

## **OPTIMIZING THE PEDAGOGICAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT IN THE BULGARIAN SCHOOL BY APPLYING INTERACTIVE METHODS**

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The issues of interactive learning, the use of interactive teaching methods have always been the focus of the theoreticians and practitioners at all levels of our educational system. However, in order to enable their effective application, they need to be studied and implemented not in isolation, only for themselves, but in the context of the overall concept of education policy, the education system and the pedagogical environment as a whole.

This paper attempts to analyze the opportunities for optimization and main aspects of pedagogical learning environment and pedagogical work based on the use of interactive teaching methods.

Modern education in Bulgaria is realized in an extremely dynamic social and resource environment in the conditions of a global economic crisis. This fact is particularly important when defining the priorities of our country in the field of educational policy, which, although implemented in the present, has a projective dimension in the future and its performance depends especially on the prosperity of the individual person and of the nation as a whole. The child "today" differs from the child "tomorrow" not only in the time it lives, but also on the social and educational specificity and rigor to the educational content as well as

to the pedagogical learning environment -

modernized, personality-oriented, with far-reaching strategic sustainability the effectiveness of the knowledge it provides.

These basic positions are also defined in the Program for Development of Education, Science and Youth Policy in the Republic of Bulgaria (2009 - 2013)

- stimulating the involvement of young people in the development and implementation of sectoral policy;

- transforming Bulgaria's medium-term plan into the country where knowledge and innovation are the engine of the economy.

In this context, it is more than obvious that it is necessary to break out of the framework of dogmatic and traditionalism of the current educational and pedagogical environment and to modernize it in the direction of: school documentation, mobility of organization and realization of the learning process for students under specific conditions (SEN - special educational needs, risk from dropping-out of school, deviating behavior, permanently absent from the location of the school, etc.), new technologies to conduct and evaluate the effectiveness of the learning process and its outcomes, understanding and conforming with the interests of the child as an active subject in the educational system.

Education in our country is based on age-old traditions and rich pedagogical experience that has proven its effectiveness over time. The experience of Bulgarian

and their specific expression is in the Strategic Priority Areas:

- achieving a European quality of education;

- ensuring equal access to education and opening up the educational system;

- development of conditions and environment for realization of the educational concept of "lifelong learning";

teachers has often been the subject of special interest by foreign practitioners and researchers in this field. Evidence of the effectiveness of our education system is also the numerous specialists in higher education - at home and abroad.

The new age, however, places the educational system and pedagogical and educational practice on the challenge of

extraordinary dynamic changes in all spheres of life, especially in the dynamics of childhood and adolescence. Today, it is not enough to know and follow the good traditional pattern of passing on knowledge and experience from the teacher to the student and evaluating with a grading assessment scores.

European inclusion implies increased interactive organization and the learning environment for adults and children, which in turn is related to the need:

1. To create pedagogical conditions for acquiring modern education in each country and place of the European Union and in Bulgaria in particular by assimilating the educational standards and dropping-out of school, victims of violence, children with emotional difficulties, etc.).

Such comments are **motivated** by existing **global phenomena** such as Globalization and the resulting mobility of people and the exchange of information from different nationalities and regions; the influence of technology in the postmodern society, which allows the combination of traditional and modern and optimally effective didactical conditions; high public expectations for modern education of the future generation, mastering the semantics of the future; increasing labor market requirements to highly qualified staff for all levels of the world and national economy. The following are the **guiding principles for**

strategies of the Bulgarian school with those of the European Union.

2. To give each child the opportunity to receive equal education corresponding to age and ability, regardless of his/her individual characteristics - deviation from the psychophysiological norm, deviating from the social norms behavior, absence from the country or the populated place, manifestation of different gifts and more.

3. To create practice of mobility of the pedagogical learning environment for each specific case - individual (independent) form of education; counseling; interactive didactic methods; variance in assessing the effectiveness of knowledge; supporting environment for children at risk (risk from

### **interactive learning and optimizing the pedagogical environment:**

**Thesis 1.** In order to achieve the strategic goal of *achieving European quality of education*, it is necessary to organize and provide pupils with a modern and humane organized learning environment, complying with the European standards as well as with the development and the interests of each child.

**Thesis 2.** For the realization of the target it is necessary to specify the main priority accents:

- amendments to the rules of application of the preschool education law and to the Staff Regulations and School Rules issued by each school in conjunction with §8 of the

Transitional and Concluding Provisions of the NPT NPDP;

- technology of conducting the individual/independent form of education; counseling students who, for health reasons, do not attend the school for more than 30 consecutive school days and for which an individual form of home-based training is organized - organization, financing, documentation;

- alternatives to traditional education - full-time education;

- types of examinations - corrective, equalizing, to change the assessment. Entrance and exit level, external evaluation (according to Article 5, paragraph 3 and Section IV Exams in the training process from Ordinance №3

- cooperation;

- responsibility;

- flexibility;

- unity in diversity;

- innovation;

- autonomy;

- accountability;

- effectiveness;

- legality.

Using **interactive learning methods** in our country is perhaps the first and most important step in optimizing the overall pedagogical process at all stages of our educational system as it brings the basic mechanism of knowledge - **the approach – self-educating!**

of 15.04.2003 on the assessment system (SG No.73 of 11.09.2009, in force from 15.09.2009)

- interactive learning methods, interactive attitudes to information channels – learning by teaching (i.e. **while teaching we learn**);

- a supportive environment for children at risk of dropping out of school;

- individualization and differentiation of learning tasks - children learn when they feel good at school when they "succeed".

**Thesis 3.** The main principles for realization of the accents are: Program for Development of Education and Science in the Republic of Bulgaria (2009 - 2013):

- personality orientation;

- equal access;

As we know, methods in learning are ways (from *methodos* – way, begin) through which knowledge and experience is passed between the subjects in the pedagogical process. Modern pedagogical practice increasingly reinforces the need to use **new, highly effective and cost-effective methods of learning, primarily related to the pupil's own cognitive activity and in direct interaction with the teacher.** (interaction = interaction, exchange)

The theoretical basis of interactive learning is **constructivism** (according to Ivan Ivanov). There are significant differences between the traditional educational model and the interactive educational model:

- the **traditional educational model** -

learning the information needed for taking  
the exam; solving problems in  
a static

environment (reproductive); applying  
knowledge and skills to specific conditions;  
"teacher-student" interaction; the teacher -  
the main subject of the evaluation.

- the **interactive educational model** -  
the awareness of the need for information;  
solving problems in a dynamic, changing  
environment (productive); adapting  
information resources and turning the  
information into a resource-friendly  
application; "pupil-pupil" interaction and  
teamwork; assessments are made jointly -  
teacher and student and identify common  
achievements and problems.

Knowledge and use of basic interactive  
methods: situational method, case-specific  
method (Case-studies); case study,  
simulation, play, role play, discussion  
methods (questionnaire, conversation,  
discussion), debating, brainstorming ("brain  
attack"), experimentation, modeling, etc.,  
that add touch of innovation and modernity  
to the learning process which today's pupil  
would be disadvantaged and incomplete in  
his/her own presentation in life situations and  
in the orientation to the rapidly changing  
reality.

The overall performance of the  
pedagogical processes in the Bulgarian  
school is based on the optimization and the  
ballasted functioning of several **interrelated  
processes**:

1. Contemporary **organization of  
pedagogical learning environment** - in  
accordance with European and national

regulations. The necessity of updating the organization of the pedagogical learning environment and its compliance with the European standards and practices motivates the amendments in the normative base at all levels in the educational system. The current document is the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning of 23.04.2008, which is a recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council, and according to which deadlines Bulgaria needs to make adequate changes: 2010 - referencing the national qualifications systems to the EQF; 2012 - determining the level of qualification in national documents according to 8 grades in the EQF. The objectives of the EQF are fully in line with the need for the training offered - pooling national education systems through learning outcomes (skills levels are based on knowledge and skills rather than resource input – e.g. duration of training); covering all levels of qualification in general, vocational and tertiary education; transparency of national qualifications; promoting mobility.

The optimization of the learning environment is in several directions: increasing the personal information of each participant in the training with respect to the latest regulations and requirements of the Ministry of Education and Science, first of all

- amendments to the National Labor Code (latest amendments to the State Gazette, issue 87 / 3.11.2009), which defines the

functions, structure, staffing and organization of the

Ministry of Education and Science and its

organizational structures and administrative staff. The NPDP defines the rights and obligations of the participants in the educational process, the governing bodies and the educational institutions in the system of public education, the organization of the educational process, the role of the parents and the functions of the pedagogical council.

## 2 Trends for the **individual/independent form of education. Counseling students. Home form of education.**

Individual (independent), individual, at home, etc. are among the so-called **alternative forms** of education. They are the modern tendency in **pedagogical environment** - preparation of documentation (individual curriculum, schedule of compulsory activities with teachers and the child, didactic tasks for self-employment and self-training, according to the needs of the individual child, etc.).

The pedagogical process of alternative forms of training is subject to specific rules, implemented with different **technological components**:

- **methods** - independent work, counseling, distance learning, problem solving, home assignments, essays, etc.

- **didactic tools** - computer, individual forms, tests, homeworks, etc.

education, which contributes to breaking the status quo and the framing of the clairvoyant form, thus contributing to the overcoming of a number of difficulties in the pupils - absences of an objective nature (relocation, illness, travel to parents in other cities or countries, traumatic experiences, etc.), the risk of dropping out of school, etc., giving students a real opportunity to compensate for the missed and to participate in a full-scale learning process, albeit on a self-preparation. The assessments obtained in the alternative forms of training are valid in compliance with the relevant legal requirements regulated by the Bulgarian legislation.

In order to achieve these forms, it is necessary for the entire pedagogical team of the school to fulfill a number of **conditions for organizing** an appropriate (welcoming) - **forms** - consultative, individual, groupwork.

### 3. Full-time form of organization of the learning process.

The topicality of the problem of full-time education as an alternative to the half-day is determined first of all by the strategic goals of the government of the Republic of Bulgaria, where the first year of the first year is scheduled for next year, and later for the older students of the initial course.

The whole form of organization of the pedagogical process has a number of positive aspects (by P. Petrov, D. Todorina, etc.):

- It is promising because it allows the institution to combine or take up part of the family's functions - independent activities,

nutrition, time organization, healthy day-care regime.

- In the dynamics of modern life where a large number of parents are engaged in work, often outside the populated area or country, day-to-day training is a good opportunity to preserve the physical and mental health of young pupils.

- It is a very good opportunity to combine educational, pedagogical, socializing activities that are realized through the complex-inter-system and system approaches, by uniting class-lessons, in-of-school and out- of-school organizational forms and activities.

- Ensure longer-lasting communication between students and teachers, greater opportunities for harmonious blending of learning and extra-curricular tasks.

4. Optimization of the pedagogical process through **new forms of examinations and control of pupils' competences** - types of exams - corrective, equalizing, change of assessment. Input and output level, external evaluation.

In recent years, a new practice (external evaluation) has been required to establish the quantity and quality of learning content acquired by students, as well as to popularize somewhat tolerated alternative forms of exams - equalizing, changing the assessment, individual testing, etc. The established **National Program for the introduction of national standardized external evaluation** regulates the terms and conditions for the implementation of the so-called External



evaluation, which gives each school the opportunity to present the achievements of its students and the pedagogical effect of the work of applying the innovative pedagogical technologies on behalf of the whole team.

The optimized pedagogical process finds its natural conclusion and synthesis through the projection of the expectations for it, expressed in the text of the National Program for Implementation of the National Standardized External Evaluation:

"... the primary objective of the compulsory assessment of pupils' knowledge and skills at the end of each educational stage (IV, VII, XII grades) through national standardized exams. The introduction of a system of national standardized external evaluation will ensure the following results:

- the public will be informed about the state of the education system and will be able to put new requirements on it;

- the state will establish the actual status of the school education, will follow the trends in its development and thus the control will become a corrective of the educational policy pursued;

- teachers will be given the opportunity to self-assess and correct their work based on the pupils' results;

- parents will have a real idea of the level of preparation of their children;

- pupils will be in a level playing field for standardized objective assessment. "

Understanding the effect of updating (in particular, combining good tradition and modernity) with the pedagogical process in our school, based on such circumstances as: the use of interactive learning methods, alternative forms of organization and verification of mastered competences, the personalized learning process, the stimulation of the diverse interests of the students, the integration and the tolerant attitude towards the "different" (children with SEN, with prominent gifts, of different ethnic origins, etc.) are among the indicator for a new school that has a real chance to establish itself with its prestige in the European educational environment and to take its worthy place in it.

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