
CONTEMPORARY TEACHING METHODOLOGIES: SCIENCE AND ART

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Abstract: The Albanian education system has been a discussion topic for many years now where contrasting concepts of teaching methodologies come face to face.

In order to be a successful teacher in Albania before the 90s, all one needed to do was have thorough knowledge of the applicable subject matter, have good communication skills and the adequate level of authority towards students. The tools required to teach in those times were simple: a blackboard and chalk - neither of which were scarce.

With the change in government to a democracy in the 90s, a new era begins for Albanian education.

Today, after approximately 30 years, times have evolved tremendously. In order to be a successful teacher, it's no longer sufficient to know your subject matter, to have good communication skills and personality. In addition to these traits, today's teacher must be well versed in technology and understand how to browse the internet in order to retrieve updated information.

Traditional teaching methods are transitioning into what are considered to be contemporary ones accompanied by their identifying elements (this is a result of education reforms and pressure from new realities such as the need to prepare students for the job market, new developments in information technology and particularly cultural development and student motivation).

What does the term “contemporary teaching” mean?

The denomination “contemporary teaching” implies a teaching methodology different from the traditional. This is implied in many aspects such as: teaching strategies, methods, techniques, in the change in roles of both the teacher and the student, in the school environment, in the respect of children's rights, in a different way of thinking and understanding, in the establishment of objectives, evaluations, etc. Additionally, contemporary teaching methods mean that we should understand this teaching style which facilitates the learning process using appropriate means, encourages active learning, encourages critical & creative thinking and learning with the student as the focal point. Contemporary teaching is a process, a constantly changing activity. In contemporary teaching, the sources of information are numerous and varied. These include the instructor, texts, the internet and peers via interaction etc.

In summary, contemporary teaching can be defined as a complex process. Following this logic, we support the idea that this teaching methodology is artistic as much as it is scientific. From the scientific perspective, teaching requires knowledge and expression both of which can be taught. From the artistic perspective, teaching requires inspiration, intuition, talent and creativity. Few of these traits can be taught. Thus, good contemporary teaching employs both academic and artistic elements. Contemporary teaching as an interweaving of art and science where the instructor is constantly learning in order to teach students (by offering knowledge according to the techniques, methods and most updated technology), creates adequate conditions for active learning and the development of critical thinking, encourages students to participate in educational activities where students can develop their skills, dexterity and way of expressing themselves thus making students more efficient and open towards their social environment.

Keywords: education, contemporary teaching, teaching methodology, methods, students.

For years now, education in Albania has become a field of discussion where different concepts regarding *teaching methodologies* come face to face.

If we were to compare Albanian teachers from before the 90s to today's teachers, we can identify many differences in their professional duties and responsibilities.

The successful teacher in Albania before the 90s had to master their respective subject matter, have good communication skills and have the appropriate kind of authority in front of their pupils. The teacher's tools of that time were simple: a blackboard and white chalk - neither of which were scarce.

The change in political regime to a democracy in the early 90s brings about a new, liberalized era for the Albanian education system.

Times have evolved significantly and teaching today is very different from that of a few decades ago. There are many reasons for these changes, but the main one is the teacher's position in educational activities in the classroom. Previously, the teacher was the main source of information, but today, the teacher is a leader and organizer of the lesson and the students' individual research. In order to be a successful teacher, it is no longer

sufficient to know your subject matter, have good communication skills and be an authority in the classroom. Today's teacher, in addition to the traits above, must have great technological skills and know how to use the internet to retrieve information while continuously updating information.

Teaching in Albania is transitioning from the traditional method to that is called contemporary teaching along with all of its accompanying elements.

Traditional teaching practices are fading due to two factors: on one hand as a result of educational reform, but on the other hand due to influences of the new realities such as: the need to shape students to fit new job markets and new developments in information technology. As a result of these factors, a new conception of teaching methodologies has taken a new route, in some ways abandoning the traditional concepts.

Differently from some years ago, new information is easily accessible today through information technology, the internet and virtual libraries in addition to the traditional method: books. We are no longer in a time where knowledge was transmitted to students only verbally from the teacher, based only on the curriculum since other sources of information did not exist. In addition, much of the information transferred through the traditional method ran the risk of being outdated unlike the contemporary forms which provide constantly updated information. Alongside the teacher's work which is now tied to technological developments, students continuously utilize the internet in order to complete their projects and homework assignments. Students being educated through the contemporary methods, will later have the advantage of showing off their knowledge in the same manner in their future professional lives. For these reasons, contemporary teaching should be supported and encouraged. Teaching can no longer be summarized simply as the oral transmission of knowledge from the instructor. Surely, the teacher is the one transmitting theories, since the teacher is the one capable of presenting, synthesizing and arguing the subject matter, but these theories do not make up the entire teaching process. It is very important that the student be continuously engaged, learn to process the subject matter in the same way that the artist processes his/her artwork. Thus it is better for the student to be the center of learning and learning the center of teaching. The rerouting of teaching about learning also makes it necessary for the teacher to understand each student's learning method as it pertains to the way new information is memorized and the transfer and integration of knowledge be that theoretical or practical.

Additionally, this redirection makes one believe that the teacher shouldn't just be concerned with the transmission of knowledge to the student. The teacher should also know how to transmit knowledge in a natural, original and attractive way, thus exhibiting, in a sense, art throughout the process of the pedagogical teacher-student relationship. This is particularly the case in regards to the didactic aspect and in the establishment of the efficient and attractive relationship between the student and the subject matter.

Good teaching is a prerequisite for successful learning by students. Without this satisfactory level of teaching (through the criteria listed above), one cannot say that a teacher appropriately organizes and realizes the learning objectives of a lesson. A teacher's personality traits and character are significant elements that in some way define the students' achievements and learning competencies. The teacher's personality and professional and intellectual character informs what the teacher considers essential and primary information and what s/he considers secondary. This does not mean that the teacher should avoid teaching secondary facts, instead the teacher should know the right approach towards providing information according to its importance. In this aspect, the development and refinement of the craft of teaching is a continuous process which changes constantly along with the realities of professional and personal life. By possessing these traits, the teacher does not impose a stiff, formal and artificial teaching methodology, but instead a teaching strategy of natural, creative methods which allow room for interactive pursuits.

It is essential to underline the fact that teaching is not an easy process and it is also an important social activity which bears a lot of responsibility. Contemporary teaching as a general process is very complex. If we analyze teaching as an interactive process, we would identify two defining aspects: the artistic and the scientific. Thus, alongside the professional, scientific knowledge that the teacher must surely know very well, the teacher must also possess other values: creativity, intuition, talent and flexibility which make the teacher the central point of authority in the classroom and in the school. There are those who think that teaching is an art form, just as there are others that think it is purely science. However, in addition to these thoughts, we support the idea that teaching is both science and art. As an art form, teaching requires inspiration, intuition, talent and creativity. Most of these traits can not be taught. If it is considered to be a science, teaching requires knowledge and wont which truly can be taught. As we mentioned above, successful teaching requires both these aspects, it encompasses elements from the work of the academic as well as those of the artist. This means that teaching is a science as much as it is an art form.

We have to accept that quite often, failure in the teacher's profession comes from the misunderstanding of "the art of teaching" which is connected to some qualities of the teacher's work with students such as:

1. Communication: which has to do with providing messages not just orally, but also through gestures. This includes body language (gestures, eye contact), use of space (standing in front of students) and voice intonation (change of intonation according to context).
2. Perception: which expresses the teacher's ability to discover the student's interior world, the emotional makeup of the group through which the teacher can achieve the most appropriate teaching method. Thus, perception contains the discovery and knowledge of the emotional state of students which the teacher can use as the foundation for his/her teaching method.
3. Interaction: which shows the importance of the teacher-student bond. Collaborative work with the students is more effective than a conversation with them. In order to encourage this interaction, the teacher should use techniques such as:
 - a. Humor in order to increase solidarity with students and to allow the students to feel free.
 - b. Allow the students to choose their desired activities.
 - c. Create opportunities to get to know the students.

By keeping in mind the knowledge provided, its nature and the methods being used in a particular discipline, we can say that teaching should be considered a science where we highlight two important criteria:

1. Identifying the problem, which includes what the teacher will ask of the students.
2. The clear definition of the links which will lead to achieving the assignment's goal. For the teacher this doesn't just mean teaching the topic, but also finding the method in which this topic will be learned.

This manner of working, shows that teaching can be considered a science where teachers identify objectives, define strategies, gather and evaluate the given information and communicate the results.

Contemporary teaching is defined as a different kind of teaching (one of higher quality, more efficient and effective) than traditional teaching. This is better understood in aspects such as: strategy, methods, techniques, forms, the change in roles of the teacher and the student, school environment, respect of children's rights, understanding and thinking in a different way, in the definition of objectives, evaluation, etc. This is why when talking about contemporary teaching, we should understand it to be a type of teaching which facilitates student learning by using appropriate forms, techniques and strategies.

Contemporary teaching means a teaching methodology that includes active learning, creative and critical thinking and a learning process focused on the student who is no longer (unlike in traditional teaching methods) in the role of the listener and passive learner of the curriculum. Today, the student is engaged in the learning process and in varied activities that assist in absorbing new information through varied sources of information (the teacher, a multitude of texts, the internet, peer-to-peer interaction, etc). A student's personal experience, interests, needs and abilities are essential parts of the teaching and learning processes. This way, contemporary teaching goes beyond reproductive (traditional) learning and creates opportunities for active learning and the development of critical thinking. This means that today's student is provided with the skills to recreate ideas, thoughts and concepts through the process of knowledge action and interaction by using critical thinking and its functions such as analysis, synthesis, judgments calls, comparison, evaluation and drawing conclusions.

As a result of a contemporary process of teaching, with interactive methods and techniques that are both scientific and artistic from the teacher, we believe that it fulfills important objectives like absorption of knowledge, engagement of the student, encouraged interaction, development of critical and creative thinking, the ability to facilitate the use of knowledge in everyday life, etc. in an efficient and high quality way. These are equally important in the creation of a well-rounded person in society. Surely, in order to achieve these results, it is important that there first be an appropriate and welcoming work (learning) environment provided by the teacher where every student feels free to express themselves freely and confidently.

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