

PHILOSOPHICAL BASIS OF THE ALBANIAN LANGUAGE CURRICULUM OF THE PRIMARY EDUCATION

Pranvera Kraja

University of Shkodra "Luigj Gurakuqi", Faculty of Educational Science, Albania
E-mail address: v.kraja@yahoo.com

Abstract

This article aims to present some issues' conception on which Albanian language textbooks in primary education were compiled, which became the product of basic education reform in the years 2003-2007 in our country. Educational reform enabled the change of basic education structure from 8 to 9 years and was it accompanied by some changes on the curricula. Compared with proceedings, the new curricula focused more on learning and they were more open and more flexible. Drafting a curriculum, it should inevitably be based on many philosophical basis, which assured its designers some guiding framework on how to organize schools and classrooms. Philosophical bases enable the determination of education objectives, the content and the organization of education, teaching and learning process. It is the right of a society and its schools to choose an educational philosophy for its citizens. In this point of view, experts of school curricula drafting emphasize that the way we choose, implement and reflect philosophical curriculum approaches, which build our philosophy of education, determine to a large extent, our decisions, choices and our educational alternatives. The focus of this paper concentrates primarily on presentation of the importance of school curricula construction on clear philosophical basis. Secondly, it focuses on the impact of philosophical choices on how we perceive the world, how we organize facts and thoughts. And thirdly, it focuses in the presentation of philosophical approaches on which Albanian language curriculum of primary education were drafted.

Key words: *philosophical basis of the curricula drafting, curricula of the Albanian language, conception, primary education, reflection of knowledge in the curricula.*

The importance of the construction of school curricula on philosophical basis

The curriculum in school practice has always meant a list of subjects that should be taught at school, but in the broader sense, for specialists and compilers of the curriculum it means "experiences that individuals require for full and real participation in society" (Ornstein and Hunkins, 1997). The way how we define the curriculum as a whole one, reflects our tendency towards it. There are a number of definitions on the curriculum, which can't be excluded, because they show the way or our view on it. Thus, the curriculum can be defined as a plan for providing some of the learning opportunities for people who will be educated; as an organized set of goals for education and/or official forming; as areas that treat the student experience; or all experiences that benefit children under the guidance of teachers; as a special environment ... that helps children achieve self-realization through active participation in school (Saylor, Alexander and Lewis, 1981;

Pratt, 1980, Caswell and Campbell, 1935; Shepherd & Regan, 1982; all cited in Ornstein and Hunkins, 1997).

According to Goodson (1994) the curricula is drafted by preconceived human goals, but also by the new goals of those who dictates the timing and the dynamic development of society. The design of curriculum is the way how we conceive it and organize its elements: the subject, the content, teaching methods and materials, experiences and activities of students, in order to provide direction and guidance. There are several models for the drafting of the curriculum, but the basis for its generally accepted compilation, include the following areas of knowledge such as philosophy, history, psychology and sociology (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1997). The philosophy remains in the centre of the curriculum, because it affects the content and organization of the curriculum of a school; it provides the teachers and especially the curriculum designers one or several frames for the organization of schools and classes. Philosophy helps teachers to answer questions such as: what are the schools, what subjects have value, how students learn and what methods and materials should be used, and above all, what experiences cognitive/non cognitive activities should they use (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1997).

Thomas Hopkins (1941) seeing the importance that philosophy has in the designing of the curricula, he appreciates it this way: "The philosophy has entered into any important decision that was ever taken to curriculum and learning process in the past. It will continue to be the basis of every important decision also in the future".¹ While Goodlad notes that "Philosophy is the starting point for decision-making regarding curriculum and the base of all decisions regarding curriculum".² Philosophy helps us to understand how we perceive the world around us, how we define what is important to us. Philosophy is an attempt to see life and its problems in a more comprehensive point of view; it affects how we organize the facts and our thoughts. It is the right of a society and its schools to choose an educational philosophy for its citizens. In this regard, experts of school curricula drafting emphasize that the way we choose, we implement and reflect philosophical curriculum approaches, which build our philosophy of education, influence and, determines to a large extent, our decisions, our choices and our educational alternatives.³

The philosophical basis of the Albanian language curriculum of primary education

Albanian language textbooks of primary education that we are analyzing are new texts. These texts were conceptualized over some philosophical basis that European countries had implement for long in their school curricula. These texts "are the product of basic education reform carried out during 2003-2007 in our country, which enabled the change of the compulsory education structure from 8 to 9 years" (Hamza, 2011, p. 5). According to Hamza, who was responsible in the sector of curriculum, this reform aimed to equip the basic education with new curricula focused on learning, which were more open and more flexible than previous curricula. The conception and then the whole curriculum drafting were based on modern didactic developments, which brought qualitative attempts in developing basic education curriculum in general and the curriculum of the Albanian language in particular.

¹ Cited in Ornstein & Hunkins (1997), p. 46.

² Ibidem, f. 46.

³ Ibidem, f. 46.

For this purpose, near the IPS⁴ it was formed a working group to study the curricula. The working group composed of specialists: Daci, Nishku, Xhafka, Zenelaj, Gjokutaj and Hamza, in the paper titled "The contemporary curriculum didactic concept" (1995, pp. 71-84), treated in synthesized order the fundamental aspects of the structure and contemporary curriculum content. They discussed the most common types of curricula in the most developed countries in the world, and unfolded new ideas, which would be the foundation where all compulsory education curricula in our country will be based. This group of experts of the curriculum made a thorough analysis of the advantages that programming and planning curriculum brings. They described the philosophical, psychological, social, political and economic basis of presenting knowledge in the curriculum.

Thus, for the first time, *there were outlined the philosophical basis* on which Albanian new curricula would built, in order to approximate of our curriculum with the curriculum of the most developed countries of Europe. According to these experts:

A well designed curriculum according to all requirements of didactic principles, unlike a plan, program or text, makes possible a naturally link and quite organically between components of teachers performance in school and simultaneously avoids fragmentation and mincing of the content, goals of the subject, etc. (p. 73).

As well:

The basic characteristic of the contemporary curriculum is an open philosophical prospect that each country choose to guide the education of children, which primarily relies on current and on the future needs, on the demands and socio-economic features, cultural traditions and ethnicity, etc. (Daci et al., 1995).

This conception was absent in our curriculum. Our curriculum has not had a real philosophical base to follow, unlike the curricula of most European countries, where the entire scientific and educational work in schools is guided by clear and coherent philosophy. But through drafting new curricula and new textbooks is intended to introduce some philosophical, psychological, social bases, etc., elements that represent great importance as they are closely linked with our study of Albanian language textbooks of primary school. Daci and his colleagues (1995, p. 74-75) point out the main philosophies of European schools, which would then be included and would represent leading philosophy of designing the Albanian language texts in primary education.⁵

Thus, among the large number of supportive philosophies, I am presenting the most essential ones that were implemented in the aforementioned texts of Albanian language:

1. The behavioural philosophers and psychologists assess the knowledge that should be learned in school, not by content, but by behaviour, attitudes and actions of students, so

⁴ Institute of Pedagogical Studies.

⁵ Petro, R. and Gjokutaj, M. (2007). Albanian language 2 (Republished, Tirana: Albas).

Petro, R. and Gjokutaj, M. (2006). Albanian language 3 (Republished Tirana: Albas).

Petro, R. and Pepivani, N. (2007). Albanian language 4 (Published Tirana: Albas).

from what they should do themselves during or after learning (Postner, 1993). Behavioural methods which we can design a curriculum with is of the tool - purpose direction and it is logical and instructive. It is the oldest method and still the main method of curriculum, even the curriculum compilers are of the opinion that this method will be dominant also in the new century. Usually at the foundation of this method there is a curriculum or a document. Most of the teachers who support behaviourism, know that to understand how students learn the curriculum, the teachers should treat and perceive their students as cognitive individuals who operate within a social background (Ornstein and Hunkins, 1997). Even in the definition of objectives they aim to express "the behaviour that educators should give the students and not the content", so the knowledge that teach students to "know how".

The concretization of these views in the texts of the Albanian language, were made by the withdrawal of pupils' opinion through the section "Then You?" In this section the child tells how he / she would act in a predetermined moment and what will be the behaviour way of him / her in the cases of a given situation. This perspective is also applied in the section "To write" when the pupil applies and puts on what he/she has learned in the previous sections, as: "To talk", "The grammar" and "Spelling".

2. While cognitive philosophers and psychologists, support the essence of their view to imparting knowledge in school in the indispensability of mental development of the students. They give priority to cognitive idea that "the fundamental factor is what pupil knows not what he/she does". According to them, "the concepts, ideas, reasoning, and mental actions in general should remain in the foundation of learning" (Witting and Williams, 1984). Theories of knowledge on information processing see the student in relation with general environment and examine how pupil applies the information (Ornstein and Hunkins, 1997). So, here they emphasized the knowledge that students learn "to know why".

This view is implemented at our textbooks in pedagogical questions apparatus which contain open-ended questions that require reasoning, analysis and argumentation from the child.

In addition, the curriculum compilers think three recognition processes of Piaget⁶ together with the educational experiences of Dewey⁷, serve as the basis for three methods of organizing the teaching experience, which are: *continuity, consecution and integration*. In other words, these processes serve as the basis for the construction of knowledge in the curriculum and how it will receive and retake this knowledge. The process of receiving and retaking of knowledge has the purpose to ensure gaining experiences to students. Let us briefly explain each of the three methods of organizing the teaching experience:

Firstly, continuity suggests that the curriculum should possess vertical repeat: this means that skills and concepts should be retaken in a "periodic" way and should have "continuing opportunity of the skills to be practiced". Secondly, *consecution* suggests that the

⁶ We all know three Piaget recognition processes, which are: assimilation, adaptation and balancing.

⁷As for Dewey, three basic educational experiences are: the situation, interaction and continuousness, which represent the experiences of environmental situations that affect the child. In this case we have the likeness of assimilation. Interaction represents today transactions, or in extended in time, which the child carries between him selves and his environment. This includes his ability to find a meaning and this process is similar to assimilation. While continuity has to do with teaching over a period of time, approximate that with balance (cited in Ornstein and Hunkins, 1997).

curriculum should include progressive development of understanding and any subsequent experience should be built on the preceding". Thirdly, integration "refers to the horizontal links curriculum experiences" which means that the subject should not be taught as a separate one and totally disconnected from the rest, but the inter-subject connections must exist in order that students' experiences to be full (Tyler, 1949; cited in Ornstein and Hunkins, 1997).

These processes are implemented in Albanian language curriculum of primary education and not only in the textbooks we are analyzing, but these processes have served as reference points on which previous textbooks were built.

Concentric character of language learning in primary education has been the basis of the construction of these textbooks. Language skills are taken and retaken again in every class, but with a broader conception of them, with a progressive development. In this way the realization of vertical repetition of knowledge is done and teaching experiences are based above those previous ensuring in this way the curriculum continuity and consecution. In terms of integration, it has also been a key element in the construction of new Albanian language curricula after 2003. The conception of these textbooks was made on the basis of integrating the subject of the Albanian language with the subject of Reading literary and from two subjects taught separately from each other, we went on teaching of a single subject, which would represent the two subjects mentioned above. But not only that, there are elements of integration in these texts with subjects such as: Social education, Sciences (Natural science, Geography, Biology, etc.), Figurative education, Health education and Musical education.

Inter-subject relationship is realized through the parts of reading, where the child receives information and integrates knowledge about the Earth, its construction, phenomena such as earthquakes and volcanoes; health care, the benefits of healthy nutrition etc. While inter-subject integration elements in Albanian language textbooks of primary education, in terms of knowledge of the language, we find with majority particularly in the section "To talk", and somewhat less often in the field "To write".

3. One of the didactic aspects that stems from philosophical factors of knowledge's presentation in the curriculum, is also the direct connection and establishing of healthy and mutual relationships between school and everyday life, between learning and contemporary practice. This idea is thrown by the group of philosophers and scientists who defend the view that school should reflect experience gained cultural heritage and the scientific one, which must be preserved and further developed. This view is in contradiction with the traditional didactic and it maintains a critical attitude towards it. According to this view, traditional didactics usually were disconnected from the reality of everyday life and often deny the reality and so it presents the knowledge detached from this reality (Tanzela, 1995; cited in Daci et al., 1995, p. 74).

This didactic aspect is practically realized in Albanian language texts of primary school through reading parts and language sections "To write" (precisely to functional writings) and "To talk" (in all cases when it is spoken to the problems of everyday life). Let us give examples of applying of this philosophical factor in Albanian language textbook 2 (second grade of primary school):

The connection to the customs and everyday life events is very apparent and evident, and it is best reflected in literary parts: "Who can fix things", "It's coming my brother", "My mother", "Lullabies", "New neighbourhood", "Traffic lights".

While as regards the rubrics of the language, the connection to the reality of daily life is realized through the sections "To write" and "To talk". In Albanian language 2, the section "To write" equips the pupil with knowledge of operational logs. Exactly, through this rubric, the child learns how to write a letter, a postcard, a note, advices, greetings, how to maintain and how to write a diary, etc. Likewise, many rich aspects and problems from daily life of the children, is presented the language rubric "To talk". The pupil is qualified to well express about him/herself sleep habits, the place where he lives, his neighbours, the life in the city or in the village, the rules of walking and road traffic. He learns to describe well him/herself (physical traits, skills, hobbies and desires), to express about the celebration of various feasts and his/her birthday, to talk about the games he/she likes the most, etc.

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