METHODS AND TECHNIQUES OF INSTRUCTION INDIVIDUALIZATION AND DIFFERENTIATION LEARNING THROUGH COOPERATION OR GROUP WORK

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Abstract: Living in a society that undergoes a continuous transition in which the explosion of information is developing side by side with the technological explosion in the area of transmitting information, it’s much more important to teach the students learning, critical and constructive thinking and solving those really important problems. To what extent can this form of group-based learning organization contribute to individual development? The answer consists in the way group learning - homogeneous or heterogeneous when objectives are clear, the methodology is adapted to the work task, there are performance criteria that target the group, in its integrity, as well as the individual, with his differentiating peculiarities. Learning through cooperation, in teams or in groups is „a way of efficiently study a complex theme, theoretical or practical, in a team or in a group, combining individual effort and intelligence with those of the group”. This method is based on the fact that man is a social being, that his existence and development are achieved by combining individual efforts with the group efforts to which he belongs too, through cooperation. Cooperation stimulates reciprocal control between students and competition. Every group member can freely express its opinion, gaining self-trust, becoming useful to the whole group. Each individual has the opportunity to be in the shoes of others and to compare himself to them.

Key words: learning, students, group.

The educational method is a common way of action of the teacher and students in order to achieve educational objectives. This is part of the external conditions of learning, which determines the efficiency and seeks to place the student in a learning situation more or less directed, a basic element of the teaching strategies in close relationship with the means of education and with the ways to group students.

Talking about methods and techniques of individualization and differentiation of instruction, the cooperative learning approach seems to be inadequate.

To what extent can contribute this form of organization of group-based learning on individual development? The answer is the organization that actually occurs for one

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group learning- homogeneous or heterogeneous – when the objectives are clear, the methodology is adapted to the workload, there are performance criteria that target group, as a whole, and the individual with differentiating its peculiarities.

The modern school is where students must take a greater responsibility for acquiring knowledge, so the teacher becomes an organizer of the learning activity. Individual training requirements in modern school - for the permanent education, requires training and capacity building to teach him to learn, to train independently.

Differentiating instruction techniques aimed a gradation of school tasks, according to the individual possibilities and own pace of development of each individual, so that the return is guaranteed for all.

In this regard, we emphasize the crucial role of the teachers in generating confidence in the possibilities of the individual as to combat the inferiority complex that is lived by many who can not achieve high performances and also to combat the uniform attitude conditions for learning and development of individuals capable of performing.

This type of approach is relatively new in Romanian education and it was "important" through educational alternatives such as "Step by Step"; subsequently it was separated, developing learning as a form of self-contained, with its own principles and laws, related to social integration of the individual order.

Among the trends of modernization of education is mentioned flexibility of instruction and education to ensure the capacity and abilities of each student in relation to their own possibilities.

School is called to organize the teaching-learning-evaluation process so that it put the student as early as possible in possession of its own means of acquiring knowledge, to practice consistently and creatively. The "differentiated treatment" concept was approached from multiple perspectives: learning strategy optimization, dynamic process, fundamental instructional category, direction skills training teachers.

"Differentiated treatment" aims to adapt the learning activity, in terms of content, the forms of organization and methodology, of teaching the students various opportunities to the understanding capacity, own work pace groups of students or individual student.

"Differentiated treatment" and "Cooperative learning" are two concepts that there are intense circulated in curricular approaches of education Romanian reform. Amid age peculiarities manifests different features specific to each individual child.

G. Mialaret (as cited in Nicola, 2003, p. 423) believes that "Every student is a case which has his specific conditions of life, their experiences, characteristics, originality". The orientation of the educational process depending on the peculiarities of individual teaching plan that is expressed by "individual treating of the student." The phrase designates routing information or message after the series of personality traits to get such a better educational effect (Cristea, 2012).

As nature and human society are in progress through differentiation and not by leveling, the emphasis educators should not be placed on the operation of individual characteristics to extinction, but their respect, because through education and training, each individuality can be transformed into human personality, able to create new material and spiritual values.

Differential treatment has the mission to identify the features that differentiate subjects, to establish the contribution of each ourther for defining of the behavior that leads to expected performance. For a differentiated treatment efficiency is required in-depth knowledge of the individual.
This need of psychological knowledge is felt both in the current educational practice, daily and for advisory work and school orientation.

The psychological knowledge it is not only a prerequisite for success in training and education, it is also a result of pedagogical activity. A child can be trained and educated only if he is known closely. Knowledge, education and training of the child are intertwined in the concrete activity, performed in the school. Between children there are natural and obvious differences of education and behavior, differences that must be known, they affected the educational process.

Depending on individual characteristics and the age of children whose applies educational measures they may have different or even contrary results.

The temperament, the needs and the aspirations that belongs to child, the special emotional states that he may go throw, the family atmosphere represents factors that often make the praise or punishment to have different „resonance” and special effects. Education and training measures turned out to have favorable results and are proper only if they are consistent with the student's personality. Children should be valued when they obtain good results, thereby enhancing self-confidence. Excessive Valuing may be unfavorable for the child when it is turned to arrogance or complacency.

In case the child is mistaken, when deficiencies are highlighted, the penalty - may have different effects; such a procedure can exert a positive influence in the case of an arrogant child, or negative influence in the case of a shy student, untrusting of himself.

In formulating requirements the individual particularities of the children should be considered; to the people with strong personality the requirements should be presented in a categorical form, and to those shy, sensitive, can be given tasks in the form of suggestions.

Also, in the punishment matter, for some children a harsher observation may be sufficient for a serious offense; in other cases a severe pedagogic measure should be applied for a less important issue.

The ignorance and the neglect of individual particularities may lead to an abstract and global treatment (considering only age peculiarities) of the person, in which case the children will miss out on the most appropriate pedagogical guidance. The knowledge and consideration of the individual characteristics of each person lead to finding solutions, means and specific teaching methods, which increases the efficiency of education with certainty.

The extent of the vast range of individual features is virtually unlimited when you consider that "features" contained therein are in perpetual change. Amongst these the most significant are those related to intelligence and abilities, character traits, interests, aspirations, attitudes etc. Individual treatment is not possible without knowledge of this range of features integrated into a whole in the student's personality "(Nicola, 2003, p. 424).

The ways throw which will be achieve the differentiation, the individualization, according to Nicola (2003, pp. 223-224) are: individualized action the which takes place on the bases of frontal activities involving the whole class (if possible, all students benefit from individual treatment, subordinated to frontal activity); individualized actions suggested and imposed as part of the learning process, but which are done independently from it (it’s those actions are no longer norm-oriented, but are based on deviations from the norm; the teacher has the chance of ensuring a complete evaluation of all the capabilities and individual experiences of each student; examples: differentiated homework, reading and additional bibliography, reports etc.).
In the classification system of educational methods, (Cucoș, 2006, p. 290) are included teaching – learning in groups (leveled or homogeneous and heterogeneous) among individual methods, front and combined using as criteria the organization of work.

Cooperation (cooperative learning, as part of a team or a group) is "a way of studying with greater efficiency a complex subject, theoretical or practical, as part of a team or a group, combining individual effort and intelligence with the effort and intelligence of the group" (Bontaș, 2007, p.190). This method is based on the considerations that man is a social being, that the existence and development is achieved by combining the individual efforts with the efforts of members of the group they belong to, through cooperation.

According to the definition there is an intersection of both concepts up for discussion, namely "differential treatment" and "cooperative learning", which justifies the approach in the present paper.

The dynamic of cooperative learning. The cooperation can be used at different times of teaching and learning, during the lessons for execute some team experiences, of the laboratory work and workshop, to the work that requires teams efforts, at a broader bibliography study, at the scientific investigation from the scientific-technical circles, solving research contracts, the specialty practice etc.

Cooperation teams may consist of students with a similar level of education (homogeneous) or may be formed from certain members of school or student group, with different training levels (scratchy).

The theory of learning through cooperation and its corresponding practices are inspired from the theory of social interdependency. It is outlined in the situation when students have common objectives and when their individual results influence the actions of the others. Interaction between people is essential for survival.

In the educational environment, it refers to the social independency born out of student’s efforts to bond and develop positive relationships or to change their behavior and prove socially worthy.

The way in which the cooperation-based activities are structured determines different types of interaction between students, which on their own influence the quality and quantity of the results of said activities. Thus learning through cooperation implies the hypothesis, according to which, the way the activities are planned will determine the quality of interaction between students.

One of the main elements that needs to be created inside the classroom is positive interdependency or cooperation. Once this element is set, cooperation leads to the accumulation of multiple positive interactions as the members of the group are encouraging and supporting each-other in the process of education and teaching.

In his research, Morton Deutsch, the one who defined learning by cooperation and integrated it into a theory, has conceptualized the three types of social interdependency: positive, negative and non-existent.

Positive interdependency encourages the interaction between the people that are working together, stimulating each member’s success in achieving common goals, named “interaction based on cooperation and stimulation”.

Negative interdependency is characterized by the reciprocal obstruction of members in a group in achieving a goal, and it’s named “interaction based on opposition and competition”. Interaction is non-existent when the members of a group work independently. During the learning process, these different types of interaction generate different results.
By interacting based on cooperation, group members promote each-other’s success: by offering and receiving help; by exchanging resources and information; by sending and receiving feedback; by asking their colleagues opinions; by promoting the sustained efforts to achieve common objectives; by influencing each-other in order to succeed; using interpersonal abilities; by receiving benefits because if the group’s efficiency.

If not long ago, the Romanian School System was promoting competition and individualism, by encouraging personal achievements, now, in the context of a learning system that is oriented to “modernity”, it has changed its strategy and approaches the idea of cooperating through means like:
- Simulating interaction between children;
- Increasing the amount of effort children are subjected to during the learning process;
- Generating feelings of acceptance and sympathy;
- Developing communication abilities;
- Encouraging the behavior that facilitates the success of others;
- Developing critical thinking;

School doesn’t just represent an institution where children and young people come to receive information, but a place where everyone must learn. Until now, the teacher was considered the main source of information for a certain discipline.

Due to the democratic influence on access to knowledge, this role is reduced dramatically, as the teacher becomes more of an organizer, a guide to learning, offering the students, in the place of the traditional “passing the knowledge” to actual “learning experiences”. This can be only achieved in an inclusive school, where there is a large diversity in students and where they are all treated as being equally important.

Cooperation is a general learning strategy that can be used during multiple didactic methods like: debate, simulation, idea assault, exercise etc.

The dynamic of cooperative learning may consist of the following components (Bontaş, 2007, p. 191):
- the determination of group learning content (classroom): theme, objectives, actions to fulfill etc.;
- dividing learning tasks on teams and establishing the coordinator, the leader of each team, and inside the teams, establishing the tasks for each team member, ensuring that their solving will be achieved according to the general objectives of the theme of each and every team;
- the prior discussion inside the teams, the obtained results, performing the operations of classification and data interpretation and establishing conclusions (solutions), then discussion, correction, completion and approval thereof inside the the all group (class, group, year study, etc.);
- experimental verification of conclusions (solutions) - if is necessary.

The cooperative learning achievement requirements - (Nicola, 2003, pp. 458-460) and (Bontaş, 2007, pp.190-191) are:
- the formation of the capacity and habits of pupils (students) to organize in teams and to designate their coordinators;
- building the capacity of trainees to divide the subject matter (problems which need to be solved) into coherent modules (major problems) and allocate them to teams and to each team member
• providing knowledge to team leaders, but also to their members, on both the general objectives of the theme (problem) and also of each team
• taking in consideration the sharing of the real learning possibilities of the teams and of each member, and also the need for each team and each of its members to ensure complete preparation in relation to the whole issue (problem), ensuring the rational rotation required by learning tasks (documentation, experimentation, data, drawing conclusions, including the role of coordination;
• the cooperation should learning combine learning in the team lead by the teacher, the learning in cooperation with the teacher, the independent learning of the team, conducted by the team leader, to develop creative the initiative of pupils (students);
• to ensure an open, collegial, democratic climate, regarding the debate of the issues, where to lead and to decide scientific criterias;
• the teacher should help assimilate accurate results by boosting the expression of pupils; (students) capability to approve them alone, to assume responsibility for the correctness of the scientific conclusions or results, developing through this self-learning, self-management, self-control and the capacity of auto-evaluation;
• learning through cooperation, as any type of work can lead to "collective anonymous author", which, at one time, cannot represent a criterium for powerful learning stimulation; it is necessary in the context of boosting cooperative learning to merge both collective and individual appreciations, avidentiatating and appreciating in an objective way the implication (effort, quality, contribution and efficiency) of each member.

Stages of learning through cooperation:
• The orientation phase - consists of everything that the teacher does in order to make the students know, to get acquainted with each other, to trust each other and discuss the main expectations. Orientation activities in the first days of school: students talk about themselves, favorite subject, about expectations and hopes to be achieved in the new school year etc. Many teachers use these guidance activities to present rules and customs that must govern the work in class.
• Establishing the rules – represents a problem of group responsibility, responsiveness to others, cooperation, consensus decision taking, problem-solving etc.
• Solving conflicts - conflicts are part of our lives, therefore natural. Conflicts arise between students and teachers, between children and parents, and students spend plenty of time watching how others exercise their power over them. In the development of cooperation, conflict is inevitable.

Once new rules are set, an overall state of discomfort emerges, for students and teachers alike.
• The productivity - A group identity emerges and the works is done through cooperation. Now cohesion of small groups, and also the class, is strong. Sometimes conflicts arise, but students are aware of the process and they can overcome conflicts, continuing their work.
The breakup - moving students from one group to another can cause discomfort for some students, because they have to adjust to other team members. The teacher helps students to realize that partnering with other colleagues can provide new opportunities for sharing effective learning experiences.

Conclusions

Cooperation, as a study method and socio-human activity, in order to be beneficial, requires combining individual potential with the team (group) potential in the context of which, if individual results are achieved, of high performance, the person concerned should remain and manifest itself as a social being.

We can mention that this method stimulates mutual control of the students, the competition and the spirit of initiative. So far, the teacher was considered the main source of information for a particular discipline.

Due to the democratization of knowledge access, the teacher’s role is dramatically reduced, as he becomes an organizer, a guide to learning, providing the students instead of the traditional "transmission of knowledge" a real "learning experience".

Each group member can freely express their opinion, gaining self confidence and becoming useful to the whole group. Each individual has the opportunity to be in the shoes of others and to compare himself to them.

Along with the inclusion of students with different abilities in regular classes in mainstream education, the diversity of individual learning needs increases and, in order to cope, the teachers must learn to turn to new techniques through which they can provide high scholarly achievements for all students.

The learning methods through cooperation provide a solution to this new inclusive challenge, researches suggesting that the learning methods techniques through cooperation can reinforce positive attitudes towards learning, can improve performance, academic achievement and self-esteem of students, can promote positive interaction and mutual support between students.

As a method with deep psychological and pedagogical implications, the teacher is required to be tactful and responsible when using it. We say this, thinking that the disadvantages of using this method are not inherent, but they are a result of misuse.

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References


