

The Way of School Democratization through Topic Work

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Abstract: *The research on this topic is a great achievement in the field of open education, considering the possibilities of democratization in the Albanian school. After the introduction, which presents the conditions which make this education possible and likeable in our schools, a thorough analysis of the literature on open classrooms and history of open class education is presented. Also, the comparison of child learning in an authoritarian classroom, versus an open and participatory classroom is done. The open classrooms approach has been reviewed towards values in school democratization, but the research includes the evaluation of the practical study conducted in the school classes, on the possibilities this education offers for the democratization of the relations born in these classes. This is achieved by analyzing the experience of teachers in different schools who have tried to apply this kind of education in our schools. The thesis has achieved some results which will serve to all those educators who want to teach the new generations not only the intellectual skills but also the affective ones and can learn how to involve the whole social community in the education process to achieve the school's democratization. As a result we would have the schools we want, the way we want, schools which would educate the children with values of a democratic life.*

Keywords: open education, open classes, topic work, the democratization of the schools

1. Introduction

Pre University Educational System (PES) over the last two decades has conducted a series of reforms changes, and system-level teaching practice. Nowadays, according to the preliminary report of the Ministry of Education and Sports for reform efforts in the PES is that this education must be democratic, considering the requirements of the basic principles of equality of opportunity for quality education and respect for individual differences. The purpose of the reform in PES is to establish the best conditions possible for students, regardless of their personal abilities and circumstances, with the aim to train them as active citizens to participate in a creative and critical way in the economic, social and cultural life of the country and be able to adapt to changing circumstances in the democratic society of knowledge. (Preliminary Report, MAS, 2014).

It is understood that these goals of Albanian schools cannot be achieved in a vacuum, but with the concrete work in the classroom, besides the changes in methodology and technology improvements, education must be changed and improved in terms of the democratization of relations arising in this environment learning. The change and the democratization of these relations should focus more on establishing and promoting free expression of thoughts and enabling students to lifelong learning.

In terms of a typical traditional learning that has characterized our school before '90, class relations have been closed within solid schemes, the official style of an authoritarian teacher prevailed. This viewpoint continues somewhat in these recent years. Authoritarian environment in traditional teaching fosters an atmosphere where everyone expects the school to perform its functions effectively, where teachers do a good job and certainly

cannot talk about failures and concerns, let alone of the democratization of the school. If we talk about the progress of intellectual and emotional students' abilities in order to facilitate their growth and school democratization, then it can be asserted that open education seems satisfactory in this regard. These important components of the educational process such as the experience of students, professional life of teachers and the coordination of work with community are more vulnerable in this education by giving each actor a significant and effective role.

Nowadays, contemporary education is advancing, however mixed with some remaining of totalitarian education. There are new realities and examples to follow. The "Danida" project, implemented in some schools of Elbasan city, since 1994, through the "topic work" and method "Story-line", has shown that besides subject integration, it can be achieved the combination of a range of teaching models which enable the student to work in collaboration with others to solve problems and the learning environment to be more democratic. Application of the "topic work" as an element of open classroom has made possible not only the change in the way teaching is planned, but it has resulted in establishing new relations and a new environment in the classroom, best reflected in some viewpoints of school life, some of which are listed below:

1. Interest and democratic behavior of students in school. Children work in a more conscious way showing more independence. Engagement in working groups and performing tasks that promote creative thinking.
2. The children, from this experience, have proven that it is not important to give only facts from books or materials submitted by the teacher, but they can prepare the material themselves.

3. "Walls that talk" display an environment where children are shown efforts, demonstrating an overall development of multiple skills to children.
4. The role of teachers has gone from that of the authoritarian one to the leader of the organizers of educational activities.
5. The object of this study will be precisely the democratization of these relations, considering the choice of education philosophy which the school and teachers follow.

2. Literature Review

Open Education is a movement in education that has some of the characteristics of typical movements in education and it does not derive from any clear theory. It is a form of education that some consider without form, and that runs on a variety of names and sometimes exists within etiquette. Due to its characteristics, open education has remained elusive, and because of this meaninglessness, it has been difficult to study and analyze.

From the literature review on open education (Kohl, 1975, Rogers & Church, 1975, Spodek, 1975), it is obvious that:

- Education is not open organizational adjustment of school or architectural form.
- Open Education can occur in schools with open areas and traditional buildings, where teachers and pupils collaborate with each other.
- Open Education cannot be characterized by institutional organization, as can be arranged by class organization. Adjustment of classrooms to centers of activities, activity programming all day, the availability of a variety of manipulative materials or emphasis on the art and hand work are not said to be an open class.
- An open class is not characterized by a policy "do not touch", where the teacher and the student must do their things. Freedom, autonomy and participation of children in decision-making are essential for an open class. Children and teacher together have a great authority in determining what happens in the classroom, but the decision is always taken within the context of reciprocity.

Contemporary concept of open education is different from earlier research on student-centered teaching. The desire for open education in schools is to integrate, to become a whole what is broken. Teaching in open education is a "devastating" activity. The instinct of life in open education is associated with values and practices of open education which are indicative of surface instinct of life in one of the most important institutions of culture that is school. Educating democracy requires that the learning environment should be democratic and open classes made this possible.

Open education, integration day, classes in progress, informal education; these phrases refer educational movement that started in England and developed in America. Open Education is a name that applies to research of teachers in a number of schools where the effort to improve the quality of learning have come to

some general beliefs and practices, which are discussed and redefined constantly. So, open education is a growth process. Many have been very enthusiastic and many have objected to. Since its beginnings until today many teachers with the desire to put their philosophy into practice are attracted by this movement.

3. Open Education and Relations Established in Classroom

Class is a community of students. It is an accepted social structure that contributes to the discussion, collaboration and learning with others. It is important for every student to have the support, encouragement and care. Every child should be recognized as a unique individual with a lot of experience to share with others. Every child has a basic knowledge of the uniqueness of the individual sets. Every child interprets the world in different ways, as it synthesizes its environment and gathers information that seems useful and important to his life.

Where is the best place to do this other than an open class? This occurs because the role of teachers in these classes lies in observing the behavior of students in self-directed learning and to lead them to the collection of data to indicate that progress has taken place. Self-determination of goals, persistence in tasks, self-evaluation can be considered a component of motivation. Within classes has started a series of appropriate and provisions for freedom of choice of those activities that can be developed in a natural situation in which the teacher can observe. Open Education looks very pleasing and more about life competing efforts to improve educational practices. But to understand these expectations require a conscious effort to move beyond the clichés of slogans; it is required a specification of outcomes and empirical exploration to determine if these results are achieved.

In open classes the teacher's role is not to control students, but to enable them to make choices and follow what pleases them. This does not mean that the teacher can expect the same from all students. A teacher in a classroom to open must cultivate a state of unexpected hopes. It is not easy to believe in a classroom, "fool" or "outstanding". The words "emotionally confused" are unjustified in these classes.

The teacher encourages the students with words indirectly. The role of teachers is certainly not to be mom or dad for the student, nor their therapist, although his work often includes psychological level. In these classes there is no formula for the student- teacher relationship. Each teacher is unique in temperament, style and interests. Some are stricter and others are calmer. Each student is unique. So there is no way how these relations should be. The most important thing is that they feel free in their work. Freedom in the classroom means freedom for the teacher as well as the student. Autonomy, ability to make decisions, self-management, the ability to act according to one's decisions can not be entirely difficult for people who are raised in authoritarian education. Lisa D. Delpit wrote in 1986: "I believe that open class movement, despite its progressive goals, disappeared in large part, because it was

not able to have good relations with minority communities and the poor" (Delpit, 1996). Even today the work of progressive educators encounter wider public resistance, however, proponents of open classes support them because they create opportunities for a more interactive environment between teachers and students by creating appropriate conditions for democratic relations in the classroom.

4. Methodology

This study aims to identify the values of open classes to the democratization of the school, reflected in the democratization of relations established in the classroom and learning environment. Seen in this light, the concept of teaching under "topic work" or "story line" method may be an option, as in this case teaching is not limited only to the granting of a system of knowledge, but uses mental potential of children, develops the active, creative and independent thought by encouraging their trends and interests. This way of organizing teaching makes children participating in learning experiences and makes them more motivated and collaborative and creates opportunities for the democratization of relations in the classroom. To consider precisely these opportunities that provide "topic work" activity as an element of open education, in the democratization of relations in the classroom, there should be taken into consideration a number of issues that relate directly to this topic. If world experience has already shown enough value to this work for us this is almost a new experience. The purpose of this study is to highlight values, difficulties and perspective of implementation of this method seeing its advantages in the democratization of relations in the classroom, which brings a new spirit to our school.

To reach more accurate conclusions and to achieve more concrete results comparable to traditional classes, especially in their relationship to class (between students with each other, teachers-students, parents -teacher, parent-child and teacher leaders), interviews were conducted with students (50) and teachers (20) in two schools of Elbasan city, where it continues with work themes since 1995, which is planned since the beginning the academic year with the support of school directories. Selection of teachers was intentional, after being selected those teachers who work with topics realize for years, while the selection of pupils was random.

The interviews were intended to compare the role played by the teacher and student in these classes, compared with their role in a normal classroom teaching in the traditional way in terms of 45 hour 'working with textbooks that are inevitable in cases when teachers use in their classrooms new teaching techniques and changing relationships between students with each class - another community feedback and support from fellow teachers and school departments, in order to point out the difference between two modes of teaching, the traditional and "Topic work" the democratization of school function, expressed in:

1. The role of the teacher in the classroom, from authoritarian to facilitator of learning and aid for children.
2. Student attitude towards the teacher and classmates.
3. The reaction of parents

These interviews intended to point out the difference between the leadership of teachers, student discipline and reactions of parents and school leaders. It was also noticed comparisons and contrasts to the children' behavior, cooperation and interest of other teachers, support from the school and the community, their support for the work being done.

The data obtained from interviews with teachers and students will give necessary data to reach conclusions on the impact of planning the teaching, which sometimes is spontaneous, in building more democratic relations in the classroom, where the teacher and student feel free in their work without affecting the realization of the goals of the work that is taking place.

Another instrument used for this study was direct observations in classrooms while the work place topics. From direct observation it was intended to be seen:

1. Percentage of the time of teachers, class, groups of pupils, to see what activities will be taken and how to manage them?
2. Students time engagement percentage with learning for different purposes or reasons (curiosity and inner reward).
3. Modification of activities, participation and pace- percentage of time the students spend in general class activities, small group activity or individual activities, the progress in their learning as a class, group and individual.
4. Assessment Resources –Students time percentage to provide feedback regarding success in learning from the teacher, other students and themselves.
5. Assessment standards – time percentage of the student feedback regarding their success in learning, based on other students and other standards. (Individual improvement).
6. Leadership participation- The percentage of no academic rules and regulations of the class in which students, teachers and others participate in decisions-making process.
7. The way of organizing the activities- time percentage that the atmosphere of activities is regular, enthusiastic, informal and relaxing.
8. Student's feelings- time percentage that students have different feelings about themselves in terms of experiences in the learning activity.

Experience indicates that it is necessary to modify the relationship between teachers and students aiming their democratization. School failure is explained only if the child is in a state of failure in social relationships, but if school failure is accompanied by a musical achievement or other technical achievements, then it is not a human failure. If a mathematician experience school failure in another subject, it is of no importance. If the child is

involved in social community and has found his way to the program, asking him achievements in all disciplines is meaningless. (Dolto, 2001) Well, the democratization of these relationships should enable the preparation of a citizen of tomorrow capable to cooperate with others and to highlight their talents.

Nowadays, it is being talked much about education reform and changes to methods, changes to programs and evaluation systems; considering that "topic work" as an element in the open education is an option given us for these changes, because the most important thing is that school meet children's needs and this methodology is close to them. Pedagogy of failure in this case will be replaced by pedagogy of success, increasing the value of the right answers instead of punishment and wrong answers, giving importance to a student team performance instead of individual skills, inventing reasons so that so the fear of not passing will be replaced effectively. Based on the conclusions drawn from the interviews, it can be reached accurate conclusions about the possibility of democratization in class relations, thus being an alternative to the achievement of educational goals for the school under its democratization.

5. Results

Interviews with teachers. Teachers claim that besides achieving the objectives for each subject developing creative skills, communication skills, self-esteem and positive attitudes toward tasks, students were able to express themselves more freely and work more willingly. Since cooperation is a key element in the philosophy of open class, students move around the classroom, working with others and seek help and support when needed. Group interaction in these classes is a primary activity that promotes learning, to share information, to acquire social skills, to develop self-confidence and social responsibility. If there was done a summary of the work organized these days, it would be noticed that teachers have combined individual work, work with groups (pairs of), the whole class work with more simplicity for creating functional learning situations and establishing cooperative relationships among students.

Students through activities organized in groups, individually, in pairs and with the whole class, not only failed to analyze, compare, classify, to give their judgment about different situations, but managed to establish cooperative relationship with each other, with the teacher to be more open to attract the attention of their parents' interest in the work being developed. All this was done not only in terms of making the acquisition of knowledge on the subject, but to realize the affective objectives, so difficult to achieve in normal situations the development of learning.

Observations in classrooms. During the observations in these classes it was evident that the resources (inks, papers, pens, tools) were used collectively; the students worked together in the performance of not competing for grades with individual work, group investigated problems and the individual work was not isolated, but in the favor

of a class group. It is clear that teachers in these classes have performed ethics education cooperation.

From observations made directly in the classroom was also meant to define assessment- resources percentage of students time to provide feedback regarding success in learning from the teacher, other students and themselves. Regarding the way work is organized, described day after day it was noticed that students were creating suitable conditions to present their work, to exchange and evaluate ideas with each other.

Another direction that would be administered directly through the class observation was leadership participation. During the job description was noticed that teachers, students the parents were involved in decisions-making process about class activities and arrangements (ways of placing works and land).

With regard to the conduct of activities it was observed that all the time the students worked in a regular situation, enthusiastic, informal and relaxing. Students of this school are accustomed to this kind of work in the classroom, and "noise" or "lack of regulation" is always in function of learning.

As stated above it is clear that planning under "topic work" creates space and flexibility in serving the interests of the student desires, and creates such a climate in the classroom, where each student feels competent in their work, and it is his choice whether this work will develop in the group or individually, work with modeling or research. They feel responsibility by creating combinations of activities varied from day to day, and highlight trends in certain areas.

Interviews with students. Students showed very enjoyable experience during this work experience. All students surveyed responded that it was a pleasure to work with this theme. Among all the works on topics that they had developed so far this was the most exciting. Since they are already accustomed to this experience, were able to discern and pleasure they had experienced during this work, which had to do with national pride. Feeling the pressure and tension was not mentioned at all by students for past experience in this work. According to the answers given in interviews with students appears that they felt more at ease than on a normal day teaching when the teacher asks and receives responses from them. In normal classes they felt more tense and often reluctant to raise up to respond, because they felt insecure and fearful responses to the assessment that would take. Even in these days of learning seem easier, because they express their opinions freely.

They claim that during this work were more cooperative with each other and many have felt this during works with groups and activities organized as a class. In relations with the teacher most of the students said that they have not changed their relationship during this work, and two of the students who considered themselves to be shy, say they feel more at ease during this work. Their desire for the development of this work to other topics is indisputable. Already become a tradition in this school, students sees an

opportunity to create, learn and to feel more pleasure from work.

Students say that everyone that during this work were felt closer to their friends, the more respected each other's opinion, helped friends, were more freely unlike a day when the teacher explains and they listen. About relationships that were established during this period teacher on students say that during this work that the teacher was not explained and give estimates for their answers, but were themselves pupils explaining the work done give their opinion about each -other.

Dolto said that when the baby is entirely dependent adult, become blind and deaf to life, while he has many expressed the need to communicate. He leaves himself to kill and closes itself deep secret desires, pleasures and hardships. He becomes "wise", namely passive and does not communicate anymore. While experience has shown that these days in the classroom environment created during this lesson had positive effects in this respect the students were free to express their desires and interests, to feel valued, get more satisfaction from the work carried out, and this in all classes.

Besides priority programs that have started classes in their child's education, emphasize the importance of family and community involvement as partners in learning. Working together they help their children to develop problem solving skills and decision making. During this period included parents helping in the base material, as well as during various activities in the classroom, taking part in the final event, seeing documentation (individual files of students, teacher notes and collective works) as well as helping in its development, unlike "normal" schools where only came to school to find out about their child's results.

Parents who work early and as noted above showed interest, and this was reflected not only in caring for equipping students with the necessary materials, but also by assisting in various teaching days. Curiosity and their interest was greater than expected.

In open classes has significantly stupid the award, arguments, conflicts and disapproval up. These are organic elements of life in a group selected from the group attributed by the teacher. The teacher is a mediator and not executable. There are many things that teachers can do in these classes, besides establishing rules and routines. It depends on the style and personality, the theme that the age of the students work. It is important that in an open classroom teacher is not required to act as a "teacher" and subjected students as children. The teacher does not need to be in front of the class and lead the right set of wrong. He may be the same person class compound that is in life. He should not be afraid to call on behalf of the students nor to speak in class. He can use his experience to help students how to make ends meet with theirs. This role is carried out in a natural way and the students themselves are aware of this. Open classroom teachers develop through actions, not by his words.

Open teachers speculate that children learn by exploring a variety of materials, making choices themselves, posing problems resolved themselves. An example of this and give us teachers whose classes held "topic work". They think that this work affects students' relationships with each other and established relationships with the teacher making these relationships more collaborative and warm, keep students listened attentively to their friends, express themselves more freely and openly communicate more each other. Students work during these days more willingly, eagerly awaiting the start of the lesson trying to do their best. Interest in performing tasks is greater (and in these first direct observations in these classes). The relationship between students' class were on the loose, so they feel more at ease and with the teacher. "topic work" developed in these classes of things created space communication and easiness in teacher-students relationship, because the student speak freely without fear and were frustrated by grade or correct answers that should give. This work had a positive impact on children. They were enthusiastic and perform optional activities.

6. Conclusion

Democratic education of the young generation today intended Albanian schools, in most certainly achieved its class, so the class itself as the leading environmental education should be more democratic. Students should listen to each other and care for the feelings and thoughts of others, to be developed by both intellectual and emotional, feel good. An alternative provided in this study is one more option, and it reflected the results of experimentation. But, it requires patience and faith in the potential of students and as a first step in determining the goals of open education programs is the design of a number of targets needed, the more accurate determination of which is achieved by recognizing the characteristics of firms that participate in these programs and better defining their role in this environment.

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The democratization of the educational institution the school as related to:

- Content of school activities; curricular and extra-curriculum activities
- Management and decision-making at the school level.

This democratization has to do with:

- Establishing good relationships between teachers and students putting into action at school level mechanisms that would enhance mutual cooperation and appreciation of all stakeholders and to minimize the fear of school life.
- Providing the highest level of participation of parents and students in decision making on issues related to education
- Cooperation with the local community for activities of students.
- Democratic and participatory method of teaching and the education of democratic education, constructive communication and appreciation of diversity.

It seems that given alternatives is convenient and serves more than goals set before the school day for the democratization of relations in the classroom and that should be taken into consideration by the elementary teachers in their work.

The realization of this work is aimed at developing better models of work, responsibility, communication skills, democratic views, values and competencies among students by providing them with opportunities to work actively with the text seriously.

7. Recommendations

Today, talking about changes, but very few believe in it. This is probably due to the fact that teachers find it easier to believe in their many years of experience and traditional teaching being one of so many years of experience are more likely to be satisfactory in this regard. We must believe in change, we need to know that this process is possible, goodwill and efforts can make it possible, otherwise there would be a learning process, which in itself is a continuous process of change. Schools should teach students how to learn and think for themselves, without neglecting basic content possession, to educate them. to educate means to lead, to educate, to guide and it is this that needs consideration by teachers sot. Buscalia (1998) said: It is nice to say to someone: "Learning is fun. You are not forced to learn everything. We will learn together, seeing the making. "To achieve this certainly should be sought new alternatives. Teaching methodologies that we know represent only a possibility.

There are many other opportunities for all, enough to have good desire, seek out and to prove. In terms of our school in every direction we turn are quite limited by a centralized curriculum (plan, program, text, heads). Yet all this can change. And this can be achieved not only with the decentralization of curriculum and professional freedom of teachers. The important thing is to change the internal

program of the teacher, how he conceives his profession, the learning process of learning, and students.

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