NEW EDUCATION IN EUROPE; PRINCIPLES, METHODOLOGIES AND EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES

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Abstract

The article highlights the curricular and institutional features of the new education developed in Europe through the contributions of the Belgian Group of Young Educators (GBEN) and the French New Education Group (GFEN). The principles of new education are placed among the known alternative pedagogies in educational theory and practice (Montessori, Freinet, Waldorf, Step by Step). The promoted methodology is diversified, it has specificity in relation to other pedagogical alternatives, through the means of instructions that facilitate personal development, by: stimulating creativity, facilitating solidarity, cooperative learning, experiential learning, metacognition. These major objectives of the new education are achieved through: differentiated and individualized curricular structures; a motivational evaluation; no scoring, etc. Second, in the knowledge society, emerging technologies have changed the ways in which people learn and interact with each other. The article also analyzes the premises by which some of the most important principles of the new education can be used in the context of the new information and communication technologies.

Keywords: New Education; child-centered curriculum; creativity, new information and communication technologies, learning management systems

1. The New Education – epistemic principles and educational systems

The new education has epistemic and methodological grounds in the educational principles that emphasize the knowledge and development of the child, promoted since the beginning of the 20th century, also called the child's

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century, as pedagogical responses to the dogmatic and coercive education of the traditional school, influenced by the educational model of the Middle Ages. In 1900, Ellen Key outlined the fundamental assumptions that will be at the basis of rethinking school and education. Even though her ideas are sometimes radical, Ellen Key has the merit of highlighting some educational directions for reorganizing the educational system, anchored in a new paradigm, that of child-centered education:

- specialization according to well-identified personal aptitudes;
- focusing on certain subjects during certain periods;
- the predominance of pupils' personal activity throughout the school;
- the connection of the subjects with the social practice and the pupil's contact with the reality, throughout the school period (Key, 1978).

The principles and pedagogical theories promoted in child-centered education, espcially the "new school", highlight assumed orientations in the phases of the consolidation of the active pedagogy and pedagogic alternatives (Montessori, Freinet, Waldorf, Step by Step): the natural development of the child; the freedom granted to him / her in the educational act; centering education on the needs and expectations of the child; rethinking the educational system and space to facilitate the contact with reality; the centering of the instructional-educational activities on the personal development of the child.

Pedagogical referentials of educational alternatives have been assumed by postmodern pedagogy, which has re-conceptualized them, developed them and incorporated them into a coherent system of methodological theories, principles and methodologies. Postmodern pedagogy, which integrates the cognitivist and constructivist paradigm, bases its cognitive and methodological system on these primary principles and valorizes them in the field of (Connor, 1999, Cucoş, 2000, Neacşu, 1999, Paun, 2002, apud Bunăiaşu, 2015, p.12, Joita, 2005): educational politics and strategies, integrating humanistic values in educational programs, pedagogical alternatives in the educational system, permanent education, curricular and managerial decentralization principles;

In the field of educational practices, the following are promoted:

- student-centered curriculum;
- symmetrical, democratic educational relations;
- the prevalence of educational strategies centered on facilitating experiential learning, the sociocentric model of instruction, metacognitive strategies;
- selecting and developing curricular content specific to the postmodern

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curriculum, built into integrated curriculum structures, transdisciplinary modules and conceptually organized through segments unrelated to each other (like "informational felts" instead of rigorously organized concepts);

- rebuilding the curriculum on the basis of the new paradigm centered on the understanding and development of the curriculum based on various factors of the curricular context (Pinar, 1998), as a curricular alternative to the normative-prescriptive vision of modern theories.

In the present, the epistemic and methodological principles of the new education are transposed on several levels and in several ways:

- alternative school systems, working according to the alternative pedagogies model;

- the rewriting of the education sciences, from the perspective of pedagogical cognitivism and constructivism, which have incorporated the educational, curricular and social values of the new education;

- the development of educational strategies and school legislation in developed countries and in those that are part of or adhere to integration into European and North Atlantic organizations, to these principles and values;

- the establishment of educational associations that promote the "new education" through: scientific studies and methodological guides; the organization of awareness, popularization and motivation manifestations of the decision makers, educational, social and cultural actors; the development of new education educational institutions and the organization of teacher training courses. The Belgian New Education Group (GBEN) and the French New Education Group (GFEN) are two educational associations that benefit from the cognitive support of the contributions of top-notch educators, organize international activities to promote new education and specific school networks.

2. New Education principles in practice today, in the context of the New Information and Communication Techologies

The modern pedagogy and the key principles that are at the core of the New Education are questioned today with the emergence of the new informations and communication technologies, in particular the invention of internet. Structural changes in technology, culture and society as a whole are bringing forward new ways of learning and interaction that can deeply influence the theoretical and methodological frameworks of postmodern education.

More to the point, the new information and communication technologies, particularly lerning management systems (such as Schoology and Edmodo) can

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be used in the context of new education, in many ways, that extend beyond the limits of the traditional understanding of this paradigm:

- First, one of the noblest ideas of new education reformers was to shift pedagogy from o focus on teacher and content to a situation in which *the child is the center of the educational universe*. Learning management systems (LMS) are center around the individual, allowing, for example, the creation of individual profiles that express childrens' identity, preferences and creativity. The most advanced LMS will offer an interface that will adapt to childrens' educational needs and potential.
- Second, another pillar of the new education is to *encourage the social interactions* between pupils, by building teams, working together to reach certain aims etc. Modern LMS offer numerous ways of interaction, not only between pupils, but also between teachers-pupils and teachers-learners. Understanding education from the perspective of connectivism, allows the creation of virtual interdisciplinary teams, study groups and projects. The teacher can create special groups in the virtual class and can keep in touch with students beyond the usual daily school schedule.
- Third, focus of the new education that can be reached with the help of LMS is *bringing learning closer to life and home*. Today, children learn in new ways that are suprinsing for many teachers and school managers. Using tablets and smartphones connected to the internet has completely revolutionized the postmodern pedagogy. Students can now learn from anywhere, and the home itself becomes an educational laboratory. Learning can be produced anywhere, offering an enourmous flexibility that is truly in the tradition of the new education founders.
- Fourth, *helping children develop intrinsic motivation* and learn in their own pace has become of of the most well-known ideas in the the new education tradition. Many strategies can be used to reached this noble aim, such as: including interesting multimedia content in the educational platforms; offering a great variety of content that stimulates the child according to his or her needs and developmental stage; recognizing the educational progress by using badges, ranks, avatars and logos (especially in competitive games or when working in teams); individualized learning tracks that can be designed to suit

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the needs of children with special needs, learning difficulties or just in way that maximize the childrens' educational potential.

- Fifth, shifting the role of teacher from a "magister" role to one of *facilitator* was also developed in the new education tradition. The new information and communication technologies not only allow teachers to manage the educational process without being too obtrusive, but offer a great deal of information about how children learn, their achievements and involvement in the educational activities. Many parameters of the modern LMS can be fined-tuned to allow teachers to adapt the way educational process is conducted by a day-to-day basis, with the help of smartphone and tablet applications. Also, a lot of information is generated by using a LMS, that can be used in scientific research in order to facilitate a better understanding of the role information and communication technologies have in our life and to provide ideas for improving the educational activities and performances.

Names such as Decroly, Montessori, Freinet, Claparède, Dewey, Ferrière, Cousinet have lasted across the decades and, still today, are key figures of modern pedagogy. Even if the movement of new education *seems* somehow outdated in the psychological and pedagogical literature nowadays, particularly with the rise of the new information and communication technologies, the principles of new education are used in most of the modern schools, having an enourmous impact on the teaching theories and methodologies that they helped transform. The principles of the new education, combined with an adequate use of the new information and communication technologies (such as LMS) can help teachers and students develop together a new pedagogic paradigm that will hopefully be one of the most important features of the postmodern society.

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