

RETHINKING SOCIAL EDUCATION FROM THE GLOBALIZED, DIGITALIZED SOCIETY PERSPECTIVE. THE ROLE OF SOCIAL EDUCATION IN ROMANIAN CURRICULUM

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Abstract: *This article focuses on the analysis of social education, redesigned from three perspectives. From a social perspective, social education is an answer to current and urgent problems of the globalized society (problems of migration, discrimination, human diversity, etc.). The second perspective is an individual one: a response to the training needs of the "Z" generation – the generation of digital natives, with a different psychological profile, much different from the previous generation, the generation that develops the concept of digital citizenship, with well-defined values. The third perspective is a didactic perspective: how can the intercultural/ social competences be achieved in school? What kind of strategies, methods, teacher-student relationships can be used to develop a responsible digital citizenship? A possible answer is an interactive approach centred on transformative learning based on authentic experiences. This research highlights the practical application of the curricular reform, which imposed major changes in the design and implementation of Social Education in Romania. As a continuation of Personal Development at the primary school level, at the second level, Social Education includes Critical Thinking and Children's Rights, Intercultural Education, Education for Democratic Citizenship, Economical and Financial Education. These changes confirm the idea that rethinking social education from three perspectives is a solution for training people for a better world.*

Keywords: *social education; intercultural education; digital citizenship; social competences*

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays education is faced with a great challenge: for what kind of future, what kind of society are we preparing the young generation today? What kind of competences must be developed for the future? The question that was only getting into shape in the beginning of the 2000s, „for the first time in the history of education, we are called upon to educate a generation of people who will live and work in a social, working, technological and even geopolitical environment which is radically different from the one in which they currently live and learn” (Hazardilacos, 2003:126) This is a first paradox of education: we must educate students for a unknown future. Robinson (2015), has become today the starting point in reconstructing many national curricula. As many social scientists say, today's generations have developed, thanks to new information and communication technologies, a new identity – the digital one. This new identity, specific to the generation of children born after the

year 2000 (digital natives), must be educated in the spirit of specific values by teachers who are mostly “digital immigrants”. This is the second paradox: the digital immigrants (which promote classic values) have to educate digital native (which have postmodern values).

2. LOCAL, GLOBAL AND DIGITAL IDENTITY AND SOCIAL EDUCATION

2.1 Generation “digi” and rethinking social skills. Today's society, characterized by diversity, globalization, generalized communication, has a strong impact on the way in which young people are trained and on how they get involved in certain relationships. The sociologists' views on the impact of society on people's behaviour, from the famous work of Naisbitt (1989) to G. Lipovetski (2007) and Ritzer (2003, 2010), are very clear: we need a redefinition of some fundamental concepts such as citizenship, identity, social skills. This redefinition is urgently required by the globalized society in which building the identity is subject to pressures

tied to globalization - localism, standardization - personalization, active involvement in the community - acceptance of the majority's opinion. Sometimes contradictory values intervene in organizing people's lives, deleting the boundary between private - public, personal - social, work - free time. People are forced to find a balance between "Nothing" and "Something" in Ritzer's sense (2010). If we add digitization, we will have a clearer picture of the complexity of the world we live in. To the multitude of facets of identity (local, national, professional, global), there is added one more: the digitized one, which has a very strong impact:

digital communities might not be local, but they feel local. Members of digital gatherings feel they belong to a real community, and *thus* project themselves into cyberspace in ways that have meaning and emotional significance (Ohler, 2010:42).

Of course, the coherent, harmonious assimilation of the identity dimensions implies the formation of social competences and the promotion of specific values: tolerance, critical thinking, social responsibility and social proactivity. Obviously, achieving these competences supposes pedagogical approaches in the spirit of the epoch, also taking into account the psycho-pedagogical portrait of young people.

The characteristics of Digital Age youngsters are highlighted by psychologists, educators (Veen & Vrakking 2011), and even psychiatrists (Gold, 2016) that draw attention to the fact that children today are far different from their parents and teachers. Although at the beginning of using computers on a large scale, teachers were more likely to express their doubts towards computers and their formative impact, considering them "dangerous" for health, creates a "copy-paste culture" and creates "social inequalities by widening the gap, creating a new form of social division and exclusion" (Hazardilacos, 2003:170-171). Today things have changed a lot: "interactive digital technology used with moderation is extremely good to cultivate and refine children's intelligence and education" (Gold, 2016:65). Moreover, digital technology is considered to have a formative impact not only on the cognitive development, but also on the social and emotional development: social networks lead to the formation of friendships and offer the possibility of "selective self-presentation" (Gold, 2016:79), which implies a (careful?) assessment and self-evaluation of friendships, images, and self-information.

The "digi" generation becomes so skilled in using technologies that they are helping their

parents to use a forum or cell phone, making possible a "reversed education" (Veen & Varking 2011:57). All these features of the Z-generation / digi generation must be taken into consideration in designing education, therefore school's role must be redefined according to the digitalized, globalized society's values.

A solution is represented by the constructivist paradigm that promotes student centred learning, learning in groups, learning in an emotionally positive context. In constructivism, learning means to create together with the colleagues and the teacher the meaning of new concepts. The curriculum is „negotiated" by students together with teacher. Another *characteristic of* the constructivist paradigm is the accent on a pragmatic learning, on authentic learning, that are in fact learning centred on competences. H. Siebert (2001) argues that competences must be formed in a real context, through the contact with experiences, and students must be taught in a real context through exploration. That is why the experiential learning meets the requirements of competence-based curriculum and "standing comfortably in postmodernism, gains an increasingly privileged place as a method of cultivating desire and forming an identity" (Usher, 2014:310).

From this perspective, the relationships between teachers and students and the community need to be reconsidered. Teachers are forced to assume roles of change agents (Fullan, 1993) facilitators, producers of new experiences that capitalize on the community's educational potential, outdoor education, distance learning. The teaching style must be change: experimentation is a attractive and motivate way of learning. The social competences can develop only through practice (social exercises!). Teachers and students, together, have to practice democracy, tolerance, critical thinking and social commitment.

In this context the subject Social education become an useful instrument to make change in students mind set and behaviour. Students have to develop the ability to understand the complex world and its problems, the new sense of responsibility and cooperation. Rethinking social education is a solution for training people for a better world.

2.2 Social Education in Romanian National Curriculum. In the Romanian curriculum, the Social education subject matter is offered in the framework of education approved by OMENCS no. 3590/05.04.2016, in the *Human and Society* curriculum area, with an allocation of time of 1

hour/week, during each of the four school years. In accordance with the provisions of the Educational Framework, within the *Social Education* subject matter there are studied: in the fifth grade - *Critical Thinking and the Child's Rights*, in the 6th grade - *Intercultural Education*, in the 7th grade - *Education for Democratic Citizenship*, in the 8th grade - *Economic and Financial Education*.

The curriculum was established based on both national and European and international documents: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989); Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child: 2012-2015; White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue, *Living Together Equals in Dignity*, adopted by the Council of Europe (Strasbourg, 2008); Education for Democracy, United Nations Resolution A/67/L.25 (2012); Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Education for Human Rights (2010); Declaration on the promotion of citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education (Paris Declaration, 2015); European Parliament Resolution on the promotion of youth entrepreneurship through education and training (2015/2006 (INI); The Final High-Level Principles on Financial Consumer Protection, document promoted by the G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors, October 2011. (Social Education Syllabi 2017:3). Social Education at second level is rethought as a continuation of the Personal Development from the primary level, as a new subject matter introduced in the national curriculum in 2013.

The "*Personal Development*" subject matter promotes learning activities aimed at developing the learner's ability of self-knowledge and at expressing in a positive way his / her interests, skills, personal experiences, relationship and communication skills, reflections on learning. (Personal Development Syllabi no. 3418/ 19.03.2013). The skills to be formed through this subject matter are: manifestation of interest towards self-awareness and positive attitude towards oneself and others, adequate expression of emotions in interaction with familiar children and adults, use of skills and attitudes specific to learning in the school context. A novelty of this subject matter, *Personal Development*, is given by the particular emphasis on the students' emotional, social and professional development. Capitalizing on pupils' actual life experiences underpins the authenticity of learning. There is a permanent reporting to what they think and feel, as well as to how students behave. The contents of the curriculum provide the opportunity for learning situations that enable

students to become aware of who they are, to analyse their own emotions, to relate to others (diversity), to be motivated to learn successfully, to explore what professions / jobs they would like to have. Also, another novelty of the curriculum is the possibility of implementing integrated activities or diversifying/expanding extracurricular activities. The skills and attitudes developed in *Personal Development* are those transferable acquisitions needed to achieve school, career and personal success.

All these aspects are found in the new Social Education curriculum at secondary level. The complex register of didactic strategies, suggested by the curriculum, stimulates the active involvement of pupils, individually or in teams. It is recommended to stimulate students' creativity by using interactive teaching and learning as well as assessment methods. Successive analyses, moments of self-assessment and reflection provide children with the necessary framework for internalizing thematic concepts, for developing self-confidence, for shaping a positive outlook on their personal resources. Particular attention is paid to exploring interests and to practising learning skills, to identifying past experiences and to learning about students' expectations regarding the activities to be carried out.

At the end of each module, students are invited to express their emotions about what they have discovered or experienced. Exhibitions or discussions based on their portfolios are opportunities for discovering and affirming students' interests and aptitudes. Thus, the context of expressing emotions and attitudes towards progress in learning is created. Reflecting "together" on individual or team-created products contributes to the development of group cohesion. Constructive feed-back, inter-evaluations contribute to creating a secure, non-labelling environment in which students practice social skills such as cooperation, offering and receiving help, affirmation of an opinion, respect for the other.

2.3 Intercultural Education as a dimension of Social Education. The analysis of the role and place of intercultural education in the curriculum in Romania in the last decade highlights the change of perspective on the need for intercultural competences in the new socio-political context. For example, a study related to students' perception of the need for intercultural education, showed clearly the formative impact of intercultural education.

Those students which have attended intercultural education think that school has an important role in forming the intercultural competences, underlying

the fact that this type of education leads to the development of values and attitudes which are specific to the present society: respect for each other, promoting diversity, cooperation. (Pavalache *et al.*, 2014:451)

Table 1. Frequency of formative effects of attending an intercultural education course (Pavalache *et al.*, 2014:451)

Categories of answers	Frequency
Acceptance of the different one/tolerance/empathy	49%
Training skills of cooperation/teamwork/adjustment to new situations	27%
Promoting interculturality, knowledge and understanding of other cultures	9%
Other answers	15 %

And yet, at that time, intercultural education did not have a well-represented status in the national curriculum. Although there are concerns regarding the intercultural dimension of education, the status of intercultural education in the Romanian school still remains, today, poorly shaped, both at the level of teachers' training and students' education.

In the curriculum for initial and continuous teacher training through the psycho-pedagogical training programme (offered by the Teacher Training Department), conducted on two levels (level I - graduate school; level II - master studies), the intercultural education exists only at the second level of training, as an optional subject matter. Intercultural education appeared in the Romanian curriculum for secondary school as an optional subject matter in 2008, year considered the one of intercultural dialogue, as a result of the Order no. 1529 of the Minister of Education and Research which stipulated the introduction of diversity issues in the compulsory curricula. In a national study on the syllabus of the intercultural education subject matter, conducted by Ivasiuc, Koreck and Kovari (2010), they outlined the following shortcomings of intercultural education syllabus: lack of the procedural nature of intercultural education, of its continuity throughout the school cycles; lack of student reflection on their own personal, social, cultural identity; dominant emphasis on the transmission of contents; lack of a genuine dialogue with the others, specific to the constructivist pedagogy. All this studies reflect the necessity to rethinking the role of intercultural education as important dimension of social education.

Restructuring the *Social Education* subject matter has been imposed by at least two factors:

1. students' and their parents' cultural diversity as a result of the labour market mobility, the economic crisis, the globalization of society in

general, changing in lifestyle as result of the digital age.

2. training students' intercultural and social competences depends on the teachers' competence of promoting diversity, of developing specific social attitudes.

Beginning on September 2017 the Social Education and intercultural education will have a compulsory and important role in Romanian national curriculum as a result of education specialist efforts to offer a new, postmodern perspective on social education. From a social perspective, social education is an answer to current and urgent problems of the globalized society (problems of migration, discrimination, human diversity, etc.). The second perspective is an individual one: a response to the training needs of the "Z" generation. The third perspective is a didactic perspective: an interactive approach centred on transformative learning based on authentic experiences.

3. CONCLUSIONS & ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The new curriculum, elaborated on the basis of the documents that give directions at European level, changes both the status of the subject matter (intercultural education is compulsory, starting with the sixth grade, for one hour a week) and the teaching-learning method, in line with the constructivist model of learning.

The recommended teaching strategies for intercultural education are the interactive ones, which involve practicing the main social behaviours and attitudes, usable in learning situations as concrete as possible, close to pupils' life experiences. Project-based learning is encouraged (various project themes with a formative impact inspired by social events in which students participate are suggested). It is important to highlight that, in new curriculum of Social Education, the project is 25-30% of learning activities. The project-based learning will be made not only in formal context (in classroom). The nonformal context and cooperation between students, teachers and local community are encouraged.

Evaluation is also rethought from the point of view of competence-based learning, in line with the learning activities. Thus, methods of formative assessment, with emphasis on the systematic observation of the student's behaviour are suggested, with the observation grid as a tool, in which are to be noted behaviours such as: spirit of collaboration, capacity to assume a role, initiative, adaptation, acceptance of different opinions coming from another colleague, etc. The analysis

of school documents (especially Social Education syllabi) in general, but also our own research related to the subject of intercultural education, especially highlight a change of approach in the design, implementation and evaluation of these subject matters. It is, in fact, a new vision on social education interpreted from a current perspective: pragmatic, global, digitized. Introducing *Personal development* in primary school as a foundation for a solid social education is a sign of concern from the decision-makers towards the quality in education, where individual and social development are mutually supportive.

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