

TIMES OF CHANGE FOR THE ROMANIAN SYSTEM OF EDUCATION – A SUMMARY OF SOURCES AND RESOURCES

Oana A. BOTA¹

Abstract: *The indisputable feature of the contemporary society is change, which determines some opportune response mechanisms of an adaptive type (as a consequence of some reevaluated flexibility) or, on the contrary, inopportune, such as confusion, instability or inconsistency (as a consequence of some functional or structural rigidity). At the level of the system and process, the specialists in the field are debating the educational reality, in trying to grasp the position held by education in the light of the numerous transformations experienced by the contemporary society. The present paper stands as a concise lecture, whose main subject is concerned with the issues of the progress or regress of the Romanian educational system.*

Key words: *change, educational system, teaching system, reform.*

1. Introduction

The phenomenon felt with an increasingly pronounced frequency is that of the transformative dynamism, whether the reference to it is holistic, general (at the society level) or the perspective is focused on the individual, on the entity (on the personal level). *What are the causes of change? What is changing? How is the change happening?* – those are just a few questions arising from the desire to create a theoretical framework/context that could be favorable to the configuration of a coherent set of interventions, subordinated to a specific purpose: the management of progress.

Understood as adjustment, the change represents the exigency of any society found in a continuous evolutive process; we are the witnesses of an era of

computers and multimedia systems – and the technical and scientific revolution brings real gains and developments within different areas and structures of society. The latter is made of human beings and becomes really beneficent only when it helps and supports the individual reevaluate and valorize his or her personal aptitudes and potentialities that may eventually inscribe in the pattern of a happy, quality life, both personally and professionally. Although the progress from the technological, material, intellectual and political perspective is becoming more and more evident, at a thorough analysis, these effects of the change are still inducing weak opportunities to improve the individual's mental health state and assure the personal stability and security, happiness and reason.

¹ Doctoral researcher, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, University of Bucharest.

In this 'territory' of (in)visible kinetics, a special interest is focused on the educational system, perceived as the distinctive (yet not independent) element of the society, characterized by the two orientations – knowledge and communication. *The knowledge society*, whose statute has been acknowledged by the end of the XXth century, distinguishes itself under the shape of a new stage of the information era, in other words, the informational society. In one of his works, Philippe Busquin, European Commissioner for Research, is drawing attention upon some few defining aspects of the knowledge society: '...unlike some points of view which concern the economic aspect only (digital economy, Internet market), the knowledge society is not just the economy based on knowledge. This is very important, decisive, and essential and involves the usage and management of the existing knowledge under the shape of the technological and organizational knowledge, the production of a new technological knowledge through innovation, a new economy in which the process is decisive and the intangible goods become more important than the tangible ones. The knowledge society represents much more, as it ensures an unprecedented dissemination of knowledge towards all citizens by new means, mainly the Internet, the e-book and the learning methods assisted by electronic proceedings (e-learning); it also aims at expanding and deepening the scientific knowledge and the truth about existence, as the only way through which an ecologically sustainable society may be ensured and will be a new stage in culture (based on the culture of knowledge that involves all forms of knowledge). Finally, the knowledge society lays the foundations of a new society of consciousness, truth, morality, creativity and spiritual' [1]. This new type of knowledge is based on the numerous

transformations occurred in all the areas of the society; it represents the foundation of the human and social development. A society dominated by knowledge or just producing it would not be sufficient; the challenging things here are the modalities by which this knowledge is managed and disseminated: 'we are drowning in information, yet we are hunger for knowledge' [10]; that is a reality not at all far from the truth. In addition, the same American author sustains that the uncontrolled and unorganized information is not a resource any more within the informational society. On the contrary, it becomes the enemy of the informational worker. Those reflections are leading to a conclusion: it is fundamental that the information should stand as source and resource, eventually becoming knowledge that could be valorized.

We are including, in the context of this dissertation, another defining element of the actual society – *communication*, such an important and instrumental process which allows and facilitates the accomplishment of progress and which should become a permanent concern of the school, with so much as communication has become a functional (and transverse) competence that may assure the individual and social success.

It is completely acknowledged the fact that no society has ever been and will certainly never be able to exist outside learning, education – as the individual's defining singularity, seen as a continuous and active accumulation of social experiences, so rich in significances, whose results or effects are to be found again in facts of civilization or culture, transmitted from generation to generation. The degree of development of a society is also dictated, besides the different economic markers, by those having a direct reference to education and school quality – the way of structuring knowledge

and learning, types of expected performances, the quality of the educational activity, the modality of distributing the knowledge throughout society [18].

2. Some senses of the phenomenon of reform in education

The explanatory approach of the term *reform* determines the updating of the significances associated to another phenomenon, previously proposed to the study: the change. At the school level, the effects of the change are felt both in the internal and external environment, yet with direct influence (constructive or not) upon the one educated and prepared for life – the individual.

Similar to any social institution, the school is subject to permanent change, either slow or standing, with adaptative character, or rapid, with a more radical character which aims at fundamental transformations (with visible effects, both at a structural and functional level). Any radical change of a social institution, which is accomplished both by internal mechanisms and the direct intervention of the members of society, may be regarded as a reform of the respective institution. Since for any reform there is a set of causes and conditions that necessarily allow and request the intervention at the level of the social institution structures, one may use these markers to make the difference between natural, contagious and artificial reforms. At the level of education, very often characterized as most conservatory among all the social subsystems, the effects of some far-reaching transformative interventions are visible after a very long time and the real influences in the functioning of the society may be measured after two or three decades. Depending on the fundamental motivation that determines it, the

reforming action may be political or socio-economic. The political reform has ideological motivations, it is rapidly applied and has a synchronizing character as concerns the other social institutions; it cannot have a natural character as it represents but an effort to adjust the educational system to the major political changes of the society. The socio-economical reform has as its cause the possible desynchronizations appearing between the educational system and the socio-economic realities. From a structural point of view, such a reform presupposes:

1. The analysis of the reform strategies (the analysis of the existent situation, the elaboration, according to the social demand, of some general finalities of the Romanian system of education, the elaboration of multiple packages of scenarios, the experimentation, the economic analysis of different viable strategies, the selection of an optimum reform strategy);

2. The formulation of the legal papers, necessary to the introduction of the reform, and their adoption;

3. The application of reform.

The education has been facing lately a series of challenges, specific to the actual society. As Professor Marga also declares, 'we have in view the extension of education to class 0 and adults; the massification of traditional academic qualifications and the increase in importance of the post university studies; the globalization of the product market and of knowledge; the internationalization of education under the aspect of curriculum and performance criteria; the emergence of a society in which the providers of education multiply and the traditional school is losing the monopoly over education; the structuring of long-life education; the profiling of constructive learning as a new and efficient type of learning' [9]. There are several guiding

lines that are desirable in accordance with the exigencies of the actual society, in which education is holding the total role in assuring the performances and progresses from the economic, cultural, political, administrative and, last but not least, social point of view.

The transition in education, as far as our country is concerned, cannot be accomplished independently from what is happening at the international scale. We are very much interested in the positive experiences in the field of education of the European countries and the issue of borrowing such successful practices has been definitely discussed. In the most situations, things were done exactly the same, yet without ultimately taking into account the specific character of our society, namely the national character, the existing infrastructure (metaphorically, we are also referring to teachers), the political factor that rules the activity in all areas of the society, by being focused here on the educational system. In the same work, the author grasps a few dimensions of the educational reform, regarding to which some corrective/changing measures are being planned: „The curricular reform; the replacement of the predominantly reproductive learning with the problem solving paradigm and the revival of the own scientific research; the improvement of infrastructure and the informatization of education; the changing of the educational management; a new interaction between education and the economic and administrative surrounding environment; the adoption of more advanced forms of international cooperation” [9].

Some of the intentions have been materialized; as a proof, we are referring, within the educational context, to a new curriculum; the evaluative practices have been updated, the same as concerns the teaching-learning methodology; the school networks have been re-organized; the

study opportunities (that of completing/continuing the studies) have been extended, in order to support the learner. Also, the interest is being oriented towards the attempt to resize teaching as a profession, as it is confronting a series of new types of constrains dictated by the changes happening at the level of roles, didactic competencies, values and professional standards.

The analysis of the reform in education, from the historical perspective, aims at ‘exploring the manner in which the present events are placed in relation with other previous events’ [14]. Not infrequently, the answer that has been insistently searched for with devotion nowadays, comes only when the conditions of a retrospective analysis, of a historical type are met: ‘A world that is accelerating speed, characterized by the mobility of individuals, masses, and situations should answer the following question: are we giving up the simple idea of a reform in favor of maintaining the spirit of research and resourcefulness to organize a permanent education of an amplitude to surprise us?’ [3]. The reform of the educational system constitutes as a superior type of change, of the pedagogical/educational type, that takes action in a historically determined spatiality and temporality. Sorin Cristea defines the concept of educational reform as ‘a structural and systemic innovation within the frame of the teaching system’ [3]. In its essence, the reform is aiming at placing the system of education in harmony with the different subsystems of society, and the innovation of the relationship instituted on the level of different components of the teaching system; besides, the reform is aiming at those qualitative transformations that may innovate the educational system.

Either it is perceived as innovation [7], [8], or as a general remaking [5], an

assembly of integrated transformations, as a restructuring [15] or a global transformation [16] the reform presupposes extensive transformative interventions (at the level of a single system component, as well as at the level of more of them) adjusted by a teleology of optimization, in the sense of effectiveness and efficiency.

S. Cristea thinks that this fundamental concept – reform - of maximum generality and stability ‘implicitly includes also the main lines in the pedagogical projection of a real program of qualitative transformation for the school institution, to consist in: delimitating a new orientation of the educational system; elaborating a new structure of the teaching system; accomplishing a new educational plan, new curricula and textbooks’ [4]. The reorientation of this teleological component in a reforming sense is generating the projection of a new organizing and functioning structure of the educational system; a dimension understood as ‘the level of education as a means of the Social Reform’ [4].

A unitary point of view upon the significances of the concept of reform in education is expressed by G. Cristea: ‘The essence of a social and pedagogical phenomenon of maximum complexity within the expression of maximum concentration which has the value of a model of analysis and action of maximum generality and abstractization’ [2].

By synthesizing, the reform of education is aiming at a major change of the educational system, by direct reference to the restructuring of the educational finalities, both at the macro structural level - educational ideal, goals of education and micro structural – general and specific objectives of the process of education. Also, the effects of the change will be felt upon the organizing structure of the system, implicitly upon the educational process and the curriculum, based on the

general objectives that will direct the elaboration of new regulating school documents. At the same time, this unity attributed to the reform of education, will contribute to the efficient control and management of the educational reality, which permanently suffers quantitative and qualitative changes and which presupposes the existence and influence of numerous variables, sometimes acting in a contradictory way; the matters of the reform in education impose the approach of some adequate methodological instruments [2].

Lazăr Vlăsceanu declares that ‘the innovating possibilities of the educational reform are not only in direct accordance with the difference between the previous and the new structures, but they are also depending, to a high degree, on the induced or requested practical activity or the size of correlation between the educational reform and the pedagogical changes really asked for’ [17].

3. An inventory of characteristics of the Romanian system of education – reformist guide marks

In Romania, the Constitution assures free compulsory education for all its citizens. We have witnessed lately, without any doubt, numerous attempts to reform the system of education; sometimes, the results were satisfying, though shy and losing ground eventually, when facing failure. Certainly, the question that has been addressed so many times would be: *why isn't it working?* The matters concerning the reform of a system are highly complex; meanwhile the reform cannot be even pretended as long as the society, on its whole, is not ready to ‘welcome’ it.

Generally, when thinking of the notion of system, one may understand an assembly of elements that continuously interact with each other, to form all

together a unitary whole. Particularly, the educational system appoints 'the institutional organization of the instructional and educational process, comprising all the institutions destined to accomplish the instruction and education of the young generation' [11].

Any system of education distinguishes itself by means of its historical and national character, as it has evolved and transformed itself (maybe even in a sense of perfecting itself) in accordance to the development of the society, from the economical, political, social and cultural point of view. We are pleading, in pedagogical discourses, in favor of a relationship between society and the system of education. That explains by the fact that any change intervening in society should be sustained and promoted by the educational system, so as the first should benefit from the results of this promotion. The system of education consists in a series of components, between which there is not a static relationship, but on the contrary - any alteration that appears at the level of one of the components influences the others, in a positive or negative way. The mission of education consists in placing the individual – the one who submits to the educational action – in relation with the products of the humanity knowledge, truth, science and culture.

When performing the radiography of the system of education, one may say there's a lot of talk concerning the necessity to accomplish the reform, yet extremely little is actually being done. To reform supposes to re-think everything that involves the system of education, leaving from the actual punctual activity taking place in classes with pupils and reaching the aspects regarding the educational politics. Therefore, the process of reforming proves to be an especially complex one and a close analysis of all the constituent

elements of the educational system is essential.

It is not a strange fact that at least the education in Romania is finding itself in a perpetual search for its own identity. This prolonged exploration, with its numerous reforming attempts, hasn't done but to deepen the system in a pretty profound crisis. Perhaps the most impressing manifestation of this crisis consists in lowering the general quality of the educational process, no matter the level of school instruction we make reference to. Obviously, the reality cannot be different as long as the political and legal system in our country is making itself conspicuous by instability, incoherence and discontinuity. It is justified the hypothesis that the educational system has endured for the last years just an embellishment, yet a superficial one, the concerns being oriented towards the form, rather than the content, a fact that has inevitably led to the qualitative level of the didactic act being placed way under the pretensions of the European education. The eventual perpetuance and accentuation of some qualitative insufficiencies within the frame of the public education have undoubtedly generated the appearance of a particular system of tutoring that proves to be still difficult to access for many families. The absurd comes from the fact that this entire phenomenon is unfolding exactly the period when everywhere in the world the preoccupation and attention given to quality is ever more intense and present.

The diminution of the qualitative level of the educational process is not the only possible reality; the decrease of credibility regarding the educational act among all the actors involved is also certain; whether we talk about students, their parents, teachers and society in its whole. Because of the failures registered along the past years, the education is no longer regarded as the place assuring the future of young

generations, but rather a waste of time, if we think of the worst scenario [12].

We may also bring into discussion the attitude of the state structures towards the present and actual needs of education. The system of education is suffering because of the weak financing, either we refer to the school institution - on a general level, or the educator, who is unfortunately enduring what some would call continuous erosion. This may be also an indicator of the dramatic lowering in quality of the educational action. The authors of the work entitled *The Romanian Education at a Crossroad* remember the fact that 'the post-December governments have launched the liberalization of education (a positive fact in itself), without assuring the adequate educational marketing. The labor market has got, from year to year, new configurations, which should be known and communicated to high-schools and universities' [13].

It is possible to surpass this crisis situation. Solutions have existed and they still exist. It is vital right now that such solutions should take a political and legal shape and be applied in schools, from the pre-school level to the university one. An optimal solution may be represented by an authentic democratization of education, strongly connected with the improvement of the teaching staff in the new types of professional-instructional standards. Last but not least, there's an imperative request for the assurance of accessibility or the extension of accessibility for the young people at all educational levels.

Adrian Miroiu has completed the list of difficulties which the Romanian educational system is confronting: its incapacity to solve its own problems. Although the reform in education may be characterized by a debut placed far enough in time, it seems to have still remained stuck in old paradigms; it is being configured the idea according to

which the reform fails to answer the needs of the present, which are dictated by the exigencies of the contemporary society [13].

4. In conclusion – a few postulates of change

Under the incidence of education, M. Fullan has identified a series of changes. We are rendering below a synthesis of some of those, which allow and facilitate the understanding of the essence of the reform:

- the change is a personal experience; stress and anxiety are normal emotions for the beginning;
- the change is approached differently by every school in order to match its own context; conflict and disagreement are inevitable and fundamental,
- there is a need for a mixture between pressure and support, between help and encouragement,
- the efficient change takes time, thus perseverance is essential; the organizational restructuring may last for long,
- a school cannot develop all the time, it would be left without fuel; the change means to alternate the periods of relative activity with those of consolidation,
- there are many valid reasons for which people do not implement the change; we are not always dealing with resistance to change;
- it is not realistic to wait for everybody to change – don't wet the rocks!
- it is necessary to make plans leaving from those affirmations!
- no quantity of information may show perfectly clear what kind of action should be done!
- *Development evolves!*
- *It is no good to make plans that are too exact!* [6].

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the strategic grant POSDRU 107/1.5/S/80765 the project entitled 'Excellence and interdisciplinary doctoral studies for an information society', co-financed by the European Social Fund within the Sectorial Operational Program Human Resources Development 2007-2013.

References

1. Busquin, P.: *Entrétien sur la recherche européenne*. In: La Recherche (2002).
2. Cristea, G.: *Reforma învățământului. O perspectivă istorică (1864-1944) (Educational reform. A historical perspective (1864-1944))*. Bucureşti. EDP, 2001.
3. Cristea, S.: *Reforma pedagogică în condițiile unei societăți democratice (Educational reform under a democratic society)*. In: Journal of Teaching (1993) No.1, p. 21-22.
4. Cristea, S.: *Proiectarea pedagogică în perspectiva reformei învățământului (Design in education from reform perspective)*. In: Journal of Teaching (1994) No. 3, p. 34-35.
5. Faure, E.: *A învăța să fii (Learning to be)*. Bucureşti. E.D.P., 1974.
6. Fullan, M.: *Change Forces: The Sequel*. London. Falmer Press, 1993.
7. Hassenforder, J.: *Inovația în învățământ (Innovation in education)*. Bucureşti. E.D.P., 1976.
8. Huberman, A.: *Cum se produc schimbările în educație (How changes are made in education)*. Bucureşti. E.D.P., 1978.
9. Marga, A.: *Calitatea educației și coeziunea socială (Quality education and social cohesion)*. In: Primary education (2002), p. 6 – 15.
10. Naisbitt, J.: *Megatendințe. Zece noi direcții care ne schimbă viața (Megatendencies. Ten new direction changing our lives)*. Bucureşti. Editura Politică, 1989.
11. Nicola, I.: *Tratat de pedagogie școlară (Treaty of teaching school)*. Bucureşti. Aramis, 2003.
12. Niculescu, N.G., Adumitrăcesei, I.D.: *Învățământul românesc la o răscruce (The Romanian Education at a Crossroad)*. Bucureşti. Polirom, 1999.
13. Miroiu, A.: *Învățământul românesc azi (The Romanian System of Education Today)*. Iași. Polirom, 1998.
14. Popkewitz, T.: *A political sociology of educational reform: Power/knowledge in teaching, teacher education and research*. New York. Teachers College Press, 1991.
15. Văideanu, G.: *Educația la frontiera dintre milenii (Education at the border of the millennium)*. Bucureşti. Ed. Politică, 1988.
16. Văideanu, G.: *UNESCO 50, Educație (UNESCO-50, Education)*. Bucureşti. EDP, 1996.
17. Vlăsceanu, L.: *Decizie și inovație în învățământ (Decision and innovation in education)*. Bucureşti. EDP, 1979.
18. Vlăsceanu, L.: *Școala la răscruce. Schimbare și continuitate în curriculumul învățământului obligatoriu (School at a crossroads. Change and continuity in the curriculum of compulsory education)*. Iași. Polirom, 2002.