

# Alternative Educational Methodologies



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Edited by

Ion Albulescu and Horațiu Catalano

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# CONTENTS

Foreword .....	ix
Chapter One.....	1
New Challenges for University Governance and Teaching and Learning in Higher Education Ștefan Popenici	
Chapter Two.....	7
Specific Identities and Differentiating Structures in Education: Promoting Diversity and Differences through Educational Alternatives Ion Albulescu and Mirela Albulescu	
Chapter Three.....	19
The Many Pedagogical Influences on Early Childhood Education and Care in Britain Verity Campbell-Barr	
Chapter Four.....	30
Educational Alternatives: Present and Perspectives Adriana Denisa Manea and Cristian Stan	
Chapter Five.....	37
Changing Words in the Romanian Language: Alternative Etymological and Lexico-Semantic Contributions Adrian Chircu	
Chapter Six.....	49
Process and Methodology: Related Challenges in the Step-by-Step Alternative Horațiu Catalano	
Chapter Seven.....	57
Methods of Developing Pupils' Communication Skills by Activities Specific to the Step-by-Step Educational Alternative Horațiu Catalano and Cristina Violeta Catalano	

Chapter Eight.....	65
Particular Features of Instructional Activity within the Traditional Primary Education System and the Step-by-Step Alternative Dana Jucan	
Chapter Nine.....	72
Active and Interactive Learning: Comparative Analysis in Traditional Education and the Step-By-Step Alternative Adriana Denisa Manea	
Chapter Ten .....	83
Formative Aspects of Questions within Morning Meetings Smaranda Florean	
Chapter Eleven .....	89
Comparative Study of Communication Skills of Students from Traditional Education and the Step-by-Step Alternative Doina Macarie	
Chapter Twelve .....	96
Attitudes towards, and Opinions of, Pedagogy among Primary and Preschool Education Students regarding Teaching in Educational Alternatives Delia Muste and Ion Albulescu	
Chapter Thirteen .....	103
The Freinet Pedagogy: Education through Success Smaranda Pușcaș	
Chapter Fourteen .....	108
Using Augmented Reality in Teaching English as a Second Language: A Perspective on Collaborative Learning through the Freinet Techniques Ioana Mudure-Iacob	
Chapter Fifteen.....	117
The Contribution of Professor Ilie Șulea-Firu to the Development of the Montessori Pedagogy in Romania Mihaela Gabriela Neașu	
Chapter Sixteen .....	125
Maria Montessori: Children and Values in Education Venera-Mihaela Cojocariu	

Chapter Seventeen.....	135
The Guiding View on the Freedom of Action and Decision of the Child in Montessori Pedagogy Olga Chiş, Viorel Dragoş and Claudia Doina Grec	
Chapter Eighteen.....	142
The Lesson's Management in Case Dei Bambini Laura Simion	
Chapter Nineteen.....	150
The Fluency of Steiner Anthroposophy in Waldorf Pedagogy Cristian Petre	
Chapter Twenty.....	160
Facing the Paradigm Change: Values of Pedagogical Experience in Waldorf Education Sorin Țigăreanu	
Chapter Twenty-One.....	169
25 Years of Curative Education in Simeria Veche Mironică Golăşie	
Chapter Twenty-Two.....	177
Implications of Applying the Guiding Principles of Alternative Pedagogies in Adult Education Cornelia Stan	
Chapter Twenty-Three.....	186
Orientation in the Environment and Learning Monica Cuciureanu	
Chapter Twenty-Four.....	195
The School Celebration: A Ground Activity in Jena Plan Alternative Delia Pop	
Chapter Twenty-Five.....	205
A Holistic and Integrated Perspective for Teaching Religion in Public Schools Constantin Cuciuş	

Chapter Twenty-Six.....	216
The Role of Parental Education Activities in the Intellectual, Moral and Social-Emotional Development of Pupils within the Step-By-Step Alternative	
Vasile Chiş and Cristina Violeta Catalano	
Chapter Twenty-Seven.....	226
The Teacher-Doctor of the Pupils Souls	
Crenguţa Lăcrămioara Oprea	
Chapter Twenty-Eight.....	235
Arousing the Interest of the Students in Educational Alternatives through Extra-curricular Activities: Application on Students Majoring in the Pedagogy of Primary and Preschool Education	
Constantina Catalano	
Chapter Twenty-Nine.....	241
Active Camp: Essential Issues of Experimental Education	
Ştefănescu Horea	
Chapter Thirty.....	249
Study of the Impact of Working Memory of Learning on Children	
Viorel Mih, Viorel Dragoş and Codruţa Mih	
Chapter Thirty-One.....	260
Efficient Alternative Assessment of the Teaching and Learning Process	
Mirela Albulescu	
Chapter Thirty-Two.....	285
The Importance of the Morning Meeting for the Development of the Emotional and Social Skills	
Carmen Muscari-Salvan and Gabriela Maier	
Chapter Thirty-Three.....	294
Reconsidering Educational Practice in the Romanian Preschool Educational System by Starting from Theories and Practice Specific to Educational Alternatives	
Rodica Brănişteanu	

## FOREWORD

Alternatives to classical education, such as Montessori Pedagogy, Waldorf Pedagogy, Curative Pedagogy, Freinet Pedagogy, the Jena Plan or the Step-by-Step Programme offer specific, flexible school profiles, open to communication and collaboration with all educational partners that meet the needs of children and teachers as well as parents.

All these promote the holistic development of a child's personality, differentiation and individualization in the educational process, setting up optimal social relationships among all members of the educational community. Of course, the existence of alternatives is beneficial for a dynamic and open educational system; highlighting and valuing, from their own, specific perspectives, issues covered less fully in traditional education.

From their beginnings, alternative pedagogies argued for pluralism as an expression of freedom and democracy in the field of education. Respect for individuality and diversity is a fundamental principle that should lead to the removal of the unique standards, specific to classical education. Educational alternatives propose goals, forms of conducting activities, content, teaching-learning-assessing strategies and school environments that move away, more or less, from the uniform characteristics of traditional education. Of course, in their case, the micro and macro structural outcomes are also taken into account, as well as the curricular criteria that ensure the global orientation of the education system.

The concept of an "educational alternative" engages possible solutions through the effort made to correct certain deficiencies in the organization of the educational establishment, replace some forms of activity, promote efficient didactic strategies and restructure the operational framework of the school institution.

Alternative pedagogies are author pedagogies, i.e. pedagogies which value the ideas of certain prominent personalities in the history of the field, such as Maria Montessori, Rudolf Steiner, Célestin Freinet and Peter Petersen. Based on their views of the great contemporary educational systems and of current school practices around the world, they promote ways of conducting the educational process, offering options for organizing and functioning that differ from those found in traditional schools. The existence of multiple systems does not imply that one is

denying or cancelling out the other. In fact, they are complementary and contribute to the improvement of quality in education.

The Editors

# CHAPTER ONE

## NEW CHALLENGES FOR UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE AND TEACHING AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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### **Abstract**

This article explores succinctly some of the most important challenges for university governance and teaching and learning. Technological innovation and the digital revolution are producing rapid changes in the landscape of higher education, and this impacts directly on how we imagine solutions to manage teaching and learning in higher education. It also explores the context of the “skills gap” and how universities can find solutions for the new set of requirements to serve all stakeholders.

**Keywords:** higher education, rankings, flexible curriculum, quality of teaching and learning.

To understand some of the most important challenges facing teaching and learning in higher education, we have to look back at some important moments that have changed the entire architecture of universities. For example, we have to remember that in Marrakesh, Morocco, education was turned for the first time into a tradeable commodity under the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). GATS covered rules and agreements governing international trade in services, and is a treaty of the World Trade Organization (WTO). The impact of this agreement between governments on commercial trade in higher education was unprecedented. GATS stated that education is a service to be treated like all other commercial tradeable services regulated under this international agreement.

This includes cross-border supply, consumption abroad, a commercial presence and the presence of natural persons. These are translated into various forms of higher education that are now common for universities: campus branches, flows of international students, international scholars teaching in universities, student exchanges and all other sectors.

The World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference, held in Seattle in 1999, placed higher education in the context of trade liberalization with the conclusions of the “Millennium Round”. This is one of the main sources of the current context in which higher education operates around the world, where universities are placed in a competitive market, where governance is changed by a number of competing factors (Sauvé, 2001; Robertson, 2003). The Millennium Round was also important because it led to new instruments that aim to give all stakeholders information about the quality of educational services, in the form of university rankings. The first international global ranking of universities was published in 2003 as the Shanghai Jiao Tong University rankings, entitled “Academic Ranking of World Universities” (and often referred to as ARWU). Since then, a large number of international rankings have appeared, measuring various indicators, such as the output of research, quality of teaching or “graduate employability”. These rankings provide information on universities to all those interested in investing in the new commodity, groups that can be represented by potential students, parents or industry.

The impact of rankings is direct, as they shape governance and decisions on resource allocation. Rankings are not only a result of globalization (van der Wende, 2003), but a consequence of global competition. They are turned into policy instruments used by governments, international organizations or university boards, as part of an increasing focus on measuring the quality of university teaching and research. Currently, the analysis of the most prominent rankings reveals that the gaps between countries in terms of performance are still very wide, even when we look at a relatively small area, such as the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). In effect, universities in underperforming regions not only struggle to compete internationally but they also lose out in terms of innovation, economic benefits and the quality of their human capital. This leaves institutions unable to attract the best academic staff and students, and causes a downward spiral of declining quality in tertiary education at institutional and regional levels.

The impact on teaching and learning is direct as managing them effectively becomes more challenging; universities have to attract the brightest students and academic staff if they are to meet the many challenges ahead, such as funding pressures, and conflicting requirements

from government, industry, local communities and partners. The reality is that the liberalization of the international trade in higher education services and the current competitive context of higher education are creating large inequalities for students and universities which are increasing over time. This has obvious implications for the funding and resources available for research and innovation; for example, the public universities in Australia reported total revenues of A\$27.8 billion for 2014 (Australian Government, 2015). This is a remarkable result, especially when we consider the relatively small number of universities in Australia and its population of only 23 million.

Nevertheless, this increasing competition brings unprecedented scrutiny on the quality of teaching and learning, research and employment opportunities opened up by universities for their graduates. A growing percentage of graduate unemployment and underemployment is pushing the issue of employability to the top of the agenda for many institutions of higher education. This is a complex endeavour, and represents a major challenge for university governance and teaching and learning in higher education. The IBM Institute for Business Value recently surveyed academics and industry leaders about the current state of higher education; they found that both parties agreed that universities were failing to meet the needs both of students and industry. Over 50 per cent of respondents to this survey believed that the current higher education system failed to meet the needs of students, and nearly 60 per cent believed that it was unable to meet the needs of industry (King et al., 2015). While industry talks about a “skills gap”, revealing that too often graduates do not have important skills for the workforce, academics point out that industry is responsible for training its own workforce. It is underlined that universities are not training institutes designed to save money for employers and produce “plug-and-play” graduates for the sole benefit of the corporate world. It should not be a surprise that the reality behind political statements and slogans is that the dialogue has stalled.

A third major challenge for academic governance is also linked to the requirement to create the set of skills relevant for the employment of graduates, and revolves around quality assurance in teaching and learning. The OECD reports that globally “10% of new graduates have poor literacy skills and 14% have poor numeracy skills – not an attractive profile for potential employers” (OECD, 2015). It would be convenient to assume that this is a problem only for poor or marginal universities, but evidence indicates the opposite. There is a general problem of quality in teaching and learning that was not solved even if higher education is in expansion and equally impacts some of the best teachers. An example is offered by

an extensive study published in 2011 by two respected American sociologists, Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa. In “Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses”, they revealed the extent of the decline in standards; their data showed that across American higher education, 45 per cent of undergraduates demonstrated no significant gains in skills vital for the new economy, such as literacy, critical thinking and complex reasoning. In their words, after two years of studies, these students did not demonstrate any significant improvement in learning: “An astounding proportion of students are progressing through higher education today without measurable gains in general skills as assessed by the CLA. While they may be acquiring subject-specific knowledge or greater self-awareness on their journey through college, many students are not improving their skills in critical thinking, complex reasoning, and writing” (Arum and Roksa, 2011).

Arum and Roksa rightly emphasize that limited learning in higher education is a problem that should be a central concern for “policymakers, practitioners, parents, and citizens alike”.

Various analysts see a decline in student enrolments in countries like the United States as a sign that universities will soon face increasing difficulty in attracting students, which will put even more pressure on the competition between institutions to attract the best students. While it is well documented that university studies clearly represent a worthwhile investment, the prospect of massive debts required to pay student fees and the spectre of graduate unemployment and underemployment represent serious concerns for potential students and their parents. In the United States, student loan debt is over US\$1.2 trillion, which has significant implications for the entire economy: even some of the most stable student loans are seen now by rating agencies as being at risk and may be dropped to junk status. In the UK, economists estimate that three-quarters of students won’t be able to pay off their debts and less than half think that their degrees will help them find a graduate-level job (Weale, 2016). Good teaching and a flexible curriculum suited to address the need to educate minds and develop skills that are relevant in current social and technological contexts are now vital requirements for universities. Those institutions unable or unwilling to look for new solutions in teaching and learning or to reimagine curriculum design and delivery face a slow, withering decline as their most likely road ahead.

The economy is changing rapidly and new technologies are displacing jobs at an accelerated rate. Technological change now impacts teaching, and higher education is placed at the forefront of the technological revolution. This requires not only a proper digital infrastructure for universities, but a

new set of skills and knowledge for lecturers. Any university interested in staying attractive and competitive cannot structure teaching around the same pedagogies and ideological directions adopted in the 1980s.

Universities have a difficult road ahead, with many challenges and uncertainties. Success in this difficult new context is already determined by the capacity to attract, retain and inspire bright students and staff and to develop their creativity and potential. There is no substitute for excellence in teaching and the quality of learning determines not only students' future, but the future of universities and the societies in which these institutions function.

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## CHAPTER TWO

# SPECIFIC IDENTITIES AND DIFFERENTIATING STRUCTURES IN EDUCATION: PROMOTING DIVERSITY AND DIFFERENCES THROUGH EDUCATIONAL ALTERNATIVES

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### **Abstract**

The availability of educational alternatives in the Romanian education system after 1990 has been a natural consequence of both the advance in the democratization of the society and the current guidelines and procedures in the field of educational sciences. We refer in particular to the fact that the educational paradigm focusing on teacher first and foremost is gradually and increasingly losing ground to educational models focused on the needs, interests and aspirations of students. These models are promoted by alternative educational programmes such as Montessori, Waldorf, Freinet, Jena or Step-by-Step. The objective of this article is to point out some of the basic features of methodologies specific to these alternative programmes.

**Keywords:** educational alternatives, diversity, difference, pluralism in education, differentiated training.

### **Diversity and Difference in Education**

A democratic society makes it possible for heterogeneity and diversity to assert themselves. Accepting diversity and difference means acknowledging that there is no one single reality but many realities, that there is no one,

single, ultimate truth, but many truths, and that there is not one history, but many. Hence, there is always more than one way to act or carry out tasks. The belief that it is always worth looking for the best way to do something is futile. As the philosopher G. Vattimo pointed out, we live in “an explosive situation, a pluralization that seems irresistible and makes it impossible for us to judge the world and its history by uniformity and single-sided criteria” (Vattimo, 1995, 10). The very idea of a “unique reality” is increasingly difficult to conceive. Reality is the result of multiple interpretations and reconstructions that are permanently in competition, without any “central coordination”. In these circumstances, a process of “unveiling differences and diversities” takes place, an act of presenting, promoting and establishing various approaches in order for them to be known and acknowledged.

Denying the idea of a single, unique model has the effect of affirming and asserting differences and specific identities, of proclaiming multiplicity and competition between paradigms and models, and the coexistence of heterogeneous elements, as well as the variety of projects. This idea implies both acknowledging the multidimensional aspect of reality and of a variety of types of relationships, and also admitting to the multiplicity of descriptions and perspectives, and to the complementarity of relations and to their interacting dynamics. The acknowledgement of an opinion as definite is not based on universal criteria, i.e. by applying generally available provisions, but on examining the manner in which this opinion operates in a particular context of life and activity. Therefore, education should not be seen as a path to cultivating a common developmental basis for everyone. On the contrary, it should be viewed as the process of revealing the uniqueness in teachers and in each of their students.

Diversity and difference are often mentioned in the theory and practice of education. The difference comprises the pedagogical models focusing on identity and subjectivity which highlight fragmented and dynamic aspects of human personality in the context of education and development. In education, differences can be opportunities, not a philosophy in themselves, but rather the ways and means to cope with a series of situations. Inevitably, education involves cultivating and assessing similarities through curriculum standards or professional criteria and through unique tests for various categories of students. It also involves the sequencing of schooling, cultural literacy, the shaping and developing of appropriate behaviours associated with citizenship and social participation, etc. Nonetheless, formal education and training mark the identity of students by systems of differences. Teachers are concerned with natural personality and differences in ability between students, as well as with

circumstances involving environmental differences and their learning abilities (Ulrich, 2007).

Pluralism in education means acceptance of diversity, multiplicity and heterogeneity. In other words, it involves setting aside the formal speech centred on what is generally and universally valid, on conformity, homogeneity and uniformity, in favour of a speech favouring peculiarity and specificity and context. In such a perspective, there are no absolute truths, only points of view, more or less plausible, more or less convincing, depending on the situation and individual subjectivity. There are many forms of expressing differences in education. They manifest themselves as different ways of thinking, interpreting, understanding and taking practical action. Among other considerations, the 1996 Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century includes the following statement: “The respect for diversity and individuality is a fundamental principle that should lead to the elimination of any standard type of education.” Formal, more “official” forms of education are often legitimately accused of restricting personal development by forcing all children to conform to the same cultural and intellectual pattern, without taking into account their individual talents” (Delors, 2000, p. 41). Pluralism in education means recognizing, interpreting and promoting the social experience of diversity and differences. This release and revelation of diversity is the process by which alternatives to the classical mainstream of education present themselves in order to become more visible, known and accepted.

### **Alternative Models in Education**

There is a whole series of different educational models, but no objective criterion would allow us to say that one is superior to others. Unlike traditional schools, which largely resemble each other, both in time and space, most alternative schools do not adhere to the idea that a particular model is suitable for all people and communities. Each of them creates and develops its own methods and approaches to teaching and learning. We must agree with the fact that there is no “best model”, but a variety of models that are appropriate, or not, to people’s diversity. This perspective can help us dismiss the idea that education should be conducted in a certain way. A model can only stand out when it is compared to others, which can imply transfers of values generating new practices, thus representing a source of mutual enrichment. Mutual separations and closures are unproductive, but they can be easily overcome through knowledge, comprehension, acceptance and respect shown to one other.

Educational pluralism also implies the existence of certain institutions and practices offering strategies in teaching and forms of evaluation which might be considered as alternatives to the traditional classic education system<sup>1</sup>. The educational alternatives provide “customized schools” that are flexible, open to communication and cooperation with all educational partners, and that strive to meet the needs of children, teachers and parents (Cuciureanu, 2011). These alternatives promote the holistic development of a child’s personality, differentiation and individualization in the process of teaching and learning, and the establishment of optimal social relations among all members of the educational community. Due to these educational options, parents have a better chance of choosing the education they feel is right for their own children. This means giving up common structures and seeking solutions that are tailored to the specific needs of children, through total – or sometimes partial – deviation from the unitary approaches that are characteristic of the traditional school.

### **Defining Characteristics of Methodology Used in Educational Alternatives**

In both traditional education systems and in alternative programmes, classes must be organized as an exploration or investigation in a problem-solving framework, on an individual or group basis. Teachers are not confined just to conveying knowledge: they must organize and provide support and guidance to students through the process of teaching and learning. In addition, they ensure that students can adapt to new situations. Differentiated training and instruction allow the unlocking of the potential of each student. When the learning environment in which students function is organized in such a way as to facilitate engagement and interaction, when cooperation is appreciated and encouraged, homework and learning materials are optimized, freedom of thought and expression is guaranteed, children become active and willing to take on current challenges. This is what schools look like when they are focused on child development and respect different teaching and learning styles.

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<sup>1</sup> After a long period of time when the Romanian education system was subject to uniformity under communist rule, the past two decades have witnessed new legislative regulation permitting the growth of educational alternatives such as Montessori, Waldorf, therapeutic pedagogy, Freinet’s theory on teaching, the Jena Plan schools, the Step-by-Step Programme, etc. Within a relatively short period of time, these alternatives have developed significantly, leading to the enrolment of a large number of students and teachers in these programmes.

The Montessori approach, for instance, as an alternative to the traditional educational system, considers the individual to be able to self-train and self-construct their own personality, by virtue of the natural forces and options available. Therefore, to educate is to create an environment that is suitable for satisfying the child's needs to spontaneously assimilate knowledge, skills and understandings; this involves preparing and organizing the external stimuli. The educational environment is shaped in such a manner as to reflect these concerns, opening the way for children to explore the world around them, encouraging them to ask questions and find answers, and helping them to understand the complexity of the world.

In educational alternatives, the autocratic type of teacher–student relationship is removed, since it does not favour real communication, but maintains a student's anonymity, passivity and inertia, and often inhibits a student's real potential. The democratization of the relationship between teachers and students is achieved by removing these patterns and stereotypes, and dogmatism of any kind. What does a teacher–student relationship look like in these educational alternatives? What type of school activities do they promote? In modern education, there is a constant and increasing concern for identifying the most effective ways to educate children. The most valued teaching strategies are those able to stimulate students' participation in activities, to increase their independence in thought and action, to enable them to take initiatives and develop a sense of responsibility. The teacher's duty is to motivate students and to encourage their spontaneity and creativity, taking into account their desires and aspirations.

Teachers should also be concerned with establishing a genuine, authentic dialogue with students. In this process, educators acquire flexibility and openness to different mindsets, to confronting different points of view and to adjusting responses accordingly. An important aspect in establishing proactive strategies within alternative educational programmes is observing and monitoring students' reactions of interest or boredom, their ability to understand, or lack thereof, in the process of teaching and learning. When opting for a democratic style in their relationship with students, teachers make decisions after previously consulting them in all relevant matters and each student's preferences are also taken into account and respected. Furthermore, this type of relationship facilitates communication, multidirectional cooperation and support, as well as indirect positive influence within the teaching and learning dynamic.

Another important role of a teacher is to constantly attempt to establish positive emotional relationships with and among students (sympathy, acceptance, etc.), to create a harmonious, stress-free environment in the

classroom. The educational method proposed by Maria Montessori is also based on respecting the freedom of the child in an organized environment that is rich in various stimuli chosen according to the interests and natural aptitudes of children. This environment is created so that it offers a pleasant and attractive atmosphere that is inviting to children and helps them to carry out their activities smoothly. In such an environment, filled with all that is necessary for the sensorial development of children, their intellectual, behavioural and social development does not occur randomly, but within the limits allowed by the space, materials and human assistance provided.

The building of students' personalities is achieved through action, confrontation, cooperation and communication. The teacher is required to use all available methods and means to avoid passivity in students, so that they are intrinsically determined to take the initiative, to act in order to discover and to trigger reactions and attitudes about the information revealed to them. This is the way the student will become an active participant in shaping his own intellectual structures. What does student activism actually imply? How will it manifest itself? Through a spontaneous desire to act, perform and achieve, to devote a great deal of effort to the complex process of searching, discovering and acquiring, a process in which they carry on a permanent exchange of ideas with their teacher. These types of approaches are used when the Freinet techniques, the Step-by-Step programme or the group activities specific to the Jena Plan are applied. All these educational alternatives have something in common – the sustained and continuous effort to customize teaching and learning activities, according to students' training needs.

The determination is to ensure that educational or any other sort of achievement is the result of personal wishes and aspirations, rather than something imposed from the outside. In satisfying their own interests, curiosities and passions and by effectively performing school tasks, children are likely to feel the pleasure and joy of overcoming difficulties and achieving goals. This will consequently contribute to the development of conscious volition, to the fostering of personal development and affirmation of their own, original ideas. In Montessori kindergartens, for instance, teachers do not “teach” in the traditional sense of the word, but create learning situations instead, by helping children to choose the materials they need and to understand how to use them better in order for the learning process to take place. Montessori teachers are supposed to be persons of patience and observers, rather than active agents of education; they are guides rather than leaders. Children enrolled in this type of

programme are perceived as proactive and assertive; they learn and develop by themselves, at their own pace, in a specially shaped environment.

An essential aspect concerning the changes brought to the theory and practice of teaching by alternative educational programmes is the shift from the dominant role of the teacher to creating conditions and a proper environment for students to participate in activities as active subjects in their own training and development. By using active-participative strategies in teaching and learning, the teacher leads students to take initiatives, stimulates communication between them, provides support, encourages and appreciates their contributions, and assesses the progress students make up to a certain point. The class of students thus becomes a place where genuine dialogue and authentic communication are created between the participants in educational activities. All students have the right, and are encouraged, to express themselves, whereas the teacher becomes a partner for dialogue, carefully listening to them and providing constructive feedback when needed.

Educational alternatives actively promote conscious and engaged studying and learning processes, based on assimilating the conceptualized experience of humanity but also on direct investigation of reality, focusing, at the same time, on acquiring knowledge through personal effort. In Waldorf education, for instance, the child is not supposed to receive pre-fabricated images or ready-made and already structured knowledge. These must be conveyed and handled in such a way as to increase the possibility of personal growth and development. When teachers exercise their role in front of the class, they must keep in mind that every child performs individual steps in learning and acquiring knowledge, competences or behaviours. Hence the need for classes to offer a broader spectrum of options and possibilities. Every teacher must provide their students with as many learning situations as possible, as well as with opportunities for them to capitalize and make the most out of the various talents they might have. This is the only way each child has a chance of achieving healthy development and growth.

Waldorf education does not aim at intentionally “labelling” students beforehand; on the contrary, it focuses on leading them to the freedom of expressing individual and personal potential. In each stage of development, children experience important physical and psychological transformations. Their body and mind, their ability to think and feel their brain and state of consciousness change and mature as well. They struggle to find themselves, to build their own identities and to form a personal idea of the world and of life, through direct experience within their immediate and extended social environment. Open situations can always be created in

order for these goals to be achieved. This type of situation is not predetermined and is supposed to stimulate any discoveries through personal effort, since “students should not be spared at all of thinking on their own” (Fucke, 2001, p. 95). The most appropriate educational method must require personal effort, all the more so since an important objective in Waldorf pedagogy is building up and enhancing free will in the context of acquiring knowledge.

There is even a degree of reticence towards advocating or disapproving certain education methods used in the classroom or teaching strategies that should be used by default: “Freedom in the process of teaching is the human condition and assumption that education for freedom as a mission shall be fulfilled in a most reliable manner. A school that wants to be alive and in line with its time needs to ask teachers to permanently refine and further develop their education methods and curricula; the same approach should be adopted for the distribution of teaching material and in choosing the relevant themes that are suitable to the current teaching activity” (Fucke, 2001, p. 18). Teachers should not impose their will in front of children, forcing them to accept ideas, preferences or interests that do not resonate with them, but instead, teachers should assist and help students in meeting their own needs and preferences.

Teaching students nowadays is not equivalent to forcing them to accumulate and store a certain amount of knowledge, especially since much of the information is not even understood. The real challenge is to teach them to participate actively in the process of creating new knowledge. In this respect, it is necessary to place students at the very core of learning situations and experiences that would fully require their available energy and capacities. Célestin Freinet (1994), founder of the education alternative bearing his name, considers that the pedagogical process should be based on the student seen as an axis around which everything revolves. This perspective on the teaching and learning process determines the need to establish a new relationship between teachers and students.

Instead of a relationship based on the teacher’s authority and the unconditional obedience of students, we have to create a relationship based on understanding, trust, support and cooperation. Even if their role is no longer at the core of the class of students, teachers continue to be competent, skilful and reserved leaders, dealing with various tasks such as organizing the classroom and selecting the methods and means required in the learning process, according to the interests and needs of each child and of the group as a whole, as well as with creating an environment that is favourable to fulfilling these needs. Among other roles and tasks teachers

can deal with, we can mention providing the necessary documentation resources, and motivating and stimulating students.

Students play an active role in the process of teaching and learning. The whole school activity must be based on students' needs, tastes, concerns, desires and preferences. Moreover, students do not like to listen to *ex cathedra* lectures for the simple reason that “. . . neither they, nor the adult lecturing them like to hear something they haven't asked for and do not feel an acute need to do so” (Freinet, 1994, vol. II, p. 402). Schools must, therefore, replace words with actions in order to help students acquire knowledge that would be useful throughout their lives. Direct influence from their educators, however, is not excluded, as Cousinet Roger stated, even if the activities proposed by Célestin Freinet largely involve a personal experience on behalf of the students. In spite of the fact that discourses and theoretical explanations used by teachers to teach various subjects can sometimes be useful, they cannot have a profound influence on the intrinsic nature of children. For that matter, practical experience is far more effective in acquiring deeper understanding of these subjects and in applying it in the development and future lives of current students.

In Freinet's concept of teachers and the theory of teaching, the essence resides in shifting the focus towards children, with their natural needs and interpersonal relations. The teacher has a major role in the early stage of organizing the class and at the beginning of activities, so that each student can be allowed to work freely. The educational model promoted by Célestin Freinet and currently assumed by the educational alternative bearing his name is based on a problem-solving type of learning, where groups of students guided by their educators consciously try to find solutions to various issues and life situations (Piaton, 1974).

The teacher's non-intervention allows the child to become aware of their own value as a member of the group, and of the value of other members they cooperate with. The teacher's role will be limited to organizing the materials that are necessary in the process of teaching and learning, and to ensuring and maintaining the climate of trust in the opinions of others. Most often, teachers are merely keen observers with a mission to direct and coordinate the activities of their students, since only by enjoying freedom will students express and pursue their own interests. Through attentive coordination offered only in key moments, will the child gain confidence and act according to their own needs and inner beliefs.

Compared to the traditional education system, where the student's role is reduced to listening and memorizing what was conveyed to them, in Célestin Freinet's educational concept, every child must be at the core of

any teaching and training process. The whole school activity should focus on their concerns, tastes, wishes and choices. The teacher also adapts to the needs of the child, taking into consideration their personality profile, abilities, and inclinations. Among the other functions of a teacher in this context, we can mention helping and guiding, supporting and motivating, facilitating learning and communication, instead of controlling, threatening, warning or punishing.

We can talk about an effective educational activity when students are not maintained in a state of almost total dependence on their teacher; on the contrary, an effective activity is one that intellectually stimulates students by creating problematic situations in which they are in a position to take the initiative, to do research and to propose personal solutions. The teacher should be able to organize the teaching and learning process so as to meet the requirements of modern education, stimulating, at the same time, the need for information, action and expression among their students. In this context, the teacher is expected to create learning situations in which students, already equipped with the techniques of intellectual work, identify solutions to the problems they face; also, competent and creative teachers are expected to search for and provide various sources of information, to encourage the expression of personal opinions, to facilitate cooperation, etc.

As far as Jena Plan schools are concerned, the concept of teaching involves completing individual work and alternating it with other activities that are organized, guided and assisted by teachers. Children's initiative is very important in all activities. The school must be a work-stimulating environment where students work individually or in small groups, according to their own interests and work rhythm, stressing, at the same time, the need for them to harmonize their work with that of the whole group. The educational process is performed using teaching methods and means, as well as the most appropriate learning situations that would help children meet their goals, by alternating the core activities at regular intervals: conversation, work, games and school celebrations.

The methods that can be used in teaching and learning are numerous, their wide diversity addressing the need to differentiate, create nuances and particularize the process of teaching. By adopting and thoroughly practising these methods, the teaching experience of the teacher and the learning situations of students are considerably enriched, and the range of educational strategies becomes more comprehensive, with greater flexibility and suitability with respect to the multitude of tasks and educational undertakings.

## Conclusions

The existence of educational alternatives in Romania is evidence of how the national education system has evolved to provide programmes which meet the needs of teachers, students and parents. It also implies the overcoming of the totalitarian vision of universalism and essentialism which are known to ignore the contextual differences and perspectives and sometimes alter interpretations. Education cannot limit itself to finding a common denominator among people, determining that they need to acquire common, standardized values and practices that have been created and established in the past. Individuals, nonetheless, must be able to freely assert both their responsiveness to universal values, and the right to differentiate and to express their own ideas and opinions.

One of the basic ideas on which educational alternatives are grounded is that the formative effects of schooling and other educational activities are directly determined not just by the degree of engagement and participation of students, but also by practising strategies that aim to remove standardization and formalism, involving students in efforts of independent and creative thinking and action. The principle of active and conscious participation by students in their own training and development is the foundation of the increased interest in strategies that promote learning, involving both acquiring knowledge and practical action.

In the context of these educational alternatives, the teacher breaks away from immutable criteria that were once considered valid, and from that point on, tradition loses its authority to set fixed models that have to be imitated or to impose mandatory directions. This is how the child can become actively, freely and consciously involved in their own education and growth, by individualizing and adapting their work to the needs and abilities of everyone. Students are not assessed in comparison to each other, since the main objective is not to rank them, but to monitor and record their achievement, evolution and progress. Students are assessed in their usual learning environment, through contextualized tasks, by developing projects and portfolios that are being considered both as learning tasks and as evaluation tests.

The quality of teaching activities in educational alternatives lies their ability to multiply their formative effects on students and avoid those situations where learning becomes a process of memorizing a series of answers to questions the students did not themselves ask. Learning by practical action stimulates the process of thinking and expressing the emotional experience of each individual, in order for them to reach a straightforward, easy-to-understand assessment of a series of their own

personal values. These formative processes will thus prepare students for the mastering and proper use of information for the purpose of fulfilling any personal and social objectives and aspirations.

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## CHAPTER THREE

# THE MANY PEDAGOGICAL INFLUENCES ON EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE IN BRITAIN

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### **Abstract**

British Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) provision is characterized by a history of philanthropy, fragmentation and tension. The philanthropic history of ECEC is evident in the number of pedagogical pioneers that come from Britain, motivated by an interest in children's development and a concern for their well-being. Despite the strong philanthropic roots and pedagogical history found in Britain, policy has been historically slow in supporting ECEC and, while Britain is now in a period where there is strong policy interest in the role of ECEC services in supporting wider welfare agendas, policy fragmentation remains. Further, while the policy interest in ECEC has noble intentions, I would argue that they are increasingly constructed along narrow lines that privilege modernist, technocratic models of accountability. In this paper I outline what is meant by Britain, as Britain does not have one ECEC curriculum or related policy framework. I then consider some British ECEC pioneers, as well as highlighting those from beyond Britain, that are drawn upon in current ECEC practice. I briefly trace the last 20 years of policy developments surrounding ECEC and the ever-emerging tensions between the ideas of policymakers and those of the ECEC pioneers and current practitioners.

**Keywords:** Early Childhood Education and Care, pedagogical values, play-based pedagogy, policy, quality.

## **The UK, Britain, England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and our Islands**

To talk of a British approach to ECEC is challenging as Britain has a complex system for managing ECEC policy. Often Britain and the UK are used interchangeably, but it is important to establish that the UK represents England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, while Britain also includes our islands, such as Guernsey and Jersey. The implications of this distinction are important for understanding why there can be differences in ECEC policy across Britain. Firstly in considering Britain, Jersey (for example) has constitutional rights of self-government. The constitutional rights of Jersey are different to the process of devolution in the UK, whereby Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales have the power and responsibility to make policy decisions (Selbie et al., 2015), but Westminster (the British parliament) will seek to ensure commonality in the intention and direction of ECEC policy through mechanisms such as the allocation of funding (Wincott, 2005). Further, the extent of devolution varies. For example, Scotland has more devolved powers than Wales or Northern Ireland. The result is that while there is a degree of common history in the development of ECEC services and a common core in the policy direction of ECEC, there is fragmentation across Britain. ECEC curricula vary, there are varying levels of provision and funding and members of the ECEC workforce are required to hold different qualifications. Further, the fragmentation that is present across Britain is also evident within the countries that form it. Take, for example, England and the qualification requirements for those that work in ECEC. Firstly, it has to be established that ECEC provision is characterized by a mixed market economy, whereby state, private, voluntary and independent ECEC providers all offer services (see Penn, 2012). Those working in the state sector are required to have degree-level teaching qualifications, while those in the private, voluntary and independent sectors who work with children from birth to age four are required to have a leader with a Level Three qualification and half of all other staff at Level Two. The fragmentation that is present within the countries of Britain and across Britain is evidence of how services evolved historically out of philanthropic endeavour and it is only in the last 20 years that policymakers have begun to intervene in the provision of ECEC services. The historical neglect of ECEC provision partly explains the