



Non-Formal Education, the New Pluralist and Functional Alternative in the Educational Process

Elena Moldovan

Faculty of Physical Education and Sport Transilvania University of Brasov

ABSTRACT

The study tries to show that now, in the beginning of the third millennium, education will be forced to diversify the seeking of optimal, present and perspective solutions that can respond to the new challenges with which the human civilization is faced with. Education cannot offer definitive solutions or treatments. It is dynamic and in continuous motion as is social life itself. Often enough, education itself becomes a tool, a source of inequalities, a source of "social and cultural reproduction", a source of social, ethnic and religious "fractures"; sometimes being quite conservative. Non-formal education is one of the major tools for teachers, regional and local communities and the state for ensuring a deep social cohesion and forming action of a new open and flexible attitude towards the international community and other nations. It is why the role of the latter must be revised and the strength of education – non-formal included – be recaptured in a globalised world. The study has pedagogical optimism and trust in the power of the renowned education to which every success becomes problematic.

KEYWORDS : non-formal education, alternative, pluralism, complementary, useful effects

INTRODUCTION

Rabindranath Tagore stated the following regarding education: "Tell our sons that everything is before us and that nothing shall escape us, nothing shall break us. If without even fighting are they yelling "It hurts" – then the humble shall kneel".

Mircea Eliade, Romanian writer and Indianite, great savant of religious history stated: "I do not share the unanimous opinion that summer holiday is the time for easy reading. You will never understand Odysseus better than at the seaside... And the second part of Faust will be better revealed in a trip into the mountains. Spring or the summer solstices are the cosmic phenomena that we experiment biologically and sentimentally; the mystery of the great vegetal

awakening is felt by each and every one of us, naturally. But think of how significant this feeling could be if we could figure out its signs, symbols and its absolute universal senses".

The alternative is a branch, a new way, a new road, including in the educational process. "Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail" said Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Therefore, any educational road, involving naturally the afferent risks and unknowns, is essential, useful and beneficial to its disciples (students, pupils even grown people). Thus, the pluralism aspect works through educational processes as well as the systematic one through the actual educational processes.

1. NEW EDUCATIONAL FORMS IN THE BEGINNING OF THE THIRD MILLENNIUM. CONCEPTS, CONTENT AND MAIN SOLUTIONS PROPOSED BY THE NEW EDUCATION

The educational alternatives are defined strictly pedagogically, for example, according to Mircea Stefan in "Lexicon pedagogic" (2006), as follows:

- Ways of solving in different ways a certain pedagogical problem presenting educative benefits and risks as well;
- Different ways of official school organization through the school laws.

"Dictionarul de pedagogie" authors Horst Schaub and Karl G. Zenke, translated by Polirom Publishing House 2001, registers the term of alternative learning defined as "the activity done in school institutions, following objectives, organization, content, ways of teaching and learning, school life and parenting activity, with a total or partial aberration from the unitary state school characteristics offering another way of education and learning.

The plurality of currents, either cooperative or conflicting, is very diverse, by consulting the educational systems practiced presently according to the European Process of validation of the non-formal and informal learning as it is done in other countries of the world. It is only natural given the intra and extra national multicultural aspect of

the educational traditions in a globalised world.

Two major ideas are thus drawn:

- Alternative learning represents a form of organization of the didactical process that offers another organizational alternative than the official one.
- Educational pluralism represents the existence of certain institutions, besides the state one, that offers a new way of education proposing other contents, educational strategies and evaluation forms considered to be representative for a pedagogical progress.

The alternative can be understood, on one hand, as an adaptation of certain types of educative institutions that have had a great success in the past trying to solve through them the problems of the actual learning problems. The alternative can also be understood in the sense of adopting an overview of the great contemporaneous pedagogical systems as well as the actual pedagogical practices around the world. It is crucial to understand that the existence of several systems does not necessarily presume their mutual denial or annulment for, in reality, they are complementary. This is done because education must be functional, thereby it must solve a conscious need; furthermore, the new education must reconnect school with life and this is done through an active school, by the student's or adult's profound engagement in the process of their own transformation, in grades appropriate to one's age. Some specialists strongly state that schools carry the burden of subjects and this is way they must be cultivated proportionally to the strength of the educated ones towards transforming science in a instrumental good for each individual. Moral and citizen education is also important and is done through a greater autonomy of the education beneficiaries.

For optimally achieving the objective aforementioned we enlist the following proposed solutions by the new education/ active school:

- Introducing active methods;
- Promoting a permanent connection between school and practical life;
- Individualizing the learning process;
- Psychologically studying individuality as a support point for individualization;
- Using intuition as a knowing method;
- The primacy of the formative culture;
- Capitalizing spontaneity, as a means of achieving the functional point of view;
- The challenges of free discipline, self leading and school cooperation as means of active integration in the social reality.

Obviously, these solutions are not rigid but flexible, needing to be adapted according to age, socialized learning profiles and other specific criteria, thus going for an enhanced efficiency in the educational processes.

3. NON-FORMAL EDUCATION, A NECESSARY ALTERNATIVE IN THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESSES

In order to become a permanent dimension of human existence, education must have a global character, harmoniously and efficiently combining formal education with non-formal and informal ones.

Two principles or theses support the efforts of those following the enhancement of instructive and educational process: permanent education and education's prospective orientation. An important particularity of the educational phenomena, in the actual stage, is the permanent character, its presence in the entire human existence. The objective of permanent education is integrating the new social realities in the knowledge gathered in the school years. The significant growth of the educative role in the development of youngsters imposes enhancing the activities through which one can accomplish this thing. It imposes specializing content and activity methodology according to the proposed objectives.

In the International Education Dictionary we find three correlated notions: formal education, informal education and non-formal education. Non-formal education is defined as follows: "the education received outside school or outside the statute of school", for example, adult education. A second definition would be: "the education done outside school, through the influence of family, friends and lifestyle". Along with extracurricular education, considered to be "any activity done outside school including non-formal education as well as any form of occasional or permanent education" and the non-formal one, considered to be "any educative activity structured in a non school environment (traditional learning, young movements, clubs and associations)" appears also the term of diffuse education defined as a "continuous process of acquiring knowledge and concepts that are in no way related to any of the institutional frames".

In the pedagogical vocabulary the concepts of formal (institutionalized) education, non-formal (extracurricular) education and informal (diffuse) education are quite famous for the correct denomination of the types of education done in today's society. The two aforementioned papers appeared in the 80's, nevertheless, recently, after Costea O. (2002), non-formal education "appoints an educational reality less formal or informal, but always with formative effects". To what undergoing non-formal education is concerned, P. Higgins (2002), distinguished four major general methodological options: centered on content (health, family planning, agrarian forming); centered on everyday problems; centered on awareness (in order to know and respect the individual's rights and freedoms) and humanistic education (cultivating a correct self esteem image as well as cultivating a initiative, creative and decisional capacity).

Types of complementary education

Domain	Cultural and artistic
Types of education	Education for personal development Cultural and artistic domain Communication Media Inter and multicultural education Folklore, popular art Romanian and foreign culture and civilization Education for peace

Domain	Civic
Types of education	Education for human rights Education for child rights Education for health Preventing school abandonment Preventing human trafficking Preventing child labor exploitation Preventing child abuse and violence Promoting chance equality (non-discrimination, disadvantaged groups Inter and multicultural education European studies Education for community development Community development Volunteering Global education (integrated projects)

Domain	Technical and scientific
Types of education	Education for personal development Technical and scientific domain Communication Media Ecologic education Protecting the environment Ecotourism Tourist orientation Agrarian tourism

Domain	Sportive
Types of education	Education through sport

Non-formal education is defined from the perspective learning process based on quality indicators and based on the European validation levels: in relation to formal education and forming shapers, in relation to the market, in relation to voluntary activity, all of these representing the multiplication and the opportunity diversification of alternative education in school and society within certain stages at the workplace, distant learning, home school, summer learning, etc.

If we refer to the components of the school stage within non-formal education, usually the activities are done in school and are comprised of disciplines with a thematic and pluridisciplinary character such as cultural and sporting competitions, sessions of scientific communication, festivities, Olympics, etc. Activities requiring a certain thematic movement (plants, museums, other diverse tourist objectives, and agrarian fields) or associated institutions are also comprised.

Unlike formal education, non-formal education is characterized by the following traits: facultative and optional character; the students are involved in projecting, organizing and undergoing these activities; they are not graded, there is no rigorous evaluation; it allows exerting the children's abilities and interests; it allows a different range of forms, high flexibility and knows different ways of financing; it facilitates team work and a pluri or interdisciplinary method; it accentuate formative and educative objectives. Today one pays a lot of attention to within the economical development process of third world countries. The ways of non-formal education are indispensable to all countries. Bautier E (2000) defines it as "the entire organized and systematic educative activity done outside the formal frame of education that includes: agrarian preparation, alphabetizing process, forming unschooled youngsters, different programs of community development (education for health, nutrition, etc.).

Non-formal education offers a set of necessary and useful social practices for each child, youngster or adult, complementing the other forms of education by: capitalizing free time form the educational point of view, promoting life experiences through voluntary, individual or group participation. Non-formal education shall offer children and youngsters choice possibilities depending on interests and preferences emphasizing the ability development for becoming active citizens. Furthermore, non-formal education shall create better opportunities for organizational development, self transaction, time management, critical thinking in adopting certain decisions or solving certain problems, ensuring that one respects the man's fundamental rights and gender equality. The beneficiaries of these educational forms are children and youngsters, as well as specialists, people working with youth and volunteers working with and for children/youngsters, national and local NGOs undergoing non-formal education activities, initiative groups and children pr youngster networks, educators, teachers, animators, psychologists, lawyers and social assistants.

4. Principles, values, actual exigencies and useful effects of non-formal education

The new strategy of non-formal educative activity is projected according to the following set of principles:

- The principle of education priority
- The principle of equal access to education – according to the Con-

stitution and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, each child having the right to education;

- The principle of interculturality;
- The principle of activity continuity with a permanent character and based on a previous experience;
- The principle of formal/non-formal complementarity;
- The principle of organizational and informational flexibility;
- The principle of decentralizing educational authority and ensuring the unity of local educational methods through coordination;
- The principle of global, unitary, multidisciplinary and integrated approach;
- The principle of transparency for implementing strategies with the participation of civil society along with the governmental institutions in accomplishing the proposed objectives;
- The principle of cooperation - the implementation strategy has at its core the institutional cooperation both on the national and international levels.

Along with respecting and promoting these principles, at the core of this strategy also lies the principle of value centered education: respect, non-discrimination, equality, solidarity, tolerance, truth, freedom, integrity, dignity, honor, honesty, originality, love and trust.

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The useful effects are multiple and beneficial, but more importantly, they are measurable and monitorized through dynamic and evolutive indicators that ensure the possibility of this monitorization, the application of certain corrective aspects in adapting them to didactical and different, social, human and professional environments, thus to a continuous educational improvement as an essential dynamic didactical process. The results of the monitorization and evaluation processes shall constitute an important source of information for evaluating the non-formal education politics and elaborating the politic documents in the participation domain (pupils or students) as well as consolidating the formal-non-formal educational system.

In the future, an intersectorial correlated approach of the educational domains is necessary, in a larger context enhancing its efficiency in accomplishing its own objectives as they have previously been analyzed.

The non-formal activities are superposed with the extracurricular activities in the urban environment and especially in the rural one, this education being imperative due to the need of consolidating and sustaining the organizations that promote and undergo non-formal education within the extracurricular institutions. For improving these abilities, educators from the non-formal education domain must benefit from a continuous instruction and an adjusted qualification program, as well as from the possibility of promoting based on the proper abilities.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, a vision of a pluralist context regarding non-formal education includes:

- The reconsideration and coherence of the relationship between the educational politic views and the allocation of resources and strategies on the long term;
- The quantitative allocation and quality optimization of human resources and materials destined for non-formal education;
- The adequacy, efficiency and distribution on temporal unities of resources (development plans on segments).

Fully recognizing non-formal education as an essential part of education is necessary as well as stimulating the involvement of youngsters in promoting ethical values and principles: justice, tolerance, peace, active citizenship, respecting human rights, all of these being key elements in establishing the strategies of non-formal education. Through its specific forms, the non-formal educative activity develops critical thinking, forms abilities and stimulates the involvement of the younger generation in the decisional act in the context of respecting human rights and assuming social responsibilities, thus achieving a lucrative symbiosis between the cognitive and behavioral components.

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