Situation-centered Approaches in Postmodern Curriculum Design

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Abstract – The paper investigates the birth or one of the newest approaches in the curriculum design with big impact on current educational theories and practices. It is analyzed the effects of objectives centered pedagogy (OCP) on curriculum theory and practice as one of the dominant curricular approaches since 1950, when the curriculum was promoted as the paradigm of postmodern education. This rational model of curriculum design shaped by the principles of scientific management and by the centrality of the objectives, more or less, in behavioral terms was constituted as a base for new developments in curriculum design as regards the theories that try to re-launch the link between the labor markets and the demands of the postindustrial, informational and global society, on one hand, and the aims of the learning programs, on the other hand. Thus, the competence based approach (CBA) is constituted, being seen as a way of projecting competence based curriculum (CBC) which places competence in the center of curricular design intercession. There are highlighted the new determinations of designing that type of curriculum that can reestablish the link between school training offer and the demands of present-day society and that can provide the relevance and authenticity of learning experiences the students are involved in.

Keywords: objective centered pedagogy, rational curriculum design, competence centered pedagogy, competence based curriculum

I. INTRODUCTION

In curriculum studies there are different approaches of curriculum design; one of the most important is represented by the objective centered pedagogy (OCP), approach which dominates curriculum design even since the ‘50s, once with launching of curriculum as a paradigm of education postmodernity [1], [2]. This approach has deep roots in curriculum rational design [3], [4] determined by the principles of scientific management and by the centrality of the objectives, stated more or less in behavioral terms (behaviorism).

Nevertheless, nowadays a new approach at the level of curriculum design is being foreshadowing, approach which tries to relaunch the link between the demands of labor market and the requests of post-industrial, informational, global society on one hand and their correlation to the finality of training programs on the other hand.

Thus, the competence based approach (CBA) is formed into a way of designing the competence based curriculum (CBC) which places competence in the center of curriculum design intercession. This approach presupposes the delimiting of the semantic area of the concept of competence. The various definitions are to determine various ways of projecting curriculum and the change of paradigm, in these both cases, is realized at the level of educational finalities, more exactly, at the level of their contents.

We define competence as the capacity to solve spontaneous or designed complex situations, by efficiently mobilizing specific acquisitions previously learned.

II. COMPETENCE CONSTRUCTS

According to D. Potolea [5], competence represents the organizer of the entire curricular construction, being a constant of curriculum for all school levels, profiles and specializations and becoming a nodal concept around which the entire curricular architecture gravitates, imposing new ways of designing and realizing the educational intercession.

A. E. Jones defines competence as a combination of skills, abilities, and knowledge needed to perform a specific task in a given context. They are delimited and ranked in order to identify the specificity of each concept and the ways in which they are linked to the concept of competence [6, p. 7-8]. On the other hand, in R. Bernard’s opinion [7, p. 31], the competence represents the capacity to address complex and novelty issues by a new combination of already known procedures and not only by stereotypical answers to a series of pre-established stimulus.

To be competent means to be able to call up an integrated assembly of resources with the aim of solving problem situations [8, p. 14]. Therefore, competence can be approached through a double perspective [9, p.36]: a) of abilities necessary for achieving particular tasks, b) of fundamental
personality traits which allow for achieving good performances in a variety of situations.

The normative documents of educational policy in Romania (National Law of Education, 2011) define competence as being the proven capacity of adequate selecting, combining and using of knowledge, skills and other acquisitions consisting in values and attitudes in order to successfully solve a certain category of work or learning situation, as well as to develop on a personal and professional level under circumstances of efficiency and efficacy.

Thus, we deal with a concept with a strong determining effect on curricular architecture which highlights the capacities which should be displayed by students at the end of instruction programs. As C. Langa states [10], all the teachers involved in the teacher training for the pre-school and primary-school education must be aware of the importance of the transversal competences alongside with the professional ones.

In the same context, I. Bulgaru focuses on defining management style that can lead to some difficulties rooted in its dependence on a number of personal variables that cannot always be described rigorously [16].

They are transversal to curricular disciplines and they are linked to families of situations with curricular and social relevance. These perspectives determine new intercessions of curricular design, the individualized approaches of learning and the contextualization of all learning activities being promoted.

What has represented the fundamental preoccupation of objectives centered pedagogy – i.e. transmitting of structured assemblies of scientific knowledge – becomes, in this new context, an instrument used to solve complex learning situations in order to develop competences.

As we have stressed before [11, p. 975], it becomes obviously clear the internal connection between competence and the situation, between the construction, development and the adequacy of it in a concrete situation or in a family of situations, the competence representing the result of a complete processing of a situation by a person or a group, in a specific or given context.

III. SITUATION-CENTRED APPROACHES

There are created the bases for new paradigmatic moves in curriculum studies through the crystallization of a scientific approach of competence which capitalizes its situational position, that is the concept of actional-situational competence launched by Ph. Jonaert [12], [13] and, from it, a new approach at the level of curriculum design (APS - approche située).

This perspective on curriculum refers to the capitalizing of some enhanced context strategies of students’ learning activities in situations which are meaningful to them and are linked to their real life, being correlated with collaborative learning strategies. It leads to the construction of competence by action in situation.

The situation centered approach (SCA) leads to the projection of a situation centered curriculum (SCC), where the situation becomes the central point of curriculum design instead of objectives and competence. The designed situation (DS) constitutes in the main organizer of curriculum which establishes the order of curriculum design, the elements of curricular structure as well as the nucleus around which revolve the instruction and evaluation strategies.

In this context, as we have shown in a previous study [14, p. 3], the necessity of selection and combining of elementary competences (student prior acquisitions as mobilized resources) is obviously clear in order for the student to solve complex learning situations (CLS) and for the complex competences to be developed. Thus, the complex learning situation (CLS) becomes the way of developing competence and the complex evaluation situation (CES) becomes the way of evaluating the competence.

Centering curriculum on situation determines the necessity of using contextualized contents (CC), certain contextualized instruction strategies (CIS) and designing some complex evaluation situations (CES). The competent processing (CP) of contents and situations becomes the indicator of competence development and, at the same time, the criteria of competence evaluation.

IV. (COMPLEX) SITUATION APPROACH IN COMPETENCE EVALUATION

The complex evaluation situation (CES) should allow for the highlight of student’s mastering the necessary acquisitions in order for them to continue in the learning process. Student’s previous acquisitions should be stressed in order for him to be guided to gaining new ones [8]. This type of evaluation makes sense if we consider the student’s punctual acquisitions as resources necessary for solving the complex situation and for acquiring the aimed competence.

The complex evaluation situation must allow for the adjustment of the individual learning process, in the sense of guiding the student to the acquisition of significant resources and of guiding teachers to choosing the most efficient instruction strategy.

The complex evaluation situation should contribute to the social recognition of competences acquired by students at the end of a certain period of time.

These characteristics of complex evaluation situation (CES) correspond to the three functions of evaluating the student’s acquisitions identified by De Ketele [8, p. 49]:

- The function of guiding the student to a certain field of instruction or to evaluate his mastering of the resources previously achieved which are necessary for moving to the new phase of learning.
• The function of adjustment and improvement of the ongoing learning process. It aims a formative or pro-active type of evaluation (formative – observing student’s achievement, pro-active – guiding of the learning process).

• The function of social certification / recognition of student’s acquisitions by giving exams and participating in various contests.

The basic functions of evaluation [15, p. 111] lead to the implementation of a certain type of evaluation strategies which are dependent, on their turn, to the implemented didactic strategy. Taking into consideration the necessity of the formative nature of evaluation, it could be permanently realized during the instruction process.

The complex evaluation situation should be part of a class / family of situations which can contribute to competence evaluating. Therefore, in order to evaluate competences, it is necessary, during the instruction process, to have exercised the solving of complex learning situations in the class of situations which are to be used to evaluate competence.

In order to design and solve complex learning situations the teachers should alternate the process of learning the resources with the process of exercising and integrate learning. In this case, evaluation could aim at the resources mastered by students as well as at their integration within complex learning situations which contributes to the developing and, subsequently, to the evaluation of competence.

Thus, the complex evaluation situation will be preceded by students’ exercising of two situations of learning / evaluation integration followed by the properly presentation of the complex evaluation situation [8, p. 54]:

• a first situation which is to be solved during a collective activity or in small groups, with the aim of making students discover the way in which such situations could be solved (interactive evaluation).

• a second situation, a different one, but at the same level of complexity which is to be solved independently by each student in order for them to learn how to manage acquisitions (formative evaluation).

• The properly complex evaluation situation which is to be solved individually, from the same class / family with the two mentioned above which aim at student’s ability to integrate / capitalize the resources in order to solve the situation and to highlight the mastering or lack of mastering the competence (summative evaluation).

The evaluation of competences through the complex evaluation situation presupposes the design of (complex) learning situation centered curriculum (SCS). Such an approach of curriculum requires the definition of families of situations derived from learning outcomes [13, p. 86] and the formal / non-formal / informal requirements of labor market and present-day postmodern society.

On the other hand, the finalities of such a curriculum cannot be represented by contents, but by learning situations, perfected position of curricular objectives defined in terms of situations or classes / families of evaluation situations [13, p. 86].

The finalities defined in terms of classes of situations facilitate the design of complex learning situations and using the complex situations in the evaluation of competences.

CONCLUSIONS

Centering curriculum on objectives will not contribute to competences development as long as the central element of instruction is represented by the acquisition of observable behavior, manifested in decontextualized situations and aiming at actions which are not relevant from the perspective of the demands of present-day society. At most, these acquisitions could contribute to the development of competences with the condition that they can be transformed, in the cases of complex learning situations, into resources which must be capitalized in order to develop competences.

Referring to the structure of curriculum, complex evaluation situations and the classes they belong to represent the inputs of curriculum, i. e. finalities. The instruction process will be centered on the student’s action who, by interaction and experimenting, builds his knowledge and competences by a competent processing of the situations offered within curriculum.

In this context, the results of instruction are represented by the competences which the students builds with the help of his own action and learning experience, avoiding the mere reproduction and restitution of the contents processed and transmitted by the teacher.

REFERENCES


