

A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS IN THE CENTERS FOR DOCUMENTATION AND INFORMATION IN SCHOOLS

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Abstract: Recently emerged in the Romanian education landscape, the Centers for Documentation and Information (CDI's) represent to the teachers concerned with guiding students towards the miraculous world of information, a resource site and a working instrument easy to adapt to their age level.

The founding of CDI's targeted easier information and culture access, equal opportunities for students from rural areas and those from urban areas, for children from different cultural, economical and social environments; thus it is considered that both students and teachers have necessary information and documentation trained personnel. The CDI creates the conditions for self documentation and techniques of individual work, access to the new technologies and different sources of information thus a motor element in the fight against school failure.

It is self-explanatory that a coherence/interdependence among the different activities, organized in the CDI's, is imperative, so that they must complement each other, in order to offer the student a wide variety of options and situations that should complete its training and information, documentation and also cultural area. Each activity suggested and carried on with the students is a learning situation, regardless of the area in which we place it: cultural, pedagogical, communicative.

Keywords: education, Center for Documentation and Information, information, documentation, school

“Multidisciplinary resource center, documentation and information center offer to the students, the teachers and to the local community a formation, communication and

information space, a new educational technology experimenting laboratory, a cultural openness, meeting and integration place”. (Extracted from *Organizational and operational Guidelines of the Center for Documentation and Information, 2004*).

Closely related to “**The program of re-launching rural education**”, our country’s government has started, through the Ministry of Education and Research, in January 1999, a bilateral Romanian-French educational project in the rural areas, “**Informational Education in underprivileged rural areas**”¹. For this reason there have been numerous preparation traineeships in our country and in France, both for the teachers and for those in charge of documenting process.

The expected result was setting up centers for documentation and information in schools and pre-schools in underprivileged areas, in order to ensure free access to information for all children, teachers and local communities. Although setting up Centers for Documentation and Information was the first notable initiative of school opening up to the community, as the beneficiary, it had in mind a change in the traditional view on education, in the sense of improving learning and teaching conditions, transforming the educational process into an attractive one, following European patterns, promoting educational innovation, introducing information and communication techniques, cooperating with the local community and openness towards the needs of the society. It was about highly noble purposes, which couldn’t be materialized without an investment in the human resources, in the sense of teacher training – through initial and continuous formation – in order to implement these policies.²

Today the number of CDI’s is quite large nationally, because the Ministry through the Order no. 3328/08.03.2002 gave free rein to the Teaching Staff Resources Center to organize such centers where there were minimum necessary endowments, proper sites and personnel to fill-in position of documentary.

Also, by its activity, the CDI’s “ participate in implementing educational policies on study, profile, specialization levels and support the accomplishment of the objectives stated in

¹ Faugevoux, Jaques. *The Romanian-French bilateral project “Informational Education in underprivileged rural areas”*

² Berindei, Cosmina; Kudor, Dorina; Petri, Alina; Răşinar, Mihaela; Sava, Eleonora; Stănilă, Corina – *Cultural management in the Centers for Documentation and Information, Cluj-Napoca, Didactic and Pedagogic Publishing House Cluj, 2009, p.11*

the Romanian education reform process”. (Organizational and operational Guidelines of the Center for Documentation and Information).

Regardless of the functioning level (pre-school, primary, middle, high-school, etc.), the CDI's are not connected to any political interests even if they were established with the help of the local community.

To our country's integration perspective in UE, the strategic objectives set by the European Community for 2001-2010 towards the development of the educational systems and professional training are strategic priorities for the current stage of the educational system and professional training reform in Romania. One of these priorities is increasing the quality of the learning-teaching processes and of the educational services, objective which can be approached from the perspective of activities that take place in the Centers for Documentation and Information and which can improve school image.

It is true that the school is not the only place where students can get information. School has the major role in endowing the students with competences and skills which they use to get and process information to their benefit. Let's not forget that information means power, and the right to information is a citizen's right, and if school does not teach students how to exercise this right, it becomes a formal right. Through its internal organization and life, the CDI's can become, for students, a school of responsibility and autonomy, both on the individual activity plan, and on the group activity plan.

The teacher designated space, with its proper documentation, leads to a quality increased educational act and to teachers' continuous training. The CDI's space ensures optimum conditions towards life-long learning through information activities, continuous training, professional improvement etc., towards personal and professional skill development of adults in the community.

Thus, the CDI is the pedagogical instruments by means of which these objectives can be accomplished. If we refer to the CDI as to a cultural space, we can easily note that we are dealing with an info-documentary structure which offers the possibilities to organize and carry on cultural activities, regardless of the socio-cultural environment where the school is located. This opportunity is provided both by the structural design, its functions, the documentary teacher's missions, and by its supplies, equipment and organization, providing a

wide range of resources and creating, at the same time, the grounds for different types of activities.

The CDI, through the specificity and the resources it makes available to its users, offers the possibility to organize multiple cultural activities, both for the teachers, and for the students, as well as for the local community. Taking into account that this info-documentary structure functions within the school, we cannot define it as a cultural space without underlining the fact that it is, first of all, a pedagogical space, where pedagogical steps are housed, initiated and carried out.

Since its conception as a separate info-documentary structure in the architecture of the educational institution, the CDI was attributed cultural features and objectives. This aspect was outlined even by one of the objectives which define the documentary teacher's specific activity: "...initiates and participates in cultural activities, in order to promote Romanian and international culture, to recognize European values, to identify role models, to accept and value cultural plurality".³

The cultural animation typology is described in the official documents in force, being left to school practitioners to design, organize and carry on activities which correspond to real needs, strategic targets and set objectives from the institutional development plan, respectively, in the documentary policy project of the school according to various local situation and particularities.

The selection and design of cultural as well as pedagogical CDI communication and management undertakings and activities are not simple, but the cooperation between the CDI manager/documentary teacher and the pedagogical team can give optimum results.

In the selection activity of the cultural approaches which are to be included in the CDI project, certain elements are to be taken into consideration, such as: the objectives defined in the institutional development strategic plan and managerial plan, the priorities set for the teaching unit, the need to diversify the activities suggested to take place in CDI, CDI functions and the purpose of the documentary teacher, the profile and specificity of the school and of the area, student's age level, available material, human and financial aids, the user's demands and suggestions, the year-round socio-cultural event calendar or community-life

³ OMECT no. 5689/20.10.2008, anexa 2

event calendar, opportunities, proponents`, organizers` and partners` experience and competence.

Optimal design and implementation of educational activities depend on how the material, procedural and organizational materials are balanced together which give a certain sense and a certain pragmatic efficiency to students training. Materializing the educational ideals into behaviours and attitudes is not possible if the teaching-learning activity does not have a coherent system of ways and means of achievement, a procedural and technical execution of the steps which are to be taken towards achieving the goal.

The modern educational system is in fact an informational system that, in order to function optimally, implies information collecting, transmitting, storing and processing operations.

All of the applications of educational information processing systems represents the activity undertaken on different grounds and operating with these individually or collectively within CDI. This implies, among other things, computer assisted training during the educational process in order to acquire knowledge, from skills and competences, exercise and search on the computer assisted control under the supervision of the documentary teacher, which is accomplished with the help of CDI activity programs.

The activities in the CDI are, by definition, cooperation activities. We refer to the cooperation between the documentary teacher and the pedagogical team, respectively with partners outside the school. In the context of cultural activity organization and entertaining, the teacher has the most diverse roles: deviser and proponent, mediator, organizer, cultural entertainer, counsellor and especially trainer. Even if the activities are cultural, the teacher`s role is mainly that of a trainer which participates directly to the molding of the students`s personality.

This is, actually, one of the main differences between a cultural event organized in school and a cultural event organized in a different structure, respectively: the role of the trainer and explicit pedagogical purpose. We refer to the teacher as a trainer who creates learning situations and working contexts which use, train, develop and enhance students` competences, abilities and skills in various ways, but complementary to school-work situations.

An essential aspect in designing and organizing cultural activities in CDI is represented by the diversity of the resources exploiting possibilities, their complementary nature. Taking into account the pedagogical, training aim of the activities organized at CDI, we outline the fact that these cultural activities can have continuity also in school activities, acquired information, practiced skills being subsequently valued formally, officially in school. That is why, it is vital to draft a CDI activity project that would give coherence to all relevant and necessary cultural and formative enterprises, from this point of view.

Cultural activities allow a multi-disciplinary approach of the contents and a different analysis of the information making easier the accomplishment of objectives in the curricular area, but with a transversal approach. Thus we track – directly or indirectly – aims in the area of civic, intercultural, axiological education, education for democracy, for the environment, for information and change, and so on. Also, creating most diverse communication situations, documentary research activities using materials in foreign languages, as well – other than in Romanian-, research result transmission initiatives also in other studied languages, will allow the students to express and use the foreign language as a work instrument, and not as a school subject. At the same time, it will facilitate a more adequate understanding of the necessity and the cultural advantage of knowing a foreign language.

Exploiting materials, means of communication and digital resources within cultural projects can impregnate and enriched formative value – in agreement with the subject matter, the purpose if the activity, its significance.

The experience exchange, the meeting between generations, the partnership between the school and the local community through joint projects, will all help to the mutual, bilateral communication development.

If the school, through its actions, through and with the help of CDI, manages to enhance the value of the local cultural patrimony, it will offer the students the chance to comprehensive knowledge and understanding of realities within the community they belong to. This will contribute to the authentic development of the student's personality, in the sense of recognition and respect towards local cultural values, and more. The valuing of the local cultural patrimony and the involvement of the local community in school life, with the help of CDI, give the possibility- once more – to the institution of education to position itself as an integrated and active part of the community it belongs to. This enhancement is not the only

purpose of cultural activities, but it can generate partnership projects between the school and the local community.

A distinct compartment of the mould of activities and possibilities that the CDI offers is pedagogical usage and exploitation of new information and communication technologies. They are a part of the students` close universe, which must not be neglected, considering the psycho-social dimensions which are involved by the approaches and interventions that exploit what the students know and want to do. Valuing various communications means – phone, fax, internet, e-mail, forum chat, messenger, sites, interactive platforms, blog etc. – create novel learning possibilities and situations, and also differentiated communication and promotion of student work and, generally, of all participants` efforts.

Each initiative organized at the CDI or through the CDI contributes to defining its identity and the role in the school which houses it. It can be what the organizers wish it to become: a meeting point, a place for the multiform communication, a site of formation and information, a place in which the modern meets the traditional, in order to fully exploit the pedagogical and formative features of the actions taken. Categorically, the existence of a functional CDI in a school turns into reality and makes it normality each student`s equal opportunity in accessing information.

CDI`s cultural animations may be pretexts for building a special communication relationship between educators and students, but also – as much as it is involved - between the local community and the school. At the same time, cultural animations can be development vectors of partnerships between the school and the community, between the school and various external partners. In this way, as in many others, school will demonstrate and strengthen the connection it has with the community it belongs to, participating permanently, directly or indirectly, to its development.

The importance of cultural activity organization is given also by the fact that these involve the child in stages which determine his active participation to his own training, giving him the chance to self-discovery and training/self-training in a more flexible, more dynamic framework, less formal and less strict than the school one.⁴

The CDI represent a base component of the educational reform, offering the possibility to form certain skills of intelectual work, of using and applying information. It represents a

⁴ Berindei, Cosmina; Kudor, Dorina; Petri, Alina; Rășinar, Mihaela; Sava, Eleonora; Stănilă, Corina – op. cit., p.7

means of access to knowledge and information, contributing to school opening towards the socio-cultural environment.

The documentary teacher is responsible with the activity of the CDI's; he is a mediator between information and the user, which implies acquiring new knowledge and recognizing competences, as well as setting up activity assessment devices. Accomplishment of objectives could not be possible without the presence of the documentary teacher whose important role in school life is obvious.

Promoter of a new didactic profession, the documentary teacher is the resource person capable to train and initiate the students in CDI self-learning techniques, in documentary research and team-learning stages.

The documentary teacher builds the directions of action according to the student's interest centers and school priorities, situating himself in complementary and collaboration relation with the teachers, the school principal, the community. Due to the documentary teacher, the CDI has become, in time, the heart of the school, a greater number of students visit this space.

If in the beginning they were attracted by the fact that the CDI is a training site for students in the field of using Internet provided information, by visiting it they realized that it is a cultural space that supports the student toward a balanced development of its personality. By frequenting the CDI all students were given the possibility to have equal opportunity access to information. Through organized activities, the student was placed in the center of the educative process becoming the beneficiary of diverse working methods. Students who frequent the CDI have been observed to have team-work skills and have developed specific competences (initiative spirit, information search and process skills etc.)

This change is very important because the CDI is a welcoming environment with precise functions, capable to make learning more attractive and closer to the European level, benefiting of a rich documentary fund, updated, on different supports, which offers access to multiple sources of information, documentation, supports the student towards being autonomous, by creating a personalized route, by free expression of options, by the capacity and the availability to deal with new situations he confronts with, challenging, creative, by approaching new self-learning and team-learning methods.

The school takes into account the audience it addresses to, but especially the level of training, the age, the receptiveness, the interest and, at the same time, tries to improve CDI's material resources to the benefit of human resources who are involved in these activities carried out in school CDI. Developable partnerships, school and local community specificity, community, school actions unity and coherence are also taken into account.

The activities organized and carried out at CDI aim at the student's improvement in learning autonomy and critic spirit development through progressive development of the orientation capacity in CDI, knowing different types of resources and documents, defining a documentary research objective and stating the corresponding key words, using traditional and informative instruments, information research, selection, summarizing, organizing and communicating in a given shape, the data found.

The CDI integrates multi-support in the pedagogical practices and in all their actions, by exploiting them by the students and it is an essential element in prevention and combat of school failure for problematic students.

Through CDI's the students are encouraged to proceed to individual research in accordance with their level of knowledge and the learning framework, encouraging, at the same time, their curiosity and initiative in matters of collecting information and their capacity to identify the main justifying events. Groups of students, classes and schools should also be encouraged in research projects or in using active methods, in order to create conditions for dialogue and open and tolerant ideas exchange.

Due to the fact that they can use the Internet, international and across-borders projects should be encouraged, projects that should be based on the study of a common theme, a comparative vision or a joint working-task in several schools from different countries or from our country, which would have the advantage of taking into account fully the limitless opportunities for using information technology and of establishing exchanges and connections between schools or, easier, between classes.

Modern communications have made it possible for the students and the teachers to be connected with their peers from other countries. The students can make a description of their daily life, their families and a history of the town or region they come from. Classes from far off countries can be connected, in order to establish ties between the east and the west or the

south and the north of the continent. Likewise virtual trips can be taken in order to enrich and enhance geography, history, literature knowledge etc.

A CDI in a school is a source of permanent and up-to-date information, an active presence in the life and world of students, teacher and the teachers, must keep in mind finding new shapes and methods of working with the information, which correspond as best it can to the process of modernization of the educational system.

This modernization is concurrent with the idea that the student must be well and hasty prepared for the future, and he must become receptive to the new, capable of studying and informing himself.

No activity field escapes the documentary fever. Currently, the information has become a raw material of society and we all are witnesses of a real explosion of information offer and demand. Information is transmitted under more and more varied shapes and forms and it refers to all human activities: cultural, scientific, technical and commercial. Getting and disseminating all types of information and under all shapes requires specialists who can gather, manage and, especially, communicate. That is why, currently, documentary professions develop more and more and will further develop in the future.

In the mere definition of the documentary teacher, the idea that he is the focal point of an information network, which transits the CDI in order to be then redistributed in the institution, under the shape of material, either rough (advertising an event), or polished. There is another idea that he is the manager of encyclopedic fund suggested to students and teachers. The role of the documentary teacher is to educate students towards using funds, so that they can master and use them in the most efficient manner possible.

The documentary teacher brings to the students and his peers a more or less developed information in the sense of documentary funds functioning and usage. It is not a question of information which comes to complete the data given to the students by his colleagues. It is an extension of that data to the extent that the methodological directions given by the documentary teacher don't apply to one subject specifically, but encloses them all in a research approach of documentary processing and operation carried out on a diversity of informational supports which constitute themselves as a mirror-reflection of what his colleagues make use of in their classes.

The skill to search information is absolutely necessary to independent learning and it is the only one that can turn the learning process into a discovery act.

Today we are living in a society of knowledge. At the base of more frequent use of this concept lie the transformations which the extraordinary development of information technologies and communications have brought in all the fields of activity and the globalization of world economy.

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