



FROM EDUCATION TO LIGHTNESS OF MIND

Gabriel Gorghiu

Valahia University Targoviste, Romania

E-mail: ggorghiu@gmail.com

Have you ever considered examining the connection between the educational process and the intellectual effort necessary for cognitive development? An interesting topic proposed to take a closer look at. More specifically, to see how education represents a whole complex of brain training, but also to identify the types of cognitive effort involved in this process, as well as how the character of the educable is shaped! On the other hand, an example is provided of how the process of simplification (usually a rather complicated endeavor) can lead to a shallowness of mind. Some studies indicate that education improves specific intellectual abilities rather than general intelligence (Peng & Kievit, 2020; Ritchie et al., 2015).

Each of us is aware that between education and mental effort is a fundamental interdependent relationship, the human mind needing challenges as well as sustained effort to reach its full potential. In this sense, the educational process, in its essence, is not just a process of passively accumulating information, but a way of actively and constantly training cognitive capacities. Without mental effort, learning becomes superficial and inefficient; without an educational framework to stimulate this effort, intellectual development stagnates. That's why we can safely define education as a serious training format for the brain... And the brain enjoys the great advantage of neuroplasticity, defined by the brain's ability to reorganize itself and form new neural connections throughout life. In other words, every completed grammar exercise, every solved math problem, every analyzed text, every decoded image, and every newly understood concept forces the brain to create and strengthen the neural connections. When we learn something new, a fragile neural connection is formed. But the much-valued repetition (from Latin we have the famous words: "*repetitio mater studiorum est*") and the effort to deepen the content proposed by the school strengthen this connection, transforming it from a simple "pathway" into a fast and efficient "highway". This is why, for example, problem-solving becomes easier with time.

But effective education must place the student in an optimal zone of difficulty. Tasks that are too easy to complete do not stimulate effort and do not lead happily to the development of students' skills, while tasks that are too difficult can lead to frustration and sometimes to dropout. Finding this balance is the art of pedagogy, which every teacher must follow - as Comenius said in *Didactica Magna*: "*The method of teaching must be treated as an art...*".

The educational process requires various forms of cognitive effort, each contributing to the development of specific skills: (a) sustained concentration (attention); (b) active memorization; (c) critical and analytical thinking; (d) problem solving and creativity. It is important to underscore the importance of diverse cognitive efforts—such as argumentation, reflective thinking, managing cognitive load, and metacognition—in fostering the development of specific skills during the educational process (Nugroho et al., 2025; Radulović et al., 2023). Here are some arguments for developing those skills:

(a) the ability to stay focused on a single task for a long period of time, ignoring external stimuli, represents a considerable effort. For example, going through complex content, listening attentively to a lecture, or working on a project are essential exercises for developing attention.

b) Even though education is not just about memorization, the retention of fundamental information is necessary. However, the effort should not be in mechanical memorization, but in making logical connections between information, organizing it into mind maps, and integrating it into existing knowledge.

c) developing critical and analytical thinking is perhaps the most important type of effort, as it involves breaking down information, evaluating arguments, identifying premises and conclusions, and formulating one's judgments. For example, analyzing a literary text, evaluating a scientific experiment, or debating a geographical problem are activities that cultivate critical thinking.

d) applying theoretical knowledge to find solutions to practical problems requires considerable effort. Problem solving and creativity are ideally suited here, requiring mental flexibility, the ability to look at a problem from different angles, and to combine knowledge from a variety of fields to generate a new solution.

At the same time, overcoming the difficulties that arise in the learning process, through sustained effort, has a considerable impact not only on the cognitive level but also on the learner's character. In practical terms, the student builds resilience when he/ she makes a significant effort to understand a difficult concept and finally succeeds in doing so; he/ she learns a valuable lesson about perseverance. This experience will increase his/her confidence in the ability to overcome obstacles, a skill transferable to all aspects of life. In addition, the student will benefit from a growth mindset. People with a growth mindset believe that their skills can be developed through dedication and hard work. Education based on valuing effort encourages such a perspective, in contrast to a fixed mindset where intelligence is seen as an unchangeable given.

An important effort of the mind is involved in any spiritual exercise that takes place in a cultural setting. In this situation, we can define a clear goal: to reach a certain spiritual fulfillment, resulting in a certain satisfaction. This effort, which - often - is sustained, can be made easier simply by the tendency to simplify some cultural content. That is to make them explicit, more simply, more quickly, to achieve that spiritual satisfaction. At the same time, simplifying complex content also represents a new effort - the mind must certainly be put to serious work to simplify things, thus making them clearer! Great pleasure and satisfaction derive from this attempt! It is like an exercise in unraveling a riddle. A mind that is not clear is a muddled, confused mind that cannot find peace!

But from this, a danger can arise: the lightness of the mind... In other words, the act of simplification can easily lead to superficiality of mind. And here is an example, which my good philosopher friend humorously recounts, allowing me to quote him approximately (Alexandru, 2025/Forthcoming): as higher education institutions in the 21st century are slowly becoming commercial companies, they need advertising and marketing techniques that are well thought out so that customers (i.e., future students) are satisfied throughout their studies and especially at the end of them... In one such marketing campaign conducted at a certain high school, students were so disinterested in what the university had to offer that they couldn't even concentrate on what they were being told... So... what can teachers from universities talk to such students about? At one point, a lady teacher (from an engineering faculty) was talking to those prospective students about the fact that during their studies, they would be revisiting the basics of Math, Physics, Chemistry, and Biology, emphasizing how important Food Science is. At one point, a tattooed, blank-eyed young man introduced a kind of question: "*Madam, I know what meat is, I know what an egg is, but do not take me for H, for O, and for all those things..., do you?*" And this is where the lightness of mind comes in... I mean, the young future high school graduate knows *the meat*, as well as *the egg*! When he sees a piece of meat or an egg on his plate, he knows them, he identifies them, smiling - for him, this process of identification is like solving a difficult math problem! He feels the pleasure of knowing, he knows the meat, he

knows the egg, and this must be emphasized to those around him! He is not nobody; university admission is solved! But we do not have to talk about hydrogen or oxygen! Or about more complicated compounds that - surely - he cannot even pronounce! This is how the lightness of mind needs no great disturbance, for it is liable to crack! And it is not with texts or literature, but with practice: the batteries of experience must be charged - i.e., the meat, the egg must be identified, tasted, etc., but without talking about proteins or chemical formulae! Those issues are freaks for the mind and block it! This is no longer about the effort of the mind! Not even about simplification for clarification! Here we simply stop the mind, we amputate it!... And this is how the ankylosing of the mind in a light superficiality comes to be recognized as a great achievement!

Consequently, the link between education and mental effort is inseparable - it is vital! Education is not a simple transfer of data, but a dynamic process that challenges, stimulates, and shapes the architecture of thinking. A 2023 review article in *Problems of Education in the 21st Century* highlights the importance of nuanced, context-specific educational approaches that challenge students and foster active engagement, rather than passive reception of information (Memisevic et al., 2023). Mental effort is the mechanism through which learning produces development and reinforces competencies. Simplifications are welcome, making the mind explicit and even energizing, and satisfying the spirit! But beware: the act of simplification can easily lead to superficiality of mind! Simplification is a useful procedure (often), but it must be used with discernment. If it becomes an automatic and uncontrolled practice, it can turn thinking into a shallow mechanism, poorly anchored in reality. So, in the act of education, a great deal of balance is needed: knowing when to require students to simplify, and when to keep things complex!

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Gabriel Gorghiu

PhD, Professor, Director of the Centre for Scientific Research and Innovation in Educational Sciences "I.T. Radu", Teacher Training Department, Valahia University Targoviste, 35 Lt. Stancu Ion Str., 130105 Targoviste, Romania.
E-mail: ggorghiu@gmail.com
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4026-345X>