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The Political Apathy of the Youngest Romanian Voters: Lessons to Be Learnt

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Associational life is a major medium for debate about public interests, for the definition of connections between the private and the public spheres, for the elaboration of ideas about civil liberties and entitlements and for the search for legal constraints on the exercise of public authority. Democracy can be preserved and then deepened when citizens engage in joint action through the sharing of a commitment to the public sphere. Many studies have shown that the transition of the former communist countries to a democratic civil society has been marked by the *communist inheritance*, a phenomenon which manifested itself as a lack of trust in the state's institutions and as nostalgia over the stability and predictability of the communist regime. I shall put forth to your attention an empirical study run in Romania in 2003-2004 focusing on the level of political participation of the youngest Romanian voters. After presenting the results of my quantitative and qualitative diagnosis work regarding the possible causes of widespread political apathy for this sector of the population, I shall argue that, in order to preserve democracy, we need to socialise future citizens in respect for the minimal values of democratic deliberation and to provide them with politically relevant skills that would facilitate the defence and exercise of their own rights. One of the most important actors in this respect is the

public school and that is why the last part of my paper contains a proposal for education reform, both from the point of view of the curriculum and of the teaching methodology.

1. INTRODUCTION

What makes democracy possible in a country and what leads to its consolidation? When looking at the still new democracies of Eastern Europe, this is a frequent question among political scientists and theorists; the analytical camps are divided into those who stress the establishment of institutions and those who would rather focus on the promotion of a vibrant civil society. Deliberative democrats in particular have been keen to point to the necessity of encouraging the proliferation of non-governmental organisations, citizen associations and networks that would increase the overall social capital and would lead to a more active citizenry, capable of holding the government and the bureaucracy accountable.

Among the civic attitudes required for the successful working of a democratic system, some talk about a capacity for empathy and the willingness to participate in public sphere debates.ⁱ Democratic consolidation requires a commitment to democratic values and rules not only among the professional politicians but especially within the electorateⁱⁱ. Other political scientists have suggested a theory of congruence, according to which the structures of authority throughout society, such as the family, church, schools, or trade unions are more democratic and tend to promote democracy to the extent that they pressure and scrutinize the processes of government.ⁱⁱⁱ

But, one might legitimately ask, what is the source of these attitudes and skills in the case of the still fragile democracies of the former communist block? Do citizens have a minimum acceptable amount of politically relevant information and skills which would ensure an active exercise of their civil and political rights, an understanding of the political messages and a well-informed selection of candidates within the electoral process? I believe the question is especially pressing in the case of newly democratised countries of Eastern Europe, such as Romania. This is a country where the pre '89 dissidence was meagre and the duration of the communist regime stifled attempts at interest articulation and aggregation outside the nationally regimented system of organisations. Therefore, the problem of finding a cure for the political apathy of the electorate is more pressing, especially when focusing on the youngest Romanian voters who, as I shall show, manifest serious levels of indifference towards politics and distrust of the institutions of democracy.

Civic attitudes do not emerge spontaneously. They are acquired through the process of political socialisation, by means of which individuals become aware of political processes, assimilate different types of information and develop their own political values. The socialisation process involves many different types of actors who mould people throughout their lives; among the most important agents I would consider the family, the school, the peer group, and the mass

media. These four agents exert a very important influence especially during the impressionable years of childhood.^{iv} Although much of the impact that the school and the family have on children is unintentional, both the school and the family deliberately set out the type of knowledge required to fit into adult society, and this knowledge includes both political and non-political experiences.

The socialisation agent which is relevant for my explanation of the low levels of political participation among the youth of Romania is the school. The school transmits formal knowledge - the information and the skills required to function in society-, values - among which responsible citizenship and the awareness of belonging to a nation-state are included -, interpersonal skills - allowing the child to cope with the formal requirements of social and political organization -, and self-evaluation skills.^v Having obtained these elements, people are prepared to enter civil life within the larger society.

I think that in a truly democratic society the emphasis should be on the transmission of the norms of group behaviour, of democratic decision-making, and of respect towards the others' points of view. The transmission of political slogans, symbols, and historical heroes should not be emphasised to the detriment of democratic values and critical thinking. But if schools require from kids more imagination, creativity and participation within discussions and decision-making processes and less unquestioned obedience to rules, their influence in the democratic political socialization of the future citizens increases.

The public school should take it upon itself to make sure that the majority of citizens are aware of the procedures of democratic control against any possible abuse by the government. In a country with a weak tradition of authentic political participation, civil society has to be encouraged by means of public policies, and in this respect the role of the educational system is very important. Many analysts have shown the distinctness of the Romanian Communist regime within the former block, in terms of the strong grip of the state on the society.^{vi} This is one of the reasons a mature and genuine civil society cannot successfully emerge by itself; this is why the hope lies with the public system of education due to its uniform reach and almost perfect monopoly over the education of the future Romanian citizens.

There is yet another element we should take into account. Many studies have also shown that, to a great extent, the transition of the former communist countries to a democratic civil society has been marked by the "communist inheritance", which manifested itself as a lack of trust in the institutions of the state, on the one hand,^{vii} and as some sort of nostalgia for the stability and certainty of the communist period as opposed to the long and demanding process of democratization, on the other.^{viii} Because of this relatively widespread phenomenon of communist nostalgia, I shall present a study on the future of the Romanian civil society at the grassroots level. What I am putting forth to your attention is an exploratory study of a few factors that might influence the lack of interest in and of knowledge about politics by the 17-19 year olds, the youngest Romanian voters in the last round of general elections in 2004. I have chosen to deal with this sector of the Romanian population for several reasons.

First of all, by focusing on the persons who voted for the first time in the general elections of 2004, I will guard against the previously mentioned "post-communist nostalgia". In 1989, these members of the population were only 4-6 years old, so they cannot be said to have lived under communist rule in terms of the formation of their attitudes towards politics. Moreover, if we make a simple mathematical calculation we shall see that the people who will vote for the first time in 2004 represent 9% of the whole electorate – a fairly significant portion. Thirdly, it has been argued that of the three sets of reforms necessary for democratization -

institutional, economic and social - the last is the most difficult and time-consuming to achieve as it requires at least one change of generations.^{ix} What I shall try to see is whether we can distinguish some of the necessary elements of a democratic citizenry within this young generation of future voters; by concentrating on the 17-19 year olds, I hope to derive some conclusions that would lead to some meaningful lessons and possible recommendations for the decision-makers, who, in my opinion, can always help in the building of a true, democratic civil society which cannot emerge by itself under the volatile conditions of post-communist transition. One possible solution lies within the competence of the educational system, as I shall show further on in this diagnosis research report. Last but not least, I think that such a paper would have relevance in a context in which the majority of the papers written on the Romanian transition to a democratic society mainly concentrate to the voting behaviour of the body of citizens at large.

I shall start from the modest hypothesis that the level of the political participation of the Romanian youngsters is explained by:

- Income - net per member monthly income;
- The extent of politically relevant knowledge- measured through a quiz on the domestic institutions and personalities and on citizenship rights and duties;
- The type of pedagogical method they experience at school: ex-catedra vs. participatory methods;
- Location: rural vs. urban.

My dependent variable is level of participation in politics, governmental or non-governmental. It will be operationalised as:

- Political party youth organization membership;
- NGO volunteering/membership;
- Membership in any type of local/ high-school/ national organization/ foundation/ association;
- Journalistic activities;
- Public protest participation/organisation.

In my opinion, the explanation of such a complex variable is an important step in trying to "cure" one of the most important illnesses of today's Romanian society: endemic political apathy affecting the youngest voters of an already fragile democracy.

2. METHODOLOGY

This project is part of a larger one which was meant to examine some of the features of the young civil society in Romania. In order to test the impact of income, residence and knowledge on political participation, I isolated some of the questions from the questionnaire I devised for the larger project and which I ran on a sample of 368 subjects. The questionnaires were applied at various high-schools in Bucharest, Ploiesti, Campina and several villages in the Prahova District as well as some rural areas near Bucharest starting from December 2002 till September 2003. They were administered mostly by myself and some of them by teachers working in those high-schools in order to guard against the influence of demand characteristics - youngsters tend to exaggerate and distort their answers when confronted with a person who is not much older than they are, whom they have never seen before and the authority of whom they are likely to disregard.

The answers for the questions which operationalised these three variables were awarded scores which were introduced into an SPSS data base, so that descriptive, diagnostic statistics could be computed.

In order to test the effect of the level and quality of classroom participation on my dependent variable, I engaged in qualitative research. I have been an observer to several classes of Social Sciences - related disciplines (both in rural and urban areas) and had the opportunity to see what types of teaching methods are being applied in the Romanian high-schools. Moreover, I taught for a semester in two different high-schools, one in Bucharest and one in a rural area near the city of Campina, and it is this position which has offered me the opportunity to see how pupils respond to different types of stimuli and what pedagogical method they are more accustomed to. A series of interviews have also given me the opportunity to see how the youngest voters perceive the political realm. Previous experience as an NGO volunteer within the Pro-Democratia NGO project “MPs and High-School Pupils” has been another source of insight into the phenomenon under study. This project consisted in an extensive series of mini-seminars run in high-schools all over the country; the seminars were centred around issues related to the main Romanian institutions and the rights enlisted in the Constitution; they were followed by visits to the lower house of the parliament while MPs were in session.

The reason behind the choice of qualitative methodology for exploring the impact of this particular independent variable is the fact that highly subjective self and other perception elements were involved. Teen-agers do not feel comfortable writing down evaluations of their own teachers, even if they are given the guarantee of anonymity. They feel more comfortable casually talking about their academic experience than putting it down in a questionnaire. In addition, being present in classrooms I could confront my opinion of the teaching methodology used with that of the students. Teaching allowed me to engage in experiments with alternative methods and observe which type students were more responsive to.

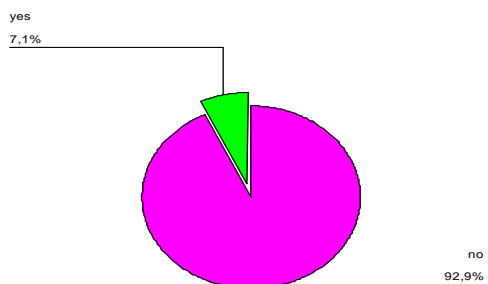
Let us now turn first to the quantitative part of my research and then to the qualitative one in an attempt to draw some conclusions about what needs to be done in order to create the premises for a vibrant civil society.

3. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Let us first look at the values on my dependent variable. The NGO members in my sample are quite few; only 7.1% of my subjects actively participate in a non-governmental organization:

Are you an NGO member?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	no	342	92,9	92,9	92,9
	yes	26	7,1	7,1	100,0
	Total	368	100,0	100,0	

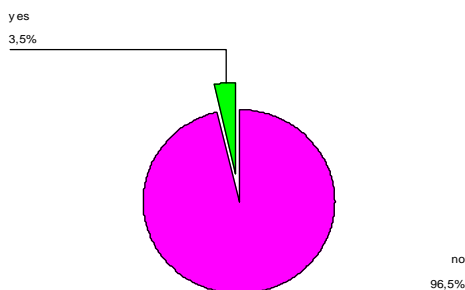


The figures are not much different for party membership, where the situation is, if anything, even more dramatic, as the percentage of pupils who are members of a political party's youth organization is only 3.5:

Are you a member of a political party youth organization?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	no	355	96,5	96,5	96,5
	yes	13	3,5	3,5	100,0
	Total	368	100,0	100,0	

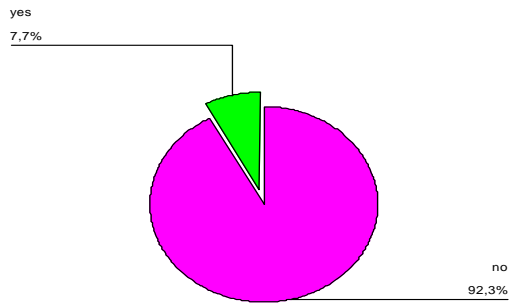
Political Party Membership



As for the percentage of pupils who have ever written an article for a local or for a high-school magazine or newspaper, the situation is the following:

Have you ever written an article for a local or a high-school magazine?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	no	338	91,8	92,3	92,3
	yes	28	7,6	7,7	100,0
	Total	366	99,5	100,0	
Missing	System	2	,5		
Total		368	100,0		

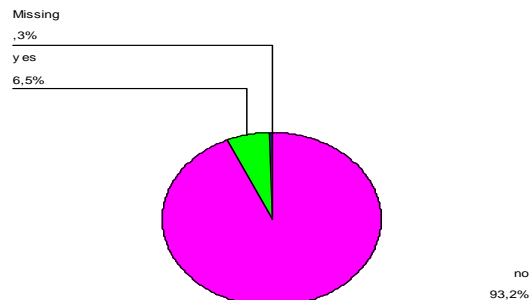


The percentage of those who have ever undertaken some kind of journalistic activity is quite close to that of those who participate in NGO activities, namely 7.6, which is very low. Let us now take a look at the results for membership in a foundation or some other kind of association:

Are you a member in a political/ civic association/ foundation/ organization?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	no	343	93,2	93,5	93,5
	yes	24	6,5	6,5	100,0
	Total	367	99,7	100,0	
Missing	System	1	,3		
Total		368	100,0		

Organization/Association/Foundation Membership

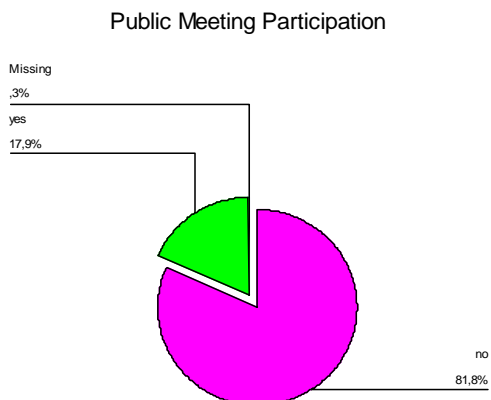


Again the figures are not encouraging, as a majority of 93.2% of my subjects are not members in any type of political or civic form of association. Finally, here are the results for participation in and organization of public meeting:

Have you ever participated in a public meeting in order to protect your interests?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	no	301	81,8	82,0	82,0
	yes	66	17,9	18,0	100,0
	Total	367	99,7	100,0	
Missing	99,0	1	,3		

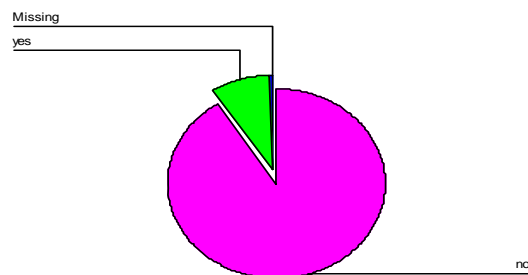
Total		368	100,0	
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Have you ever helped organizing a public meeting?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	no	334	90,8	91,0	91,0
	yes	33	9,0	9,0	100,0
	Total	367	99,7	100,0	
Missing	99,0	1	,3		
Total		368	100,0		

Helping with the organization of a public meeting



While the situation with respect to participation in public meetings is better, as the percentage of those who have actually participated in such meetings is 18, the percentage of those who have involved in the organization and preparation of such public gatherings is lower (9%), which means that the subjects find it harder to initiate than to participate in such activities.

From the results presented above it is quite clear that the level of participation in political and even civic activities of my subjects is quite low. The youngest Romanian voters are far from being interested in exercising their citizens' rights. But before examining what factors might influence this type of attitude towards the political fora, let us check whether there is any form of association between the residence variable and the other independent variables. The reason for such a strategy is that sociologists warn us that residence tends to be an antecedent variable which might undermine our conclusions.

Classroom Participation and Residence. On the classroom participation variable, surprisingly enough, the urban children did not better overall. As I explained in the methodology section, in order to measure this variable I engaged in a series of interviews, passive and

participatory observation. The conclusion I could draw was that, irrespective of their residence, most students claimed that most of the times teachers dictate in class while they are required to reproduce the contents of their notebooks when examined. A lot of students complained about the all-knowing, almost authoritarian position taken by most teachers in the high-schools I visited in both rural and urban areas. Among their concerns, examination in the form of reproducing memorised material and the lack of practical application of concepts and theories to problem solving contexts was also emphasised.

The reason why I believe it is surprising that I did not find differences between the teaching methodology used in the two environments under scrutiny is that the newest teaching methods are first diffused in the town schools and only later to the schools in the villages. Moreover, the teachers in the urban areas are more likely to have access to important sources of information, and so they are able to update the ways in which they hold their classes. In addition, there is also another factor, namely that of the relative absence of qualified personnel in the rural areas, where the teachers who have obtained lower grades in the employment selection process (the yearly exam for the teachers who want to occupy a position in the Romanian school system) are given positions. The reason why we did not register a significant difference might be the cultural reproduction by teachers of the styles they themselves have experienced in schools as students. In addition, few fully qualified teachers decide to work for the National Education System as they generally prefer to work for better salaries in alternative careers within the private sector.

Since students are not used to freely expressing their opinions, to making their voices heard and to critically assessing the different situations they are faced with they are unlikely to be able to become actively involved in an organization requiring this type of skills. It is in the classroom that the democratic participatory attitudes have to be cultivated first, but the situation is far from encouraging in this respect, since these teen-agers are rarely asked to give their opinions on the issues taught to them in high-school. As a consequence, they are reluctant to enter extracurricular activities that would require exactly this type of participatory attitude. From my qualitative work, I could see they feel some kind of anxiety whenever they have to express their opinions on different topics. In this respect their reluctance in filling in my research questionnaire is illustrative. It is clear from these results that reform in terms of teaching methodology at the level of the entire Romanian educational system is a must.

In terms of the level of *politically relevant information*, I expected that people in the urban areas would be more informed than those in the rural areas. The quiz was meant to measure the extent to which my subjects were aware of the current political events and personalities and of their rights and duties as citizens. If we compare the averages of the two sub-samples, however, the means are almost equal:

Residence	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Rural	7,6393	122	1,3256
Urban	7,5815	233	1,4391
Total	7,6014	355	1,3995

It is only with regards to the relationship between *income and residence*, that we have significant differences: the mean net monthly income for a family of three in the villages is 5.229.630 lei while the figure for the urban areas is 11.328.191 lei. While the direction is

unknown, urban dwellers seem to be better off than urban dwellers, a conclusion not rare in sociological research in Eastern Europe.

From all these descriptive statistical tests we can conclude that the low levels of classroom participation and politically relevant knowledge do not vary with residence. The only variable that seems to be associated with residence is income. However, when looking at the relationship between level of income and political participation^x, the only form of political involvement that seems to be influenced by income is party youth organisation membership. This can be interpreted in two ways: either that the level of participation increases with income as people having better material status will have more time and more resources that they can spare for such activities, or that family connections and/or traditions are behind this association.

Let us now look at the impact of the rural–urban dichotomous variable on the dependent variable. In terms of NGO membership, 9.8% of the village inhabitants are NGO members while only 6% of the city inhabitants are involved in a non-governmental organization. This can be explained by the fact the immediacy of the problems within a small community can be a strong reason for active association.

As far as membership in the youth organization of a political party is concerned, the results are reversed: it is only 1.6% of the rural people who get involved in such activities while 4.7% of city inhabitants are party members. This is probably due to the fact that party activity is more intense and more visible in urban areas, so that people are more likely to find out about and get interested in these activities.

In terms of participation in public meetings, the urban students are more likely to go into the street and demand voice than the rural ones: the percentage of public meeting participants in the cities is higher (20.3%) than that found in the rural areas (14.8%). The difference can be caused by the fact that the urban pupils are more exposed to the impact of the media and to other similar protest activities – cities are industrial centres where most union activity takes place- from which they can take inspiration.

As for involvement in civic/ local/ high-school foundations/ organizations/ associations slightly more rural pupils get involved in such civic or high-school organizations, such as literature, music or art clubs, administrative organizations concerned with community life, religious associations, social care associations and so on. The reason for this could be that the age - appropriate entertainment opportunities that are the norm in the cities are scarce in the villages. In addition, anthropologists have found that personal responsibility for the community’s immediate problems seems to be clearer in the villages, where face-to-face relationships lead to more personalized connections than the mediated ones in the big cities.

From our exploration so far, it is clear that there are not major quantitative discrepancies between the level of political participation between urban pupils and rural pupils but there are differences in terms of the type of participation they choose to engage in; while urban pupils tend to more easily engage in forms of protest and to be affiliated with political parties due to their privileged exposure to a more active political scene in cities, the rural youth tends to engage in forms of political association built around problem solving and community related issues.

The relationship between politically relevant knowledge and participation will be examined next. The difference in the quiz averages between those who participate and those who do not are not as great as one might have expected:

Sub-samples	Quiz Average (2decimals approximate)
Party Youth Organisation Members	7.61

Party Youth Organisation Non-Members	7.59
NGO Members	7.58
NGO Non-Members	7.62
Public Protest Participants	7.59
Public Protest Non-Participants	7.61

This is again an unexpected finding since one would expect people who know more about politics to be more participatory than the apathetic. But as we can see from the above table, the averages are too close to justify such an assumption. This can be explained by the fact that, given the harshness of the long Romanian transition process and the return to power of the Social Democratic Party in 2000, pupils seem to have lost trust in the power of the democratic institutions and do not see any point in engaging in decision-making processes. This hypothesis has been confirmed by the students' declarations during the interviews and the seminars organised by Pro-Democratia.

Let us now turn to the relationship between political participation and classroom participation. As I said before, the classroom could serve as a laboratory for democratic participation, the place where the skills for participation in the local and national public sphere can be learnt. The relationship between these two variables was examined through a series of qualitative methods. First I ran a series of mini-interviews with the students of the classes where the questionnaires had been applied. The most important reasons that the students gave me for not wanting to engage into politics was that they felt anxious about it and its implications, they felt that they did not know enough in order to make a contribution and that they found it hard to take the initiative to associate in order to solve any type of problems. They said they generally found it difficult to work in teams so as to solve problems related to their form organisation (organising schedules for watering the flowers in the classroom, organising small trips, a literature club, cultural evenings) as they were not used to engaging in collective efforts.

As a passive observer, I could see that, most of the times, the method that the teachers used was far from promoting any type of class discussion or debate on the various issues at stake. The teacher usually assumed a superior all-knowing position which remained unchallenged until the end of the class. In this way any type of initiative by the student was suppressed, the pupil was discouraged from thinking analytically and critically about the topic, from formulating his or her opinions and from giving voice to them and subjecting them to the attention of his fellows. It is for this very reason that pupils felt some kind of anxiety whenever they were asked to undertake an individual or a collective task that did not fit the usual pattern of giving and reproducing information between the class and the teacher. Pupils are not used to making use of the information that they have acquired in providing solution to the problems they face on a regular basis. Moreover, they are not accustomed to cooperating with their classmates when having to cope with a common issue.

As an intern teacher in 3 high-schools belonging to three different areas of our country I have tried to apply some more participatory teaching methods in the Social Science classes that I had the opportunity to hold (Mass Media, Civic Education, Politology). One very frequently used method was to divide the classroom into several teams and give them tasks the accomplishment of which took several minutes to a few days. I observed that the results (in terms of pupils' cooperation and academic outcome) tended to improve if they were left more time to think things over and produce results. Reluctance also tended to decrease once this type of exercise was repeated, and they even began to suggest different issues amenable to this type of method. I also

have to mention that the younger the pupils the higher the propensity towards participation in the classroom.

The reason that I bring up these aspects is that, in my opinion, a part of the solution for the problems characterizing the (lack of) grassroots political and civic activity in Romania lies with a reform in the type of teaching methods used in the Romanian schools. The argument for focusing on this area is that the Romanian educational system has a national reach and that the school is the second most important agent in the socialization of the children and in their preparation for becoming responsible citizens of the political society. Unless one gets the skills and the attitudes favourable to an active engagement into the local and then later on national arena in the classroom, then the chances of getting them outside school are rather meagre. Gaining self-confidence, learning how to listen to the points of view of others, learning how to cooperate and feeling empowered enough so as to initiate out of the pattern actions should be the primary focus of a teaching methodology for democracy. Inter-personal skills are essential for the creation and maintenance of a vigilant civil society and it is with the public school that the responsibility for creating democratic citizens lies. One starts getting involved at lower levels (e.g. the classroom), where one gets acquainted with the rules of participation, where one acquires trust in one's capacities to speak and make oneself heard and gains the skills for critical assessment and informed decision-making. It is for this reason that I think a reform of the educational process in terms of both procedure and content is necessary for the success of the political socialization of the future citizens and decision-makers of Romania. The plea for such a reform is justified by the fact that the majority of the Romanian teachers use what Freire called the "banking system" teaching methodology,^{xi} which consists in the transfer of information from the notes of the educator to those of the student. This is not an approach that could lead to the development of a responsible active citizenry.

In my opinion, since it is difficult to equalise income, there are several steps that can be taken in order to promote citizens' participation in both local and national politics.

My proposal focuses on two areas of reform:

- The curricula;
- The teaching methodology.

4. WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

4.1 CURRICULA PROJECT PROPOSAL

One way of encouraging people to participate is by teaching them their own rights, the mechanisms they can use in order to protect and to enjoy these rights, their obligations as responsible citizens, the ways in which their voices can be heard by the governing and, last but not least, how to scrutinize the government's actions in their attempt to increase the accountability of the latter as well. It is here, at the content level, that we need to work first, as in Romania there is only one course in Civic Education which is compulsory for the 13-14 year-olds. I think that this course should be complemented by a similar one at the secondary school level, because it is at an older age that pupils are more likely to become aware of their responsibilities and duties as adults living within society together with their equals. It is also at this age, according to Jean Piaget's age table,^{xii} that they tend to develop thinking autonomy, that they begin to wish to be treated as equals by the teachers and by the parents and that they begin to formulate their own conceptions of life and the world around them. It is because of this that I

consider it appropriate to introduce a second course related to the matters of concern for this research project in the high-school national curricula for the senior pupils.

Further on I shall present a curricula project which I wrote according to the requirements of the National Council of Evaluation within the Ministry of Education. According to the present legislation such a course could only be taught as an optional one by any teacher specialized in social sciences. The conditions are the following:

- the curricula project is presented to the children and to the parents who may or may not approve of it;
- if the project is approved by the parents and the children, it is brought to the attention of the high-school's council, the members of which make it compulsory in that they will require pupils to attend and get credit for this discipline.
- the teacher then writes the plan of the new curriculum, which will then be brought to the attention of the District Inspector, who has the right to send it back to the author for modifications. After it has been approved, the discipline gets equal mandatory status with the other disciplines in the school curricula.

Now here is the curricula project, which I believe should be made mandatory at a national level and which should not depend on the teachers' contingent willingness to initiate such a project and on a particular group of parents' willingness to approve of it.

PRESENTATION

Duration: 1 year, 1 class per week.

INTRODUCTION TO POLITICS represents an optional discipline at the level of the "Man and Society" curricular area and is meant to present the 12th form pupils with the basic elements necessary in the study of any political system. The purpose of the classes is to provide students with a general perspective on the discipline and the object of political science, emphasizing the main themes and paradigms in political science.

At the end of the classes, the pupil should be able understand the problems that occur regarding the object of study of political science, to explain the extent to which political science is a science, to define the major themes in political science research and theory, and to analyse political events from at least one of the theoretical approaches discussed in the classroom.

CONTENTS

1. Political Science as a Social Science

- a. What is a social science?
- b. The relationship between political science and other social sciences.
- c. The object of political science.
- d. The history of political science as an academic discipline.

2. The Political Society

- a. What is political society?
- b. The relationship individual - the group.
- c. Political socialization and political participation.
- d. Interest groups and pressure groups.
- e. Political parties and elections.

3. The State

- a. What is the state?

- b.The Constitution: the fundamental law of a state.
- c.The Rule of Law.
- d.The type of state:
 - The State structure;
 - The form of government;
 - The political regime.
- 4.The International Society
 - a.International Organisations: universal and regional. Classification.
 - b.UN and its role in world politics.
 - c.International Financial Institutions.
 - d.Global justice and environmental problems.

The course will be an interactive one; the teacher will encourage the pupils to suggest topics for discussion, to make known their problems in understanding the functioning of the Romanian political system, their rights and obligations as citizens or their critical opinions about some political events. In addition, a wide range of additional material will be used in order to stimulate their curiosity and imagination. Moreover, the class will also be aimed at improving the pupils' capacity to express their ideas orally or in writing.

GENERAL COMPETENCIES

- 1.The identification of some facts, phenomena, processes and concepts which are characteristic for the realm of the social sciences in general and of political science in particular.
- 2.The use of some specific instruments in order to present a practical or a theoretical problem.
- 3.The explanation of some facts, phenomena, events, by means of the theoretical frameworks learnt in the classroom.
- 4.The interpretation of a survey or of an inquiry from a political science perspective.
- 5.The use of the knowledge acquired for solving practical problems and for assessing some real-world situations.

VALUES AND ATTITUDES

The discipline Introduction to Politics shall seek to have the pupil know the contemporary political reality, to have him or her socialised from the political point of view and to make him or her aware of his responsibilities as a citizen.

The emphasis will lie on the free expression of the students' personality, on their positive relationship with the others, on the optimal use of their creative and imaginative potential, and on the improvement of their capacities of expression and of their capability to issue value judgements regarding the political events in Romania and in the world.

METHODOLOGICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The teacher teaching Introduction to Politics has to make use of the elements corresponding to each unit so that the students might gain the specific competencies. The themes of study will be approached in relation with current social and political events, but trying to keep the order of the chapters unaltered.

Teaching questionnaires for the evaluation of the teacher by the students will be used and the focus will be on the presentation of an interdisciplinary perspective (history, sociology, economy, law, philosophy). The students shall regularly be organized into micro-groups with an emphasis on team-work.

The teacher will also be able to make use of additional material, such as banners, diagrams, videos, audio-cassettes, newspapers, magazines, pictures, documents, pieces of legislative documents, computers.

To the extent that it is possible, visits to the City Hall, to the political parties' head-quarters, to the Parliament or to the Presidential Administration shall be undertaken.

As for the evaluation of the students, the teacher shall make use of

- Tests of all types;
- Questionnaires;
- Evaluation reports;
- Essays and research projects;
- Practical projects;
- Computer testing;
- Multiple choice and self-evaluation tests;
- Comparative analysis;
- For-and-against argumentation;
- Portfolios.

As can be very easily seen, in evaluating the teachers will try to measure both knowledge and practical skills and abilities of the pupils.

The document that I have included above is only the initial stage in the process of trying to get the project approved. Further on, I shall concentrate on the teaching methodology issues. We cannot contribute to the creation of active and aware citizens if we focus exclusively on the content of the lectures. Much attention has to be paid to the way in which the information is conveyed, so that the students might be able to develop some critical apparatus, some analytical skills in the exercise of their rights and in the process of scrutinizing the actions of their representatives. So how should teachers teach, irrespective of their discipline?

4.2 PARTICIPATORY TEACHING

Each society possesses a certain system of codes and meanings for all the activities taking place within it. The purpose of education is to help each and every individual build a framework of such meanings within him- or herself in order to achieve his or her own interest and goals within society. It is through education that man adapts himself to the social world by means of a tri-dimensional model: the cognitive, the normative and the practical. Out of the three, it is praxis that lies at the basis of both knowledge and value assessment, and it is only during adolescence that the human being reaches a certain degree of independence of thought and evaluation.

These observations apply also to political education, which is one of the general forms of education together with the moral, the religious and the aesthetic education; each and every society has built a system for political education which takes into account the fact that there are three stages in the political development of the individual.

The first is the pre-political stage when the political is "present" in the environment from which the child "absorbs" it (6-7 year-olds). The second stage is the development of concrete political thought and attitudes; and up to the age of 14 the political education should be practical. The third and the last stage is the period of development of political independence, when the individual becomes able to discern between the positive and the negative aspects of the functioning of the political system^{xiii}. This last stage cannot be achieved without detaining the relevant political information and without encouragement from the educators in the direction of critical assessment and participatory activity. In order to achieve success during this last stage the educators should award plenty of attention to the type of model they provide their students with and to the type of attitudes they help them develop.

The objectives of political education are of four types:

1. objectives related to the language of politics, i.e. concepts;
2. objectives related to the relevant data, information, knowledge;
3. objectives related to analysis methodology and research skills;
4. objectives related to political activity (praxis).^{xiv}

As can be easily seen, these objectives build upon one another, and we cannot say that political education has been accomplished unless all four types of objectives have been accomplished, with political participation as the most illustrative token for the success of the educator.

In order to get such hoped for attitudes from the pupils, the teacher has to adapt his or her teaching methods to the expected outcome. When choosing a certain method, the teacher has to take into account several factors, such as the end of education, the content to be taught, the age of the pupils, the individual characteristics of the pupils, the psychosociology of the group, the available teaching devices and his or her own capacities as a teacher. Specialists in teaching methodology state that there are several functions that a teaching method accomplishes:

First, there is the cognitive function, i.e. the method provides the pupil with access to information about the data and about the procedures so that it becomes a way to learn, to discover, to do research; then there is the formative function, i.e. the function of gaining new intellectual and practical skills, new attitudes, feelings, and types of behaviour. The instrumental function of the method refers to its being an execution technique, while the normative function implies that the method shows the teacher how to teach and the student how to study so that the best results be obtained.^{xv} Taking into account these functions and the objectives of political education, the maximization of the active-participatory dimension of the methods and the minimization of passive learning come as natural. Moreover, we should also add the attenuation of the magistro-centric approach to teaching and thus allow pupils a more important role in the discovery of scientific truths.

But which are the methods that could help students develop the skills necessary for an active participation in the public sphere? In my opinion, the amount of time devoted to lecturing should be diminished in favour of heuristic teaching, which is a dialogical method in which the students are asked questions and which is based on the Socratic maieutics and erotetics as the arts of asking appropriate questions which help the respondent get to the core of the problem. Another method of interest for the present research is the didactic demonstration, which consists in the presentation of some facts and phenomena and in which the pupils are involved as active agents. This type of

demonstration can take several forms, such as the figurative demonstration (e.g. graphs and charts), the model demonstration, blackboard demonstration, or audio-video demonstration (TV and computer based).

Didactic observation can also be used in order to develop the students' responsiveness to contemporary political phenomena. It can be either systematic, under the teacher's supervision, or individual, thus acquiring a heuristic and participatory aspect. Other important methods are the case method, which consists in the creation of some typical, representative situations where pupils are asked to observe the case from various perspectives so that some meaningful lessons can be learnt, and the didactic discovery, consisting in the reactualisation of the experience so as to exercise the pupils' individual capacities to solve a real life problem. Last but not least, problematisation as the creation of problems to be solved, didactic modelling which has both an illustrative and a cognitive function, and role-play represent three more examples of teaching methods which can contribute to the instilling of participatory attitudes in tomorrow's citizens. In this respect, we must not forget that teachers and teacher-administrators are powerful socialization agents, as they are "the human contact point between pupils and the formal school organization".^{xvi} The teacher exercises influence on the pupil in several ways: he or she acts as the major vehicle for transmitting the school curricula and the associated values and he or she sets up the rules of expected behaviour and acts as a potential role model. So, the behaviour of teachers and the way they relate to the pupils is likely to influence the children's attitudes, skills, behaviour patterns and values.

But how do these methods function in reality? In order to illustrate their role in the teaching process, I shall suggest a plan for a lecture on the role of elections and voting in a democratic^{xvii}. The reason for the choice of the topic for my illustration of democratic attitudes forging teaching methodology lies in the consideration of the huge impact that awareness of the role of elections and voting has on the levels of political participation and voting turn-out in a country. Also we have to keep in mind that apathy first gets expressed in low voter turnouts during election time. So what can we do to encourage people to vote and to feel that they have some power?

CLASS PLAN

Discipline: *Introduction to Politics*

Subject: The role of elections and voting: definition, main types of electoral systems, actors involved, importance for democracy.

Operational Objectives

By the end of the class the students should be able to:

1. define the role of elections;
2. explain the relationship between elections and democracy, having in view issues of legitimacy and accountability;
3. enumerate types of electoral systems;
4. identify the elements a successful electoral campaign;
5. understand the dimensions of free and fair elections;
6. analyze the differences between electoral and ideas campaigns;
7. distinguish among the examples provided by the teacher those belonging to the above mentioned categories.

Methods and Strategies

- heuristic conversation;

- exposition and case studies;
- imagination exercise and role play;
- simulation;
- didactic demonstration;
- didactic observation.

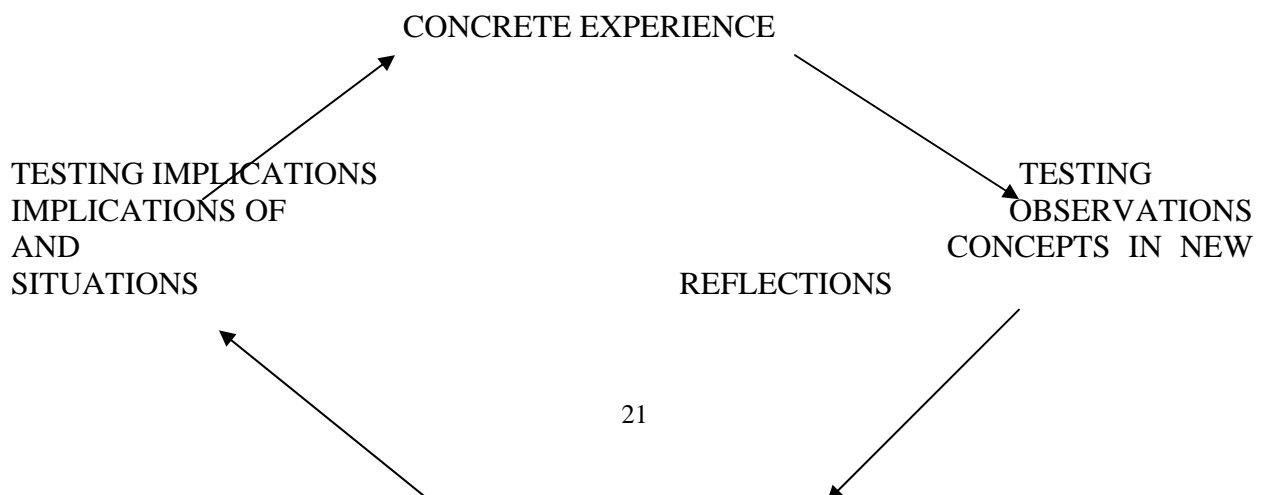
MOMENT OF THE LECTURE	THE TEACHER'S ACTIVITY	THE PUPILS' ACTIVITY	METHODS AND STRATEGIES
Administrative activity 2 minutes	The creation of the necessary climate for the beginning of the didactic activity		
Evaluation of the last homework 20 minutes	<p>By means of a free discussion with the pupils, the teacher verifies whether the students have learnt the content of the previous lesson, "Political Parties". The teacher takes into account the following aspects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the presentation of the factors which have led to the appearance and development of political parties (economic and social); • the classification of political parties (Duverger and Hirscheimer). <p>The teacher also checks the group homework "Monitorise the press for news on the activity of one parliamentary political party in your country" and awards democratically discussed grades to the teams which present their reports. At the same time, the students from the other teams are</p>	The pupils actively participate in discussion, they provide the others with examples from their own experience in order to support their opinions. They present their homework in teams with one or a multiple spokesperson. They help the teacher evaluate their performance and grades are deliberated upon with the teacher presenting a set of criteria to be followed in the evaluation of the presentations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free discussion; • Exemplification; • Oral reports; • Collective grade deliberation – <i>essential for empowerment feelings</i>^{xviii}.

	<p>required to evaluate the others' performance. The teacher will observe the way in which the students make use of the learnt information in the attempt to answer the questions, the accuracy of their observations, the language they employ, and the manner in which they relate to one another during the discussions. He or she will encourage the least participative to express their opinions and evaluate the performance of the competitor groups.</p>		
<p>Teaching the new lesson 20 minutes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By means of heuristic conversation and didactic demonstration the teacher tries to discover, together with the students, the role of elections in a democratic society and the ways in which it is related to issues of legitimacy and accountability within a democracy. <p>In order to help pupils understand the contents, the teacher presents additional materials which are strictly related to each part of the lesson:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newspapers/journals articles on elections in the world; • Electoral posters; • Videos from 	<p>The pupils actively participate in the discussion and take notes from the black-board. They intervene and make contributions to the ideas launched by the teacher and provide the class with relevant examples from their own experience. At the same time they make value judgements which they support with arguments.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heuristic discussion; • Didactic demonstration; • Didactic observation; • Didactic exposition; • Didactic discovery.

	<p>elections all over the world where certain functions of elections can be easily identified; in this respect examples where elections are held for the first time after the fall of an authoritarian regime are extremely relevant.</p> <p>Starting from these materials, the teacher guides the students towards understanding the differences between the different types of elections and electoral systems which he/she also includes in a diagram on the black-board. At the same time he/she tries to make the necessary corrections in the students' perceptions. Examples from their country of origin are emphasised.</p>		
<p>Recap of the taught lesson and announcement of homework</p>	<p>In order to firmly retransmit the new information and to see whether the pupils have understood it correctly, the teacher asks the pupils who have prepared the homework on press monitoring to rejoin in their groups and this time they will have to come up with a slogan (and a candidate in the case of presidential system) in view of a simulation of elections. By the end of the class the students are</p>	<p>The students in the groups cooperate in order to produce the slogan and they designate a spokesperson to make it "public".</p> <p>The teams take note of each other's slogans so that in the next class they will be able to bring up something original.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Didactic exercise • Discussion; • Provisional reciprocal evaluation by the teams; • Simulation; • Group work and role play.

	<p>supposed to come up with a slogan for their team and to continue the task for the next meeting when they will produce an electoral speech adapted to the issues they see relevant for their country at the time and some promotional material in the form of an audio/video material or through role-play. A second homework task will require the pupils to come up with examples of elections in the world where there have been doubts about their free and fair character and bring to class relevant material.</p>		
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It is through the application of this kind of methods, I think, that the students will be able to get the best out of any type of class, or as Boyte claimed, to get “opportunities to practise political skills like strategic thinking, bargaining, negotiation, listening, argument, problem solving and evaluation.”^{xix} These are, in my opinion essential “ingredients” for the better functioning of the control functions of a civil society, and children will not be provided with an opportunity to acquire them unless something is changed in the way educational systems attempt to politically socialize them, and this is a stringent problem especially for young democracies. They have to be made aware of the world around them, of the current problems and dilemmas, by being given the opportunity to freely express themselves, to have the power to act and to try to solve these difficulties by taking full responsibility for the consequences of their actions. In order to do this, action has to be doubled by reflection, and in this respect Kolb’s learning cycle^{xx} is relevant, illustrating the continuous process of passing from an inductive to a deductive stage within the educational process:



FORMATION OF ABSTRACT CONCEPTS AND GENERALIZATIONS

The time awarded to practical experience and to participatory interaction between the pupils and the teacher will have a huge impact on the future citizens' skills and on the way in which they will be able to protect their own interests and rights in adult life. This is why the combination of concrete experience with a reflective stage, a critical/ analytical one, and one of applying new ideas is a natural and essential process of knowledge and skills "acquisition." It is only in this manner that education accomplishes its natural task. Students have to be faced with real life experiences or simuli and thus be provided with the opportunity to test their theories and opinions in practice (the deductive phase); then they can refine them in terms of contents after having observed practical implications in case studies (the inductive phase). In this way we can also hope to teach respect, group cooperation, reasonableness in interaction, though we cannot always expect to get the pupils become more personally and empathetically connected with one another. It is only by the observation of these aspects that the classroom can become, in my opinion, a laboratory for a responsible civil society of the future.

5. CONCLUSION

We started with a crucial question: how can the members of a democracy be provided with the necessary understanding and capability to reap the greatest possible benefits from the democratic processes while at the same time protecting that process from those aspects like apathy and disinterest that would lead to its destruction? The solution we suggested was an educational one: we need to provide students with information, analytical skills and also to instil in them some basic commitment to the values of respect and mutuality of restrictions that are essential for the preservation of democratic deliberation fora. The academic enterprise itself would be severely damaged if these values ceased to guide interaction within and outside educational institutions. The standards of open- mindedness, the willingness to listen and take seriously other proposals are essential both to the academic and democratic political system. Given this, the classroom can serve as a laboratory for democracy provided that a certain kind of teaching methodology is employed to transfer all kinds of knowledge in different disciplines. I have chosen to illustrate this type of methodology by means of a social science lecture plan but we should not restrict these techniques to the humanities. They are essential vehicles of empowerment through the transfer of some parts of the decision-making aspects regarding classroom rules, topics of discussion and even grading towards the students who will feel more motivated to prepare and more responsible for the results of their work. Given a minimal amount of information related to the functioning of their community's institutions and to the channels of accountability they can avail themselves of and given a certain set of practical attitudes and capacities, pupils will be more likely to understand the importance and the benefits of (at least) minimal political participation. As for the character education involved, social interaction everywhere in plural societies requires a certain level of self-restraint and reciprocal respect that are essential for stability but which in no way paralyse the actors who learn to avail themselves of the existing channels of deliberation that they may reform in view of their objectives; however, reform can only be legitimate to the extent that the dialogue is not interrupted through violence. This is why we do not consider this kind of character education as an infringement of

individual autonomy but on the contrary, as its restatement within the boundaries of inter-subjective practices of recognition and decision making.

ANNEX: QUIZ POLITICALLY RELEVANT KNOWLEDGE

1. Romania is:

- a) a republic;
- b) a parliamentary monarchy;
- c) a military regime.

2. Romania's president is;

- a) Iliescu;
- b) Nastase;
- c) Vadim.

3. Romania's PM is :

- a) Iliescu;
- b) Nastase;
- c) Vadim.

4. The Romanian Parliament has :

- a) 1 chamber;
- b) 2 chambers;
- c) 3 chambers.

5. Has Romania been invited to negotiate with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization?

- a) yes.
- b) No.

6. Is Romania a UN member?

- a) yes;
- b) no.

7. Is Romania an EU member?

- a) yes;
- b) no.

8. Is Romania an OSCE member?

- a) yes;
- b) no.

9. Is Romania an OPEC member?

- a) yes;
- b) no.

10. Is the US an EU member?
a) yes;
b) no.
11. Is Russia a NATO member?
a) yes;
b) no.
12. In Romania, general elections are held:
a) every 2 years;
b) every 4 years;
c) every 3 years.
13. Can laws be proposed by the ordinary Romanian citizens as opposed to the political institutions?
a) yes;
b) no.
14. Are the ordinary Romanian citizens allowed to form a political party?
a) yes;
b) no.
15. Are the ordinary Romanian citizens of an electoral unit allowed to revoke an MP from his/her function?
a) yes;
b) no.
16. Does the Romanian Constitution protect the right to private property?
a) yes;
b) no.
17. The Romanian government is:
a) elected by the electorate;
b) nominated by the PM;
c) nominated by the US.
18. The Romanian Constitution dates back to:
a) 1965;
b) 1991;
c) 1993.
19. The Romanian President is:
a) elected by the electorate;
b) hereditary;
c) elected by the parliament.
20. Do ordinary citizens have the legal right to strike?

- a) yes;
- b) no.

21. Do you know which party holds the greatest number of seats in the Romanian Parliament?

- a) after 1996.....
- b) after 2000.....

ⁱ Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society* (Glencoe: Glencoe, 1958).

ⁱⁱ Herbert McClosky, "Consensus and Ideology in American Politics," in *American Political Science Review* LVIII (June 1964).

ⁱⁱⁱ Harry Eckstein, *Division and Cohesion within a Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965).

^{iv} Marlene Mackie, "Socialization", in R. Hagedorn (ed.), *Sociology* (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1980), p. 145.

^v Mackie, p. 152.

^{vi} Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America and Post-Communist Europe* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

^{vii} Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, *Politica dupa comunism* (Bucuresti: Humanitas, 2002).

^{viii} Dumitru Sandu, *Sociologia tranzitiei* (Bucuresti: Staff, 1996).

^{ix} Ralph Dahrendorf, *Reflectii asupra revolutiilor in Europa* (Bucuresti: Humanitas, 1994), p. 14.

^x Net income was recoded into an ordinal variable with 4 categories. Party members all fall within the last category while there is no apparent association between the other forms of political involvement and income.

^{xi} Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (NY: Continuum Publishing, Co., 1970), p. 67.

^{xii} Jean Piaget, *Equilibration of Cognitive Structures* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

^{xiii} I. Cucos, *Pedagogie* (Iasi: Polirom, 1996), p. 86.

^{xiv} I. Cucos, p. 87.

^{xv} G. Cerghit, *Metodica predarii* (Bucuresti: Ed. Stiintifica, 1980), pp. 12-17.

^{xvi} W. B. W. Martin and A. J. Mac Donell, *Canadian Education: A Sociological Analysis* (Scarborough: Prentice Hall, 1978), p. 149.

^{xvii} I have to mention again that this lecture plan has been written according to the requirements of the National Council for Evaluation within the Romanian Ministry of Education.

^{xviii} Empowerment as I see it is about teachers' transferring to those whom they decide are appropriate recipients greater capacity to make decisions on the awarding of grades but also on the issues and examples to be discussed in class. This is an important mechanism to be used in encouraging pupils to participate in class and later on the political arena.

^{xix} Harry C. Boyte, "Turning on Youth to Politics," in *The Nation* (May 13, 1970), p. 626.

^{xx} David A. Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (Englewood Cliffs: NJ Prentice Hall, 1998), p. 119.

