



## **A DIFFERENTIATED APPROACH TO TEACH ECONOMICS (AND SOCIAL SCIENCES): DELIBERATE AND EMERGENT DIDACTIC STRATEGIES**

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### *Abstract*

*There is a perception among adolescents in high school that some disciplines are less important than the others. Within the list one may find some of the economic related disciplines such as negotiation and contracting, marketing, entrepreneurship, postal businesses administration, etc. The perception could be different from school to school, depending school's specialization, from adolescent to adolescent, depending their interest, but in general there may be a general pattern of 'low-interest disciplines'. In high school, the focus is on math, literature, biology, physics, history, geography the so-called fundamental, or baccalaureate disciplines. In this line of thinking, the question I try to find some answers in this paper is what can the teachers do in the case they need to teach 'low-interest disciplines' to 'low-interest classes' in order to also cultivate a positive educational experience? First, based on direct observations and data collected from a case site I hypothesize that the operational objectives and the didactic strategies should be different for the low-interest classes than those used for the higher-interest classes. Second, I introduce from the business strategy the concepts of deliberate and emergent strategies (Mintzberg, 1978; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985) and I hypothesize that the didactic strategy can and should change since the educational context is not static and linear in nature. To be contrasted this assumption with the prevailing approach existent in the pedagogy literature, where the focus is on alignment and universal didactic strategies applied from end to end. In order to support the theoretical framework, I describe then through a case study the didactic strategies implemented in three classes involved in studying economics related modules.*

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Keywords: economics pedagogy; social sciences pedagogy; educational planning; operational objectives; didactic strategies

## **Introduction**

Education, in a broader sense, means to transmit the values, norms, and the knowledge historically embedded in one society from one generation to the other, to form the abilities and competences in order to grow socially responsible citizens, to prepare the new generation for the social interactions required to live within the contemporary society, to prepare the young generation for work and family life (Ionescu et al., 1995). The kids and adolescents assimilate progressively the values, beliefs and social norms embedded in the society from birth until they become younger adults, this process of assimilation continuing throughout life. This educational process is commonly known such as lifelong learning (European Commission, 2019) or adult education/learning and development (Santos & Drago-Severson, 2005). The education takes place formally (what we learn in school), non-formally (what we learn through internet and television in a systematic way), and informally (what we learn from our grandparents, parents, friends, television, internet, social media, etc.) (Ionescu & Bocos 2009/2017).

Until the present day, the educational process as described above, particularly regarding setting operational objectives for the lessons and formulating and implementing didactic strategies to pursue those operational objectives was perceived, in many cases, as a one-way street. It means undifferentiating the educational process depending the adolescents' predisposition and interest to study. Even though there are scientific probes stating that, for example, the socio-economic status of the adolescents influences the performance in learning (Mih, 2010/2018) the educational practice and theory continue to assume that setting operational objectives and drawing didactic strategies to pursue those goals is a universal educational planning process. For example, despite the fact that the evidence tells us that the adolescents pertaining to families with higher socio-economic status are more interested and motivated to learn (Lehene, 2020), the process of setting the operational objectives and drawing didactic strategies for one class formed mostly by adolescents coming from families with low socio-economic status is the same as for the adolescents pertaining to classes formed mainly from adolescents pertaining to high income and higher social status families.

In the same rationale, the education as being perceived by the educational practitioners and theory in the present day is view as a process assuming that all the pupils treat all the disciplines as being equally important (Albulescu & Albulescu, 1999; Cerghit, 2002; Ionescu et al., 1995). For instance, is well known that in high school the focus is on math, literature, physics, languages, chemistry etc. Consequently, the process of setting operational objectives and drawing didactic strategies is the same for all the disciplines, no matter the importance placed on the discipline by pupils. Both, the pedagogical literature and the practice assume this educational planning process. For example, within the pedagogical literature is mentioned that for instance, for math and economics, should be developed operational objectives for all the categories (cognitive, cognitive-formative, affective-attitudinal, psychomotor) and designed a balanced expositive/informative-participative/formative didactic strategy, importantly, no matter the predisposition and interest to study math or economics by pupils.

This is the gap in the pedagogical literature this paper tries to fill. The main idea developed in this paper is that it makes more sense in the case the adolescents in high school are not interested in the discipline is taught (therefore, they are not interested in the informative dimension of education) to accentuate and focus stronger on the formative dimension. More specifically, in the case the adolescents are not interested in the discipline is taught we should focus more on the operational objectives for the cognitive-formative and affective-attitudinal categories and abandon or less focus on the pure cognitive and psychomotor ones. Regarding the didactic strategies side, in this context, I argue that we should design mostly participative-formative didactic strategies, rather than expositive-informative ones. In short, to cultivate the formative dimension of education at the expense of the informative one.

In contrast with the existent theories in the pedagogical literature, the approach developed in this paper makes a call for considering also a context driven didactic strategy, or a bottom - up didactic strategy, or in the terminology of this paper an emergent didactic strategy. What it brings in discussion is the importance of considering the characteristics of the pupils in the class at the time of formulating and implementing didactic strategies, rather than considering only an imposed didactic strategy, a top-down didactic strategy. To develop this idea, I introduce from the business strategy field the concepts of deliberate strategy (a top-down strategy according the initial planning) and an emergent strategy (a bottom-up strategy elaborated taking into consideration the educational context and the

pupils' characteristics) (Mintzberg, 1978; Mintzberg & Waters, 198). I argue that for a modern education both types of didactic strategies should be considered.

To support the proposed theoretical framework, in the empirical part, I illustrate through a descriptive case study, developing an argumentation through a comparative logic between three classes (Eisenhardt, 1989, 1991), the changes made in the operational objectives (in the sense that the operational objectives were abandoned for the informative dimension of education) and regarding the emergent didactic strategies designed and implemented, in a problematic educational context. It is especially important to mention from the beginning that the paper it is addressed to theory building and refinement and not to theory testing (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Therefore, the paper aims for analytical generalization, to theory advancement and new propositions development and does not aim for statistical generalization from the sample to population (Yin, 1984/2014).

The remainder of the paper continues as follows. First, I am going to review the existent literature in the pedagogical field with respect to the topic of our study and I am going to develop the theoretical framework of a differentiated approach to teach economics and social sciences. Next, to support the theoretical framework, I am going to illustrate through a descriptive case study the changes made regarding the operational objectives and the didactic strategies implemented at three classes in a medium performer high school. The paper ends with outlining the main conclusions.

### **Theoretical foundation**

#### *The determinants of perception of 'low interest disciplines' in high-school*

The first question one may ask at the point start reading the present paper is the following: there are less important disciplines in the perception of high school students? And the answer is yes, there are. We can observe this fact in everyday teaching practice. I am sure each teacher knows that some disciplines are not regarded as being so important by the adolescents, parents or even peer teachers. Some of us even we faced situations in which the teachers from the so-called 'important disciplines' (e.g., math) to ask us to let the pupils to go to study supplementary hours in math, during our classes in economics. The students have baccalaureate, they need to study math not marketing!

On the other hand, we can observe that there is a general perception among the pupils involved in high school education that some disciplines are less

important than others through looking, for example, to their occasionally declarations in press. Next, I am going to mention some high school pupils' declarations in the local press to outline the fact that the high school pupils do perceive through this lens the reality. "We have received many more assignments [...] for the fundamental disciplines such as Romanian Literature, Math, English" shared Tudor a "Gheorghe Lazăr" Pedagogical High School pupil. "[...] From my perspective the teaching modalities were good for the baccalaureate disciplines" said in turn Miruna. Ariana and Irina two pupils of "Avram Iancu" Theoretical High School indicated that "the attention of the online teaching is on baccalaureate disciplines. For the other disciplines if the teacher asked for too many tasks there were complaints" (Tamas, 2020). As we can see, there is a perception of less important disciplines among adolescents. We cannot generalize this fact to all the pupils but it is clear that there is a perception of less important disciplines among some pupils. Additionally, as we are going to see in the empirical part, the students in our study told directly to the teacher "we don't care these disciplines, they are not important". And I am not referring here only to the twelfth-grade pupils which have baccalaureate exam. So, why there is a perception of low-interest disciplines in high-school and what determines that?

There are many reasons why the adolescents in high school may be low interested in some disciplines and more interested in others. For instance, for some pupils in their twelfth grade which are preparing their final exam, the disciplines which are not related to their baccalaureate are being perceived not as important as the baccalaureate disciplines. The pupils wishing to pursue in their life other careers, unrelated to the disciplines they are studying in the high school, are also low interested in those unrelated disciplines to their career. In this case, the curriculum is not aligned with their interests (Lehene, 2020).

According to Vygotsky (1971) socio-constructivism theory of cognitive development the learning process is a result of constant interactions between a person more competent than the kid/adolescent and the kid/adolescent. In this perspective, the adolescents may arrive at the school having assimilated already the preconception that some disciplines (such as math, literature, history, chemistry, biology etc.) are more important than others (such as postal businesses operations, marketing, negotiation and contracting, etc.). These preconceptions additionally can be strengthened by other teachers as we have seen above, or by colleagues of the adolescents.

Additionally, other factors such as the salary of the profession for which the adolescent studies might determines the low interest for the particular discipline. If the pupils have to study disciplines or pursue educational programs which do not provide attractive opportunities for the future, in terms of financial issues and quality of life, just from the start they will not be interested to study these disciplines. For instance, in the case the adolescents need to study postal businesses operations. In Romania, the salaries of the postal employees are quite modest (Gheorghe, 2020).

Now that we have seen that there exists a perception of low interest disciplines among pupils in high school and we now understand the determinants of low-interest disciplines, the questions is what can we do in order to cultivate also a positive learning experience, even in the case the students are totally uninterested in the discipline we teach. Since we as teachers in high school we have little time at our disposition to change the mental pattern/cognitive distortions of the students regarding their existent preconceptions (David, 2006) and since we can do little with the external factors such as the educational regulatory documents (Institutul de Științe ale Educației, 2020), what we can do instead is to focus on the didactic strategies through which we teach.

*Different operational objectives and different didactic strategies for the 'low-interest classes'*

Even though, there might exist a general perception of low-interest disciplines in high-school, the main idea which stood at the base of this paper was that in high performers high schools a greater degree of adolescents – the majority - will be motivated to study, even if the disciplines taught to them are not essential from their perspective. Therefore, the existent approach regarding the educational planning and implementation, existent within the pedagogy literature for decades, could be maintained. The teachers at the beginning of the scholar year should set undifferentiated operational objectives and draw didactic strategies balanced/equilibrated for both fundamental dimensions/purposes of education: informative and formative (Ionescu & Bocos, 2009/2017; Farenga & Ness, 2005). The implementation of the initial educational plan even for those 'low-interest disciplines' will not face many challenges in high-interest classes/high-performers high schools.

The problems might arise, and even more accentuated, in medium and low performers high schools. There is a higher predisposition to exist low-interest

classes in medium and low performers high schools than in high performers high schools. For those low-interest classes teaching them low-interest disciplines will be incredibly challenging, and the educational activities even might look like an educational disaster. In these situations, as is the case in this paper, there will be displayed lots of problems: listening to music during the class with or without headphones, speaking with colleagues repeatedly totally ignoring the professor, bullying the teacher, walking all around the class like in the park during the class, playing different games on smartphone, ignoring the professor, skipping classes and so on. Like in the kindergarten. All these problems arose in the classes studied in this paper by the researcher.

From all these problems and assumptions generated the main research question of this paper: *what can we do in order to also create a positive educational experience at the point we need to teach 'low-interest disciplines' to 'low-interest classes'?*

The psychologists, pedagogy scholars and professional teachers tried for decades to provide tools and solutions to high school education in order to try to optimize the educational process and to improve the interest in learning as a whole. Along the time, were developed many theoretical and practical didactic methods and procedures (such as lectures, didactic descriptions, didactic explanations, didactic dialogues and debates, storytelling methods, discovery-oriented learning, etc.) and forms of organization of the didactic activity in the classroom or the organization of the student's activity. All in the service of creating a positive educational climate and facilitate the accomplishment of the operational objectives (Ionescu & Bocos, 2009/2017). The integration and articulation of those elements into one single plan is named didactic strategy (Albulescu & Albulescu, 1999). According to the cited authors all the didactic strategies could be classified *grosso modo* in two categories: expositive/informative and active-participative/formative. For the purposes of this paper I am going to utilize this classification.

#### *Theoretical perspectives regarding the efficacy of the didactic activity*

There are various theoretical perspectives regarding the efficacy and efficiency of the didactic activity and the election of the proper didactic strategies for classroom implementation. Some scholars put at the center the alignment of the elements within the established didactic strategy (Biggs, 1996; Cohen, 1987). According this view, the alignment of the operational objectives, teaching methods and procedures, didactic means/resources, didactic activities, forms of

organization of the didactic activity and the evaluative strategies constitute a premise for the success of the didactic activity. In this perspective, the proper didactic strategy depends on the type of operational objective the teacher wants to achieve. It is the classical Bloom's taxonomy which drives/determines the adequate didactic strategy to be designed (Bloom, 1971). For instance, for pure cognitive objectives such as the assimilation of the knowledge and concepts the teacher needs to develop a certain type of didactic strategy. The established didactic strategy for this objective is quite different from the didactic strategy designed to attain affective-attitudinal or psychomotor operational objectives. This theoretical perspective is a pure pedagogical perspective.

From other theoretical perspective, the psychologists argue in turn that there are specific class management practices which the teachers have at their disposition to lead the class to accomplish its stated objectives (Mih, 2010/2018). The class management theory discusses the behavioral aspects of pupils in the classroom, to provide a better understanding and evidence-based practices in order to better manage the behavior of the kids/adolescents in classroom. This theoretical approach is based on the classical work of operant behavior theory developed by Skinner (1953, 1974) and Watson (1913) (David, 2000, 2006). According to the class management theory the success of the didactic activity depends on the teacher's ability to manage and change the behavior of the adolescents into a more adaptive, pro-learning behavior. There were developed a vast repertoire of techniques for behavioral control in classroom (verbal prompting, contingency contract, operant behavior changing through enforcements-punishments, gradual strengthening) (David, 2000, 2006; Mih, 2010/2018).

A more recent theoretical orientation, and probably the most scientific validated, focuses on the emotions not on the behavior, to provide an understanding of the behavior in class and to provide appropriate solutions to manage the emotional state of the pupils. The authors in this theoretical perspective argue that the emotional state of the adolescents during the class is one of the main determinants of the performance in learning. To better learn the scientific content (or simple being able to learn the scientific content), being proactive in school, likening the school, not skipping classes, the pupils need to develop adequate emotions management abilities (Goleman, 1995/2006). Moreover, in order to be able to learn, the pupils need to be helping to develop their attentional abilities (Goleman, 2013). In short, they need to be helping to stay in an optimal emotional state for performance. The research of Goleman (1995/2006, 2013), for instance,

explains how the emotions of the adolescents capture their attention and they become less attentive, troublemakers, start disturbing their peers and making lot of problems. In the moment the adolescent is in the grip of his/her emotions his/her performance and behavior in learning is hampered and his/her attention is captured on what is disturbing him/her, no matter what the teacher is saying. This phenomenon is called 'emotion captured attention' (Goleman, 2013). There is an entire curriculum developed around this theoretical perspective, mainly developed in United States and promoted around the world, called Social and Emotional Learning (Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, 2020).

Given these theories and theoretical orientations, what is seems that until now was not developed is the specific didactic strategies the teachers have at their disposition in the cases they need to teach to the students which are not interested in the discipline is taught to them. It means, an educational planning perspective in the case of the problems in class. I am referring here to adopting an entirely different didactic strategy, the teachers may implement, as an articulation of its elements (teaching methods and procedures, forms of organization of the didactic activity, didactic means/resources, didactic activities) for the medium and low interest classes. In short, changing the didactic strategy through which we teach.

This new approach might be justified for two main reasons: the scarcity of resources and the shorter-term perspective. To change the irrational cognitions of the adolescents (David, 2006) and/or help them to develop their emotional life (Goleman, 1995/2006) these interventions will take a really long time. More than that, these developments will produce benefits latter long after the pupils will finish the high school. Moreover, the application of the class management practices (Mih, 2010/2018) in order to accomplish the operational objectives, yes will work, but we will spend more time in trying to control the behavior of the pupils rather than teaching per se (Lehene, 2020). Therefore, the idea is to focus on the operational objectives and the didactic strategies to improve the immediate attractiveness of the educational climate. In other words, a short-term approach. Nevertheless, this approach will work complementarily with the daily psychological interventions mentioned above which are termed in this paper long-term interventions, or necessarily abilities for life.

#### *Deliberate and emergent didactic strategies*

The classical work in business strategy developed by Mintzberg (1978) stays at the core of my argumentation in this paper (*see* Figure 1) As in the business

strategy where the organizations can develop and implement a deliberate or emergent strategy the same happen in the classroom context. The teachers may draw detailed plans and operational objectives, but this does not mean necessarily that the pupils will conform or will act according the teacher's plans. As we are going to see in our case the adolescents have the power to change the entire strategy. The same as in the business world where the context may force the companies to change their strategy, depending customers and markets' needs, the same happen in the educational context. The teachers may find themselves in the posture to change the entire didactic strategy depending students' predisposition to study. This bottom-up strategy, or context driven strategy, is called emergent strategy (Mintzberg, 1978; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). On the other hand, in the case the teachers are able to implement the planned strategy and accomplish the operational objectives according the initial plan the strategy implemented is called deliberate didactic strategy. For the readers who believe in the pursuing of the didactic activities according the planned strategy no matter the educational context (a pure deliberate didactic strategy) I strongly recommend reading the classical works of Mintzberg (1978) and Mintzberg and Waters (1985).

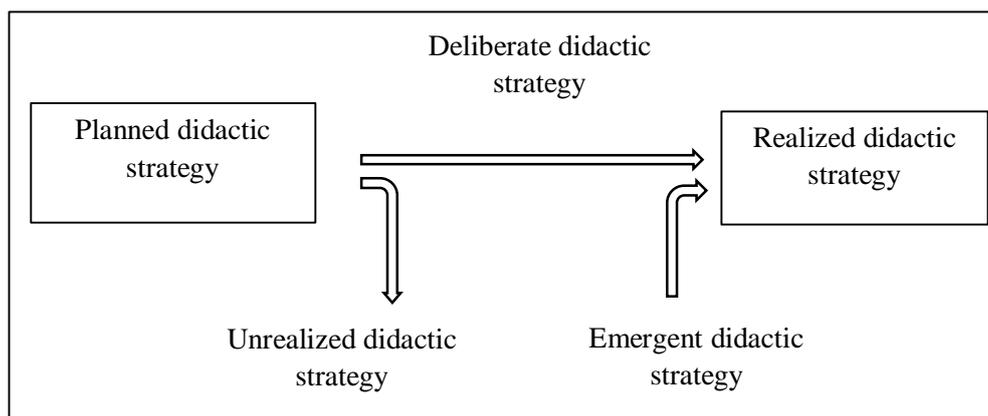


Figure 1. Deliberate and emergent didactic strategies (adapted from Mintzberg & Waters, 1985)

The operational objectives represent specific educational finalities, measured in terms of change in the direct observed behavior of the student, due to the class, seminar or course (Ionescu & Bocos, 2009/2017). The operational objectives can be classified in the following categories: cognitive (*e.g.*,

assimilation of the knowledge, theories, concepts pertaining to the specific discipline), cognitive-formative (*e.g.*, development of intellectual abilities such as synthesis, analysis, deduction, comparison, memory, attention, critical thinking), affective-attitudinal (*e.g.*, attitudes, personality traits, character) and psychomotor (*e.g.*, manual discipline-oriented operations, application procedures) (Radu, 1981). For each category of operational objectives the teachers need to develop at the beginning of the year – or develop emergent ones along the year (Mintzberg, 1978) – specific methods, procedures, didactic means, forms of organization of the didactic activity, develop didactic activities and put in place evaluation tools, everything articulated in a single didactic strategy.

### **Research problem and objectives**

Until the present day, within the pedagogical literature and practice it is assumed that the educational planning process is as a universal process which works in all the situations 1) no matter the predisposition and interest to study by pupils, 2) no matter the importance of the discipline for pupils. This approach to teach economics and social sciences is a top-down approach, involving establishing undifferentiated operational objectives and didactic strategies, is linear - not changing along the year.

To solve this problem, the general objective of this paper is to provide a new framework, to develop a new approach to teach economics (and social sciences) in high school. The new approach is a bottom-up approach, involving establishing different operational objectives and didactic strategies taking into account pupils' predisposition and interest to study and the importance of the discipline. Is a dynamic approach, is not linear, arguing that the didactic strategy can change along the scholar year. From this general objective I derived the following specific objectives:

- O1.* Describe the importance of considering pupils' predisposition to study and interest for the discipline for the educational planning.
- O2.* Describe why do we need different operational objectives and didactic strategies for medium/low predisposition and interest educational contexts.
- O3.* Specify on which educational dimension to focus in medium/low predisposition and interest educational contexts.
- O4.* Specify which operational objectives to keep and which to abandon in medium/low predisposition and interest educational contexts.

- O5. Describe the importance of a bottom-up, context driven, emergent didactic strategy.
- O6. Provide a descriptive case study to demonstrate how the new approach works in reality.

### **Research methodology**

#### *A descriptive case study*

In this paper I used a single-case design with three embedded units of analysis (Yin, 1984/2014). Each unit of analysis represents a class/a group of students in the high school. The high school is the case I chose to discuss for the purpose of this paper. The classes I chose are a ninth, eleventh, and twelfth grade and are all classes preparing the students for the same specialization. Although the specialization is included within the broader economic domain it is very narrow focused on a particular segment within the economy: the specialization pursues to form technicians in the postal services industry. I chose these three classes for the purposes of this study since their predisposition toward studying and learning is opposite, ranging from a medium-higher predisposition to study to a lower predisposition to study. I refer to the pupils' predisposition to study such as a variable capturing the attitude of the pupils to participate, be proactive during the class, ask questions, be interested in studying the economic-related disciplines taught in the high-school.

There are some advantages regarding the utilization of the single case studies. For instance, the unusual, the extreme, the critical, or the revelatory case all are typically cases which are more likely to be studied such as single cases. There are important lessons to be learned from such cases, since they have high potential to be revelatory and to produce important findings (Yin, 1984/2014). The single case studies also have the advantage that they permit the holistic analysis of the case and draw conclusions from the case itself and not only from a particular segment/part within the case (Ragin, 1997; Stake, 1995). According to some scholars, the single case studies in comparison with multiple case studies and/or quantitative studies are more likely to produce richer theoretical insights, since they look at the social phenomena through an in-depth approach and analysis of the holistic case, providing a richer description of the context and the case itself and, very important, considering the personal characteristics of the subjects involved in the study (Dyer & Wilkins, 1991; Ragin, 1997).

Regarding the research design, this study is a descriptive case study since is used by the researcher in order to illustrate, support and provide a better understanding of the developed theoretical framework (Bhattacharjee, 2012). The case study also uses inductive research techniques in the sense of the grounded theory approach developed by Glasser and Straus (1967). For instance, refining the existent theory and building a new theoretical framework from empirical data. Despite the fact that I used a single case study I have analyzed the data through a comparative logic between the units of analysis within the case, as suggested by Eisenhardt (1989, 1991). I also used a theoretical sampling procedure in order to select the case and the units of analysis. Theoretical sampling (not random or stratified) refers to the selection of the case and units of analysis which are more likely/more suitable to illustrate/support the theory proposed by the researcher (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). In this line of thinking, I chose the units of analysis which are more likely to predict contrasting results, but for anticipable reasons (Yin, 1984/2014).

There are typically three types of case studies used in social sciences: exploratory case studies, descriptive case studies and explanatory case studies (Piekkari & Welch, 2018). Traditionally, the case studies had been viewed such as inductive research designs, used normally to build new theories and generate generalizable hypotheses, used complementary with deductive research designs such as hypotheses testing. The researchers first start with observations and analysis of the empirical data, build one theory and then through statistical analyses test the theory deductively (Carlile & Christensen, 2004; Eisenhardt, 1989). More recently, however, new developments within the research methodology literature demonstrate that the case studies could be also used for other purposes, not only for inductive/exploratory purposes. Therefore, the utilization of the case studies for research is far more broaden than it was regarded until now (Welch et al., 2011). For instance, Gilbert (2005) used eight cases in order to test and refine the theory of organizational inertia. Szulanski and Jensen used one case - the proverbial N=1 - in order to test the theory of knowledge transfer in the multinational contexts (2006, 2011). Regarding the terminology presented above, this paper could be categorized such as a theory refinement-oriented paper.

#### *Data sources*

*Observations.* The author carefully observed the behavior and registered the subjective experience of 81 high school pupils during six

intensive months<sup>1</sup>. The adolescents were involved in educational activities related to the high school economic education in the site mentioned above. As a direct teacher (with a daily meeting with the older adolescents - 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades and a two-day meeting a week with the younger adolescents - 9<sup>th</sup> grade) the researcher was able to design some alternatives didactic activities to build and favor a positive educational experience, even in the face of a problematic, low-interest educational context.

Table 1. Description of the methods implemented

The case: AM technological high school	Hours of observation (400 hours)	Number of adolescents observed (81)
IX grade	60	31
XI grade	160	27
XII grade	180	23
<i>Methods</i>		
• Informal structured interviews		43
• Secondary data analysis (classbook; secondary analysis of the formal tests, power point presentations elaboration, comparative analysis; regulatory documents)		81 (minus absents)
• Daily observations of adolescents' behavior		81 (minus absents)
• Informal discussions regarding adolescents' future		81 (minus absents)

*Interviews.* All the older adolescents present to the class (eleventh and twelfth grades) were asked to complete an informal document regarding some aspects of interest, for the purpose of understanding their motivation behind the lack of engagement in the teaching-learning activities. The adolescents were asked to answer to questions regarding the following dimensions: (1) social and economic status, (2) their future career, (3) what they like to do in life - pleasant life, good life, meaningful life (David, 2000). According the existent evidence in the educational psychology literature (Mih, 2010/2018) these three dimensions were identified as the drivers for the lack of engagement in the educational activities conducted at school (Table 2).

Table 2. Informal structured interviews

Questions adolescents needed to answer
Where are you from (rural or urban area)?
What was your level of scholar performance last year (annual mean)?
What do you want to do after the high school?
What do you want to do on long term (your career)?
What are your hobbies? What do you like to do in your life?

<sup>1</sup> The six months period of observation was elected since from march 2020, in Romania, the educational activities were stopped and modified in the context of COVID-19. After this date, the educational activities could not be considered as being normal.

*Secondary sources and other data.* Regulatory documents were examined such as The Standard for the Professional Development (SPD), The Year Planning (YP), The National Curriculum for the Technological Education (NCTE) and other class related archives such as the formal classbook, the tests implemented to conduct the formative evaluations along the year, the power point presentations, and the comparative analysis between two companies. The formal classbook was investigated to check the grades obtained by the adolescents in relation with the disciplines taught. The formal tests, the power point presentations and the comparative analysis were analyzed for consistency in writing and the contribution to the development of adolescents' intellectual work abilities (capacity of argumentation, capacity of analyzing and synthesizing data, critical thinking, capacity of elaboration of a text/presentation, capacity of inductive and deductive thinking development).

*Context and case short description*

It is important to mention from the beginning the fact that the case is a high school, a medium-low performer educational institution in the Romanian educational landscape. There are important differences among the adolescents within the educational population, in terms of their socio-economic status, gender differences, cognitive processes used to analyze the information, and even differences depending their intelligent performance and creativity (Mih, 2010/2018). In this rationale, the segment of pupils admitted to study within the high school/case (from the entire population of the same age pupils studying in Romania) is not the more oriented toward enjoying school, liking to study, valuing the school and education (for various reasons as discussed by specialists). Therefore, the lot of research in this study is composed from 81 medium propensity to study adolescents, divided in three classes, studying economic related modules.

For confidentiality reasons I chose for our case the name AM, such as a placeholder name. AM is a state funded high school located in the city of Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Romania, is a medium developed country with a GDP of 250.08 billion US dollars in 2019, representing 0.21 percent of the world economy and a GDP per capital 12.131 US dollars being equivalent of 96% of the world's average (Trading Economics, 2020). Cluj-Napoca is the fourth city in Romania by number of inhabitants, after the capital Bucharest, Iasi and Timisoara with a population of 323.108 inhabitants (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2020). The city is also an economic hub and a cultural center with a multicultural population. It is

important to mention the fact that the city hostess the largest number of students in Romania. Every year thousands of foreign and Romanian students come to Cluj for studies, the city being characterized by a cosmopolite and university-oriented culture (Wikipedia, 2020).

The economics and business education in Romania start formally at the high school level (Institutul de Științe ale Educației, 2020). There are now three broad economic related specializations, at the high school level, the pupils can choose in order to enter into the field for the first time and get contact with the economic and business objective laws, principles and concepts. They are called: public alimentation and tourism, economic-administrative-post services, commerce and services (Ministerul Educației și Cercetării din România, 2020). The main purpose of the high school economic education is to introduce the pupils for the first time to the economic and business disciplines such as firm's administration, marketing, accountancy, service quality, marketing policies, negotiation and contracting, financial analysis, etc. Beyond these specialized economic disciplines, in Romania, the pupils in high school also study in their 10th grade Education for Entrepreneurship and Economy, respectively Applied Economy in their 11th and 12th grades.

The site is a medium-low performer technological high school in Romania. It was founded in the 1980's due to the anticipation of the local engineers of the explosion of the new emerging technologies such as personal computers, information technology services and the development of modern electronics devices. With a 50-year history, AM occupies now a traditional, leading position in Romania in its industry education (Admitere liceu, 2020). The high school has passed from 80's to our days through various reforms, 'flirting' between two major scientific fields: engineering and economics. If in the burgeoning period the focus of the high school was on engineering disciplines, in our days the economic specialization represents an important educational component in order to try to assure the survival of the high school.

According to Institutul de Științe ale Educației (2020) AM offers high-school educational programs in both fields: engineering and economics. Judging after the performances obtained in the last years, AM is a medium-low performing high school depending criteria such as pupils' baccalaureate exams, admission criteria and the participation in Olympics. According to the specialized platform Admitere liceu.ro, AM is situated in top 350 high schools in Romania, with an

average admission exam note 7.50, 6,52 baccalaureate's mean, and 78 % baccalaureate's successful rate (Admitere liceu, 2020).

### **Observations and data analysis**

Consistent with the existent pedagogical literature, I developed at the beginning of the scholar year formal plans and balanced expositive/informative-participative/formative didactic strategies (Table 3). The first intention was to transmit the economic principles, theories and concepts to the adolescents which was a pure cognitive objective. Second, I wanted to promote the development of their cognitive-formative abilities such as the abilities to elaborate and realize an analysis or synthesis, to develop their abilities to think inductively and deductively or simple to being able to realize effective strengths-weaknesses analyses. This intention was implemented through realizing various analyses the adolescents needed to conduct along the year. Third, I wanted to promote the development of the adolescents' affective life through cultivating their attitudes toward economic disciplines, and school in general. For instance, through a simulation of a negotiation the adolescents learnt the adequate attitude they should manifest when negotiating in the real life. The adolescents were practicing the management of their emotions in public speaking situations also. Fourth, my intention at the beginning of the scholar year was to work with the pupils to develop their psychomotor economic related abilities. For instance, I wanted the adolescents to develop their abilities to realize an effective economic analysis.

However, as I mentioned in the theoretical part and as one can see after reading this case, a formal plan sketched at the beginning of the scholar year does not mean automatically that the operational objectives will be accomplished. There may be various challenges the teachers may encounter over the year. In our case, I faced many challenges during the implementation phase which in some situations even forced me to propose/design a new didactic strategy (which in the terminology of this paper is called an emergent strategy). In the exhibit below, I have synthesized the evolution of the didactic activities in the classes we will discuss, during six months of intensive observations.

Next, in order to facilitate the understanding of the theoretical framework I am going to present the specific activities I have carried out in order to implement the designed didactic strategies mentioned above, grouped by class.

Table 3. Synthesis of the didactic activities conducted during the period of observation

Variable/Class	9 <sup>th</sup> grade	11 <sup>th</sup> grade	12 <sup>th</sup> grade
Level of interest in studying economic modules	High-medium interest	Medium-low interest	Low interest (not interested at all)
Interventions required to implement/modify/change the strategy	Few interventions	Medium level	Many interventions
The adolescents were not interested because...	-They are noticeably young -Low social and emotional development - There is a bias at the social level regarding the importance of the economic disciplines	-There is a bias at the social level regarding the importance of the economic disciplines -Low social and emotional development -The prior economic teachers have not cultivated the importance of the economic disciplines	-They had baccalaureate from other disciplines -There is a bias at the social level regarding the importance of the economic disciplines -Low social and emotional development -The prior economic teachers have not cultivated the importance of the economic disciplines
Didactic strategy planned at the beginning of the year	Expositive-participative ***	Expositive-participative ***	Expositive-participative ***
Didactic strategy implemented	Expositive-participative***	Expositive-participative **	Participative***
Didactic activities carried out to implement the strategy and accomplish the operational objectives	-Lectures*** -Firm resources analysis -Power point presentation	-Lectures** -Comparative analysis -Elaboration of a project in team -Power point presentations*	-Lectures* -Comparative analysis -Power point presentations*** - Elaboration of a project in team -Elaboration of a report**
Benefits/Output	-Assimilation of economic theories, principles and concepts*** -Development of cognitive-formative abilities* -Public speaking abilities* -Management of their emotions*	-Assimilation of economic theories, principles and concepts* -Development of cognitive-formative abilities** -Public speaking abilities* -Management of their emotions**	-Development of cognitive-formative abilities*** -Public speaking abilities*** -Development of metacognitive abilities/self-regulated learning (planning and organization of learning) *** -Management of their emotions**

Note: Intensity: \*= low intensity, \*\* = medium intensity, \*\*\* = high intensity

### 9<sup>th</sup> grade: didactic strategy not modified (deliberate)

The first class I'd like to discuss is a ninth grade class. The adolescents during the scholar year needed to learn through a combination of didactic activities, articulated within a balanced expositive-participative didactic strategy: (1) weekly lectures from which they needed to take notes in their notebooks; (2) they needed to elaborate and then present through a power point presentation an analysis regarding one company they know its products and operations; (3) they needed to elaborate an economic analysis regarding the resources and processes existent

within the company discussed during the first semester. The discipline taught to this class was Firm Economy.

As one can see in the Table 3 there were no important changes made during the year in the planned strategy. Even though there were serious problems regarding the implementation of the didactic activities, the didactic strategy could be implemented. During the weekly lectures, the main challenges in order to conduct the daily educational activities were related to the implementation of class management practices in order to try to control the noisy, nonattentive and emotional imbalanced adolescents. Even if the lectures were not operated exactly as designed according the formal planning the operational objectives were met, and the informative purposes accomplished. The main problems at this class, however, resulted at the point the adolescents needed to present through a power point presentation the analysis of a firm from the private sector. Regarding the oral presentation, most of them did surprisingly well, even though they are noticeably young. The main challenge was to maintain a favorable atmosphere in order the presentations to take place. The adolescents who did not need to present interpreted the presentation of their colleagues as a relaxation time (*e.g.*, talk to each other, listening to music, watching online videos, etc.) Only was missing from the picture the popcorn and the relaxation would have been completed. Regarding the economic analysis the adolescents needed to send the report by email, and they were graded accordingly the quality of their work.

As a conclusion, the operational objectives and didactic strategies planned at the beginning of the scholar year were not modified/changed for this class (Table 3). For both dimensions of education (informative and formative) the purposes and the operational goals were attained. In the terminology of this paper the realized didactic strategy at this class was mostly a deliberate one.

*11<sup>th</sup> grade: didactic strategy modified (deliberate and emergent - mostly deliberate)*

The second class in our analysis is an eleventh-grade class. The teacher had a daily meeting with the pupils in this class. The academic disciplines taught to this class were Entrepreneurship, Business Administration, Postal Businesses Operations Exploitation. As one can see in the Table 3, for each discipline, there were put in place balanced expositive/informative-participative/formative didactic strategies. At this class, the specific didactic activities pursued were: (1) daily lectures from which the adolescents needed to take notes in their notebooks; (2)

elaboration of a comparative analysis between a private company in the postal industry and the national postal operator, regarding some specific dimensions; (3) elaboration and presentation through a power point presentation of a postal service, offered by the national postal operator; (4) elaboration of a project in order to solve a school's problem - project worked in teams; (5) elaboration of a power point presentation regarding a successful entrepreneur.

For this class, the same problems were observed as for the class discussed previously. For instance, the adolescents were excessively noisily, unattentively and many times emotional imbalanced during the lectures. Also, the presentations made by their colleagues were interpreted as a relaxation time. However, in contrast with the anterior class discussed, the lectures for some disciplines could not been conducted. For instance, for the Postal Businesses Operations Exploitation. The noise in the class was so high - not only one day, this was the normative - that it seemed impossible to hold a lecture. At this point, the teacher was forced to change the planned didactic strategy and even made changes in the planned operational objectives (focusing stronger on the operational objectives in the formative dimension and neglecting the operational objectives within the informative dimension).

According the initial planning, there were weekly lectures put in place to be hold by the teacher. The change consisted in assigning the pupils the chance to hold they themselves the lectures. Basically, the scientific content was not presented by the teacher, but by the pupils. The adolescents were assigned a certain chapter from the textbook which they needed to study (additionally they were instructed to consult also other resources if they wanted) and prepare a power point presentation to give to their colleagues as if they were the experts in the field. In this scenario, the pupils were the lecturers lecturing, not the teacher. The teacher only was acting from aside, like a coach, and intervene to open the discussions, to provide clarifications and explanations and to correct the errors arising during the presentation.

Through giving the adolescents the opportunity to present themselves the scientific content, for this discipline, the teacher thought that this method could be a stimulus for the pupils to become more interested in the discipline taught and attentive to the class discussions. And it worked. But, as it was expected, the success came at the expense of the cultivation of the informative dimension of education. As Lehene (2019) remarked, a strategy of this type has some drawbacks. For example, in our case, the students selected from the textbook only

the parts they wanted, understood, or liked. Also, the quality of the oral presentation/lecture for some pupils who have not well-developed public speaking abilities or for which they became emotional was low. The goal of the lectures is all the pupils to learn the scientific content at the high quality as possible (Lehene, 2019). Since in our case there were many lectures of medium to low quality, the assimilation of the scientific content for the Postal Businesses Operations Exploitation had been seriously hampered. This led me to the conclusion that in the medium and low interest classrooms the focus should be on the formative dimension - if the pupils are not interested in the scientific content is taught/informative dimension, as it was the case for this discipline - at least to extract some benefits from the didactic activities. In this case, through developing their public speaking abilities/lecturing, to help them to develop their management of their emotions during lecturing and to help them getting out effectively from their comfort zone.

As a conclusion, for the eleventh class the teacher changed the planned strategy from a balanced expositive-participative, designed to develop both the informative and formative dimensions of education, to an imbalanced expositive-participative realized strategy, with less informative benefits and more formative benefits (Table 3 and Table 4). In the paper's terminology, the informative goals were unrealized goals (and consequently an unrealized didactic strategy), the new activities (the adolescents presenting themselves the scientific content/lecturing) were part from the emergent strategy, and the other educational activities conducted according the initial planning (*e.g.*, elaboration of a comparative analysis) were part from the deliberate strategy.

*12<sup>th</sup> grade: didactic strategy modified (deliberate and emergent - mostly emergent)*

The third class in our discussion is a twelfth-grade class. In comparison with the previously two classes discussed, the adolescents in this class added to their low level of interest in studying economic related modules also the justification "we have baccalaureate this year and we want to focus on the disciplines for the exam, and not on economics" (As they explicitly reminded the teacher this argument several times along the year).

For this class, the author had with the adolescents a daily meeting as with the eleventh class. The following economic modules were taught: Postal Businesses Administration, Negotiation and Contracting, Marketing Policies, Sustainable Development. As mentioned above, a balanced expositive/informative

- participative/formative didactic strategy was designed to be implemented. In order to implement the balanced didactic strategy there were carried out educational activities such as: 1) elaboration of a comparative analysis between a private company from the postal industry and the national postal operator; 2) daily lectures from which the adolescents needed to take notes in their notebooks; 3) elaboration and presentation through a power point presentation of a postal service, offered by the national postal operator; 4) simulation of a real negotiation; 5) analysis, synthesis and elaboration of a written report regarding one of Romania's objectives for sustainable development; 6) a group/team project regarding a product (good or service) of a company; 7) a group/team project regarding the marketing plan for the product elected in the first project.

In comparison with the two classes analyzed previously, for this class, the teacher needed to modify the entire didactic strategy put in place at the beginning of the scholar year, for all the disciplines taught. This class was the class where many changes were needed to be implemented in the initial plans. This fact is due to an incredibly low predisposition and interest to study (not interested at all) by pupils regarding the economic modules. Even though at the beginning of the scholar year there was put in place a balanced expositive/informative-participative/formative didactic strategy, with classic lectures, since the lectures were almost impossible to be implemented (the cultivation of the informative dimension of the didactic strategy) the teacher had been forced to change the entire strategy for all the disciplines taught at this class. It means, as in the previous case, all the lectures at this class were replaced with power point presentations of the pupils. The pupils were the lecturers/teachers.

The other didactic activities were pursued according the initial plan, even though there were serious challenges needed to implement the didactic strategy. For example, regarding the simulation of the negotiation process many problems arose in the stage of negotiation preparation (*e.g.*, drawing the formal plan of the team for the negotiation). Since in the first semester, the lectures for the Negotiation and Contracting class were almost impossible to be implemented, at the point the theory needed to be put in place to work of course there were lots of problems encountered.

As a conclusion, the didactic strategies implemented at this class were changed from balanced expositive/informative-participative/formative ones to imbalanced almost exclusively participative/formative ones (Table 3 and Table 4). It means, for the second semester, given the fact that the adolescents in this class

were totally uninterested and was almost impossible to hold a lecture, the teacher was forced to totally abandon the planned informative strategies and replace them with totally participative ones. In the terminology of this paper, the realized didactic strategy was an emerging strategy. The lectures which cannot be hold were part from the unrealized didactic strategy and the deliberate didactic strategy contained the educational activities planned at the beginning of the scholar year and realized according the established plan (*e.g.*, elaboration of a team project in order to develop a marketing plan for a specific product).

The synthesis of the educational activities carried out and consistently the didactic strategies implemented (realized strategies in the terminology of this paper) containing those educational activities can be observed in the Table 4.

Table 4. The implemented/realized didactic strategies

Variable	9 <sup>th</sup> grade	11 <sup>th</sup> grade	12 <sup>th</sup> grade
Didactic strategy realized	Deliberate	Deliberate and emergent (mostly deliberate)	Deliberate and emergent (mostly emergent)

### Discussion and drawing the new theoretical model

Up to now I have presented how the teacher has changed the didactic strategies planned at the beginning of the scholar year (methods and procedures of teaching, didactic resources/means, forms of organization of the didactic activities, educational activities) in order to favor a positive educational experience in a very low-interest environment, regarding studying economics. Next, I am going to present a new approach to teach economics (and social sciences disciplines more general) developed from evidence.

First, as we have seen in our analysis, if were to adopt a classical approach, to keep working according the initial plan, doubtless teaching in this problematic context the planned didactic strategy will have been transformed in a mostly unrealized didactic strategy and unrealized operational goals. Consistent with the ideas developed in the theoretical part, rather than keep trying over and over again to implement the planned didactic strategy – through using various class management practices, behavioral interventions, or specific pedagogical practices – I argue that the teachers facing problems such as those described in this paper (*e.g.*, extremely noisily adolescents, emotional imbalanced, unattentively, class and peer molesting, etc.) should reorient and change the planned strategy with an emergent strategy, context driven. This modification in the initial planning is necessary in order to at least extract some benefits from the didactic activities. The

alternative is to waste precious resources (such as time, money, teachers' health, etc.) in didactic activities that: 1) do not add any value to the students since they are not interested in the discipline is taught or 2) they are not going to work in this field after graduation. The main idea, in comparison with the existent pedagogical thinking, is that the initial planning could change along the year since the educational context is not linear in nature but dynamic.

Second, regarding the educational planning process at the beginning of the scholar year, particularly for medium and low interest educational contexts, the development of operational objectives, then sketching didactic strategies to accomplish those goals, should continue to be established based on the operational objectives taxonomy (cognitive, cognitive-formative, affective-attitudinal, psychomotor) (Bloom, 1971; Radu, 1981), but placing a different level of interest on each category. The teachers should start with setting different operational objectives for the medium and low interest educational contexts. For the medium and low interest classes, regarding studying economics, the cognitive-formative and affective-attitudinal categories should be focused, enforced, and prioritized. On the other hand, the pure cognitive and psychomotor categories could be abandoned or be less enforced. Next, based on the established operational objectives, the teachers need to draw different didactic strategies (didactic methods and procedures, didactic resources/means, forms of organization of the didactic activities, didactic activities) consistent with the established different operational objectives. As a final step, the teachers need to develop evaluation strategies which need to be aligned with the different operational objectives and didactic strategies carried out to attain those objectives. The new approach to teach economics (or other social sciences for which the pupils manifest no interest in learning in high school) can be synthesized according the Table 5.

Table 5. A new approach to teach economics (or social sciences) developed from evidence

Predisposition and interest to study	High	Low
<b>Operational objectives</b>	Cognitive ***	Cognitive */ none
	Cognitive-formative ***	Cognitive-formative***
	Affective-attitudinal ***	Affective-attitudinal***
	Psychomotor ***	Psychomotor */none
<b>Didactic strategy</b> (didactic methods and procedures, didactic resources/means, forms of organization, didactic activities)	Balanced expositive/informative - participative/formative	Mostly participative/formative
<b>Evaluation strategy</b>	Formative and summative (informative and formative criteria)	Formative and summative (mostly formative criteria)

Note: Intensity: none = absence, \*= low intensity, \*\* = medium intensity, \*\*\* = high intensity

Third, there are two broad situations at the beginning of the scholar year, which may influence the efficacy of the educational planning process for the next scholar year. On the one hand, the teachers may know in advance pupils' predisposition to study, resulting for example, from teaching them in previous years. In this case, the educational planning process will be easier to be conducted. In the case the adolescents' predisposition to study is known (whether high or low), the teachers can establish efficient operational objectives and sketch appropriate didactic strategies in order to attain those objectives (balanced or imbalanced/differentiated). On the other hand, the teachers may don't know or don't have any clue regarding the predisposition to study of the adolescents for the next year (*e.g.*, there is a new class). In this case, the classical theory of educational planning, favoring a balance between the informative and formative dimensions of education should work.

### **Conclusions**

In this paper, I have introduced a new approach to teach economics and social sciences more general. The traditional view within the pedagogical literature is that the process of setting operational objectives and drawing didactic strategies to pursue those objectives is linear, without changes along the scholar year, a top-down approach, and without considering the pupils' characteristics and interest to study the particular social sciences discipline. The new approach makes a call for considering pupils' predisposition and interest to study the particular discipline and the educational context, at the time of setting operational objectives and drawing didactic strategies. It is a bottom-up approach suggesting that the didactic strategy can change, the process of setting operational objectives and drawing didactic strategies being dynamic, not linear. According this approach, the didactic strategy can change over the year and consequently all the elements constituting the didactic strategy will change (didactic methods and procedures, didactic resources/means, forms of organization of the didactic activity, didactic activities), depending pupils' predisposition and interest to study.

The new approach to teach economics and other social sciences for which the pupils may manifest no interest in learning, may be useful for the pedagogical practice since brings into the discussion the possibility of change and favors a formal and systematic, but dynamic approach, to teach economics and social sciences. It is very suitable, particularly, for teachers working in medium and low

performers high schools. The teachers in practice, of course, they encountered problems such as these described in this paper and they have designed innovative didactic solutions and tools to cope with these problems for decades (here is nothing new). But what I bring in the discussion is the need to focus stronger on particular categories of operational objectives, and less strong or even abandon the others. More than that, on which categories to focus is not a randomly decision. In the case of problems and low interested classes, not everything works, nor should be developed didactic strategies randomly. Therefore, the main contribution of the paper is on which educational dimension and categories of operational objectives should we focus and which dimension and categories to abandon. For both situations, at the beginning of the scholar year - setting different operational objectives and formulating different didactic strategies - and during the scholar year, abandoning some operational objectives and designing, if needed, an emergent, context driven, didactic strategy.

In relation with the existent theoretical foundations there are needed five main theoretical changes in our pedagogical thinking: (1) it is important to take into consideration pupils' predisposition to study and interest in the discipline for the educational planning (setting different operational objectives and drawing different didactic strategies); (2) the formative dimension of education should be prioritized, strengthened and focused, at the expense of the informative one in medium and low interest educational contexts; (3) in medium and low interest educational contexts should be prioritized the cognitive-formative and affective-attitudinal categories of operational objectives; (4) in medium and low interest educational contexts there should be sketched different didactic strategies, mostly formative oriented; (5) the initial didactic strategy could change along the year, depending the adolescents' behavior, thus becoming a deliberate or an emergent didactic strategy.

All the changes discussed above are short term interventions - class specific interventions - needed in order to improve the immediate attractiveness of the educational context. Of course, on the long term, but applied daily, and complementarily with these interventions, there are needed other types of educational interventions developed by psychologists or pedagogy scholars such as cognitive restructuring, social and emotional learning, curriculum revised, parenting counseling and many other interventions which I'm sure each school and teacher already masters.

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