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***The Romanian Educational System between Challenges and Opportunities.
The All-knowing Teacher and the Ignorant Student***

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Abstract: *The Romanian educational system is at the end of almost three decades of change. After 89, we had over 60 law changes, of which 5 major, and over 20 ministers. Now the Ministry of National Education is working on a new reform. Discontinued and sometimes contradictory educational policies have led to a situation where we have one of the highest rates in Europe at school drop-out, poor student outcomes, and the labor market does not receive the staff it needs. In this reality, we do not want to analyze only the effects of policies. We will not provide a sector-wide analysis, but we will highlight some ideas related with the reform of educational sector.*

Keywords: *Romanian educational system, teaching science, innovation, reform*

Introduction

An objective evaluation of the educational sector in Romania is under the sign of the ideological risk: depending on the chosen indicators, outcome may differ. To avoid such thing, we will use the indicators of the PISA test, administered by the OECD². The advantage of doing this is double. On one hand, the OECD applies the same type of test since 2006, once every 3 years, therefore we can see an evolution in time of Romania's results. On the other hand, we can compare the results obtained by Romanian pupils with the results of those from other educational systems.

1. Contextual Elements in Romania's Educational System

The PISA test [1] is applied to about 540,000 15-16 year-olds from over 70 countries, following a methodology which ensures the results are representative. From a biological point of view, people this age already have all the ways of mental operation defined, and the way questions are formulated can reflect the impact of institutionalized education on a generation of young people. In Romania, in 2015, it was applied to over 5,000 students. The test measures the performance in Mathematics, Science and Reading, on 6 steps of cognitive activity: the first one checks the ability to identify and name phenomena of the surrounding world; gradually, at the second and third levels, it is checked to what extent these young people manage to operate with abstract notions, given predictable contexts; to what extent they can apply rules or thinking algorithms, starting from easily identifiable doings in controlled contexts; levels 5 and 6 validate high skills to make of making connections between notions and information, to permute or organize them creatively, to make analyses and hypotheses, to discriminate relevant data from those that are irrelevant to the subject of the discussion. Thus, they are not knowledge assessment tests, but the use of thinking, the ability to use it in useful, new contexts. In the table below we put the data obtained by Romanian pupils in the 4 PISA tests:

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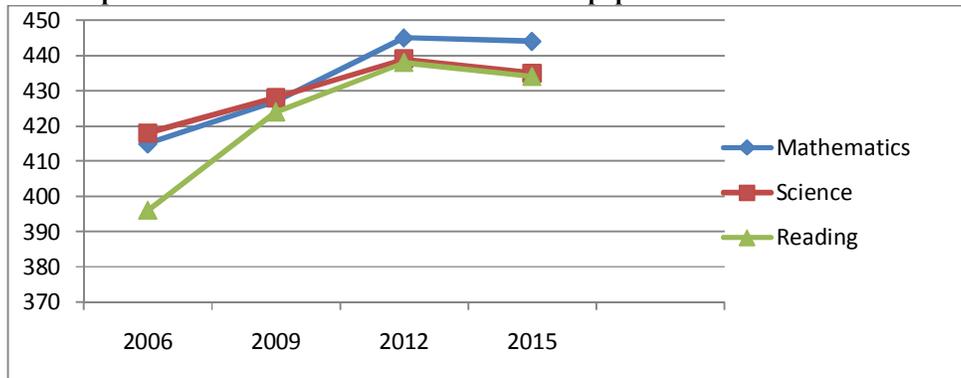
² <http://www.oecd.org>

Table no. 1 The data obtained by Romanian pupils in the PISA tests from 2006 to 2015

Year/Domain	Mathematics	Science	Reading
2006	415	418	396
2009	427	428	424
2012	445	439	438
2015	444	435	434

The data from table 1 are graphically represented to see the evolution in time of math, science and reading results:

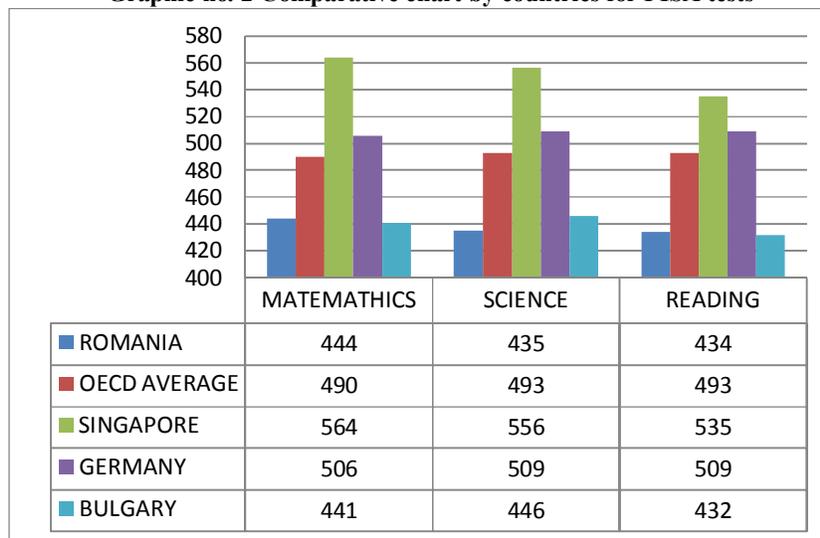
Graphic no. 1 The evolution in time of Romanian pupils 'results in the PISA tests



The data show us progress in all years compared to 2006, but also a stagnation, even a slight decline in 2015 compared to 2012.

The 2015 PISA study, released in stages in December 2016 and early 2017, places Romania Sciences at 435 points in Science, compared to the 493 average score of the OECD countries, and to the best score for the Singapore's pupils, which was 558. On the Reading side, Romania accounted for 434 points, and for Mathematics 444 points. The chart below reflects the scores obtained by the Romanians.

Graphic no. 2 Comparative chart by countries for PISA tests



Under these conditions, the 48th din countries for Romania reflect, on the scale of thinking, what kind of generations we grew up, with what capacities, with what innovative perspective. The above graph shows the absence of progress in recent years. Moreover, we are in the last quarter of the

rankings, well below the average, somewhat on a par with Bulgaria, but much under Germany or other countries around.

Study data also highlights the dispersion of pupils on performance levels. Thus, the share of Romanian performers in total (levels 5 and 6) is 4.3%, while the share of the lower levels (1 and 2) is 24.3. The OECD average is 15.3% and 13%, respectively. How does the above data compare to the reality of notable performances of Romanian pupils at the Olympics? Obviously, the results exist, but the selection base is very limited, so good results appear to belong to individual performance areas rather than as part of the educational system's effort to generate performance.

Finally, we are also interested in the capacity of the educational system to generate equity. For the purposes of the OECD, this is a complex concept delimited on two related objectives: inclusion and fairness. The first concerns the objective of ensuring that all pupils, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds or traditionally marginalized groups, have access to high quality education and reach a basic level of competence. Fairness refers to the objective of removing obstacles from the path of the full development of the talent, which comes from the economic and social circumstances over which individual students do not have control, such as unequal access to educational resources in the family and school environment [1, p. 201]. At this level, the Romanian student's resilience index draws attention to 11%, compared to an average of 29%³. A pupil is considered resilient if he/she is in the last quarter of the country at the moment of the study, in terms of socio-economic status. Therefore, we can consider that the chances of raising children with material and social difficulties by education in Romania are extremely low. More specifically, the Romanian educational system fails to have a more significant impact on increasing the potential of those from disadvantaged environments.

2. Exploring Solutions: the Teacher's Reform and the System's Reform

In the context in which the Romanian government is working on a new law for education, what could be the solutions that could be suggested to solve the issues outlined above?

In terms of explaining the role of the teacher, we must understand, as a premise, the complexity of the educational act, which is realized through a chain of interpersonal and social actions, in order to transform the individual into an active, creative, free and autonomous personality. Paradoxically is that, originally, the term *school* originates from Greek, and it means free time, perhaps in correlation with the fact that education was initially accessible to a small number of people who had the time and money available to follow it. Religious leaders were the only ones educated in the sense of being literate and used this competence to read and interpret sacred texts. Others learned the same social habits and work skills as the elderly via examples [2]. Education, as we know it today, has gradually emerged. Although the richest children had private teachers, most of the population was completely unskilled until the nineteenth century. Bowles and Gintis believe that: schools are designed to legitimize inequality, restrict personal affirmation to compatible forms with obedience for an arbitrary authority and to contribute to the process by which young people come to resign their fate [3]. Ivan Illich [4] validates this perspective, considering that a non-critical acceptance of the existing social order is being taught by a hidden curriculum.

An education that is carried out by the authorities and involves obedience is an education that is carried out in a relationship of power in which unknowing children are in opposition to all-knowing teachers. This relationship is tension-creating, and those teachers who have lost any trace of an inner child will only see enemies in the students. "They always complain that they know nothing and that they do not even want to learn anything that their infantilism and their lack of self-control are pissing them off. This kind of teachers has completely distanced themselves, both internally and externally, from childhood. The child has simply become the Other, something the teacher himself will never be again. This kind of educators often terrorizes their students. Their relationship with children rests on order, discipline and obedience. They seem to have the joy of demonstrating their power over children

³ <https://www.compareyourcountry.org/pisa/country/ROU>

and by keeping them in chess under the pressure of scrupulously and whimsically accurate grades” [5].

The solution regarding the teacher seems to be the contact with the inner clueless child in order to in order to be able to activate the knowledgeable adult in his students. In other words, the following goals about the rethinking the teacher's training and refinement, with emphasis on "soft" skills would be needed:

1. the teacher’s awareness regarding the psychological causes of behavior: traumas, needs, projections; release from trauma and projections[6];
2. conscious reconnection of teachers and pupils through an authentic, topic-subject relationship, where each is in contact with their inner universe and co-creates a learning experience;
3. Shifting the focus from results to process, from evaluation to experience;
4. The introduction of the emotional dimension of human being and assertive expression into the finalities of education.

Regarding *the system’s reform*, we propose:

1. Responsabilizing students through programs that provide them with space for initiative, decision-making, problem-solving.
2. Responsibility of local authorities and schools to adapt the structure and content of the curriculum; as a result, more options, more hours should be available to the community and school;
3. Diversified and optimized learning paths on learning cycles (the emergence of high-school-vocational school - vocational options is far too late at the level of the 9th grade);
4. the construction of optimal governance at each educational institution, with more outward-oriented management boards (parents and businessmen) and managers who also have management resources (staff hiring, ability to motivate performance, including a budget available to the board of directors), reducing the role of the inspectorate to the one of standard control body;
5. identifying models of good practice developed in the private area or in partnership with non-governmental organizations⁴ and their multiplication.

Conclusions

The Romanian educational system is at the end of almost three decades of change. After 1989, we had over 60 changes on the law of education, of which 5 major, and over 20 ministers. Discontinued and sometimes contradictory educational policies have led to a situation where we have one of Europe's highest school drop-out rates, poor student outcomes, and the labor market does not receive the staff it needs. In this disconcerting reality, we believe that the emphasis on reforming the system, only from the point of view of the central government's action, is one that is mistaken from a strategic point of view. The education sector is too big and too symbolic for each political actor to leave it untouched by a specific political mark, moreover since there has never been a national pact on functional education. The strategic solution is in decentralization and deconcentration, in decreasing the share of centralized decision-making and in increasing the decision-making power of local authorities, communities, economic agents and the non-government sector.

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⁴Non-governmental organizations have begun to develop expertise and programs that can have structural impact. We exemplify here the contribution of the National Coalition for Education in the formulation of relevant points of view on the sector or the Community Foundations Federation in Romania, which, through the Științescu Fund, which finances innovation in science education, can document other forms of community involvement in the field of education.

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