The European Dimension of Education – axiological component of the European educational policies

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Abstract

The axiological dimension of the curriculum supposes on the one hand the spreading of some specific internal values and on the other hand the potentiality of connecting and giving a meaning to the external values, to the totally different cultural and social stimuli.

Keywords: values and attitudes, European dimension of education, European citizenship

In the last decades of the 20th century, by changing the priorities in the classical triad of the educational goals (knowledge, abilities, skills, habits, attitudes) advanced by the teacher G. Văideanu during his activity under the *UNESCO* aegis, there has been put an emphasis on the importance of the final component ***values and attitudes***, in the compulsory structure of the curriculum, in the European context. (G.Văideanu, 1988, p. 82).

The International Commission on Education for the 21st century in its Report to UNESCO warned that the future of the mankind depends on the options which the individuals make from the ***values*** perspective, options which are generated essentially in the context of the formal education.

Consequently, the axiological climate feeds the educational goals consistently, imprinting them with a specific dynamic which contaminates all the other ***components of the curriculum***, *contents, didactic strategies* and *assessment*.

The educational European programmes planned for the next years, reflect the concern for promoting the ***European values*** along with the economy globalization and the knowledge society.

In an epilogue of the Commission Report, Z. Nanzhao makes an inventory of the ***values*** which have to be formed through the *curricular contents* in order to build a *global moral profile*:

- Being conscious about the ***human rights***, supported by the social responsibility feeling;
- Appreciating the idea of ***social equality*** and ***democratic participation*** in the process of governing and taking decisions;
- Understanding and tolerating the ***cultural differences*** and the ***pluralism***, a fundamental condition for the ***social cohesion***;
- A spirit of ***being open towards the otherness***;
- Having a spirit of collaboration in the context of promoting a strong ***solidarity*** towards the world's problems;
- Entrepreneurial spirit, both on the economic market and in everyday life;

- ▪ Openness towards the idea of **non discrimination of the gender**, considered as both goal and way towards the human development;
- ▪ **Receptivity** and **openness towards change** (J. Delors, 2000, pp. 213 – 214).

An important problem in this context is how students with different cultural backgrounds, who don't share the same values, can learn to integrate? The first answer is that these students have to be educated through *values* and *co(shared) ethical principles*, associated with the *multiculturalism, the human rights, the solidarity* and *the social cohesion* (Robert Fullinwider, 1996, Gutmann, 1996, Taylor, 1992). These aspects must be found in the teachers' training as well as in the curricular design. Furthermore, *the democratic education, the education for the human rights, the intercultural education* and *the education for a global citizenship*, as premises for forming the *global citizenship*, built up on solid ethical principles and shared human values can also be feasible solutions.

In 1988, a resolution was adopted by the European Council whose general purpose was the development of *the European dimension of education* through which the young generation has to assume a **European identity** and become familiar with the **values of the European culture and civilization** (CEC, 1988).

Even since the first use of the concept the **European dimension of education**, in the *Council Resolution of the European Ministries of Education* from 1976, it has gone, as M. Vorbeck (2000) declared, beyond the study of the *European Union*'s institutions. In the quoted meeting it was stated the necessity **to confirm the European dimension as an integrated part in forming the European citizenship by developing the intercultural skills at the level of the relationships and interpersonal communication**.

The European dimension of education was present as a concept persistently and more constantly in the vocabulary of the European educational policies, at the end of the 80's. In the beginning, in the articles 149-150 of the *European Union Agreement*, it referred to the *efforts of mutual contact* or to the *common exchanges and projects concluded by the institutions of the compulsory education* from the countries of the European Union. Obviously, it was about a *"European extension of the state policies"* because education and training were supervised on a national scale. **Thus, the European dimension was becoming an auxiliary feature of the state policies in the education field, associated with more openness and cooperation within the European space**.

Another step of this evolution corresponds to the political changes from 1989. All the European countries became members of the *European Council*, a Pan-European organisation, totally different from the *European Union*. Consequently, the meaning of the European dimension widened significantly, **the European dimension becoming a common goal for all the educational systems in Europe**, enhanced by the three **values** which offered an identity to the *European Council*, such as *human rights, pluralism* and *rule of law*.

Beginning with 1993, in the *Charter of the New Europe*, adopted at the same time with the *Maastricht Treaty*, the concept was processed, getting the meaning of:
- ▪ **Education in Europe,** asserting itself as belonging to a common cultural space;
- • **Education about Europe** referring to the contents and the subjects which study the different aspects of the European civilization;

- ***Education for Europe*** aiming to form the *identity* and the *European citizenship*.

Another important step in the evolution of the *European dimension* was marked by the closeness of the two zones of European concern, the *European Union* and the *European Council,* especially after the considerable extension of both organizations. It can be noticed that during this phase, the ***European dimension was becoming the way of being for the European educational systems***.

It has to be mentioned that beginning with the year 2000, the *European Commission* adopted a series of recommendations concerning the promotion within each European state of an education which encourages, through *goals, contents and methodological approaches*, ***common European values***. In this context there has also been asserted the necessity of a *democratic education*. The first common educational dimensions, provided by the European documents, were the *education for democracy, life-long learning and the intercultural education*.

Christine Winter identified the key-words through which the ***European dimension of education*** becomes operational, these being, in most cases, *values and important messages bearers*: *culture, division, communities, empathy, cooperation, respect, geography, tradition, partnership, globalism, freedom, understating, common patrimony, tolerance, positive attitudes, solidarity, identity, exchange, justice, integration, multiculturalism, politics, impregnation, interculturality, sensitivity, openness, citizenship, civic sense.*

Other important terms in order to define the concept of the European dimension are:
- ***European culture***;
- ***European consciousness,*** meaning the feeling of belonging to a common civilisation;
- ***European citizenship***, considered as a result of the education construction within the European space;
- ***European society***, for which the European Council was submitting in 1996 a series of common values such as: *human rights, human dignity, democratic legitimacy, pluralism, diplomacy, dialogue, human solidarity, equality of chances, individual responsibility* (R. Tudorică, 2004, p. 27).

In the European educational context there was underlined especially the sense which explains the European dimension of education as *an orientation of the educational policy having the purpose of training and developing the personality according to the **European values***. *The European dimension of education* is also defined in the European context as a common feature of the educational European systems, as a common project which takes into account *the democracy, the pluralism and the intercultural approach of the diversity* (R. Chivu, 2008, p. 15).

In the curriculum structure, the *European dimension* is a part which is carried out by transmitting knowledge, shaping skills, values and attitudes, through some specific subjects or by promoting the ***cross-curricular approaches***, aiming at ***the education according to the European values***.

A lot of reports from different countries concerning the education, and didactic principles (Eşi, 2010, 41-50) supervised by the European organisations show the development degree of the *European dimension of education*, as a goal oriented towards values in the structure of the compulsory curriculum:

In ***Lithuania***, for example, the new curricular features for the primary and secondary level of the compulsory education aim to synchronize with the European cultural heritage. The syllabuses for *civic,*

ecological or moral education concur to the implementation of the values and to the training of the skills connected with the *European dimension of education* (Z. Jackunas).

In **Slovenia**, on the topic of **the European dimension of the curriculum** there were introduced contents concerning the *humanist values*, including: *the human rights, the respect for the others, the tolerance, the education for peace and cooperation, the gender equality, the concern for the environment*, etc. The idea of a **European curriculum** was applied in study fields such as: **history, geography, arts, civic education** (D. Piciga, 1995, p. 38).

In **Switzerland**, at the *Conference of the Districts' Managers*, the economic managers of the public districts adopted two important recommendations which aim to structure a federal educational frame. They tried to cover the following aspects of **education**: *values, history, cultural heritage, common shared future*, etc. They encouraged the internal and external exchanges in the education field (R. Sauthier, 1995, p. 37).

In **the Netherlands,** *The Resolution of the Ministries of Education from the European Community* was followed by the proposal of creating a national common platform for all the educational activities which include important features for the development of the **European dimension of education in the structure of the compulsory curriculum** (K. Broekhof, 1995, p. 41).

In **England**, understanding and applying the *European dimension of the education* was inserted in all the structures of the curriculum (J. Singh, 1995, p. 29).

In **Ireland**, the new curriculum for the secondary compulsory education enhances *the presence of the European dimension* **in the cross-curricular themes**. Consequently, there was promoted an important number of curricular projects carried out in partnerships with other European countries (J. Koolahan, 1995, pp. 35-36).

In **Scotland**, the introduction of *the European dimension* has the highest degree of success there where the *direct experience* is put into practice. One can understand that the connections between the schools of the countries members of *the European union*, the use of the didactic materials from abroad, the face to face contact with people from other countries, the use of the modern communication technologies, support a high European integration (J.Mitchell, 1996, p. 56).

In **Denmark**, one of the benefits for promoting the European dimension was to strengthen the importance of **the inter and transdisciplinary approaches** within the compulsory education. On the other hand, there was increased the importance of the **extracurricular activities** in order to promote the *European dimension*. The exchanges between schools and groups of students were appreciated at an international level, so that each student of the secondary education must participate in a study visit during his three years of compulsory secondary education.

In other European countries, there are fewer opportunities from this perspective and we consider here especially the countries from the **Central and Eastern Europe**. The geographic distance or the lack of consistent contacts with the schools from the Western European countries, still determine low performances regarding the *European dimension of education*.

The European dimension of education becomes subsequently, in a continuous and systematic manner **a basic component of the European educational policies**, with important value accents through which one aims at the *training of the European citizens*, with a *European identity*, able to manage a *European society*. Due to its nature, based on **openness, cooperation, interculturality and innovation**, this component represents an important feature for the curricular reforms all over Europe.

The project of the European Constitution, adopted by consensus by the European Convention in 2003, advanced the idea of rendering substance and motivation to the European model, through **values**. Europe has always been a global, over national project, a synthesis of four essentially European values– **Germanic freedom, Roman order, Christian faith and Greek thinking**, the European Union being created on the **values** of **the human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, cohesion, legality and human rights**.

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