The Educational System in Romania: An Overview of How Communism Has Influenced Current Aspects and Programs

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Abstract

Romania's history under the influence of Communism has had lasting effects on all aspects of daily life, from politics to economics to education. Many of the philosophies imbedded in the fabric of Romanian society during the Communist regime under leaders such as Ion Antonescu Nicolae Ceausescu are still affecting Romanians today and particularly the decisions made regarding schooling and the system of education in Romania in terms of curriculum, instructional methods, and standards. Involvement in the Holocaust was often downplayed but now the goal is to circulate truth as to the scope and depth of connection with the Nazi principles. Perceptions of minorities, such as the gypsy Roma people, as well as those diagnosed as Special Education, stem from ideals communicated by the Communist platform. In education, ministry officials are working diligently to break from Communism, embrace democracy, and implement change to revitalize the educational structure through re-writing textbooks, reform in teacher training and a new prominent role of research.

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The Educational System in Romania: An Overview of How Communism Has Influenced Current Aspects and Programs

Romania's history is fraught with inconstancy and turmoil, as the country was plagued by oppression both from within and from external powers for decades. Becoming a Communist country in 1947, Romania was led by tyrannical dictators Ion Antonescu and Nicolae Ceausescu until the fall of Communism in 1989. Romania's transition to Communism had a serious impact on the people, limiting their freedom and indoctrinating them with Communist ideas. Using the schools as a platform, leaders sought to infiltrate the curriculum and influence the children, training them to be future, faithful Communists, the effects of which are still present in the educational realm today.

This event brought about significant political, economic, and social change in the nation as people attempted to adjust to a radically new way of life. The revolution also affected education as teachers and students alike transitioned into a post-Communist world. In prior years, education was highly regimented and "the curriculum was strictly controlled, as all-important decisions were centralized" (Reisz, 2006, p.74). After the shift, reforms took place that altered curriculum, demanded new and updated textbooks, and increased teacher autonomy. However, the process of reform was slow and current educational practices are still dealing with the effects of Communism.

Romania and the Road to Communism under Antonescu

The road to Communism was multifaceted and had long-lasting effects. Before World War II, the communists had little influence on Romanian politics. It was not until the crucial years near the end of the war that Communism took hold and led the country down a dark and tumultuous path for the next 35 years. It was a period in which

Romania was overtaken and led by a political faction whose aspirations were foreign to the desires of the Romanian people (King, 2006). During World War II, Marshall Ion Antonescu took control of the country, allying himself with Adolf Hitler's campaign in Germany. Known widely as one who proudly held anti-Semitic views, he persecuted Jewish people by "barring them from the military, expelling them from schools, restricting them from theatres, and limiting their employment as doctors" (Misco, 2008a, p.65-66). More than using mere harassment, he "sought to eliminate Jews in Romania through deportation, Romanization, and ultimately murder" (p. 66). Desiring a pure Romanian race, Antonescu echoed Hitler's sentiments and claimed that "there has never been a more suitable time in history to get rid of the Jews" (Misco, 2008b, p. 7). Antonescu remained in power until he was overthrown on August 23, 1944 by King Mihai and his followers. King Mihai appointed Nicolae Radescu as premier, but Communist leaders maligned Radescu, calling him a fascist and turning the public against him. In February of 1945, Mihai gave in to Communist and Soviet pressure and appointed Petru Groza as premier (Sanborne, 2004).

Romania and the Road to Communism After World War II

After World War II, Romania faced pressure from beyond its borders as the Paris Peace Treaties declared that the Soviet government now controlled 90% of the land. Troops of the Red Army were sent in to ensure control and fill local official positions with Communist sympathizers (Leustan, 2005). Under Groza, key positions were filled by Communists: the Ministries of the Interior, Justice, War, and National Economy. Their agenda "was to destroy Romania, root and branch" (Markman, 1996, p.230) and build a new nation upon the remains, seeking to challenge the long-standing traditions,

and recruit workers for their cause. The Communists used their power to dominate aspects of everyday life, shutting down newspapers and eliminating challengers using faithful soldiers (Sanborne, 2004). Supposedly free elections were held in 1946 but "balloting was widely seen as fraudulent, [as] the Communists and their leftist party allies claimed 90 percent of the vote and 379 of the 424 seats in the National Assembly" (p. 51).

As they emerged as the law-making authority, the Communists took great measures to control education and the information that reached the classrooms. Originating in Lenin's writing, "The Tasks of the Youth Leagues," new programs were instituted that conformed to the Communist ideal of education. Lenin charged school officials with the idea that the purpose of educating the youth is to instill in them Communist principles. Communism gained support among the administrators, expediting the indoctrination process. The new Minister of Education, Stefan Voitec, became active in Communist reform in 1945. His methods included purges of teachers, new pro-Communist text books, privileges for Communist students, pro-Communist demonstration and the organizing of youth (Markman, 1996). The Communist Party was quickly gaining numbers, as "from a mere 1000 at war's end, the party swelled to more than 800,000 members by 1948 as many Romanians, clearly seeing which way the political wind was blowing, flocked to its banner" (Sanborne, 2004, p. 51). Although Communism was not embraced by all, and some schools and students opposed it at first, it was not long before "resistance was crushed. Directors and principals were changed, pro-Communist rectors were placed over every university, teachers and professors were purged, commissaries multiplied, children were kept in schools on national holidays"

(Markman, 1996, p. 470). These practices squelched any hope of defiance and rewarded those faithful to the Communist cause. It was not long before "Communists headed all student societies and received power to determine who should get state privileges in tuition and reduction in free text books…Communists held in their hands the keys of knowledge for scores of thousands of young people" (p. 471).

Not only did they dictate who could or could not go to school, but Communist leaders also determined what material was being taught. Education was characterized by simple recitation and recall (Misco, 2008b) without challenging students to think critically on their own. Controlling the information as well as the teaching methods, the Communists had complete jurisdiction over what was entering the minds of the young children in the school system. Not only primary schools were affected. Higher institutions also paid the price as a law was passed allowing influential Communist leaders to become university professors. Students were admitted, not based on their pre-university scores, but on their political alliances (Markman, 1996).

Romania's Role in the Holocaust

Holocaust education is a controversial topic of debate, as the truth behind Romania's involvement in the Holocaust has been misrepresented for decades:

> Before 1989, Romanians had an idea that Hitler was bad and that gas chambers existed, but, as the Ministry official suggested, "nobody told us about what happened in Romania"… a sizeable number of Romanian citizens perceive the Holocaust as an accident in history, a label that makes it easy to dismiss as an aberration (Misco, 2008b, p. 15).

Uninformed citizens hailed Ceausescu as a national hero when, in reality, Romania's offenses against the Jewish people within her borders were as atrocious as those of the Nazis (Carp, 2001). Notable were the brutal crimes of pillaging and looting: Jewish property left behind was plundered when the people were displaced from their homes. But more than just pillaging, the most ruinous crime committed was the heinous act of genocide (Mutler, 2009). The loss of human life was devastating; approximately 400,000 of the 760,000 Jews were killed (Carp, 2001). Participating in numerous pogroms during the 1940s (Mutler, 2009), the Romanian Communists were guilty of many horrific crimes, including murders and massacres, beatings, abuse, torture, plunder, expropriation acts, confiscation, seizures and requisitions, expulsions, evacuations, internment and hostage-taking, deportations, and refusing the right to work (Mutler, 2009).

Because the public was being fed lies to hide the terrible reality, they were ignorant of these heinous events. Those in power did nothing to correct their misperception, for "historical memory is a function of what societies choose to remember or forget" (Misco, 2008a, p. 63) or in this case, what the Communists wanted the people to remember or forget. In fact, up until 2003, the official position denied any involvement whatsoever with the massacre of the Jews (Misco, 2008a). Only in recent years has there been a push to correct the lies and circulate the facts throughout the country.

Holocaust Education in Romania

With regard to education, officials have recognized that the Holocaust was not truthfully covered and, as a result, children's understanding of what happened half a century ago was often partial, perfunctory, and biased. Efforts have been made to re-

write textbooks and make Holocaust education mandatory in schools, but it has been a slow and arduous process. Even as recently as 2004, textbooks were still found with mistakes and incomplete information, such as the omission of Romanian responsibility in the Holocaust (Misco, 2008a). Since the textbooks were flawed, the responsibility for correctly covering the material was left up to the individual teachers. This was shown to be difficult, for "many of the teachers were trained under the Communist regime [and] not only have a cursory understanding of the Holocaust, but they also have misinformation about the subject" (Misco, 2008a, p. 75). To remedy this, teachers needed to receive accurate information and learn to communicate it effectively to the students.

As Romanian politics moved toward democracy, officials called for widespread reform, recognizing that "democratic societies require citizens who can make informed judgments about controversial issues" (Misco, 2008b, p.8). But the news was not widely accepted, for when the correct account of what had occurred was entered into the textbooks, people reacted defensively. They refused to accept responsibility for the wrongdoings against the Jewish people. The truth contradicted everything they had believed for decades. In an effort to make reparation and ensure that the truth was honored and to raise awareness and call for reform, numerous memorial organizations, such as the Elie Wiesel International Commission for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania (Mutler, 2009) and the Romanian Jewish Holocaust Survivors' Association were founded. In order to inform the general public about what happened and to ensure that it would be remembered, October 9th was designated Holocaust Remembrance Day,

and the event is covered nationally by news reports, school assemblies, documentaries, and newspaper articles (Shafir, 2007).

Specifically targeting society's youngest members, teacher training programs were implemented, providing accurate information to teachers who were trained under the communist way of thinking (Misco, 2008a). Providing resources and incentives, the current government's leaders are ensuring that children have mandatory Holocaust education courses in schools, in the hope that it will lead to the "development of tolerance, cherishing of diversity, and anti-racist attitudes" (Misco, 2008b, p.7, 10). An education is meant to adequately prepare students for life after school. It was hoped that these classes would reap lasting positive effects, since studying and confronting controversial issues increases a student's interest and knowledge of current events and instills values of tolerance and empathy (Misco, 2008a). Despite the efforts to spread the truth and correct the Romanian society's views on the Holocaust, it is evident that decisions made under Communist rule following World War II are still affecting the country today, and seemingly simple solutions are proving more difficult to implement than expected.

Romania under Nicolae Ceausescu

Communism continued under the watchful eye of Nicolae Ceausescu in the 1970s and 80s, causing continued hardship and oppression to the Romanian people. Ceausescu was born on January 26, 1918, and as a teenager growing up in Bucharest he joined the Young Communists' League. Revealing his character early, those who knew him said that "[he] got involved for the violence rather than for the ideology… [and was] prone to unpredictable rages" (Sanborne, 2004, p. 58). Beginning in 1965, Ceausescu "steadily

removed all of his major competitors and took control through various strategic posts, claiming the seat of both state council president and supreme military commander" (p. 57) by 1974. Surrounding himself with loyal supporters, Ceausescu rose to power and led the country through one of her most trying times: "the Bucharest regime under Ceausescu became tyrannical and unresourceful at home, with all those characteristics of nepotism, corruption, and indifference to popular needs that has disfigured Romania's prewar governmental systems" (p. 61). With radical ideas about how a country should be run, Ceausescu's doctrine of scientific socialism was "a mélange of vulgar Marxism and fierce nationalism" (Paraianu, 2005, p. 1) and was accepted by Western nations because of his renouncement of Soviet politics. Turning to a policy of national exclusivism, he used terror and imprisonment (King, 2006) to convert citizens to his cause, convincing them that they were acting in the best interest of the country. There were people who challenged his rule, but they were dealt with harshly, as "Ceausescu's punishments were not ultimate, but they were certain: harassment, demotion, transfer, house arrest, and prison" (Sanborne, 2004, p. 60).

In 1971, Ceausescu traveled to East Asia and was heavily influenced by what he observed in the Communist countries of China and North Korea. Impressed with their social experiments and cultural conversions (Danta, 1993), he sought to transfer these ideals back to Romania, and thereby ensure his overt and overarching control. Because his power was unchecked, he was able to put in place a variety of impractical and devastating policies. In an effort to eliminate foreign debt, he "cut domestic electricity usage, slashed imports and stepped up exports… [making] life for the vast majority of Romanians–never luxurious even in the best of times – become one of unrelieved misery

(Sanborne, 2004, p. 63-64). He also pushed the so-called *Pro-birth program* outlawing abortions and contraceptives in an effort to boost the population. However, his plan backfired as women were dying after undergoing illegal abortions and many babies were being born into homes that could not afford to keep them. The children were then abandoned or sent to overcrowded and poorly managed orphanages. As demonstrated by these examples, the Communist administration could be described as a system founded "on the continual violation of human rights, on the supremacy of an ideology hostile to an open society, on the monopoly of power exercised by a small group of individuals, and on repression, intimidation, and corruption" (King, 2006, p. 721). Further evidence of this point is another program implemented by Ceausescu: the policy of *systemization* in which he required the abolishment of thousands of ancient and historic towns, transporting over 40,000 people to inadequately structured housing projects in cramped, run-down neighborhoods (Sanborne, 2004). Using his newly formed secret police, Ceausescu often gave the citizens less than twenty-four hours notice and refused to provide proper compensation (Danta, 1993). Despite the chaos he wreaked on the nation, loyal supporters excessively praised him, hailing him as the "savior of the nation," "the hero of peace," and the "most brilliant revolutionary thinker of all times" (Sanborne, 2004, p. 62). Before being overthrown and executed in December of 1989, (Danta, 1993) Ceausescu spent the equivalent of $300 million USD to build the People's Palace, or the House of the Republic, as a symbol of his supremacy. It was constructed to be the largest building in the world, boasting 6,000 rooms, but since he was expelled from power, it has remained empty (Sanborne, 2004); a testament to Romania's denunciation of his administration. With regard to education, Ceausescu advocated what was known as

nationalist communism and spread his propaganda with tales of "the 'golden era' of Romanian history, a series of glorious battles culminating in the victory of the Communist Party and Ceausescu's leadership" (Ciobanu, 2008, p. 59). This false information circulated throughout the educational system, misinforming teachers and students across the country.

The Fall of Communism

December of 1989 brought about radical transformation for the country when an anticommunist revolution took place, stripping Ceausescu of his power and declaring Romania a free country. The preceding months were characterized by chaos and injustice as fighting and street demonstrations occurred, and rallies, demanding a change of regime, were held. This was the first cooperative effort by the Romanians to regain the rights and freedoms they knew they deserved. However, utopia was not achieved overnight, for Romania did not instantly go through a period of *de-Stalinization*. On the contrary, the officials who took over the government after Ceausescu's fall, known as the National Salvation Front, were former members of the secret police and had an agenda of their own. Several national reforms had to take place to bring about a true change in power. Positions were re-filled and new policies introduced to counteract the Communist policies in place. For the Romanian people, simply glossing over or burying their past was not an option; they had to make a complete break with it and turn towards the future. Vladimir Tisamanueanu, a political science professor at the University of Maryland, and the leading expert on Romanian history and politics, was chair of the Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania, the first public denunciation of Communism. He described the Communist era as one of mindless obedience to Soviet

power and mass subjugation of the citizens of Romania. The Commission's report made it clear that the country needed to draw a concrete line between the Communist past and the Democratic present, choosing to move away from what was familiar and embracing freedom and independence (King, 2006). It is an on-going process and one that continues to affect current policies today as the people seek to renounce the old political system that governed every aspect of life and accept a radically new way of thinking.

The Road to National Reform

After Ceausescu's Communist ideals were eradicated in 1989, a total reform was in order as freedom of education took a place of priority. After a period of chaotic and lenient policies about education, a new Minister of Education, Liviu Maior, was elected and he began regulating the standards and practices of schools around the country. Dissatisfied with the governing principles instituted by ministers promoting Communist ideals, Maior sought to rewrite these guidelines and unite the schools under one national policy (Reisz, 2006). A rigorous process for determining standards of accreditation was instated, which required all higher level education institutions to be recognized and re-evaluated for accreditation every five years (Nicolescu, 2003). Accreditation is based both on reports prepared by the institutions themselves, and a formal report completed by the National Council for Academic Evaluation and Accreditation, as well as the students' test results during the first three years. Standards were set for all aspects of the educational system, as criteria were established for teachers, curriculum material, research methods, and finances (Reisz, 2006). This brought a new level of professionalism to these institutes and showed their dedication to the new standards of learning established after the change in regime.

In support of teacher autonomy and freedom to present students with an abundance of information, a law was passed in 1999 proposing a reform that would allow higher education institutions to have greater academic and financial independence (Nicolescu, 2003). As the governmental and economic systems of the country have changed, the teachers have had to adjust their material and methods so that graduates will be equipped with general and technical skills, allowing them to participate in local politics and compete in a market economy. As in almost any other sector, change met some resistance. Those who had been educated under the 'old system' were wary of increasing the autonomy of schools and cautious about the restructuring of higher education. Despite opposition, the reorganization of universities and technical schools has moved forward to promote the development of students who are thinking critically and able to participate in the democratic government.

Reform under Andrei Marga

Reforms continued to take place, and in May of 1997 a new minister of education, Andrei Marga, replaced Maior. Marga introduced several new modifications including updated curriculum and new textbooks (Paraianu 2005), changes that had not been made in fifty years (Marga, 2002). These programs were certainly an undertaking as they sought to "improve the quality of learning, teaching, and the whole organization and management of education" (p. 124). Changes were made through the removal of ideological subject matter, re-writing congested syllabi, and allowing for greater teacher creativity (Nalin, 2002). Marga called for a reform of not only the methods, but also the mentality that citizens had about the educational system. He felt that "it was obvious that

the superficial changes that had occurred in education up until then had not been productive and that a comprehensive reform was necessary" (Marga, 2002, p. 132).

Hoping to distance the country from its Communist roots, Marga sought to restructure the system to meet European standards (Marga, 2002) and to prepare the students to be active members in a global community. To achieve this goal, a New National Curriculum was instated, changing course syllabi, adding additional options for textbooks, and endorsing activities that develop critical thinking and practical skills and methods (Istrate, Noveanu, & Smith, 2006). Before the changes, the core subject matter was taught in isolation without giving students the skills needed to assimilate knowledge into multiple subjects. To ensure that change was taking place in an efficient manner, Marga and the Ministry created boards such as the National Center for the Training of Managers in Education, Center for the Continuous Training of the Teaching Staff, and the National Center for the Curriculum. These programs offered new training opportunities to allow teachers and administrators to stay informed on current trends and to increase their bank of teaching methods. Teachers were also granted salary bonuses for the first time, giving teachers in some schools an increase of up to fifty percent of their pay. With regard to structure, the old system of trimesters was converted to semesters to match the European style calendar. New and advanced Information Technology equipment was installed in trade and secondary schools across the country, including micro-networks of computers that have access to the Internet, providing students with opportunities to stay connected with news and events outside the country and to utilize advanced educational computer programs.

Marga expanded Mirai's accreditation policy by applying it to pre-university institutions as well. The National Commission for the Evaluation and Accreditation of Pre-university Education was set up in 1999 and was the first of its kind in Romania. It held the responsibility of assessing, authorizing, and recognizing the accreditation standards in elementary and secondary schools (Marga, 2002). Higher education also benefitted as new policies regarding admission were put into effect. In 1998 admission examinations became the sole requirement for acceptance instead of the numerous tests and rigorous academic requirements, thus allowing more students to attend as a result of the procedural change. In 1997, 250,000 students were enrolled in higher education, compared to 403,000 students admitted in 2000. The work is far from over, however, as the educational system is still far behind the European and American standards. According to the 1995 Third International Mathematics and Science Study, Romania's mathematics scores ranked thirty-fourth out of forty-one countries and their science ranking was thirty-first (Istrate et. al, 2006). These results suggest that greater attention and resources should be allocated to secondary schools and their training programs in math, science, and technology, areas in which the ministry is working to implement new policies.

Textbook Reform

A further action intended to bring about radical change in schools after the changeover from Communist rule was correcting and re-printing textbooks done by a team of notable historians. The project began in 1998 and was finalized in 2000 (Marga, 2002), when, for the first time, teachers were able to choose from a large selection of alternate textbooks (Ciobanu, 2008). This lengthy task was worth the effort for it

presented teachers with options that would enhance their curriculum and introduce more variety into the classroom. History textbooks were the most scrutinized, for they play a prominent role in determining the orientation of future generations' perceptions of the present (Paraianu, 2005).

Under Communist rule, "Measures were to be taken to exclude all true enlightenment and all real information. To achieve this, history was to be re-written… with new heroes, new dates, new meanings" (Markman, 1996, pgs. 233, 471). Presenting themselves to the people in the best possible light, the Communists controlled the flow of information to the general public. They claimed that the Party not only invented the modern Romanian state (Nalin, 2002), but also "solved the national problem…[and] fulfilled the longstanding dream of the Romanian people" (Paraianu, 2005, p. 4). Schools provided an effective method for spreading their propaganda as political slogans were incorporated (Nalin, 2002) and "textbooks [were] as ruthlessly supervised as other Romanian publications, and school management at the top was as aggressively Communist as the leadership of labor unions or of the army" (Markman, 1996, p. 467). Re-writing history, the Communists were able to fabricate an account that had neither inconsistencies nor disagreements, dismissing any other view points as *imprecisions* (Paraianu, 2005). The textbooks were a unique platform through which the Communists could spread their Marxist-communist ideology. Information was "principally focused on a constructed narrative of victorious class struggle against the class enemy, and the concept of the socialist system as the inevitable end of history" (Ciobanu, 2008, p. 58). Ceausescu taught that the true great men in history were not the kings or politicians previously taught, but instead were working men who supported Communist ideals

(Nalin, 2002). To ensure that the information was being taught in all schools, a law was passed in 1948 that assigned education to the state, giving it a unified and secular structure (Muster & Vaideanu, 1970). Silencing anyone who spoke out against the new regime, a new school of thought was founded, defining new ethics for the country by simply stating that ideas which endorsed Communism were morally acceptable and those which did not were unlawful and punishable (Markman, 1996).

After the fall of Communism, historians were free to communicate the true account, relating facts based on critical thinking and from multiple perspectives (Paraianu, 2005). However, the changeover was neither instantaneous nor straightforward, for "the debate of the recent Communist past raises even more delicate dilemmas since many of the victims and perpetrators are alive and, in the case of the latter, many continue to be influential" (Ciobanu, 2008, p. 58). Many Communist sympathizers cried out, arguing that the textbooks presented an "anti-Romanian aggression" that was going to dismantle the country (Paraianu, 2005, p. 3). Democratic leaders had to be cautious when citing details of the not-so-distant past, for many of the Communist officials were and are still at the forefront of the political arena. For this reason, "after the collapse of the Communist regime in 1989, Romanian historians were reluctant to recalibrate or rewrite recent history. They claimed that it was too early to analyze the Communist period objectively and argued also that they lacked access to relevant documentation" (Ciobanu, 2008, p. 59). As a result, many teachers were still being forced to teach incorrect or heavily slanted material to their students, instilling in them a biased perspective. Even after the decision had been made to redraft the textbooks, the process of deciding what to include was complex as experts on both the

public and national level had differing views on what is true and imperative, making a consensus all but impossible (Nalin, 2002). Following this discussion, the devising, writing, printing, and distribution process has been lengthy and convoluted, dramatically increasing the time it takes to get the books into the classrooms.

Realizing the importance of educating today's youth, officials have committed to give support to schools across the country and to the Science of Education in an attempt to raise the economic, social, and cultural standard (Muster & Vaideanu, 1970). Gradually circumstances have changed for the better, as teachers are now given the option of what textbook to use in their classroom (Misco, 2008b) thus giving teachers more lesson-planning choices.

The Changeover of Curriculum

More than just textbooks, the scope of curriculum and the nature of courses have grown significantly since the fall of Communism. New curriculum is being written, giving teachers options and supplemental activities to liven up the instruction, for "most of the textbooks do not prescribe what the teacher is to do, nor does the program of study" (Misco, 2008b, p. 14). In the past, teachers were told exactly what and how to teach a certain subject according to the Bologna process, which was an attempt to create uniformity and consistency of curriculum expectations. Now, more is left to teacher discretion, and education experiences vary from school-to-school as "teachers must prepare a general plan for the year, which is aligned with the program of study, [but] they retain day-to-day instruction decision-making" (Misco, 2008a, p. 73). Under the new reform laws, schools can custom-design up to thirty percent of the curriculum, allowing them to differentiate instruction based on the individual needs of the students (Istrate et.

al, 2006). There is a growing shift from teacher-centered to student-centered teaching, as officials hope to move away from rote memorization and to empower children to think critically for themselves. But because of the preferences of teachers who have taught in this rigid and behaviorist way for decades, the process of reform is slow and complicated (Misco, 2008b). It was found that even after the curriculum had been changed for several years, only twenty-five percent of the teachers indicated a dramatic change in their instruction methods (Istrate et. al, 2006). However, the future looks positive, for "having opportunities to employ content and instructional strategies of their choosing, including textbooks, special courses, and controversies, certainly serves as a portal for innovation and change" (Misco, 2008a, p. 86).

Another area of reform is the new courses and schools of thought being made accessible to students. The Civic Foundation Academy was established by Ana Blandiana to give teenage students and teachers a unique setting to learn the truth about Romanian history under communism and "promote civic education and revise the country's history falsified by the communist regime" (Ciobanu, 2008, p. 59). The classes are taught by a myriad of professionals, including not only professors and historians, but also dissidents, diplomats, and artists from the Communist era. Blandiana believes that an education that is structured to analyze history and the impact that Communism had on schools is essential for teaching future world-changers. But while the responsibility falls on the teachers to enlighten and instruct, in the end "a genuine reconciliation with the truth of Romania's communist past must ultimately rest with the country's youth and its education" (Ciabanu, 2008, p.62).

The Prominent Role of Research

To keep up with the recent trends in the educational realm, research has taken a prominent place in educational circles in the 21st century. In the past few years, a marked emphasis has been placed on the importance of both teachers and students conducting research. In an effort to keep up with the intellectual world, the Accreditation Law was passed in 1993, mandating that all university professors must be actively involved in a research project (Reisz, 2006). The purpose is that officials believe that if more research is conducted, then greater change will occur in the structure and implementation of educational policies. This will, in turn, create an enhanced relationship between teachers and administrators as they seek to combine research with practice (Muster & Vaideanu, 1970). More than ever before, knowledge evaluation, or assessing what and how students learn, has become a priority (Marga, 2002). There has been considerable promotion of inquiry-oriented instruction in an effort to stimulate higher order thinking skills and to generate curiosity and problem-solving ability in students (Istrate et. al, 2006). Researchers are studying various educational theories and methods and creating new curriculum, programs of study, handbooks, demonstration lessons, and offering schools technological improvements that are accessible to all students (Muster & Vaideanu, 1970). Projects that developed were made possible by the large financial loans administered by the Ministry of Education, that established new research institutes connected to major universities (Marga, 2002). Former Minister of Education, Andei Marga, re-emphasized the value of research and called for a national push to get teachers involved in personal research projects to increase both their general and specific content knowledge.

In addition, students in the classroom are being viewed in a different light. No longer are teachers reading about a student's ability in a file, but rather research has provided them with "instruments necessary to a current and creative application of the new ideas…counseling differentiated according to the school levels, validated tests batteries with clearly differentiated functions, etc." (Muster & Vaideanu, 1970, p. 70-71). The doctrine of Communist rule aimed to create a supposedly equal society, one in which there are no classes, no states, and each person is seen as part of the collective whole, working toward the end goal of political, economic, and social equality. As the schools deviate from that philosophy, students are seen as individuals with differentiated needs and abilities. And because of these varying needs, the teacher's approach to instruction has had to change as well. In the period of educational reform from 1997 to 2000, teachers moved away from a reproductive-learning approach to one that focused more on problem-solving-directed thinking (Marga, 2002).

The Roma: A Marginalized Minority

These reforms, however, have not solved all of the problems plaguing Romanian society and the educational structure. The gypsy people in Romania, also known as the Roma, are often discriminated against and marginalized by others. Representing a large percentage of the population, the Roma are nomads who traveled from Western Europe and Asia and have made Romania their home. With roots in Communism, the concept of 'organic nationalism' was "found within a history of forced assimilation, exclusions, anti-Roma measures, and other phenomena" (Misco, 2008b, p. 17). Though it has been 20 years since the walls of Communism fell, these beliefs are still affecting Romanian society, and the Roma, or Romani people as they are often termed, are direct victims of

Supremacist thinking. As a whole, the Roma students are characterized by poor school enrollment, high dropout rates, and limited participation in higher education (Misco, 2008b). When Romania declared independence from the Communist regime, officials claimed that democratic rules would be implemented, ensuring the freedom and rights of all people. Part of these entitlements is the right to an education. However, this has not been the case, as education is often inaccessible to the minority population: "the majority of Romani children in Romania remain significantly hindered in their ability to claim the right to a substantive and meaningful education" (Cahn & Petrova, 2001, p. 104). When they are able to attend school, the students are often discriminated against by teachers and peers, sometimes to the point of physical abuse and harassment. Furthermore, the Roma children are subject to many educational disadvantages such as less-qualified and often unmotivated teachers, fewer and less current textbooks, segregated classrooms, and the intolerance from parents of non-Roma children (Cahn & Petrova, 2001).

Though primary schooling is mandatory, admittance into schools for children who were not born in Romania is difficult for, since 1992, Romanian birth certificates are required for entrance. Even after that process of transferring citizenship is completed, students were still at a disadvantage, for school boards often refused to acknowledge classes taken abroad, putting them well behind students their age (Cahn & Petrova 2001). Among those who are were lucky enough to gain admission into public schools, many Romani children were sent to classrooms that were segregated from the non-Roma students. When the Roma parents fought to have their children included, parents of non-Roma children threatened to remove their children if they were to be in the same classroom as the gypsy students. Blinded by their prejudice, "students and community

members believed the Roma to have such distinct values, heritage, and history that they are irrevocably incongruous to that of Romanians" (Misco, 2008a, p. 78) and have been, as a result, ostracized from society. There have been instances in the media when the Roma are portrayed as "marginals and outcasts who are by definition suspects; they carry the hereditary gene of criminality" (Lenkova, 1998, p. 1).

On the other hand, the difficulties for the Roma students are not solely imposed on them from outside. Studies have found that Romani families tend to be unsupportive of their children's search for education (Misco, 2008a), making it a struggle for both students and teachers in the communities. Because of the lack of support from teachers and parents alike, Professor Gheorghe Sarau, a researcher for the Ministry of Education, estimates that "around 65% of Romani children leave school in the 3rd and 4th grades…only about 20% of those Romani children who complete primary school continue on to secondary education" (Cahn & Petrova, 2001, p. 118). And due to this overarching lack of education, the Roma are deprived of basic rights later in life: "the Roma have always been the most ignored and neglected of all minorities, only because there were hardly any educated people among them" (Lenkova, 1998, p. 4).

The dream of creating a purely Romani state originated with Antonescu and his Communist ideals and still infiltrates the thinking of Romanian people today as discrimination and intolerance is deeply ingrained in the nation's history (Lenkova, 1998). In her article on Roma prejudice in the media, Balkan Media Researcher Mariana Lenkova cited numerous examples of television shows, movies, and news articles that portray Roma people as "blood-thirsty sub-humans" commonly involved in "drug dealing and trafficking in babies" (1998, pgs. 2-3). The media is an effective tool to convey a

pervasive prejudice that has profound effects. Violence against the Roma is so prevalent in the media, people have become accustomed to it and even applauded Roma lynchings that were extensively covered in the news in 1997. It is a stain on the social system of Romania and one that needs to be removed. These children deserve all the opportunities and benefits that the Romanian educational system has to offer.

Structure of Schooling

While much of the education system has seen extreme alteration as a result of Communism and its ideals, the general structure has remained constant. Primary school begins at age six and secondary school begins in grade seven but is only compulsory until the tenth grade (Muster & Vaideanu, 1970). Romanian students are at a disadvantage because this system prevents many of them from receiving the valuable and varied curriculum taught through the eleventh and twelfth grades (Misco, 2008a). Another difference between the Romanian and American systems is the types of courses offered to high school students. In Romania, there are two tracks that students can choose between: science or humanities. The track they choose dictates which courses they will study, providing them with only a narrow scope of classes An alternate option for the students is trade schools that offer specializations in a wide variety of fields of study, including industry, agriculture, economics, education, and sanitation (Muster & Vaideanu, 1970). After 1989, the Ministry of Education took on a new approach, abandoning the goals of indoctrination and focusing instead on the idea that the goal of higher education is not only to impart book knowledge to students, but to provide them with skills that will benefit them in their future occupational endeavors. Students are encouraged to develop their individual abilities in order that they may successfully

contribute to society directly after high school. After secondary school, vocational training or university is highly encouraged, launching students on a practical career path.

Higher Education: Public and Private

After the fall of Communism, "the higher education system was…probably the best functioning of all civic institutions" (Reisz, 2006, p.73) and it continued to prosper as private higher institutions began to emerge alongside public schools. There are considerable differences between the two, in matters of structure, cost, and graduation benefits. Public higher education is free and accessible to all whereas private universities are more expensive but offer more varied courses of study which provide students with tactical links to community businesses and programs abroad. Despite the benefit of diverse course options, many believe that state schools are superior, because students attending receive recognized diplomas at the end of their program. Many private schools are still in the process of being accredited and cannot give certified scores. One criticism of state schools is that they are still dictated by communist educational practices, and are characterized as rigid, focused solely on lecture-based theoretical knowledge rather than the skills and opportunities needed to practice the learned concepts (Nicolescu, 2003).

Other higher education changes have taken place since 1989, with the changeover of professors and curriculum. University professors with tenure dating back to the Communist years were interviewed and, in some cases, replaced with alternate teachers who embraced the new government and advances in education policies. The changeover was difficult and protracted, creating a time of upheaval in the structure of higher-level schooling. Nevertheless, post-secondary education is gaining popularity in Romania as students, parents, and ministry officials alike have realized the importance of

supplementary education and career preparation. Time and finances have been allocated in order to improve the admittance process, increase resources, and replace teachers, all of which has affected the methodology of instruction.

Teacher Training in Romania

In line with the push for greater accountability in schools and the higher standards placed by the European Union and the Department of Education in Romania, the teacher training program is a vigorous and complex progress that guides teachers as they prepare to enter the classroom and make a difference in the lives of the young students around the country. Prospective teachers must complete a three-year program at a university that emphasizes both theoretical and specialized knowledge. Before completion of the program, the student must finish pedagogical practical work in which he must spend one day a week or three weeks consecutively in a classroom setting, giving lessons and demonstrating mastery of his craft. Once he has graduated with his degree, the future teacher enters into a probationary period. After three years in the classroom, he must successfully pass three permanent-appointment examinations and undergo a time of special inspection. The tests may be taken up to three times, but if failed on the third try, the candidate can never receive licensure. In addition, the teacher must then pursue two further didactic diplomas, including a Master's degree. Education officials accentuate the fact that "the teaching profession requires expert knowledge that should be updated through permanent and constant study" ((Radulian, 1984, p. 288). Once he has met the qualifications, he must also take part in an updating course every three years to stay informed on the current trends and policies in education. Summer courses are available in which teachers come together to learn and discuss specific special and methodical

questions with other professionals in their same field or area of specialty. Teachers in Romania must be highly self-motivated and are responsible for self-evaluation and be subject to outside assessment, which provides for "substance, integrity, stability, and flexibility" (p. 290, 296). A teacher is held to a high standard in that he is

> required, in his three-fold status of specialist, educator and pedagogue, he is a creator and performer of his own teaching strategies and their judge, to provide evidence of 'a critical mind' that should allow him a 'systematic outlook, a single whole vision" (p. 294).

Connecting the importance of appropriately training teachers with an effective, democratic society as a whole, Virgiliu N. Radulian, the Director of the Central Institute for Further Education of Teachers, stated that "it seems obvious that any developed and powerful contemporary nation depends not only on economic strength, but also on the vigour of the educational system, and therefore on the training and inservice training of teachers" (p.285). In an effort to pull their country out of the throes of Communism and to assimilate into the world's standards of educational excellence, the teacher training programs instituted in Romania seek to produce competent, knowledgeable teachers who can help guide the country towards a solid foundation of democracy (Radulian, 1984).

Special Education, Past and Present

Special education was also affected by the fall of communism, for in 1989 Romania adopted an *equal access for all* approach to education (Ives, Runceanu, & Cheney, 2008), placing a special emphasis on identifying children who would benefit from special education, and reforming the existing programs. Up to that time, students who were identified as having a disability, whether physical or mental, were largely

ignored or treated with contempt. Special education was not considered important in Communist-style schools, even to the extent that the Communist leaders ended programs that would train specialized teachers to work with these disadvantaged children. These measures were an attempt to equalize education and ensure that all students were taught the same material and no child was given more attention than another.

One example of the vast differences in political policy before and after 1989 is the TEMPUS project, a dual effort between Romania and guarantors from the European Union to develop programs that allowed students to receive a Master's degree in special education. Furthermore, in 1991, the State Secretariat for Disabled Persons position was created, charging an individual with developing policies that would cater to the needs of disabled people across the country. In addition, a new identification process was implemented, raising rates of recognized special needs children from 2% of children up to 10-12%. The authorities realized that "as levels of inclusion rise, it will be increasingly important for all teachers to receive some training in working with students with disabilities" (p. 11). New programs are being created around the country that are dedicated to intervening early and offering hope to both students and families dealing with special needs. While many applaud the efforts being made, others argued that not enough is being done, for criterion for eligibility is not clear enough and therefore, easily manipulated. Nonetheless, the future is bright for special education in Romania as steps are being taken to provide these students with the help they need and to integrate them back into mainstream classrooms.

Conclusion

The history of Romania has greatly influenced the current state politically, economically, and socially. Romania's years under Communist influence and rule had a serious impact on the people, limiting their freedom and indoctrinating them with Communist ideas. All areas of life were affected, including education. Using the schools as a platform, leaders manipulated the system in an attempt to influence both current and future generations by limiting teachers, controlling curriculum and propagating inaccurate information. Since the fall of this regime in 1989, many changes have occurred, some immediate and some more gradual. The outlook is optimistic for Romanians as they continue to move towards democracy, implementing innovative educational programs, providing teachers with supplementary training and greater autonomy in choosing their day-to-day curriculum, and seeking to offer a quality education to every child.

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