

STRATEGIC COHESION IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

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Abstract:

Educational policies are constantly put up for debate. Moreover, it becomes more and more difficult to be put into practice since it is hard to reach a common ground when deciding on how the education system should look like in a country. The aim of our paper is to analyze the role played by strategic cohesion in the education system generally and in Romania. The methodological approach is literature review.

Keywords: *coherence, strategy, educational, forces, means, actions, expertise*

JEL Classification: *I2*

Introduction

Educational policies are generally very difficult to put into practice, since their proffered objectives vary, on the one hand, depending on the doctrines of the ruling parties, the demands established by the educational policy of the European Union and, needless to say, market demands. For this reason, it is most likely that the recurring reforms of the Romanian education systems appear to be patterns with no purpose whatsoever, rather than patterns showing continuity or completion. Even more so, quality standards in education - and especially in higher education - by which Romania has abided have not led to flux optimization, but rather to excessive bureaucratization and misuse. This paradox is due mostly to the lack of strategic coherence in educational policies and strategies, the main cause being the impossibility of generating a strategic expertise corresponding to a political decision with regard to education systems.

In this regard, we aim to discuss the concept of strategic coherence in educational strategies and policies, and therefore in educational systems. Strategic coherence will generate the strategic expertise of decisions within the Romanian education system. The debate will be both principled and algorithmic, as coherence - and particularly strategic coherence - cannot be generated and, above all, achieved with no intrinsic logic of the scientific approach upon which a true educational paradigm is based.

Levels in the educational process

Education is the only instrument of cognitive reproduction and intellectual transfer that ensures the perpetuation and development of our society. Its horizons are endless and, therefore, it is difficult to identify a particular route and decide which course would be the most effective. More often than not, the educational process, in all its forms and formulas, is extremely difficult and knows no hiatuses because the lack of coherence is incompatible with the means of generating and treasuring knowledge, and the fracturing of knowledge is incompatible with our society. Unfortunately - or perhaps fortunately - knowledge, as a form of existence of human society, as an ontology, gnoseology and logic - is an endogenous process and not an exogenous one (at least from we have learned so far), and therefore, its stimulation, conception and staging - as a continuous process, intrinsic role, and structural frame of human existence on earth - belongs to man himself. We do not know if it us who decided to be so or if such a decision belongs to a deity - at first there was the Word - but the

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sheer capacity to think this shows how great man's responsibility for ensuring this *modus vivendi* based on cognition of society is.

Sophists used to say that "Of all things the measure is Man, of the things that are, that they are, and of the things that are not, that they are not". This famous two-and-a-half millennia sentence is a postulation of axiology and has in fact generated one of the greatest paradoxes ever to create a rupture in social ontology: the demiurge man of our society and man as a product of society. And, as a result, the excessively social and, above all, socialist doctrine camp along with their never achieved variation, the communist one.

Of course, this dichotomy/division seems to have no relation to the educational process taking place in any society; however, it is these doctrines that will generate policies, namely political actions, that is, decisions that may sometimes appear shallow, and other times tortuous. These decisions intrude upon the clarity of the educational process, due to group interests, expressed by *de facto* majorities which are usually counterfeited. Whenever there is no corresponding strategic expertise, these types of interests, expressed by all kinds of doctrines that are found often in policy decisions regarding the educational processes, will foist on these processes directions that dissuade the education system from its basic principles - universality, consistency, value, usefulness and effectiveness - or translate these principles into narrow, fragmentary and circumstantial views. We say this because decisions concerning educational processes exist, in their essence, in democratic societies – in point of fact, in any society, even in authoritative political regimes.

Levels of educational process are basically the following:

- The decision (political level);
- The implementation of policy decisions and elaboration of strategic decision (strategic level)
- Creating and updating the structures and formulas of implementing the strategic decision (operational level)
- Taking concrete action within networks and educational institutions (tactical level)

Decision-making level (political level)

This level is particularly important in guiding the educational process, since it sets the goals and horizons of the process. Therefore, educational policies (understood in their capacity to take action and make decisions regarding the educational process) have to be designed after thorough analyses of the process and appropriate expertise developed by "the headquarters of the educational process ", that is, by the strategy experts' community. Note that educational policies cannot be changed every four years, as in the case of Romania, because neither the political cohesion nor the strategic one can be achieved, and the education system cannot maintain a level of required and effective educational cohesion.

The effects of this inconsistency are well known. The educational decision is expressed through the law and procedures for the allocation of forces, means and resources.

Strategic level (the implementation of political decisions level)

For the coherence and consistency of education, the strategic level - as a consistent level of training, merged into a uniform concept and using coherent and consistent forces, means, actions and resources within the education system - is a unitary system that engineers the educational process, such that it ensures education by all possible means - formal, informal and non-formal - so that everyone will benefit from this process, firms, public institutions, security and defense ones and, last but not least, all components of education (formal, non-formal and informal).

The strategic level is not only expressed, but also ensures by means of strategic planning of the educational process, by preparing, joining, using and merging all forces, means, actions and resources into the same concept, thus generating a corresponding strategic frame and ensuring an update based on feed-back connections and actual requirements of the

dynamics of international educational processes, of effective requirements, and national and universal patrimony.

The strategic level observes the entire educational process and its determination, analyzes them and based on that, operates the updates and enacts the principle of strategic coherence, and furthermore ensures the expertise need by policy makers by way of appropriate mechanisms and systems already existing in our country (committees within the Parliament corresponding structures in all other ministries and institutions in Romania).

The operational level (level of implementation of the strategic decision)

The strategic level ensures both the strategic coherence of educational processes and the identifying of horizons of waiting for the results and effects of those processes, however, setting clear goals on educational levels, years, stages, etc. In other words, the strategic level creates the strategic frame needed to achieve the strategic goal set by policy makers, materialized within the strategic objective, and the strategic planning required for the realization of this objective and purpose set by policy makers.

In reality, it is the operational level that ensures “the device” in order to make the strategic plan. The operational level will be found within each educational category (preschool, school, pre-university, undergraduate, postgraduate (masters), doctoral, postdoctoral, continuous professional development) and consists of systems that facilitate the realization of general and specific requirements of the law, by applying the requirements of the strategic plan so as to achieve all conditions, forces, means, actions and resources necessary in order for educational establishments within the corresponding category to operate at maximum capacity (limited to available resources at hand).

The level of direct action (tactical level)

It is the level of educational action itself. All upper levels have only one purpose: to ensure the necessary conditions for the direct action to work properly, coherently and effectively. It is neither separated from the other levels, nor entirely different, even though it has direct competences in the basic, superior and continuous forming of the intellectual potential of the country and therefore the planet, as well as in providing access to cognition.

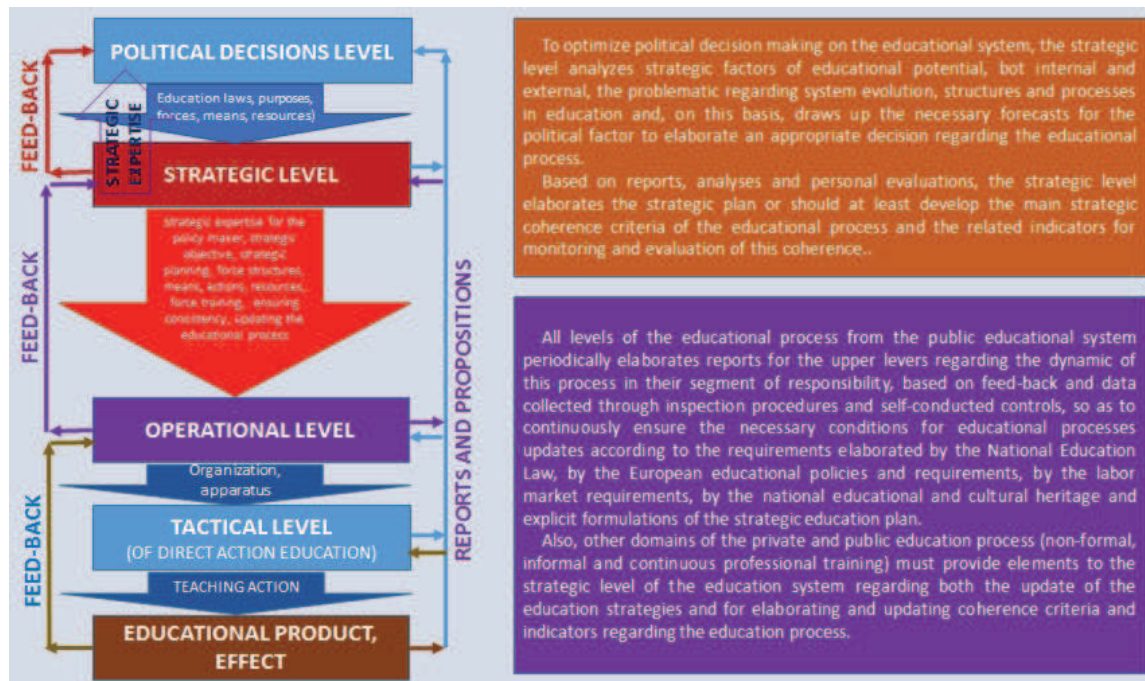
Hence, illiteracy is one of the worst injustices that occur in human society. And, it is due especially to political decisions and lack of consistency and strategic coherence in education systems.

Philosophy and network physiognomy of educational processes do not change the competences of these processes, but rather bestows upon them a handful of duties and functions that connect these levels, thus facilitating direct communication and removing the restrictive and overly bureaucratic effect that any hierarchy will generate. Nevertheless, it will preserve the rigor and strict algorithms which ensure compliance with the competences and a clear indication of the mission of each level.

The network is perhaps that element that will favor strategic cohesion, even though such a consistency is first and foremost related to a concept that is to be found within this level.

We believe that only the strategic level of the educational process is able to generate and operate such consistency, as it possesses all the competences related to the strategic surveillance of the educational decision, the creation, structuring, planning and modernizing of the forces (limited to the amount fixed by policy makers, though surveyed by the strategic level), as well as to the rigorous planning of forces, means and resources (after the strategic expertise has been done) and to the strategic planning of actions within the entire educational system.

A representation of these levels and the main interactions among them is shown as follows (Scheme No. 1.):



Scheme No. 1. Levels of education and the principle relationships among them

Source: Conception of the authors

Note that the strategic expertise of policy makers on educational problems precedes the political decision concluded in the law concerning education, but does not stop with the advent of the law and the implementation of the methodology. It continues throughout all educational cycles so that policy makers will be aware of the strategic dynamics of the whole educational processing and, if necessary, be able to apply the correctives required. Without a coherent and consistent expertise made by the policy makers, that is, the government, parliament and the presidency, an effective strategic coherence and consistency will not be possible. Such a strategic expertise cannot be achieved unless there is a significant amount of strategic scientific research within public and private educational institutions, together with the scientific research and its results in all other areas. Consistency means collaboration, interoperability, real-time accessible database [by which we promote a holistic technology effect approach, one in which technology is part of the process, interacts with other elements and supports the system and is not regarded as a separate factor (Istance, D., Kools, M., OECD)], integrated, well secured and thoroughly equipped functional network.

The need of strategic cohesion

In order to prevent unnecessary and misguided effort and its harmful effects (unfortunately present in the last decades) it is necessary that we consider a much better approach to this process, especially at the strategic level. Unfortunately, the National Education Law does not state this explicitly, and even the little information it offers is rather vague. First, the educational strategy means the science, culture, skills, experience, method and art of putting into practice a political decision regarding the educational process in order to establish the aim set by the policy makers, within the limits of the amount of forces, means and resources established, and according to the principles of compatibility, performance, quality and consistency. Furthermore, the educational system of a nation, along with health care, security and defense, has a very special strategic importance and is related to a vital strategic interest - that of educating and training people, and making them ready to live in a society, serve it and ennoble it. This vital strategic interest and the special strategic importance are closely related to

the very essence of existence, the inherent development and security and to the generation of economical, social, cultural and moral creation of prosperity, security and defense. It is here that the need for strategic cohesion within the educational process commences. We say educational process and not educational processes, because we refer to the unity of this process, regardless of its form and objectives. The strategic coherence of the educational process deals with the merging of all forms, formulas, stages, partial goals, objectives, forces, means and resources in order to ensure a high-quality educational product – the educated man - thoroughly prepared, able to continuously improve and produce, together with the other educated men, all of which happens within a social, economic and culturally appropriate framework, one of cognition, prosperity, freedom and security, and owing to the fact that the world is and always will be conflictual. It is, however, difficult to put together such a large diversity of educational processes that the requirements of the educational market, the need for preserving new values created by the educated man, and his qualities and abilities generate.

Creation involves intellectual freedom, while the exaggerated rigor and especially the excessive formalities might repress man's state of freedom. Man is constantly undergoing an educational process (throughout his entire life). Hence, his efficiency, which highly affects the potential in all its forms, is repressed as well.

Strategic coherence, however, requires certain constraints, more specifically, certain requirements, and these may (or may not) have inhibitory effects within an educational process that is too repressed, and where the university autonomy or the relationship with the labor market, for instance, are excessively conditioned. Therefore, if the labor market demands for electronics engineers, the educational system should focus on training and improving electronics engineers, putting aside the other components of the educational process that are not solicited by the labor market, but which are, however, essential to social and cultural life of the community. Requirements of the labor market within the educational process are to be thoroughly analyzed, evaluated and, most importantly, reported, due to the fact that they all have different effects on the educational process. Today's requirements are typically available today, those of tomorrow - to be taken into account particularly in higher and trade education – are also available today, for these forms of education and not only. Because school is preparing today tomorrow's professionals. Consequently, today's educational requirements aim at training graduates for the labor market of tomorrow, and their identifying, assessing and forecasting is a challenging task. With the time button, the strategic coherence principle requires the strategic domain within the education system to possess a pre-emptive capability, based on a good scientific forecasting of both the labor market requirements and the curriculum. We must also take into consideration the possibility of investing in tomorrow's professionals and risk losing them to other systems; e.g. "student departure" (Hovdhaugen, E., Frolich, N., Aamodt, P.O, *Informing Institutional Management: institutional strategies and student retention*). To this is added the assessment of the evolutionary process of the cognitive culture (which has already been universalized), the national culture which retains its essential systems of values, the organizational culture and the professional one.

The integrated concept of strategic coherence of the educational process

Cognitive culture is that culture which, without removing the differences between cultures, is turned into a new type of culture, and relies on knowledge and facilitates the globalization of information and almost everyone's access to nearly all the existing databases in the world. Together with the great cultures and the national ones, it represents the structural frame of any and all educational processes and the point of departure. It assures the cognitive stability of society's product, as well as the product of the family and school, that is, of the educated man (and all people are a product of the educational process, otherwise there would be no people). Great cultures (as a support of great civilizations) and national cultures (as a support of civilizational entities represented by states) speak today, more than they did

yesterday, through this cognitive culture that virtually operationalizes them. Together with this cognitive culture they represent the structural frame of human beings on planet Earth and its support in comprehending the depths of the universe. Moreover, these great cultures symbolize the foundation of the strategic coherence of the educational process, the starting point and the universal receiver of the efforts made by the educated man. The other products of strategic coherence are the organizational culture and professional or vocational culture. Only this fundamental strategic framework consisting of four types of cultures could be established and effectively materialized by the strategic level of an educational system, a concept of strategic coherence of the educational process. Even though cultures are generally differentiated, they are merged into a single unit by the cognitive culture that universalizes their value systems. This cohesion becomes the integrated support of the consistency within the educational process.

Strategic coherence function of the educational process

The main function of strategic coherence of the educational process is to ensure the quality of all components by avoiding unnecessary overlapping, breaks and disturbing redundancies. Strategic coherence does not hinder the freedom of educational institutions, nor does it stimulate bureaucratic, harmful and time-consuming rigor, but helps them to get out of such traps, providing criteria of consistency and sets of indicators necessary for monitoring the implementation and effects of this principle. (www.assistancescolaire.com)

Strategic planning of the educational process - the most effective tool for achieving strategic coherence

The main instrument of the strategy of an educational process is, most assuredly, the strategic plan. This tool (which we call The Strategic Plan of the educational process) hinges on the merging into single concept with concrete objectives, themes, issues, forces, means, steps, timelines, actions and resources, in a certain strategic vision which aims to achieve a very precise educational purpose and which is set by policy makers. The strategic plan is the main instrument of strategic coherence, without which education would become, if not chaotic, then fragmented with many random events that could not put into practice an educational policy, be it long-term, or short-term.

The possible effects of strategic coherence

The possible effects of strategic coherence are numerous. They express its place and role regarding the proper functioning of the process and the attainment of performance.

Among the most important strategic effects of the strategic coherence of the educational process are the following:

- continuity of educational processes at the quality, architecture and intensity required and imposed by complex systems, regardless of political regimes, governing systems, goals and objectives formulated by policy makers, existing conjunctures and requirements made by educational partnerships:
 - generating a highly educated human potential able to cope with social, economic, political, cultural, cognitive, military, etc. requirements;
 - generating and improving educational support needed in order to avoid educational loops;
 - maintaining the nation at a high level of intellectual, technical, creative and innovative performance so as to ensure a rich cognitive heritage, prosperity, freedom, health and security, prestige and respect;
 - avoiding excessive bureaucracy and unnecessary effort;
 - minimizing costs;
 - increasing efficiency.

Strategic coherence is, of course, an attribute of the strategic level of the educational process, but every school is engaged, by complying with the regulations and educational

methodologies recommended, and by planning the educational process on an operational and tactical level, thus ensuring the internal coherence of the educational process and that of inter-institutions and inter-levels in the area of the entire assembly.

For instance, if there is no interruption within the educational process and if we consider the Romanian educational system nowadays (before school and after graduation we still have access to certain elements of the informal system of education and they are not always as useful and positive as they should be) we could define strategic coherence as follows (table 1):

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1	Red	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown
2	Red	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown
3	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown
4	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown
A	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown
B	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown
C	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown
5	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown
6	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown
7	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown
8	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown
9	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown
10	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown
11	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown
12	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown
I	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown
II	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown
III	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown
13	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown	Light brown

Table 1. Strategic coherence levels

Source: Conception of the authors

In this scheme, the light brown color which complements the horizontal continuation of the educational process after graduating from school is actually an element and a criterion of strategic coherence. It can be evaluated based on a few markers of participation of the individual to the extension of his education.

The sepia color represents the continuous, intensive learning, usually by formal institutionalized education. This may be an ideal and linear form of strategic coherence of the educational process. Unfortunately, we are far from achieving this ideal because of the many disturbing factors that make it almost impossible to achieve a strategic coherence beneficial to the educational process, and this can no longer continue as it may seriously affect the efficiency of the educational process, which has already encountered difficulties and the effects are not easy to repair. Obviously, the criteria of coherence are established by the strategic level, in cooperation with all other levels, including that of political decision. It is the planning process that ensures the criteria of coherence by means of controlling and ensuring quality, but especially by using the network and the evaluation and optimization programs of coherence. Such programs will become functional only after they have been developed, approved and standardized.

Only then can we really talk about coherence criteria and indicators, and real-time evaluation systems of strategic coherence of educational processes.

Conclusions

In any system of education and educational process the principle of strategic coherence is essential. The implementation of this principle ensures the strategic level of the educational process and, of course, with the participation of all system components.

Strategic Coherence is not simply framing strict principles and the rule of law, but it appears both as a bridge between levels and between parts of the education system and process. Consistency is not only a state of security of the educational system, but also a health parameter, a function of the dynamics and its resources, and above all, a condition of performance and efficiency.

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