for the disciplines of the same curricular area, there are differences from this point of view and the teacher must present them to the students accompanying them with appropriate explanations so that the learning through the intercession of the book to be truly productive.

4) The ability of writing. Compared to the oral expression, the written expression is far more complex. It involves, in addition to formulating correct statements, the graphical realization of the content of the communication. And besides, the real purpose of writing is to communicate, to draft, with the help of graphemes (the graphic signs of the letters), the content of the information expressed in different contexts, depending on the set objectives. The writing is used either to record the information transmitted orally, or to synthesize them and record them in different forms (notes, lecture notes, summaries etc.), or to edit various works of different scales, depending on the many circumstances requesting communication through writing. Even if the information received from various sources can be recorded by the electronic equipment, which decreases greatly the writing with graphical tools (manual, mechanical, electronics), the writing will long remain an instrument of the intellectual activity. Regardless of how it is recorded, the written communication represents a capability that requires rigor, an extra thinking effort, an effort of synthesizing the content, accuracy both on the graphics of the writing itself and in terms of spelling.In this respect, the written expression implies a much greater intellectual effort than the oral one. And this effort implies certain language specific to each 'subject' of study, a way of expressing that makes the 'beneficiary', the one who receives the written message, understand all the intentions of the author's thoughts, images, meaning of those expressed with the help of the graphic signs.

3. **Learning creativity**

Until recently, the trend has been to associate almost exclusively the process of creation with the concepts of 'talent' or 'genius' or special, even extraordinary, 'native endowment', so, as we can see it is

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about synonymous equivalences of the creative capacity given only by the hereditary information. Such trends could not be imposed because the act of creation should not be identified with or mistaken it for the native endowment; it is not a mystery, being tied, to a considerable extent, to work, mental effort, the conscious activity of the individual, which involves searching, deliberation, maximum neuropsychological consumption.

In the educational activity, the sense of creativity has peculiar shades, at least in that that, from the outset, it is not necessarily to form creators in the proper meaning of the term, whose creative products to be original and contribute directly to the progress of life and social activity. In teaching it is especially about the development of some capacities for knowledge that will become a foundation of the real creative process, when the young people enter the flow of work and productive life as creators of material and spiritual goods. In this sense, the question that arises now in education is the use of some methods and techniques in the work with students, allowing 'creative learning' (N. Radu).

Within the educational process, the students' product is not very interesting as a social value in itself but on the psychological level, the suppleness of the solution found to solve the school obligations; it is also interesting the extent to which the solutions of these issues produce a state of surprise, emotional feelings, into the learners, feelings which revive the desire and curiosity to discover other ways, other solutions, more elevated, more elegant.

Such school performance is only possible by calling on the intellectuals factors, starting with the spirit of observation and progressively to the complex forms of thinking and creative imagination. Such performances imply, necessarily, radical restructuring in the teaching methodology, creating such an appropriate atmosphere that students forget about tension, fear, fear of punishment or reprimand, an atmosphere conducive to communication, consultation, cooperation during the learning activity. In such an atmosphere, even the young people with tendencies towards passivity, unaccustomed to the intellectual effort, fall gradually in the intellectual work process, get a taste of solving the school issues; they release gradually their latent mental energies due to their desire to assert themselves. On such a path, we can speak of a creative atmosphere of a class or a social group, which can lead, ultimately, to 'the creation of the creator'.

To understand better the meaning that creativity has it is very suggestive the characterization, made many years ago, but appropriate even nowadays, by a well-known Romanian psychologist, Al. Roşca, 'People characterized by creative thinking get faster to new ideas and principles', 'get to discover new relationships between objects and phenomena, new methods or processes of investigation, to achieve new

artistic forms etc. Creative, from the individual psychological point of view, may be the thinking of an individual who gets to 'discover' things already known on an independent path. Creative is also the thinking of a student who solves a mathematical problem in a different way, perhaps more 'elegant' than the one from the textbook, or than the one presented by the teacher in the classroom, even if how the student solved the problem, it is not new to science'.

Next we would like to present without commenting a few thoughts, true aphorisms of some illustrious personalities of culture, because they support convincingly the above considerations: 'In infancy there is a freshness of imagination, unusual curiosity, a kind of poetic genius that grown up scholars or artists can find only with great difficulty'. 'Everything starts with poetry, but nothing gets done without technology. This is why poetry should be everywhere so present that the apprenticeship of mechanics does not exhaust the living source of creation' (G. Berger, pag.19). Creator is anyone in their trade or occupation unless they are content to do the mechanically what they learnt from their ancestors, but seeks to add to the place where they stay, the work they do something from their personality. The creative element should not be looked for only in the so-called higher activities; it can be found in any human being and activity.

What should be noted, on the cultivation of creativity in the educational activity, is that nowadays the view that any normal, healthy person can cultivate and develop creativity in a greater or a smaller degree is increasingly supported.

On the other hand, however, in any field, creativity requires some motivational and character traits, such as: high sensitivity for a specific area, developed interests, special curiosity, tenacity in the face of difficulties, positive attitude, confidence in the face of some reasonable risks (tests, daring), but not hazard.

The cultivation of the students' creative spirit can take place in all disciplines. In this respect, it is not about special methods used for the cultivation of the creative spirit, but rather by the use of the known ones which fall into the teaching strategies used in such a way that lead the students towards the learning activity, the very act of 'discovery' of new acquisitions, and especially of their creative application in practical reality. Moreover, determining the areas of practical application of the learning process gains by own contribution (effort) is a very appropriate means of stimulating creativity.

We expanded this theme of creativity on the assumption that it is productive that, through revealing how the issue of cultivating creativity in students works, we should suggest indirectly solutions that can help achieve this major goal of contemporary education; subjects of all curricula – 'Language and Communication', 'Man and Society', 'Mathematics and Natural Sciences', 'Technology' etc. – due to their unique objectives and contents, to the identification and explanation of some facts, processes and specific

concepts and due to providing connections throughout the system, make an important contribution to the cultivation of creativity.

4. **Conceptual and organizational guides of the New National Curriculum; their implications for the special didactics**

a) **Perspectives of the new type of undergraduate school**

The outcomes of undergraduate education, with its two segments, mandatory (primary – secondary) and high school level, spring from the educational ideal itself, formulated in the *Education Law*. These outcomes consider the personality profile that the education in its entire structure tends to form, according to the society's needs for its evolution. From this aspect, the outcomes of the undergraduate education, of high school in particular, call 'the formation of a graduate able to decide over their careers, to contribute to their own development intellectual and professional paths, to integrate actively in social life' (M.E.C., C.N.C., Methodological Guidelines *Language and communication*, 2002, p. 8).Next, in summary, there are a few details of the objective set out above, which apply to all the curricular areas: training the students' ability to reflect on the realities of life and human activity by linking and integrating the information gained from different fields of knowledge; valuing their own experience to form an optimal vocational guidance; developing and exercising the capacity of integration into socio-cultural groups, such as: family, friends, professional environment etc.; developing the key functional, relational skills to social success: communication, critical thinking, decision making, processing and use of complex information; forming moral autonomy, etc.

From the analysis, even a summary one, of the aims of the school at least two significant observations for educational practice can be noticed: the **domination of formation** focusing on capacities and skills, as well as the fact that, in a more or less degree, **all school subjects have their own contribution to the achievement of these objectives.**

In the same context, the methodological component cannot be excluded in having the outcomes to be achieved, with regard, in particular, to the process of teaching and growing the interest and motivation of students for their resolute commitment in such an endeavour. For this it is necessary a 'gradual diversification of the curricular offer, according to profiles and specializations for multiplying the opportunities to choose from'. In such conditions, the teachers should focus their entire effort to fulfil their role as organizers and mediators of teaching/learning experiences that the students practice.

b) H**igh school education and the future society**

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Under the conditions of the contemporary society, the undergraduate education should mark decisively the shift from an encyclopaedic learning, unattainable relative to the speed of multiplying of the information, to the use of some techniques and strategies that ensure information processing and conversion into behaviours dominated by functional capacities and skills.

Currently, due to the regulations established on the framework plans, the high school is divided into **vocational branches, profiles and specializations**, which allow a real diversification of schooling, according to the teenage students' interests and aptitudes, and a redistribution of the resources, so as to ensure the promotion of the elite on any of these branches.

c) **Curricular cycles, a new model of unity and continuity in the organization of education**

Lately, the research into the psychology of age and the learning theories have evolved spectacularly, especially as a result of the increasing focus on rebuilding and redefining educational aspects of the school ages. At the centre of the specialists' preoccupations are mainly the periods of childhood and adolescence.

The structure of the Romanian educational system, for more or less known reasons, has not kept pace with the results of the investigations made, including by Romanian specialists, in the psychology of learning, which ultimately required firm interventions in the formal structure of the system. The solution was to introduce **curricular cycles**, which has not disrupted the system itself, but brought the corrections necessary to ensure the unity and continuity of its segments.

Curricular cycles are periods of schooling, grouping several years of study, even different levels (stages) of school, which share both objectives and learning activities and content. The construction of these curricular cycles aims to ensure the unity and continuity of the educational process in all its structures, especially in terms of objectives, content and teaching methodology; which implies a transfer of the teaching methods, as well as the establishment of some explicit connections across the whole curriculum.

Next we will show how these structures are formed, with their names, names that suggest their specific objectives as well as the ways of achieving them.

The cycle called '*fundamental acquisitions*' consists of the preparatory group from the kindergarten (so called because it has as the fundamental objective to prepare the children from the last preschool group to adapt to the specific of the school activities) and school years I and II of the primary school.

The '*fundamental acquisitions*,' suggested even by the name of this curricular cycle, consider the assimilation of the basic elements of the major conventional languages: reading, writing (oral and written communication), arithmetic calculation, etc. by the children of preschool age from this group and the pupils

of school years I and II. It is about, as shown, by the initial 'literacy' of children. Another objective is to stimulate them to perceive, know and master the close environment. Such goals 'link' very well with the stimulation of the children's creative potential, imagination and spirit of observation. At the same time, all these objectives stimulate the growing motivation for learning, understood as a social activity.

The '*development cycle'* (school years III and IV of primary school and school years V and VI of secondary school) aims at the formation of the basic capacities necessary for the learning activity. These capabilities relate, among others, to: the practice of the correct communication, oral and written, including reading, in order to correctly receive the printed-written message; the development of language acquisitions to use the Romanian language, the mother tongues and the foreign languages, to correctly express in various communicational situations; the development of the abilities to communicate using different specialized languages; the development of autonomous thinking and of the capacity of integration in the social environment.

The *observation and orientation cycle* includes school years VII-IX and has as a specific objective to direct the students to freely express their future school and professional option. It tries to help students discover their own affinities, aspirations and values in order to build their positive self-image; form the analysis capacity of what is acquired through learning in order to move towards a particular professional career; further develop the capacity to communicate using different specialized languages; the development of the autonomous thinking and of the responsibilities related to the integration in the social environment.

The *thoroughgoing studycycle* consisting of school years X-XI aims at deepening the study into the chosen profile and specialization, providing, at the same time, a general education based on the school subjects of the core curriculum of subjects and the options in other disciplines.

The *specialization cycle*, consisting of school years XII-XIII (including the students attending evening classes), has as main objective the pre-specialization to efficiently integrate in higher education or in the labour market.

As it is relatively easily found, even if each curricular cycle has its own objectives, they are subscribed, each in its place, to the entire educational system, its structure having a unitary character. Among the specific objectives of each curricular cycle there is a natural continuation, and their achievement as a whole provides implicitly the attaining of the general goals of education according to the demands of the contemporary and future society, which will integrate the young people after graduating, and then for their continuous training.

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