

## OPTIMIZATION OF EDUCATIONAL CLIMATE, PRIORITY OF THE CONTEMPORARY SCHOOL

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### **ABSTRACT**

*OPTIMIZATION OF EDUCATIONAL CLIMATE REPRESENTS A PRIORITY RESEARCH TOPIC FOR ALL THE GREAT EDUCATIONAL CENTRES WORLDWIDE. THEY ACKNOWLEDGE “THE DECLINE OF THE TRADITIONAL SCHOOL” AS A REAL ISSUE GENERATED BY THE INADEQUACY OF THE CURRENT SCHOOL TO THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE SUPER-TECHNOLOGIZED SCHOOL, BY THE GAP BETWEEN THE SCHOOL OBJECTIVE AND THE CHILDREN’S REAL PRACTICAL NEEDS, BY STRESSFUL UNDIFFERENTIATED TEACHING METHODS, BY IGNORING THE EMOTIONAL RELATIONAL STUDENTS’ LIVES ETC. THAT IS WHY, IN THIS PAPER WE HAVE FOCUSED OUR ATTENTION ON ANALYZING THE VAST ISSUES ARISEN BY THE CURRENT PARAMETERS OF THE EDUCATIONAL CLIMATE, AN ANALYSIS INDISPENSABLE FOR THE SCHOOL OPTIMIZATION AND RENDERING IT MORE EFFICIENT.*

**KEYWORDS:** *EDUCATIONAL CLIMATE, EMOTIONAL RELATION, EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS*

### **The Decline of the current school system**

Today the educational centres worldwide are concerned with finding the most viable solutions for an issue which the educational systems around the world face: the decline of the current school system. In a 1994 interview, Linn Dority, who is a collaborator in the programme “EDUCATING” initiated by the Technologic Institute in Massachusetts, noticed that while the global issues have increased we “*have not learned how to survive in a technologized world and we are still hampered by old methods in finding solutions for the conflicts.*” Students “*are not properly educated, an education oriented towards practical intelligence and appeasing conflicts*”, considering it a personal issue, which is wrong: students themselves are part of this issue. The aim of their education is *compliance, subordination and obedience, their intellectual abilities not being stimulated.*” [1:26]

Thus, Linn Dority decried the “*hidden curriculum*” which Alvin Toffler spoke about in “The Third Wave”. It seems we are still tributary to an education organized as he mentioned “*as the factory pattern*”. This comprises “*in most industrialized countries three courses: punctuality, obedience, repetitive and mechanical work*”. And one more thing, he said: “*children begin school earlier and earlier (...), while the years of compulsory education increase irresistibly*” [2:66]

At the same time, “*the curriculum*” crushes under the informational wave the initiative, the creative attitude and particular abilities, hitting merciless sensibility, need for action and childhood enthusiasm. Many schoolteachers of our age have never heard of the infinite valences of the *game*. Consequently, under the threat of a super-loaded curriculum, a school marked by *negativism, irritation, artificiality and formalism* has been consolidated, centred more on the teacher rather than on the student; a school which has not found the “*necessary time*” to follow the rhythm proper to any child to develop, being more like a torrent crushing his personality. No wonder why such a school scares the students and transforms them into neurotic parents unable to adapt to the future society.

Tiberiu Kulcsar, in his book “*Psychological factors of the school success*” drew attention to the fact that in 42,7% of the cases of education failure, it is not the intellectual factors that are to be incriminated, but *those non-intellectual – affectivity, volition, motivational, social and even pedagogic*. [3:53] He says that “*a minimum degree of positive evaluation*” is necessary based on *self-confidence and competence which are indispensable for the psychic balance* [3:71] and educational success. Instead of being concerned with this balance, the school – marked by the obsession of *elitism* – puts on the student’s shoulders the burden of textbooks intended for “academic” use, seeing the child as a genius or at least “*a mini-adult*”. It follows that we have a school for few “*summits*” where the other student are only *performers*. Having been paid a little attention, positive appreciation and involvement in pleasant school activities and more often depreciative attitudes or even violent, the child loses self-confidence and comes to spend the most beautiful period of his life “*fearing*”. he leaves for school fearing he will not comply with the requirement and then he comes home fearing to tell his parents about this.

Few teachers pay attention to the effects of their attitude upon the *shy, slow* child or on the contrary, *impulsive* or marked by a special issue. Discouraged, pushed to the side of the classroom, “*left at the hand of the classroom’s opprobrium*”, lacking understanding, backing and affectivity, that child may become the future social “monster”. The superiority complex – the syndrome of Superman which provides more and more megalomaniacs, mythomaniacs, rogues and criminals – has always developed based on a complex of inferiority in childhood or adolescence. “But what can we do?” – more and more ask – “our hands and feet are tied with the CURRICULUM!”

Alfred Binet had already decried, a century ago, “*school passivity*” seeing the child as “*an urn*” where knowledge is poured. In addition, he said noticing the disinterest for the child’s individual personality and abilities, *school represents “ready-made clothes and not tailored clothes” for the child* [4:28]. Before him other psychologists and pedagogues had faced the same issues before him. In 1801, Pestalozzi noted: “*School-enrolment is an important date in the child’s life who has been free so far and from then on he sees himself locked in a room often dark and non-ventilated, immovable which is contrary to his instincts, in other words he enters an environment to which he is compelled to adjust* [6: 33].

Like him, Rousseau, Tolstoy, Kerchensteiner, Bertohold Otto and then Claparède and Binet stricken by the same dissonance between the needs of the child and the school offer, leave behind educational masterpieces which have never been capitalized by the current school. Instead of “*life cult*” [5:101], they had, the pedagogues who considered themselves “scientists” have imposed the cult of tiring and often absurd artificial systems which are called today “*curricula*”. That is the reason why, Maria Montessori analyzed vehemently the concept “*scientist*” who for her was not he man that conceives ideas in the

lab, but that who really “*knows the nature*” of the child and comply with it. She had the courage to shock the whole world by conflicting the “scientific” pedagogy to the reality of a school in which the leading part was not played by the curriculum, but “*the child itself: by living and developing through the physical and intellectual work*, this comes to define certain *levels of culture* approximately corresponding to the his *successive ages*” [5:295] and participate to his formation. “Casa dei bambini”, which she opened for the children with special needs on 6 January 1907 in the neighbourhood San Lorenzo in Rome, came up with *solutions* to the educational issues, “*not only to through a useful light upon the difficulties and perils*” in common schools, as the so-called “*scientific pedagogy*” did. This is the reason why this “Montessori School” had shortly become “a real Mecca of education” [5: 55-83]. Ever since Montessori schools have extended rapidly, obtaining remarkable success worldwide.

### **Emotional intelligence – an inner force educationally ignored**

Approximately a century ago, H Wallon said “*Between emotion and intellectual activity there is the same evolution, the same antagonism. Before any analysis, the sense of a situation is given by the activities which it challenges, the moods and attitudes it arises. Within the psychic development, this “practical intuition long precedes the power of discrimination and the competition*” [7: 98]. The psychologist foresaw thus a new concept, which later Daniel Goleman was to assert: EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE. The above mentioned concept should be paid attention of the contemporary school, which, usually, ignores the development of emotional relational abilities of children.

Researchers in the domain have observed that outside the *neo-cortex*, that is the *brain* which controls the intellectual capacities, there is an *emotional brain (paleo-cortex)*, called “*limbic brain*” by P. Broca. Older, more experimented and stronger, the latter, manages the emotional states, being at the same time the host of communication processes which to a great extent concern the unconscious sphere, called “para-normal” today. At the end of XX century, Damasio was to explain that there is a *constant tension* between the two “brains”, reflected by “*the struggle between passion and reason: a good cooperation between the two brains generates inner harmony, while competition between the two, irrespective of their nature, “makes us unhappy*” [9: 36] D.A. Damasio drew attention on the fact that *emotions are “indispensable to reason”*.

The recent discovery that *the belly and the heart has small “brains”* – specialized networks of thousands and thousands of neurons – totally changes the perception upon the cerebral control. As a matter of fact, the researcher say, regarding the emotional intelligence, it is more correctly to speak about a *heart – brain system*, having at its disposal through the agency of the two branches – sympathetic and para-sympathetic – of the nervous peripheral system, of an “*acceleration*” which controls the reactions of “*fight/hit and run*” type and of a “*brake*” through which the *relaxation and calm states are induced* [9:54]. As we have seen school always pushes the “acceleration”, thus disturbing the functions of the little student until a real “*physiological chaos*” is induced.

E. Ockel, T. Kulcsár, M. Gilly, through their studies confirm the intellectual and emotional overload upon the child’s health. That is why the educational projects experimented by Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Montessori, Wallon, Binet and others were not built on maximum “grammar” curricula of traditional school that completely ignore the emotional personality of the child, but on the *individual needs of the child* regarded first from the perspective of his *inner feelings*. They left the child the possibility of choosing the

activities that better correspond to his abilities, curiosity and natural feelings, thus helping him to *discover by himself* his inner forces and activate them, amplified by his emotional force of his enthusiasm to work *on his initiative, so receiving credit in the activity intended to his formation/ training*. In exchange the “modern” school remains insensitive to the most pressing needs of the child, leaving his emotional at random. By excluding of its concern *emotional intelligence education*, the contemporary school, obsessed by elitism more suitable for a “*meta-human*” – (the computerized man proposed by Max Moore) – has got up vitally threatened by this subtle force. In 1995, D. Goleman drew attention upon an American criminalist who “*stated that we were on the verge of a “storm of delinquency” which was to come upon us in the following 10 years*” [8:343] . The prophecy – supported by an explosive increase of criminality among minor persons – has been already fulfilled: the American specialists have just announced the number multiplied by two of criminal delinquents and of suicidal cases among youngsters, comparatively to the period in discussion. Nevertheless, the school system goes on ignoring a crucial issue of humankind: LACK OF EMOTIONAL EDUCATION.

In a full chapter of the book “*How can we get rid of the fear of others*”, the psychologists C. André and P. Legeron draw attention on the fact that “*THE MAN IS A STRESS FACTOR FOR THE MAN*” [10: 70]. They put *nervousness, shyness, inhibitions, anxiety or social phobia* on behalf of causes like: “genetic factors, biological processes, educational manners, cultural pressure or other elements of *individual history*.” In this individual history *the educational climate* of childhood plays an essential role. It would suffice for those carrying on the school curricula to remind their own tensions generating so many *affective, relation or health* issues in their childhood.

A tensed environment, *often conflicting* may easily generate “*the physiological chaos*” so well described by David Servan-Schreiber in his book “*Cure stress, anxiety, depression without medicine*”. This chaos discredits the body’s immunity and exhausts the child’s heart, a fact which has already been confirmed by Edithe Ockel’s research which has been synthesized in the book “*How much can the child be required in the educational process*”. The researchers in Pittsburgh have also observed that the stressful activities, enervating situations and even simple *evocation of the past negative events*, may bring about *slow down of immunity mechanisms in the next 6 hours, reducing secretion of immune-globulin A (IgA)*, representing “the front line of the body’s defence against the infectious agents. On the contrary, the positive thinking may amplify the production of IgA in the next 6 hours [ 9: 78].

Let us think now that most of the children spend most of the school year “*fearing*”. That is why there is no wonder that more and more children with *gastric, heart issues, insomnia, migraines, all kind of infections and allergies*, but also *unsettled psycho-emotional states*. Despite this fact we are still unprepared to understand, to protect and to support correctly the child’s development.

### **Whose is the fault anyway: school or family’s fault?**

Two years ago, in a well-known psychiatry hospital I attended to an astonishing scene, which afterwards I have understood perfectly. A lady professor doctor in child psychiatry went out of her room and told decidedly to the multitude of patients waiting in the waiting room: “Go away! Now! I do not want to see you here!” She did not see me! When I went in, I found out in surprise a terrible think: the child psychiatry offices are merely harassed by the parents and school teachers disturbed by their children’s

behaviours. “Then if the healthy children but ill educated or extremely stressed by school are not diagnosed and prescribed a bag full of medicines, as a guarantee of their calm, many parents claim the incompetence of the doctor they have just seen”. Here is another trap in which both the doctor and the child are: the doctor is thus compelled to invent a diagnostic to the parents’ satisfaction, that there is a solution for their issue; while the child, who whether he was not ill up to that moment, he might get sick from the adverse effects of the medicines, medicines which he might be addicted of on lifetime.

Nevertheless the children we take to the doctor today are the same children who were not still two and amused us by climbing over our bodies slapped us, they put jam in our shoes and of course they showed off in front of our guests! They are the same children whose aggressive or obscene language made us admire them; we were happy as if it were an accomplishment, every time we were slapped or every time they pulled hairs from their grandparents’ head or beard!

How did these amusing children transformed over night, the children that always made us laugh (as ingenious as destructive!) transformed in the whimsical, lazy, discontent, greedy, tough, revengeful adolescents, only interested in their pleasure, unforgiving with us when the money are little for their endless whimsies, arrogant and naughty, which are left not only by school (less aware of its mistakes), but also by their families?

How easy we forgot that the delinquents, sadist, drug-addicted, perverts, truants, depressed people, the losers of today’s schools used to be our favourite toys, the trophies which made us proud even if they were aggressive, and our “stars” who were so amusing with the toy-gun in their little hands, or with the hair gel, nail enamel and lipstick in their purse when they were three, irrespective of their gender, both at home, in the kindergarten or school. Has anyone thought that their future behaviour is written in their first three years of life and that the parents’ early responsibility is more useful, than the later punishment? Because after all, either it is about low marks, a psychiatric diagnostic and a medicine prescription on life time or the child’s fall in the social opprobrium and his penal conviction, we are talking about a serious punishment of what we the adults once tolerated and stimulated...

What a confusing education! For these mistakes difficult to repair, the school blames the family. As we have seen the family cannot be absolved of its responsibility and its guilt concerning the educational mistakes, though for many children “the seven years spent at home” have become “seven years spent in the kindergarten”. But who educates the contemporary family, living in a hectic world, overwhelmed by the stressful speedy work and poverty, a world in which the parental instinct is not enough: today’s education, as Ecaterina Vrășmaș noticed in one of the few books dealing with “Parents counselling” cannot be done at random any more.

On the other hand, “the elevated school” complaining obsessively of the parents’ indolence adds to the “educational record” even more serious mistakes: self-sufficiency, rigidity alternating with libertine behaviour, ignorance of intellectual and development particularities of the child, indifference in front of emotional relational issues and resistance to effort, despise for the family who has with difficulty raised the child, the fact that most of the children are good performers in the classroom, inadequate textbooks, the exhausting timetable centred on the teachers’ needs not on the students’ needs, rendering insensitive children by studying mathematics during the physical education, music,

drawing, religion or social classes, classes which are vitally important for their health and education...

Let us add to all these elements of an unfavourable educational environment, the roll and milk which are un-edible for many of the students because of their intolerance to lactose and who may easily develop different allergies to milk, the chips, fast-food products responsible for their digestive issues and overweight-ness of many children, the dark clubs and internet-cafes as death holes which attract the children bored in the classrooms or in the flats lacking any practical, action perspective, drugs, cigarettes and alcohol sold at the gate or inside the school, gangs of older students concerned with the “paid protection” of the younger ones, inter-schools fights between these kind of gangs and group rapes tolerated by the school unable to establish teams of psychologists, social workers and officers ensuring the security or with the police, which much too often advise the victims to withdraw their complaints in order not to discredit the school or the offenders; rich students who enforce their order in the schools where their parents allocate money; lack of interest for the school discipline; lack of respect for the unique child’s personality... Here are some of the causes which lead to delinquency, psychic deviation, development and health problems, aggressiveness and estrangement marking the school education today. To support this conclusion, the answer to the question about the aspects characterizing the current school climate which we posed to 100 students with a vaster research: more than 75% of the questioned students have characterized it as *stressful, conflicting, discriminating and generating fears, disquietudes or physiological disturbances*.

Maria Montessori – this unequalled “*discoverer of the child*” – admits “*the great difficulty to discipline the human*”. Yet with her great power of understanding asserts that “*when the child moves it complies with natural requirements*”; and states: “By saying the child, “Do not move” does not mean you make him understand but you *take him as an adult*”. “*The child having disordered movements, is first of all a child with unnourished mind; suffering from “mental hunger”* [5: 281- 282]. Many educators attitude is guided by conformity to “obligations imposed by the school curriculum” and not by profound, emphatic understanding of the child, by the real feed-back and by the concern to a continuous adjusting of the working methods to the child’s needs.

As we have already pointed out, the child has some fundamental needs, corresponding to the levels of “Maslow’s Pyramid”: security (being taken care of), love (belonging), appreciation, self-achievement but also free choice, of being useful, to move and have relation with the surrounding world, to research, to understand. Any trespassing, restriction, ignorance of these needs may confuse him and put him in a conflict with the source of his discomfort. This conflict arises suddenly by his self-defence mechanisms and may be translated either directly through negative attitudes or aggressive or indirectly by wearing “social masks”.

### **An education paradox: inferiority complexes**

The messages affecting the child’s education profoundly and totally are not always those established by the school curricula or pedagogues; those are often received through the agency of the powerful coercion means of school or family. That is why, learning the knowledge referred to by the school curricula will always be in the second plan, as an artificial obligation even for the best student, otherwise lacking motivation for a long period of time, motivated only by competition with the reference group or by the desire to

satisfy your parents and educators. It is thus either a matter of dependence, either one related to competition and image. Saussure said that “the human is the only animal obsessed by his image”. And the child learns this obsession very early. He has at his disposal all the necessary instruments in order to find this poison of life: mirror, verbal appreciation or the reverse, school competition etc. All of them compel the child to grow up in a continuous lack of trust and lack of confidence concerning his image, which he feels all his future evolutions are connected to. This lack of confidence rapidly polish his self-defence mechanisms: out of the imagination hat many social masks will come out, intertwined with lie, forgery, hypocrisy, slyness etc. which will be of the mind’s selves, ready for the life carnival. Nonetheless, soon enough, this attempt to protect his self will prove generating new relational problems, inner conflicts: self-conscience and the ”feeling of social communion” (Adler) which the child is born with urges him to love, to forgive, to be good and devoted to his fellow – humans. But the fear that the others will mock at his weakness or his clumsiness make him wear a mask after mask; so that the inferiority complexes are amplified, intertwining with guilt. Overwhelmed by them the voice of the child could hardly be heard. What a loss for the contemporary world...

### **From “army-school” to “smile school”**

Jean Vial in his “Plead for innocent people”, blamed “energetically” with his friend Fernand Oury “*the army school defined by hugeness – a school which remarks itself through abusive effects, rigour and dogmatism. (...) How cannot your mind be shorter with so many isms? he amused. Consequently, Vial pleaded for “A FLOWERS SCHOOL”, that is a school having a human aspect and dimensions, (as the little rural school) as he was also encouraged by UNESCO representatives’ conclusions that the rural school of small proportions “is the best of the possible schools”. Indeed the flowers of human world should grow among the other flowers of the Nature and not among cold and sombre concrete walls which darken their perspective, tearing off their reality and shadowing their joy for life. In a school with hundreds or thousands of students it is difficult to feel protected and respected, loved and listened to. But, Vial asks, “Who is going to save the school of human dimensions?” [11: 372]. And we add who is going to give the child back the joy, the *enthusiasm and anxiousness to attend this school?**

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