

EDUCATION FOR ALL - ensuring the right to individualized and accessible education

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"We believe and proclaim that every child has a fundamental right to education, and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning, [...], that education systems should be designed and educational programmes implemented to take into account the wide diversity of children's characteristics and needs"
(The Salamanca Statement, 1994)

Introductory aspects

History shows that developments in society and education are consensual, which means that substantial global and national changes utterly impose the occurrence of significant changes in the educational field as well. In depth transformations at society level and the dynamics of these transformations require the construction and reconstruction of educational paradigms, the provision of educational solutions that successfully meet the challenges of the contemporary world. Thus, educational policy directions are designed and reviewed according to imperatives, demands and challenges of the contemporary world and want to be "answers" to the major issues at a societal level.

'Education for all' represents a new direction in the world educational policies, launched in 1990 at Jomtien, Thailand. The motto was adopted in 1994 at Salamanca, where "education for all" was defined as "access to quality education for all children". The phrase refers to providing opportunities for all children to participate in education, irrespective of how different they may be and how much they deviate from social norms.

The same declaration asserts the uniqueness of every child's educational profile, based on their own characteristics and needs, which should be personalised and contextualised. All education systems should reconsider their resources so as to create conditions for all children, regardless of physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic abilities, to educate and to develop common learning environments.

The right to education of every individual was proclaimed in 1948, by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and has become a topic of discussion in the field of educational sciences, sociology, philosophy, etc.

In the "Dictionary of Pedagogy" (1979), 'the right to education' is defined as a context which presupposes the existence of "possibilities and conditions capable of ensuring the agreement between the innate potential and the system of educational influences in the personality formation process at different stages of development."

Ensuring equal opportunities to education as presented in specialist literature

EDUCATION FOR ALL – ENSURING THE RIGHT TO INDIVIDUALIZED AND ACCESIBLE EDUCATION

American pedagogy specialist J.S. Bruner (1970a, 1970b) admits the idea of “seeding” an inclination towards learning in the individual by means of exercises and views the development of individual action as depending directly on educational factors. He argues that school, the educational process can lead to the child's intellectual development, thanks to stimulating opportunities, useful for making progress in their development. In other words, the training process generates and moulds development.

Going beyond the declarative stage which supports the idea that intelligence and cognitive processes can be learnt, Bruner believes that one should not wait passively for a certain knowledge assimilation capacity to develop and that the educational process can actively influence and precipitate this time to come if appropriate conditions are ensured and appropriate methods are used. Thus, we cannot limit ourselves to the child's interests and capacities as these can and must be created and stimulated. “[A]nyone can learn anything at any age, provided that the content should be presented in an accessible manner” says Bruner (1970b). Therefore, the school is somehow ‘forced’ to create appropriate conditions to enable each student to develop in an optimal manner - an optimistic view on accessibility, which requires trust and respect for student's individuality. It is essential that every system of knowledge and skills should be prepared thoroughly by anticipating it in earlier stages, using adequate methods and techniques to ensure success.

Referring to successful educational processes, Bertrand Schwartz (1976) states that their offering equal access to education is not promoting the principles of equality, i.e. “identical treatment for all in the name of equality” but, on the contrary, it means “giving everyone access to a suitable form of education both in terms of rhythm and methods”, adapted to match their own personality as well as their psychological characteristics and resources.

Referring to the principles of the new paradigm in education, Bruno Wurtz (1992) formulates the principle of egalitarianism, flexibility and age integration, referring to the fact that progress in the field of learning rhythm may be different due to interindividual differences.

Highlighting the pedagogical foundations of Romanian educational reform, Professor Sorin Cristea mentions one of its principles, namely the principle of equalisation of opportunities in education, which aims at creating appropriate psycho-pedagogical conditions necessary for bringing forward every individual's potential. In achieving these goals, all those directly involved in the educational act have a very special mission.

Similar concepts are present in R.H. Dave's works as well (1991). He pleads for individualizing the educational process so that “everyone can obtain - through all forms of education - the highest possible level of self-achievement”. These principles of education for everyone are operational if the internal resources of the educational system are relied upon, if we count on the thorough use of the educational reform mechanisms. Equal chances of success in education, along with creating necessary conditions to achieve this goal were and still are a problem throughout history. Schools should integrate all children in the educational process irrespective of their intellectual potential, their social and family backgrounds.

Nowadays, many countries agree that education is crucial for progress to take place. Designing the entire educational system should start from the premise that each individual can be educated, can be helped to move from one developmental stage to another, especially since the educational

EDUCATION FOR ALL – ENSURING THE RIGHT TO INDIVIDUALIZED AND ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION

influences refer to the "zone of proximal development", according to L.S. Vygotski (1978). He put forward the idea that a child's mental development is realized starting from society-related aspects and ending with the individual ones: a task carried out by two people becomes an organizing principle for each individual as the intersychic action becomes intrapsychic action. During interactions and joint activities the superior mental functions of the child occur and develop. Hence, these common functions become individualized. From this point of view, he regards the joint activity as an internal mechanism and a necessary step in the individual and argues that the source of mental development lies in the internal contradictions which occur as a result of external requirements. Devising the necessary means for overcoming and solving these contradictions lies primarily in education. On the one hand, education provides content to be learnt, and on the other hand it is concerned with how it is desirable that they be assimilated, with the training and personal development processes. Education holds great relevance in forming and shaping human personality provided that it is carried out skilfully, with professionalism and responsibly thereby becoming an art in itself. Therefore, the educator's mission is of utmost importance in the teaching processes, which involves making contents accessible to everyone.

Principle-related issues concerning equal rights to education in Romania

Every individual's right to education should be acknowledged by society, and if the existing education system does not meet the needs of all people, special education should be considered, i.e. education for children with special educational needs. It's about teaching children who have difficulty or are unable to adapt to the educational and societal requirements. However, now the trend is to strive to prepare all children in regular school systems. But if this is not possible, the quality of special education must be closely linked to regular schooling and observe the same quality standards.

Education is teleological in nature as it presupposes intentional actions purposefully oriented towards explicit final aims with educational activities conducted in accordance with certain rules and regulations, known as didactic principles. In recent years, with the eve of modern didactics, these principles were redefined from a multidimensional perspective: axiological, pedagogical, psychological, sociological, highlighting the theoretical, conceptual and pragmatic implications (M. Ionescu, M. Bocoş, ed., 2009).

Interindividual diversity is complex, and the need to take this into account is expressed in the principle of accessibility and individualisation, which means that the organisation and carrying out of the educational process should be realized according to students' background peculiarities (age, sex, previous training, physical and mental potential, and so on). Making knowledge accessible is the responsibility of decisional agents, i.e. those who are in charge with designing the curriculum and syllabus. But of utmost importance is the teacher's ability to render knowledge accessible in designing educator teaching sequences

Currently, in the context of the ongoing educational reforms in our country, a new education framework plan is used. This has been progressively introduced as follows: between 1998-1999 for grades I-V, between 1999 and 2000 for grades V-IX, and between 2000 and 2001 for high school. The Framework Plan is the basis of the new National Curriculum, which focuses on the use of learning objectives, learning contents, teaching, learning and assessment methods in a

EDUCATION FOR ALL – ENSURING THE RIGHT TO INDIVIDUALIZED AND ACCESIBLE EDUCATION

partially controlled manner by using the national curriculum, which consists of two segments - core and school-based curriculum.

At the basis of the new educational framework plan is a system of general principles, which aim at facilitating the emergence of a new curricular culture:

- The principle of equal rights to education - refers to the right of each individual to common education, conducted under compulsory education by completing the core curriculum.
- The principle of decongestion - recommends selecting and simplifying curriculum content as well as avoiding information overload.
- The principle of a decentralized and flexible curriculum - refers to combining core curriculum with the school curriculum.
- The principle of selection and cultural hierarchy - has led to the integration of disciplines in a system, to their interconnection and the emergence of the concept 'curricular area'.

Curricular areas subsume many disciplines that provide multi- and / or inter-disciplinary perspectives on various study areas. The traditional view which involved that the subject areas should include monodisciplinary subjects was dropped. They are scientifically selected on the basis of epistemological and pedagogical criteria. During compulsory schooling and high school, curriculum areas remain unchanged in terms of name, but they tend to vary quantitatively from one form to another.

The National Curriculum from our country includes the following curriculum cycles: basic acquisitions cycle (kindergarten – 2nd grade), the cycle of development (3rd grade – 6st grade), the cycle of observation and orientation (6th grade a - 9th grade), deepening cycle (10th grade-11th grade), specialisation cycle (12th grade).

- The coherence principle, which is to ensure the stability between curricular and disciplinary areas of study, horizontally and vertically.
- The social connection principle - emphasizes the need to provide correspondence between educational institutions and social requirements, optimal connections and collaborations between educational institutions and the community.
- The principle of achieving compatibility with European standards in education.

Some principles which can assure the development of an academic community based on observing the equal opportunities to education were introduced in the fundamental law of national education (Article 202) which led to legislative benefits in Romania.

a) the principle of non-discrimination - whereby all students receive equal treatment from the institution of higher education; any direct or indirect discrimination against students is prohibited;

b) the principle of counselling and free complementary services in public high education - expressed through: counselling and informing students by teachers outside the classroom, seminar or laboratories, vocational guidance counselling, psychological counselling, access to main specialty books and scientific publications, access to personal data on the school situation;

c) the principle of participation to decision taking - according to which decisions within institutions of high education are taken with the participation of students;

d) the principle of freedom of expression - according to which students are entitled to express freely their academic opinions, within the educational institution they study;

EDUCATION FOR ALL – ENSURING THE RIGHT TO INDIVIDUALIZED AND ACCESIBLE EDUCATION

e) the principle of transparency and access to information - according to which students are entitled to free access to information concerning their own learning and academic life of the community they belong to, in accordance with the law.

Conclusion

The whole school activity is focused on building and shaping the character of the student, in accordance with the social requirements of modern times, the main purpose being students' social integration. If in designing the content and forms of this activity, the psychological characteristic of the child were not paid attention to, this would endanger the achievement of the proposed objective, the affirmation of the child as an individual able to develop.

New trends in the development and modernisation of education are necessary in order to develop curriculum resources for insuring the inclusion of children with special educational needs in the educational system. In particular, there is a need to develop appropriate methodologies for adapting the national curriculum to the special needs and potential of children, in order to reduce the rate of school failure and early school leaving and to support them in their learning and provide differentiated and individualized educational pathways.

Adapting the curriculum to the learning abilities of all children is a challenge for the modern school, along with the challenge assumed for drafting the support curriculum (continuous teacher training, refresher courses, methodological guidelines, best practice models). Schools must identify, recognise and respond to the diverse needs of students, by harmonising individual learning strategies with methods and teaching instruments in order to ensure quality education for all, including children with learning disabilities, emotional problems, adaptation and integration problems, as well as for those coming from disadvantaged backgrounds.

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EDUCATION FOR ALL – ENSURING THE RIGHT TO INDIVIDUALIZED AND ACCESIBLE EDUCATION

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