

OPEN EDUCATION AND THE OPPORTUNITIES IT OFFERS IN ALBANIA

Shqipe Haxhihyseni,

Universiteti “Aleksander Moisiu” Durrës

e-mail: shqipeshyti@yahoo.com

Abstract

What is open education? How is it conceived in literature? What is the history of open education in the world? Answers to these questions will be given through a review of the literature on this issue. Also, an analysis of the movement, which is little understood and recognized especially in Albania, will be given, focusing on: the definition of open education movement in education, the place it occupies in the movement, its history in the world since it was first established to today and how it was interpreted and understood in years.

How much is it known in Albania and how are they applied? These questions are answered, too, by the analysis that will be given to this issue, based on the Albanian literature and experience of the Albanian education in recent years, making a presentation on the concept of open classrooms as an alternative to traditional procedures as well as theoretical and practical problems of an open classroom and its variability will be discussed in light of the opportunities that offer these types of classes to meet the needs and interests of pupils focusing on the perspective of these classrooms and priorities to bring the Albanian education, arguing not only for the support of this progressive movement in education, but also showing the difficulties that may arise for the receipt of it by bureaucratic organization. The theoretical treatment of open classes and open education aims to encourage teachers to explore and experiment these ideas in order to improve the teaching and application of teaching models that are closer to the interests and experiences of children.

Keywords: *open education, open classrooms, teaching models, topic work*

Introduction

Open education is an educational movement that has some of the characteristics of the typical movements in education and does not derive from any clearly stated theory. It is a type of education that some consider without form, and that is determined by a variety of names and sometimes qualified within a label (Spodek, B.,1975). The lack of a clear definition of the term (concept) is probably because due to the fact that, even freedom itself, can not be determined easily and defined. But what are the basics of human interest that have encouraged open education?

What is then open education? With what does it resemble? How will it be known whether it is being worked with? How will be it explained? These are questions that have been raised since the beginning of this movement in education and have been the focus of controversy between different researchers at different times. This is because due to its characteristics, open education has remained somewhat elusive and because of this incomprehensibility it has been hard to study and analyze.

One reason for the incomprehensibility and open education themselves is its justification of definition of characteristics, often in the form of hypotheses using different slogans. The uncertainties in this case has been useful to increase the popularity from each point of view. And although this ambiguity has advantages, it also has its disadvantages, because to understand a phenomenon one must be explicit. At this point it seems as if proponents of and open education themselves are caught in a serious dilemma. If teachers who follow this form of education do what the students want, so that the latter become human beings characterized from a psychological openness and more worthy members of a new culture and open, then the progress towards membership in this open community will depend on several actions to develop awareness of some significant social implications (Morgan,K.,1975).

Namely the lack of a determined state of what open education is and the lack of a formal doctrine, has been one of the strongest points of open education. Being an ambiguous phenomenon, the best way to determine what education is to say what it is not. In this way confusion between open education and other researches in education is avoided

1. Open education is not the arrangement of the school environment nor an architectural form.
2. Open education can happen in schools with open areas and in traditional buildings, when teachers and pupils collaborate with each other.
3. Open education cannot be characterized by institutional organization, as it cannot be characterized from the class organization. Adjustment of the room in activity centers, the programming of an all day activity, the availability of a variety of manipulative materials or emphasis of art and needlework is not necessary to happen in an open class.

4. An open class is not characterized by a policy of "do not budge", where the teacher and the student must do their things. Freedom, autonomy and the inclusion 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.

Open Education is human instinct that operates in the field of education, therefore derives from internal human requirements for learning. In defining its goals just like in any educational program, a number of forces act immediately and this is true in the case of open education. Philosophy, theory of psychology, and empirical experience associated with these programs are important factors that interact to influence the relationship between goals and human lives. Humanistic philosophy has defended the thesis that the great task of humanistic psychology is to cooperate with the behavioral sciences to determine how to create environments capable of selfactualization education.

Bernier and Williams (1973) found the ideological origins of open education that was progressivism and suggested that open education is a form of neoprogressivism. Kolberg and Majer (1972) suggested *that the origin of open education was the romantic ideology. The emphasis on freedom of children allowed the internal "good" to be released and supported the emotional and intellectual growth as well as the physical qualities attributed open education and are cited as indicators of romantic ideology.* If we make an analogy with Naom Chomsky theoretical thought, we can say that open education can understand better the limits of the surface structure and deep structure. Surface structure includes classes observed in practice (the syntax of education); deep structure gives us the sense of practice.

So, it must be said that open education is not just an idea of a great philosopher of education, although Froebel and Dewey ideas seem to have had much influence in this area. Even Piaget influence seems to have been significant in this direction too. Thus, in primary education in England are followed the research of Piaget as a base for helping children develop their intelligence and mental operations through engaging of human beings and other cultural resources in the context of education. If we carefully studied open classes it is seen that there are adapted a lot of Piaget principles in them. Focusing on the theory of Piaget reconnaissance learning concepts, the use of concrete activities, play, manipulative materials, and interaction with others, are seen materialized, noting that in each case the teacher plays an important role in promoting the interest of the child and to assist them in gaining the knowledge and understanding of the world. This type of learning is accepted and encouraged in open classes. This means that the focus of education should be child as an individual (as in the progressive movement) but with a focus on intellectual processes. The desire for open education in schools is to be integrated, become a whole what does not work. Teaching in open education is a "devastating" activity. Such is education open. The instinct of life is associated with values of open education and open educational practices are indicative of the surface of the instinct of life in one of the most important institutions of culture which is school .

1. Topic work as an element of open education

Topic work or projects based learning, which is mostly used to integrate learning areas is typically described for achieving open education, has among other, the following purposes: to develop an all-round education and to encourage children to work harder and to participate more actively in the learning process. The knowledge are given in an integrated manner and summarize the experience of each day and teachers can attend a variety of ways to guide children. Also working by topic work, children learn how to ask and learn from themselves (Stewart,J., 1986).

Instructional programs for these classes generally emphasize:

- *Integrated instructions*
- *Individual and social responsibility*
- *Creative arts*
- *Instructions based on the basic skills*
- *Communication skills*
- *Development of self concepts*
- *Problem-solving and thinking skills*
- *Environment-rich promoter*
- *Development of confidence*
- *Developing a positive attitude to learning.*

Open education is a way to the thinking of a child on learning, about knowledge. It is characterized by openness, the doors are slightly open, and children come and go, classes are open and children bring materials that interest them. Space is fluid, without boards and banks organized in rows or in any other consistent manner, a variety of spaces fill up with a variety of materials, children move freely from one space to another.

Time is open, allowing the student to work and explore, rather than to force them to describe the teacher's requirements. Curriculum is open, chosen by adults and children as a function of the interests of children. It is a dependent variable, dependent on the child more than one independent variable which depends on the child.

2. History of Open Education

Open education, integrated day, classes in development, informal education: these phrases refer to educational movements that started in England and have been growing in America. Open education is a name that is applied to the researches of teachers in a group of schools where in effort to improve the quality of learning have reached some general beliefs and practices, which are discussed and redefined continuously. So, open education is a growth process. Many have been enthusiastic and many have contested. Since its beginnings until today many teachers wanting to set philosophy in practice are drawn from this movement. In the 60s and 70s, individuals in schools, the school system, teacher preparation institutions in all parts of America were attracted by the idea and developed it "realizing" in their way, although there have been many absurdities on open education. So, on one hand it was suggested that open education was a remedy to all "diseases" of education, set up overnight by rescuers or communists, while another treatment regarded it as a phenomenon seen in British primary schools and that it should be copied to have appropriate schools.

Interdisciplinary learning in America has been an active issue since 1890 and in the early twentieth century has been paid considerable attention. Many professional writers, observers and analysts have written on open education. Among them Djuj (1915) Rag and Schumacher (1928) and Sheehy¹ (1954) presented the warnings of open education especially in the education of children in the first years of primary education. Also the Froebel contribution, Montessori's, and others is unquestionable. In the 1960s, the concept of open education has a recurrence through the researches of H.Taba and other educators. In these years open classes became common in American schools. Teachers began to formulate cooperative units and creativity was considered the most important element of the curriculum.

Then, in 1970, it was noticed a move towards standardized assessments, while schools in the 1980s began to respond to the new needs for teaching by instituting special programs that

however remained "extra" instead of being integrated in the curriculum. In the late 90s different opinions began to converge and educators began to accept the fact that interdisciplinary learning can grow and not threaten traditional learning.

Arkeman and Perkins (1989) helped in opening of horizons of teachers helping that many teachers experiment with interdisciplinary units. These efforts have put the basis of interdisciplinary learning and continue to be applied today . Thus the history of American education is filled with failures of school reform efforts, from the "social effectiveness" in "integrated curriculum" and then "open class".

Examples of the application of work with topics as teaching methodology that creates more space for the integration of subjects are in vogue today. The English National Vurriculum advisers themselves argue that the combination of subjects through projects is the best way for the implementation of the teaching of the school day¹.

So, it seems clear that open education is not a historical accident. It has a long way, healthy and diverse. These educational movements that started in England and raised in America, after the 90s had their beginnings in Albania through the application of many projects such as: "Step by Step", the 'Danida' project, kindergartens working according to the Montessori models , without forgetting that interdisciplinary teaching in Albania has an earlier strand. It should be noted here the contribution of A. Xhuvani in the '30s. He spoke of "teaching synthesis" a teaching which was intended to make a close connection through learning and subjects, all the subject of teaching were to be finished within a week or a month and he has discussed this idea as "concentration of subjects"(Osmani. Sh,&Kazazi, Nj, 2000)

Today in Albania term "open education" little or not at all known. The philosophy of open education is not translated as literature, and is not given as such or in schools that prepare educators. A possible reaction of a person who hears about education when this entry is: What is it? Uh?

While forms of the work of this theory are applied in fragments and in many cases are unjustly influenced by traditional educational practices by accomplishing only imposed elements from the conditions created by the school . In our schools there are already recognized terms such as: work with projects, learning with centers, subject integration, but such practices remain just as terminology to indicate that in our country something is changing, while the bureaucracy in schools and teachers or leaders mentality makes that with all desire to "modernize" these methodologies have remained only "forced labor" for the school.

Many educators may still fail to understand difference between traditional school and the open one can not be discussed depending on the number of projects that are developed and changing the seating arrangement, but it can be discussed on at least two levels:

- The level of social perception, which manifests itself through the rhetorical and stereotypical movement
- The level of primary incorporation refers to more structural features of the two systems of education.

Fact is that teachers are not prepared to work with the open class. With the request for a greater sensitivity to different students, patience and sense of humor, teaching in open classes requires a clear idea of the goals of education, flexibility and an ability to cooperate with other people and the risk that occasionally new ideas can be abandoned. The system that

¹ [http:// telegraph.co.uk/ About Turn As School Topic Work- eucation/education news/3299593/ returns.html](http://telegraph.co.uk/AboutTurnAsSchoolTopicWork-education/education%20news/3299593/returns.html)

prepares teachers teaches them knowledge and skills that take their place in a convinced manner and that penalizes failures that can even be the result of innovation. If a teacher takes seriously the wishes of the students, he has clear ideas about education in order to justify the guidance of the students.

Also, it must be said that open education requires such conditions where teachers collaborate with other teachers, students and the community, but this approaches usually only in primary and fades through cycles in further education.

Open classes are not a utopia. In many schools, adults are the decision makers. On the basis of status and hierarchy, they are assumed to be qualified to decide what to teach and how to teach the child. To be safe teachers in traditional schools give children some choices, but the concept of choice is distorted and abused. It is common practice giving children a range of alternatives: Write a report for this or that. In this case the student chooses the many problems posed by adults (teachers), without the necessary freedom that is at the core of the philosophy of open education.

Therefore, this paper provides among other things a summary of what open education is, what it implies and how can it be implemented in our schools in good will so that this philosophy can be recognized and enforced by walking step by step and without fear of change. Innovative elements that have already been introduced in schools should become part of the improvement of teaching and drive towards democratization and the final separation from the traditional mentality of teaching and learning.

3. The perspective of open education

In the last few years there has been an increase of the emphasis on how students learn and the quality of their learning. Thus some subjects are taught through Topic work (in America, Norway, Denmark, etc). While in Scotland it is more widespread the method Story Line, which is basically principles of topic work. These methodologies consist in the integration of subjects, thus history, geography, science, education can be studied as part of a wider body of knowledge. But this work can be developed even on a single subject or certain theme by which the integration subject can be realized.

In all these efforts it is important to see beyond the focus for educational responsibility. So, it is necessary to see if what happens to children in open classrooms is stable and if there are consequences involved in these programs. Do these programs boost the development of the child and in which direction? Do children become more involved in researches for knowledge, freedom and justice? The knowledge about open education outcomes may be more didactic focus of study. This is because the elements of open education have not yet reached the necessary impact and perhaps happens as a result of insufficient attention given to them.

Education is an image and reflection of the society, but it must be admitted that there are social cultural economic educational and political differences between societies, cultural, economic, educational and political, which should not be ignored. Cultures are complex and generalization on them is dangerous, so they should be seen with priority not only for their values but also the changes that prevent the transfer of educational practices from one culture to another.

Today, interdisciplinary learning has become more widespread and accepted for the curriculum plan. This concept already has history behind it so that teachers plan interdisciplinary units with confidence, courage and understanding.

Naturally arise these questions:

- Can we import this system without significant changes?
- Can we interweave elements of this education with the current education?
- How can it be developed?

Ideas for integration are clearly seen even in our schools and it is often written and spoken about them. In the books that are in use today in our schools, in the alternative textbooks is clearly seen the attempt to integrate the learning of language with the reading literature, which is intended to be accomplished by the principle of integration through these lines: speaking, reading and writing, with the intention of connecting better the students to linguistic knowledge with communication skills, relying on the best models of spoken word, writing and reading. It is seen the attempt to in the fact that their combination and integration problems still remain questionable on how they are implemented in most of these texts, but also significant problems must find solutions to improve the quality of training more of the children's language, especially in the field of communication.

Also, in almost all the curricula developed by the IZHA², is noticed that integration is mentioned as an element of successful implementation of areas in education since first class of elementary to high school programs. Now, with the introduction of the New Curriculum in high school, the terms, project of subject or interdisciplinary project and integration, often are found in the instructions given to each subject, such as social subjects, as well as scientific ones.

However, it should be noted that the democratization of school and the realization of the goals that it has cannot be achieved simply through integration which in many cases becomes mechanical and sporadic, but changing the curriculum and the most important lies in changing the mindset of drafters and implementors of the curriculum .

It's time for the school to be more open, more democratic and changes to take place in it. The need for change is also noted in SKPA³ 2005-2015 (SKAP, 2007), which states: "It is now a necessary the conception and development of a model of curriculum oriented by the demands and focused on knowledge and skills sufficient for active citizens of a democratic society based on market economy. Implementation of this requirement dictates the transition from the existing method: "curriculum based on disciplines" in "curriculum based on learning outcomes", according to which choices are opened to new subjects and / or integration of subjects.

Integrating subjects realized through working with topics is one of the experiences that make the learning process more effective in the years of basic schooling and global experience gives us not only points of orientation, but also supporting points for the development of these programs. What are some supporting points for these programs? Below are summarized some of them basen on studies of Rogers& Church(1975:31).

1. *Erikson calls the age of 5-12, age of industry. The child learns best when he is active, moving, communicating, when he puts things together, manipulating concrete materials, briefly, using his senses in activities that are real to him.*

² IZHA-Institute of Education Development.

³ SKAP- National Strategy of Preuniversity Education

2. *As an active student, the child is the primary agent in his development. He was born curious about the world and begins to explore and activities to learn about it.*
3. *Learning is something that the child does, it is not something that is done with him.*
4. *Every child is special in the way he learns.*
5. *The best learning starts from the child's experience and his interests.*
6. *After a period of time each child should learn important skills and principles. These are the tools of culture and the student expects to learn these in school.*
7. *For a child the reality is entire and unique and is not divided into different subjects and isolated skills.*
8. *The game is the child's labor. When a child starts an activity in which he is involved he plays and works simultaneously.*
9. *A school, a class, a program should be a rich environment of learning. The teacher's role is to lead towards the goals that he has clear in mind.*
10. *Aesthetics is the heart of the world of children. Music, poetry, painting, dance and other arts are the real business of education.*
11. *Evaluation of the student's efforts should be made on the basis of his individual learning. Comparison with friends is inappropriate. Mistakes are not failures. Evaluation should not turn to judgment.*
12. *Children need to learn how to live together, they need opportunities to experiment in social relations and as well as intellectually. They need adults who are dedicated to helping those through solutions to their own problems and as well as interpersonal ones and those relating to school.*
13. *Childhood is a stage in life to be enjoyed.*

According to the studies conducted on these programs it results that this program should begin from classes 1-3 and should then be extended year after year. So the children will continue this kind of program for as long as their parents wish it. No "severe" evaluations (failing grade) should be done in these three years, but the progress of the program should be made by the board. It is worth highlighting the fact that although in classes 1-2 in our schools should not have failing grades and students, there are cases when teachers looking for "the best" of their students use such evaluations: "very well" associated with good grade, or "you should work more carefully", associated with a score of 7, or "very bad", associated with grade 4⁴.

The practice of grades and tests as we know it is virtually unknown in the open classes. In an informal situation the child's growth is estimated by the children themselves. It is a continuous progression, while occasional tests, which usually take place in our schools, are seen as a waste of time because if it is not known the child's development after work done what will be tested?

Practice and such situations can cause teachers to be skeptical. How will they accurately measure student achievements? But not only this. Teachers can have a number of fears in the beginning of the process. They may have difficulty in establishing relationships with children

⁴ Evaluation metric evaluation in Albania from 1-10, 10 is the best grade.

that differs from the current way. Maybe they can not give up their role of lecturer. Also teachers need to organize the class. They should create an environment that supports the learning. While teachers give up the textbook they have a hard time evaluating students and are unsure how much have the children learned.

Informal ways to follow the activity of all children and especially teachers need to feel what they do. Isolation of the teacher in classroom is not suitable, otherwise he will turn back to textbooks.

Another problem may be the environment in which learning takes place. Open environments can create noise problems, and because it can result in suppression of conformity and therefore the school architecture does not have to be structured to develop this program. Open Education then, can occur in open areas of schools and in schools with traditional buildings when teachers collaborate with each other. The children can be organized by the level of achievement or subject interests, but seating of children or teachers in a cozy corner can be anything except open. Together, the children and the teacher can have a great authority in determining what happens in an open class, but the decision is always within the context of mutual cooperation.

4. The implementation of open classrooms in Albanian school

Open classes are not only space and integration, but a way of teaching and learning that allows students to be more active through discussions and projects and allows students to assume their responsibilities. Today, through thematic instruction can be fulfilled a curriculum can be organized around major themes, allowing integration of base disciplines and in the same time exploration of other subjects. In this way a democratic environment will be created in the classroom.

By considering a number of goods generated by elements of open classes is surprising that very few teachers in Albania are using this methodology. It may be because our educational system (as unwritten law, because the written law requires quite another thing), which emphasizes the memory of the content and student achievement through competition.

Another reason could also be the school bureaucracy. In many cases, the leaders and teachers become slaves to endless documents and it is forgotten the purpose and content of school. In this context, two of the questions that arise are:

- Under what conditions open classes can be simultaneously, widely and in an effective way, present in Albanian schools?
- Freedom for teachers to make decisions about their work, and education for teachers on the issue with which decisions should be made?

Reaching these two conditions depends on a more effective organization of teachers and those who teach teachers, thus, teaching faculties. This takes time and effort and requires for the teachers to be knowledgeable and free.

However, as being before the fact that our education system is already more open, which has not been possible years ago, teachers need to learn, to experiment and to implement this kind of education, going beyond the traditional. In this way they can:

- To improve the collaboration, creativity and independence
- To increase positive attitudes towards school
- To raise motivation and satisfaction from learning
- To increase school results and also those affective

All these lead to the democratization of relations in the classroom, enabling the realization of many goals that our schools today have in front of them to prepare its citizens for the future by educating to the students tolerance and respect.

Primary classes who want to use the integrated day can be organized horizontally, ie, students of the same age, thus students of the same grade of a school, but the work with topics can be accomplished very well with vertical groups too, namely students of different classes of the school. In this regard, it seems a more appropriate methodology for those schools that have few students instruction is offered in collective classes.

Today teachers, along with the knowledge of the text use also many other resources for a successful teaching. Thus, using the Internet to find information today is feasible in almost every school. But the work with topics requires many other resource materials so that teachers go to individual interests and abilities with appropriate materials.

Building of an open curriculum will help teachers by giving an important guide to what is the relevant educational program for each child.

This open curriculum should function under the leadership of the headmaster of the school and then go directly into the hands of teachers, the headmaster and the teachers in the full sense of the word help children to shape the curriculum.

Teachers are the providers of inspiration and guidance to children, create opportunities for the learning of skills in a natural way, develop a large range of possibilities for different interests and development of grade level and individualize the progress of each student.

Below are listed some activities suggested to be developed by the teacher in order to move towards an open class gently. These activities relate to the learning concept of "Units and Topics."

Units.

The successful units depend on a variety of factors such as:

- *A skilled and caring teacher*
- *Opportunities to fulfill the needs of children*
- *Degree of integration of the objekt*
- *Development of critical thinking*
- *Problem solving*
- *Detection*
- *The experiment*
- *Planning*
- *Evaluation* (Hertzberg. A & Stone, E, (1972)

However, thematic units are complementary and the teacher who will work to the opening in social studies should perfect his skills and understanding, the connections between units and at the same time introduce the joy and adventure of working with different topics.

These thematic units increase the interests, experiences and classroom activities. A story can be read , they can be taken on a trip or sent to a movie, the beginnings are really various. Traditionally, a teacher can begin work with topics by reading a chapter and make specific inquiries around it that are related to the content. In an open situation the teacher may set children in a circle and discuss ,ie about their favorite game. Questions that arise are nothing but the guidance of teachers for classroom discussion.

Waiver from tests, textbooks, grades, lack of their pressure in the classroom is in confrontation with two worlds or two sets of values, requiring a great deal before it is accepted. (Bernier, N.R., & Williams, J.E, 1973). This has to do with the built environment from the teacher to make it clear to students that something will change in the way of the work in the classroom.

Topic work

In general learning projects are open and not closed in terms of teaching-learning relationship. The aim of the project is normally unknown to the student , so that the student is free to have his reasons for doing it. If it is done it helps children decide what they can benefit from this work, and they are extensively written for the student to identify his targets. Unlike behavioral objectives, it does not narrow the scope of a child's learning.

The Topic (the selected topic) for each project of learning is based in the interests of the child. Children are more likely to be interested in learning projects that have topics that are closely related to their interests.

The fact is that these learning projects, or topic work, are so successful in the world and have given satisfactory results in the education of the young generation. Implementantion of this in our schools can give the chance to younger generations for an adequate education.

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