

Optimization of Learning - Inclusive and Innovating Strategies

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Abstract: *The act of learning, process and how efficient it is are all elements that are tightly related to the individual and social particularities, as well as to educational practice. The concerns that theorists and practitioners have in the field of psychology, pedagogy; special psycho-pedagogy are oriented towards identifying new strategies, inclusive and efficient, generating sustainable learning with a high level of transferability. Cognitive, metacognitive and motivational elements, paired with the material and time resource, the pragmatism of curriculum contents and the specific methodological strategy shape the core of active-participative, efficient and qualitative learning.*

Keywords: efficient learning, inclusive learning strategies, innovation, motivation.

Efficient learning

Nowadays learning is associated with desirable change. The learning process created in formal, informal and non-formal contexts depends both on the individual and on society, particularly, the environment in which he/she is active.¹ Learning may be regarded from three juxtaposing perspective, namely:

- Attitude towards knowledge, towards life;
- Acquisition and practice of new methods, skills and values that are necessary for living in a permanently changing society;
- Process of training for new situations.²

Efficient learning requires the existence of a learning environment that favors the occurrence of study, which has generated educational approaches and orientations such as the ecological and interactive beliefs regarding difficulties in learning. These emphasize the possibility that organizational and methodological changes lead to more appealing and beneficial learning for all students. Among the challenges triggered by the occurrence of this educational concept, we may name the following:

- Student-centered learning – as a result of acknowledging the importance and uniqueness of the individual;
- Pedagogy of engagement- a type of pedagogy that responds to the diversity of educational needs;

¹ Adriana Denisa Manea, „Features of Educational Activities in the Contemporary Society,” in *Astra Salvensis*, VI (2018), no. 12, p, 245-253.

² I. Neacşu, *Independent academic learning Methodological guidelines*. URL: http://www.unibuc.ro/n/despre/amfi-cad/docs/2011/apr/12_10_37_45Invatarea_academica_independenta.pdf 2006, accessed 02.01.2021.

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- Interdisciplinarity and trans disciplinarity curriculum- in accordance to socio-cultural pragmatism;
- Democracy and human solidarity- a more fair, humanistic, natural educational facility;
- Peace and intrapersonal and interpersonal comprehensiveness – understanding and accepting differences and changes.³

Efficient learning requires self-determination and engagement, and the way in which it takes place varies considerably, according to particularities and experiences that are circumscribed to specific contexts, even more as we reckon that every human or social agent is a unique and independent piece of the learning process.⁴ To choose the resources, their amount and the moment of using them is to learn smartly. To learn how to learn is synonymous to increasing one’s individual learning capacity, in other words, to efficiently accelerate the learning process. Personal development is a continuum, it never ends with a skill acquisition or with a scored result.

At academic level, the instruments of efficient learning are critical thinking and metacognitive strategies. Metacognitive strategies name the aspects related to monitoring and control of learning, as well as the development of the learning potential. To grant a personal significance to studied material means to put them in personal systems of knowledge, to permanently establish connections between previous experiences and the new ones, between knowledge and its applicability, between and inside the knowledge fields. Self-monitoring of progress and control over the effort invested in learning trigger the need to master learning techniques.⁵

Academic learning is active, purpose-oriented and leads to measurable results. It requires engagement and willing participation in the process of knowledge building. Purpose orientation means an orchestration of one’s efforts towards reaching objectives. Objectives are established starting from weaknesses, which will be turned into needs for instruction and self-instruction. Objectives in learning can refer to data acquisition, to building skills, development of behaviors or learning potential. Measurable results represent an impetus for the pursuit of effort investment in learning. The results become tangible in various aspects (passed examination, known concepts, assumed

³ Adriana Denisa Manea, Maria Barbă, M.(2020). „Learning in inclusive environments, in Perspectivele și problemele integrării în Spațiul European al Cercetării și Educației,” in *Perspectivele și Problemele Integrării în Spațiul European al Cercetării și Educației* Cahul, VII (2020), 2, p. 29-33, https://ibn.idsi.md/collection_view/782

⁴ Adriana Denisa Manea, „The efficient management of academic learning,” in *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai Psychologia–Pedagogia*, LXI (2014), no. 1, p. 81-89.

⁵ A. Glava, *Metacogniția și optimizarea învățării*, Cluj-Napoca, Casa Cărții de Știință, 2009.

ideas), but there are also results that may be demonstrated in time (successful job, intellectual performance, specific life behaviors).⁶

Learning can be regarded as the result of one's own efforts to prosper in society, in other words, ongoing education supported through lifelong learning courses and self-education is meant to ensure success and personal and social prosperity.⁷ Expert studies emphasize and explain the manner in / degree to which students' personal traits (such as gender, academic motivation, self-efficiency) , the family environment (such as the parents' social support) and school climate (teachers' social support, learner autonomy, quality of educational practices) have an impact upon their engagement in the learning activity and the acquisition of academic performance.⁸ Therefore, we acknowledge the relation between learning results and personal, social and environmental factors. Interconnected factors meant to ensure academic performance can be identified at the level of personal context (motivation and expectations, awareness of prior interests and beliefs, decision and control), of the social context (socio-cultural mediation within the group, mediation facilitated by others) and at the level of the physical environment (rigor/ fairness of organization and orientation, design, capitalization of opportunities and experiences)⁹. This way, learning is regarded as a continuous dialogue between the individual and the socio-cultural environment, which naturally emphasizes the existence of interdependence at the level of the three contextual domains previously identified as a prerequisite of being a successful learner.

In secondary education, there are several factors responsible for the occurrence of efficient learning, such as: personal engagement in learning and effort investment; student-student collaborative activity; guidance and monitoring actions on behalf of the instructor.¹⁰ Students' direct engagement in the explanation/ construction of concepts is proof that educational independence occurs when students' and teachers' actions come together in formal and nonformal educational contexts.¹¹

⁶ S. E. Bernat, *Tehnica învățării eficiente*, Cluj-Napoca, Presa Universitară Clujeană Publishing House, 2003.

⁷ Adriana Denisa Manea, A.D. (2014). „Lifelong learning programs-an effective means of supporting continuing education,” in *Procedia -Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 142 (2014), p. 454-458, doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.07.648.

⁸ T. Tonofrei, „Efectul angajamentului în domeniul școlar la elevi”, in *Interuniversitaria*, 14 (2018), p. 277- 283.

⁹ J. H. Falk, L. D. Dierking, *Learning from museums: Visitors experiences and their making of meaning*, Walnut Creek, CA, 2000.

¹⁰ Adriana Denisa Manea, „Educational management and the dynamics of educational models,” in Ion Albulescu, Adriana Denisa Manea, Iuliu-Marius Morariu (eds.), *Education, Religion, Family in the contemporary society*, Saarbrücken, Lambert Academic Publishing, 2017, p. 75-83.

¹¹ G. A. Zuckerman, T. M. Bilibina, O. M. Vinogradova, O. L. Obukhova, N. A. Shibanova, „On the Criteria of Activity-Based Education. Kul'turno-istoricheskaya psikhologiya,” in *Cultural-Historical Psychology*, 15 (2019), no. 3, p. 105–116.

Inclusive and innovative learning strategies

Learning is not only the transmission, respectively the reception of knowledge, but it also embeds complex mental processes that are built in time (of assimilation, understanding, processing/ elaboration, transfer). Learning how to learn or metacognition means teaching individuals to be aware of the cognitive forces and intellectual characteristics they have and, at the same time, of what they are studying, so that each may build one’s personal learning program. Stemming from the fact that meta means change, metacognition means the individual’s intervention in order to streamline learning or knowledge and represents a superior level of knowledge that, in this case, is future-oriented. Consequently, learning (an aware and systematically supported process) is deliberate and planned, which requires:

- ✓ learning the aware behavior of cognition;
- ✓ self-evaluation and management of one’s personal cognitive system;
- ✓ self-control capacity and the ability to acknowledge one’s learning;
- ✓ ability to monitor knowledge progress;
- ✓ readjustment and balancing knowledge mechanism;
- ✓ analysis of one’s own intellectual functioning;
- ✓ comprehension of learning, solutioning and memorizing mechanisms;
- ✓ acknowledgment of learning trajectory;
- ✓ knowing knowledge.¹²

We may state, based on educational practice, that training metacognition can improve one’s attitude towards school requirements, towards the educational institution and it bears a positive influence upon students regarding their own learning, together with an increase of team-work potential, which means not only interaction, inter-knowledge but also the capitalization of experiences regarding cultural pluralism.¹³

Nowadays encyclopedia-sized knowledge is impossible to reach. The goal of modern education is to endow learners with a structured set of functional skills. The prevalence of teaching activity shifts from information accumulation to acquisition of instruments that allow access and processing of data. Just as teachers, whose tech-savviness comes as prerequisite in the teaching domain, need to adapt to the customized needs of their students, learners are also challenged by the multitude of sources, media and content to choose from. But, by working closely together and transforming the purpose of education into a mutual goal of self-development, the task of teaching-learning

¹² I Cerghit, *Sisteme de instruire alternative și complementare. Structuri, stiluri și strategii*, București, Aramis, 2002.

¹³ C. Stan, Adriana Denisa Manea, „The Dimensions of Intercultural Education,” in *Astra Salvensis*, 6 (2018), no. 12, p. 291-297.

turns into a more tangible one¹⁴. Innovation in learning has emphasized the possibility of using particular didactic strategies that lead to learning efficiency. We recall in this respect the strategies that accentuate the progressive building of knowledge and ongoing strengthening of the capacities to use it, coherence and inter and transdisciplinary approaches, flexibility of approaches and differentiated learning paths, encouraging the learner's capacity for self-evaluation and development of a reflective filter and self-demand.

Didactic strategies that are centered on active-participative, efficient and qualitative learning require sharing ideas with others, cooperation in problem-solving, abilities in expressing personal viewpoints, as well as persuasion skills, of asking questions in view of understanding. In the current educational context, the role of the teacher is to facilitate and moderate learning, to help students understand and explain, provide arguments for the expressed points of view. This way, their role as partners in learning becomes imperative. The learning dynamics calls for evaluation that indicates the measuring and appreciation of skills (what the student knows to do with what he knows), emphasizing qualitative elements (values, attitudes), evaluation being doubled by responsible, fair and assumed self-assessment.¹⁵ In other words, learning progress is under scrutiny for each student, based on dynamic and formative assessment.

Innovation in learning is present in using strategies both from a cognitive/metacognitive perspective, and from critical thinking, as well as technological viewpoint. Having digital skills is a prerequisite in gaining school and professional performances.¹⁶ Digital education supports the customization of learning (students become experts at identifying their own learning style meant to ensure educational and social performance).¹⁷ In order to develop critical thinking in educational practice, a rigorous organization is deemed necessary, which requires:

- giving enough time to the free expression of ideas, beliefs, providing feedback;
- keeping a balance between creating expression opportunities and showing indulgence;
- actively engaging learners throughout the entire activity;

¹⁴ Ioana Mudure-Iacob, „Digital Literacy: From Multi-Functional Skills to Overcoming Challenges in Teaching ESP,” in *Astra Salvensis*, 7 (2019), no. 14, p. 59-70.

¹⁵ C. Stan, A. D. Manea, (2015). The Divergent Relationship between Assessment and Self-assessment in Higher Education. Experimental Results,” in *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 209 (2015), p. 497-502, doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.11.278.

¹⁶ A. D. Manea, C. Stan, „Study regarding the use of information and communications technology,” in *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 33 (2018), p, 271-277, <http://dx.doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2018.06.33>.

¹⁷ A. D. Manea, C. Stan, „Online communication,” in *The European Proceedings of Social & Behavioural Sciences*, 8 (2016), no. 12 (40), p. 317-323.

- showing respect to each individual;
- encouraging risk taking through assertive communication.

Critical thinking is the instrument of efficient learning that helps a person seek orientation in the world of possible alternatives and become aware of the mechanisms of his/her own thinking. The most relevant contribution of critical thinking is that it leads to action, At the same time, any comprehension is followed by a consequent action. Analyzing the relevance of critical thinking regarding successful learning, we can observe that perseverance leads to the consistency of acquisitions, while the reflection and self-reflection critical capacity upon learning experiences is materialized in the possibility of making an assumed choice over the personal development directions.

The implementation of inclusive strategies causes changes regarding the learning environment (which will be stimulating, motivating), engagement of all students (learning scenarios will be customized for all learners, so that their participation is an active and aware one), feedback regarding the performance level (both the student and the teacher will have the possibility of reception, understanding and acknowledgement of learning, of recorded performances and gained merits).¹⁸

Inclusive learning strategies are characterized by a set of actions through which learning is triggered, assisted and directed by teachers, maximizing success rates for each student. Thus, stemming from iconic learning, when teachers used the Socratic technique of asking questions in order to encourage students to think more profoundly about a specific topic and task differentiation (graded tasks- the teacher designs a variety of tasks around the same key concept by taking into account different preparation levels that students have) one moves to learning centers and independent projects. Within learning centers, students work independently or in small groups to complete more complex projects (transdisciplinary). When students show interest in a certain school subject, they can work together with the teacher or guide in the community in order to draft an independent study plan for the field of interest. Both in the case of learning centers and independent project, the idea of activities outside the classroom and within the community increases¹⁹, often with the help of technology.

Creating inclusive learning environment means that the entire teaching staff acknowledges that there is diversity among all groups of children, at all levels of education and that, the correct and efficient approach of differences is what fundamentally defines the new trends in education. The practical means by which we can create inclusive learning environments entail:

¹⁸ A. D. Manea, „Educația incluzivă - un imperativ al societății contemporane,” in *Astra Salvensis*, 2 (2014), no. 3, p. 162-165.

¹⁹ S. V. Ținică, V. Cișmașu, *Suport de curs*, 2015, available at <http://schoolforeveryone.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Suport-de-curs-educatie-incluziva.pdf>.

- Transformation of the classroom into a comfortable, interesting, ergonomical, free and cozy learning environment;
- approaching a wide array of formal and nonformal activities to facilitate learning;
- flexible management of teaching, learning and evaluation according to learners' needs;
- designing differentiated learning contexts;
- providing permanent support to all students in teaching them how to learn efficiently, constructively and pragmatically;
- encouraging cooperation activities instead of competitive ones;
- using various pedagogical resources that are customized to the learners' needs and interests (learning means, didactic methods and processes, forms of organizing activities. types of learning, evaluation strategies).²⁰

A significant element that triggers and supports learning is *motivation*. There are multiple and complex sources of motivation. Internal and external factors confound and influence motivation for learning. Motivation can be defined as the interior drive that directs human behavior. Any type of external force can also influence behavior, it is mainly guided and supported by one's inner forces. Among the array of internal factors, we may refer to curiosity, self-efficiency, attitudes, needs and competence.

Conclusions

Generating efficient learning depends on the level of participative activism, of targets and measurable results meant to produce, which entails the occurrence of permanent changes. In the educational context, desirable change must implement the focus on cooperation, partnership, social learning and capitalization of positive, humanistic relations.

Educational practice has emphasized the dependence of using inclusive didactic strategies in the process of reaching efficient learning which requires an integrated approach of contents, the development of practices in cooperative and collaborative learning, differentiation and customization in learning and evaluation, as well as a holistic approach at the level of customization/ pluri-educational teams for formal and nonformal activities.²¹ It can be said that inclusive strategies represent the new orientation towards facilitating learning and making it efficient. The system of interrelations acting at the level of interactive strategies relates to the team of trainers and the active and participative methods of pedagogy: problematization, problem-solving, discovery, learning in pairs, learning by research and individual and group learning, using divergent questions, heuristic conversation, decision-making and

²⁰ A. D. Manea, *Educația incluzivă-teorie și aplicații*, Revised Second Edition, Cluj Napoca, Editura Eikon, Școala Ardeleană Publishing House, 2020.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

conflict negotiation, creative conflict management, role play etc.²² The operational mechanisms that allow us to make learning efficient are identified both at the level of students (expressing opinions, asking and answering questions, giving arguments, cooperation in task management, capitalization of personal experiences), as well as the level of teachers (designing and coordination learning, encouragement and emotional, intellectual support, setting milestones and giving feedback, initiating and supporting partnership throughout learning, designing various simulation contexts).

Quality is a key coordinate in the meaning of the current efficient learning concept. Efficient and qualitative learning can be reached by organizing open and flexible educational contexts, alternating formal and nonformal activities, actively engaging families in the students’ instructional and educational process, making digital research a permanent aspect, alternating roles at the level of the teacher-student binomial, practicality of educational actions and curriculum contents, promotion of assertive and responsible attitudes towards one’s self and society.

²² *Ibidem*.