

A MAJOR ISSUE OF THE CURRENT SCHOOL: OVERBURDENING THE PUPILS

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Abstract: *The Romanian school has always been confronted with adjusting the contents to the real life. From time to time, the same two issues emerged, namely to refresh the theoretical contents and that of orienting the learning toward the requirements of the changing society. The imperatives have always come from the community/ society, the school itself being validated through the correspondence degrees between these imperatives and the adopted/ applied strategies.*

Keywords: school, overburdening, curricula, transdisciplinary, law, Spiru Haret.

1. General considerations

The issue of overburdening the school curricula and multiplying the tasks which the pupils have to solve throughout the school year has been in public debate for many years. There is too much talking, yet nothing clearly denominated has been achieved in point of discharging the curricula, the operations being limited to mere adjustments. Not even the organization and structuring the curricula on domain levels, which has been used for more than 16 years, have produced any fundamental change; the disciplines - corresponding to different sciences – keeping their basic characteristic, that of fragmentation. Inter and trans-disciplinary remain at the stage of concept, more often than not accomplishing through the school curricula – connections among the domains entering the same field of approach of many disciplines. The causes are multiple and they concern:

- Maintaining the classical procedures in individual training retaining the deficiency of didactic personnel training and maintaining the inoperability of the curricula levels;
- The inefficient activity of the analyse commissions for re-structuring the school curricula;
- Retaining the mentalities concerning the monopoly of some disciplines in the curricula as their importance is concerned for individual training;
- The fears of the teaching staff concerning losing the tenured position, to follow the narrowing the number of classes allowed to the taught disciplines etc.

The aspects correlated with de-burdening the pupils refer to, as we can notice, both the discharging of syllabi (by restructuring the contents) as well as discharging the curricula and remove the burden of tasks (especially homework). In essence, overburdening refer mainly to

quality, as it is not the quantity that is important, but the quality of the knowledge matters, namely their utility for the further schooling years and for the life itself. In other words, it is worth establishing what is really significant and necessary to keep whereas what is irrelevant and insignificant to be eliminated.

2. *Some historical considerations*

The Romanian school has always been confronted with adjusting the contents to the real life. From time to time, the same two issues emerged, namely to refresh the theoretical contents and that of orienting the learning toward the requirements of the changing society. The imperatives have always come from the community/ society, the school itself being validated through the correspondence degrees between these imperatives and the adopted/ applied strategies. Never, in its historical evolution the Romanian education, has the problem of giving up some disciplines come up or structures of the contents in the school curricula, for the reason that the volume of knowledge might be too high, but strictly for reasons of finding a correlation with the social requirements and age conditions. Some bench-marks are relevant in this sense.

The Law of Public Instruction in 1864, the first organic law in the domain, the disciplines to be studied in the high-school were (art. 116): religion, languages: Romanian, Latin/ Greek, French, Italian and German; rational arithmetic, “legal system of length and weight”, elements for book keeping, geometry, algebra, trigonometry, natural history, elements of physics and chemistry, cosmography, statistical geography, elements of philosophy and rhetoric, elements of political economy and administrative law, vocal music, gymnastics. Whether we take into account the relation school-real life, the compulsory disciplines in “real schools” (aiming to necessary learning for an occupation or profession) become enlightening. These pupils studied: arithmetic and industrial accountancy; descriptive geometry and machine drawing; physics and chemistry, mechanics, levelling and erecting plans, woodwork (carpentry, timberwork), ironwork, yellow copper work, foundry.

27 years after the Law of public instruction has become effective, the government, led by Lascăr Catargiu, during the period when Take Ionescu was ministry, succeeds in advancing the *Law of primary and natural primary education*, a law which provisioned as education subjects: reading, writing, Romanian language, practical arithmetic, essentials of geometry; essentials of the country history and geography, natural and physical sciences; prayers and sacred history; vocal music; gymnastics; military exercises and “if possible”, “handmade working and gardening”.

These study subjects were divided by the curricula in three progressive courses: inferior course taught in the small villages’ schools; the inferior and average course taught in the primary schools and the complete course taught in the primary schools; the principle of continuity, the principle of gradualism in relation to the age particularities and the principle of avoiding overburden of the pupils’ working programme were very strictly observed.

In this sense I consider important to remind the provisions of the article 18 in the Law stipulating: “In any primary school, the pupils shall not be kept in the classroom more than 3 ½ hours per day in the first two years, nor more than 4 ½ hours per day in the next years of study; besides these classes the gymnastics exercises and gardening are to be performed outdoor”.

The above examples are enough to demonstrate the searches of the bills initiators in the domain of public instruction referring to the contents of the primary and secondary education in Romania at the end of the 19th century.

At 30th of March 1897, Spiru Haret is appointed as the Ministry of Culture and Public Instruction in Dimitrie A. Sturdza government, a first class personality who had exercised (interrupted only by the governmental rotation, set up by the liberals and conservatives) the dignity for ten years (ten mandates without ever been reshuffled). Spiru Haret has defined exemplarily his mission: “the merit which has to oblige a minister to possess it is to know and understand his country’s affairs, to discover or build the necessary tools to work with, to correct, to develop and determine the healthy currents, to utilize and throw light upon the individual initiatives, to bind the general thoughts and dispositions, to be the centre for establishing the ideas and germinate them” [1].

3. *The timely conception of Spiru Haret concerning the reform of the Romanian school*

Starting from the principles underlying the 1864 Law – *the organic character of the education* (“unique school for all the people”, unique enactment of the public and private education, of the instruction domains – primary, secondary, higher, of the school in the rural communes and urban centres), *gradual secularization, equal rightful access, necessity of teaching staff training, establishing the rights and duties of the teaching staff* etc. [2] Spiru Haret insisted upon the *educational, formative* character of the education and upon its *connection with real life*. In his 1903 report, defining “The Objective of education in schools”, Haret made clear: “We feel bound to get rid of anything useless in education only by tradition, yet without taking into consideration the reality itself: either a timely social necessity or filling a soul necessity. Nevertheless, it is equally important to approach the school to the people, school should be the centre where the good, healthy currents should start, in order to elevate and strengthen our ancestry. We try to render national our education, as long as we want it to suit our country, instead of taking it into consideration as it is, throughout a time and conditions which are not ours anymore...”. Moreover the aim of the education “is not only the instruction, but also the youth education, and this part is even more important and difficult than the first one”. This represent a real creed, expressed in a national, impeccable style, justifying the reason for which Spiru Haret has remained the model education ministry for the Romanian education. The work to reform the school via Haret’s thought and actions was so significant that neither the contemporary conservatives, nor the communist regime could appeal its value. Whereas the originality and efficiency of Haret’s ideas rendered the 20th century Romanian school a benchmark to follow by the education in many European countries.

Almost all Haret’s ideas defining its conception are valid today: starting with the need to develop the school infrastructure to solving the major issues facing the rural education, from connecting the education to the real life and strengthening its formative character to strengthening its national identity by applying thorough contents, from organizing the educational system on democratic bases, but above all scientific to exceptional training of the teaching staff. We shall deal with analysing these coordinates of Haret’s reform – of cogent value today - in another study. The present study is to deal only with the disciplines studied in the secondary school (gymnasiums and high-school) in order to re-evaluate the thesis of overburdening the pupils/ students.

In this sense, taking into account the fact that the secondary education consisted of gymnasiums and high-schools for boys and I and II degrees secondary schools for girls, we present the table of educational disciplines for each structure.

Educational disciplines

Gymnasium	High-schools	I degree secondary schools	II degree secondary schools
Religion Romanian language Latin language French language German language World history Romanian history General geography and Romanian geography Elementary rational mathematics “applied in land surveying”[3], „Levelling, sewing, irrigations wit book keeping notions” Elements of physics, chemistry, natural sciences and cosmography Notions of hygiene Notions of practical law and civics Drawing Vocal music, Gymnastics	a) <i>Compulsory disciplines</i> for all the school-people Religion, Romanian language, French, German World’s history and Romania’s history Notions of psychology, logics and political economy, practical law and civics Vocal music Gymnastics SUPPLEMENTARY b) <i>Classical studies</i> Latin and Greek language Mathematical revisions, physics and natural sciences Drawing c) <i>Real studies</i> One language (Italian or English) Rational mathematics (algebra and plan metric trigonometry and spheroids with general theory equations of unknown quantity; topographical applications, levelling, sewage and irrigations; Elements of analytical geometry of two dimensions; Notions of rational and technological mechanics; notions of descriptive geometry) Physics , chemistry, cosmography Natural sciences Hygiene Linear drawing d) <i>Elective disciplines for the pupils of classical section mean to ensure their training in exact sciences:</i> Physics; Chemistry Hygiene Natural sciences Geography (studied instead of Greek)	Romanian language French language German language General geography and Romania’s geography General history and Romania’s history; Arithmetic and rational elementary geometry with practical applications and notions of “book keeping” Elements of cosmography Elements of natural sciences, physics and chemistry; Notions of pedagogy, de hygiene, medicine and domestic pharmacy , „ especially with view to raise and look after children; Domestic economy Handiwork Calligraphy and drawing; Vocal music Gymnastics	These disciplines were studied in addition to those studied in I degree schools: Notions of psychology, logics, political economy, practical law and civics One of the languages Italian/ Latin/ English

Along with the Law on professional education in 1899, Spiru Haret introduced the most progressive organization patterns aimed for “theoretical and practical study of agriculture, forestry with the connected and derived industries, crafts and trade”.

The contents of the professional education were diverse, depending on the specific of the schools (apiculture schools with the connected and derived industries; forestry schools; crafts schools for boys; crafts schools for girls; trade schools for boys; trade schools for girls). The differences referred also to the geographical area, area which influenced different occupations. It is worth mentioning that these professional schools emphasized learning of crafts, the classes allotted to the practical disciplines represented more than 2/3 in the curricula. For instance, the *agricultural elementary schools* (in which the period of study was 2 years) aimed at “practical learning of rational agriculture concerning small cultures”, in which the students learned about “one or more of the connected cultures and industries”. All the more, the learning process supposed besides the practical component, a theoretical component, for revising reasons and reinforcement of knowledge in the primary school (revision of arithmetic, geometry and geography in the curricula of the fourth grade of primary urban school or the fourth and fifth grades of the rural school and “in addition notions of simple book keeping”).

It is only by examining the curricula in this period (in the beginning of the last century), we can have an insight – articulated and argued – concerning “the urgent need” for de-burdening the curricula, so often approached nowadays.

It is precisely for this reason, that we foster not the diminishing of the disciplines studied, but we foster studying useful disciplines, with informative-formative character for all the nowadays students.

REFERENCES

- [1] See Tiberiu Horațiu Gorun, Adrian Gorun, *Fundamente normative ale modernizării învățământului românesc (1864-1918)*, Editura ProUniversitaria, București, 2013, pp. 59-60
- [2] *Antologia legilor învățământului din România*, Institutul de Științe ale Educației, București, 2004, p.9.
- [3] Arpentagiu = arpentaj (topogr.) = 1 (Metodă de) întocmire a unui plan topografic prin folosirea instrumentelor de măsurat lungimi. 2 Tehnica măsurării pe teren a parcelelor cadastrale.
<http://www.dexx.ro/index.php?a=list&d=Dictionar%20explicativ%20roman&p=328> (nota trad.)