

THE INNOVATION OF LLL TEACHING AND LEARNING METHODOLOGIES IN ROMANIA

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Abstract

The concept of lifelong learning has, in Romania, certain ambiguities naturally generating certain consequences on the educative practices in schools and outside them. In opposition, we note that, at the level of educational policies there is a constant concern for assimilating the recommendations of the Commission of the European Communities regarding the promotion of lifelong learning principles even before Romania becomes an EU member, in 2007.

The analysis criteria we propose regarding the manner of application of the Memorandum for lifelong learning and the creation in Romania of the favourable framework for integration in the European Area of Lifelong Learning are the key concepts launched by the two important documents.

The critical approaches have no absolutist nature but extract their essence from several assumptions with an optimistic content starting from the idea that the new knowledge society needs: a. New people for a new world; b. New educational contexts for new learning people; c. New teaching methodologies for new learning needs; d. New teaching instruments for new learning results.

Appreciation is given to the Romanian latest Law of National Education (2011) and to new curriculum reform it proposes. In the framework of deep changes announced by the new law, a special attention is given to the innovation of teaching and learning methodologies.

Key words: *lifelong learning, principles, concepts, teaching methodologies*

Forward

Adults' education is a field which witnessed an unprecedented development in Romania in the period that followed the anticommunist revolution of December 1989. Before the reminded event, the educational programs destined to adults were made especially in enterprises when workers had to learn how to use new and unknown technologies or when, for the performance of certain professional tasks, an increased qualification degree was necessary.

The trainers who performed lifelong training programs at that time were experts in a certain activity field and had no psycho-pedagogical background, not to speak of a background in the adult psycho-pedagogy field.

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However, although during the communist regime psychology and education sciences were not at all valorised, in the academic environments the interest for increasing adults' creative potential through training programs adapted to such age categories generated reference productions, with an authentic theoretical and practical value.

Adults' education in a new social and cultural context

In the period immediately following the anticommunist revolution of December 1989, in Romania, ample movements to reform the education system began to manifest themselves, at all levels.

Such movements had – on the one hand - a profound *recovering nature* through the attempt of re-discovering and re-valorising the creative energies of the Romanian people and the Romanian educational traditions, and on the other hand – a *liberating nature*, as a natural reaction against the ideological servitude imposed in the last 50 years.

At the time of adopting the famous document *A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning*, in October 2000 by the Commission of the European Communities and of launching the call for *Making a European Area for Lifelong Learning*, the spirit of change and innovation had already manifested itself in Romania also in the adults' education field. Although not yet a member of the European Union – the event occurred in 2007 - at that time, there was an increased receptivity both in political circles and in cultural environments as to all that promised a rupture with the communist past.

Reforms began to occur in such rhythms which today many individuals consider to be much too alert, creating the risk that the generated changes are only in form and not in substance.

The need to change deeply affected not only the production environment but all segments: social, political, cultural...

Under such conditions, many adults had to review and rebuilt their professional behavior, adopting new attitudes to learning.

Lifelong learning became not only an educational desiderate but a stringent reality.

New people for a new world

History demonstrated that, when a society changes dramatically, the people that resist are those who know how to quickly adapt to change. Serge Moscovici – a reputed French psycho-sociologist of Romanian origin – highlights, in this regard, the role of those assuming the initiative and the risks of the consequences produced by the change. He names this category of people “active minorities” (Serge Moscovici, 1997).

In the post-December Romania, a series of *active minorities* were established, who understood how important education is and how urgent is to support adults in their personal and professional reconstruction process. Some people made it with more, others with less, skill, but all of them were aware that passing from the socio-economic communist organization to the capitalist organization generated a predictable state of inadaptability.

This is the explanation for the fact that, while, at an international level, it was announced that mankind passed to a new development stage: *the knowledge society*, the Romanians – like many other nations liberated from the communist camp – discovered in the direct

confrontation with life that the only solution for resisting the avalanche of changes was to *learn continuously*.

People became very quickly aware not only of the fact that they had to learn permanently but that they had to learn *differently*.

New educational contexts for new learning people

In the period that followed the adoption of the Memorandum on LLL, the promotion, in Romania, through all the means, of the lifelong learning concept and strategies was largely supported from a political and administrative point of view. Education experts also brought an important contribution to opening the complex meanings of the concept to practice.

It was more and more obvious that education was not limited to a simple interaction within which one *offers* and another one *receives*, but that the most important function it has is to *endow the individual with a complex of methods allowing it to self-develop its cultural and intellectual horizon* [Al. Darie, 3].

For revolutionizing the adults' education field, a necessity was felt to create an updated, flexible and coherent normative and legislative framework establishing the rules for the organization and functioning of this subsystem – as a distinct dimension of lifelong education.

From this point of view, starting with 1998, important progress was made in Romania, first through creating the identity in the *adults' education* field. Almost in every year that followed, important legislative documents were adopted which promoted the application of the new vision and of the new methodologies for adults training, for creating institutions with explicit tasks in organizing adults' programs, for the authorization and accreditation of the training programs destined to adults, for the evaluation of the learning results obtained in formal, non-formal, informal contexts.

A crucial moment in the development of the adults' education field was the issuance in 2000 of a Romanian Emergency Government Ordinance which instituted the obligation of adults' trainers to run through special psycho-pedagogical training programs.

In relation to this legislative document, the *Trainer's status* – document detailing the personal and professional qualities a trainer should have – was subsequently prepared.

Consequently, in the next period, the trainers in the network of state institutions started to feel the competition created by the trainers in the private environment. If the trainers in state institutions (especially those in higher education) tend to maintain a rigid behaviour and continue to focus on the *transmission* of contents, the trainers in the private environment are much more dynamic, more flexible, more non-conformist. So many times the curricula forming the object of adults' training programs from the state institutions network are identical to those of some programs promoted by private suppliers. However, what makes the difference between the two categories of programs refers to the used teaching methodologies. The methods used in state institutions have a preponderantly traditional nature, while in private institutions the innovative teaching methodologies are dominant. On the background of the deepened economic crisis and recession, the suppliers of adult programs in the state network succeed in 'collecting' several trainees only due to the low costs of courses. In exchange, the private suppliers offering more expensive programs, but higher from a qualitative point of view, are seriously affected by the crisis.

The new context of the crisis also generated some dishonourable practices among trainees. Many of them started real certificate hunting. Consequently, graduates' files become more and more voluminous, while the competences they held are more and more '*narrow*'.

New attitudes and new learning needs of adults

The certificate hunting is directly related to the placements on the labour force market. Generally, the employers in the network of state institutions are still influenced by the many certificates a person may submit upon employment.

However, the employers in the private system are quite reticent as to the too big volume of the documents acquired by a job seeker. They appreciate more the *attitudes* that adults have to learning.

From this point of view, we distinguish three distinct categories of adults:

1. The adapted adults: very flexible, dynamic, independent and with a lot of initiative, attempting to keep up with changes and times. They are very receptive to what is new, focus on success, are willing to learn always something new, understand the mechanisms of functioning of the new competitive context.
2. The conformist adults: they do something new only if necessary, they indulge themselves in their behavioural habits, are inert, without initiative, wait to be offered jobs and solutions to problems, are good executants. They launched and maintain the certificate hunting practice.
3. The non-adapted adults: rigid, do not take risks, are always dissatisfied, consider victims each time: of their colleagues, chiefs, of the legislation..., they are not willing to learn. They complain about being too "old" for this. They continue to be contaminated by communist practices when occupying a job position was mandatory, and competition for acquiring it was conjectural.

The attitudes to learning adopted by adults are also influenced by the geographical area in which they live and perform their activity. For instance, in the areas which are active from an industrial point of view, adults are more active from the point of view of the receptivity to lifelong learning practices.

The situation is also heterogeneous among the sectors of the economic, social, cultural life.

New teaching methodologies for new learning needs

The Romanian education science experts have been concerned with the problem related to the optimization and innovation of pedagogical methodologies for some time.

In 1996, Ungureanu, D. proposed the abandonment of traditionalist pedagogical interventions – which proved to be irresolute in „knowing“, modest in “doing“ and sterile in “knowing to do“) and their replacement with inciting interventions – favouring personal development – penetrating social „needs “ (Ungureanu, D., 1996).

In the author's opinion, the *method* concept itself is worth being subject to important reconsiderations. Its main role in the didactical process – „is to put contents in motion, supporting on education means, under the imperious incidence of pre-established objectives, with intentions and efforts to compatibilize the entire process with the age peculiarities” (Ungureanu, D., 2005).

The Romanian expert papers drafted in the last decade make often references to the numerous paradigm changes which occurred in the didactic methodologies field: the movement of focus from the product to the process (Păun, E., Potolea, D., 2002), from the teacher /trainer, to the learner/trainee; (Joița, E., 2010; Cojocariu, V., 2010 ; Radu, I.T& Ezechil, L; 2009) from the content – to competences (Manolescu, M., 2005; Panișoară, O. I., 2009) etc.

Much less numerous, adult psychology and pedagogy papers illustrated, on the other hand, the characteristics by which the new teaching methodologies, which have a higher impact force on adult trainees, distinguish themselves:

- the accent on the stimulation of adults' motivations for learning (Neacșu, I., 2010)
- the necessity to stimulate reflective capacities, critical thinking (Dumitru, I., 2000)
- respect for adult's independence and autonomy in learning (Negreț, I.D& Panisoara, I.O., 2005)
- the challenging of the lateral, non-conventional thinking and of creative capacities (L. Ezechil, 2007; L.Ezechil et al., 2011).

Generally, we note that the problem related to the necessity of applying certain new, innovative methodologies in adults' education is approached either *globally* – as a natural effect of reform movements in all the sectors of the social, economic, cultural life – or from the *perspective of the basic subcomponents of the didactical process, i.e.:* teaching, learning, evaluation.

Global approaches ensure a continuum between Romanian cultural traditions and the recent trends to modernize didactic methodologies. From this point of view, it was highlighted that Romanian education was always concerned with school performance, even if, in the avant-garde of the values promoted by this system, *cognition* - understood as an ensemble of gathered knowledge - had a constant position.

For more than a decade, didactic methodologies started to be approached mostly from the perspective of the sub-components of the didactical process: teaching, learning, evaluation..., which led to the identification of new ways to make the educative intervention more efficient.

Regarded from this perspective, the three sub-processes (teaching, learning, evaluation) are valorised either in terms of their specific potential, or as a continuum, as correlated sequences of an integrated whole within which *connections* are at least just as important as the *parts*.

Thus, if “until recently, the characterization of teaching was made more from a technical, instrumental point of view, now, in addition to the technical dimension, other two aspects determining an efficient teaching are taken into account: the didactic style of the teacher and its teaching philosophy” (Sava, S., 2007, p.173).

New teaching methods for new learning results...

1. Psycho-pedagogical tools

In our opinion, the most important instruments which may influence the quality of adults' training programs and which can develop life long learning opportunities are the psycho-pedagogical tools.

Most of the times, psycho-pedagogical tools are not new. *New* are only the modalities of using such tools in the adequate contexts and for the adequate subjects.

For the Romanians, the problem related to the psycho-pedagogical training of adults' trainers continues to be a sensitive aspect.

Due to the ideological exaggerations in the communist period when *psychology* and *pedagogy* were considered "dangerous" sciences, today there is also a certain deficit of psycho-pedagogical training among teachers /trainers.

Here it is, for exemplification, an opinion reflecting a thinking manner which has been obsolete for a long time:

You lose too much time with interactive activities! You no longer have the time to teach all the other very important things that must be taught!
(from the confessions of an adult trainee, economic background, 49 years old – upon the finalization of a lifelong training program cantered on the use of interactive methods)

The results of the different studies and research made in this field, and the experience we have in delivering adults' education programs, determine us to estimate that the main weakness in managing adults' training policies consists in the (still!) low concern for the manner in which adults' trainers are trained. Our opinion is also confirmed by a study made in 2008 in the context of a Grundtvig project with the theme *Cultural organisations as communication and learning environments*, coordinated by Romania (partners: Bulgaria, Italia, Turkey, Lithuania) on which occasion it was highlighted that adults' trainers continue to resort to the traditional forms of organizing training activities: lectures, frontal activities, lectures combined with self-didactic learning. Non-formal learning and the application of the new methodologies of ensuring individual consultancy in learning through tutoring, coaching and mentoring only represent 10-20 % of the preferences of the questioned adults' trainers. Such methods as: the role play, the group work, practice-based exercises, brainstorming... are almost unknown or are used in an unprofessional manner.

2. New ICT in Adults' Education

The problem of using computer for didactical purposes constitutes a constant concern both for the educational policy makers in Romania and for the trainers in all the learning environments: formal, non-formal, informal.

Starting with 2003, in the national curriculum for the training of future teachers, the Computer-Based Instruction course was introduced as a mandatory discipline. Consequently, the computer was introduced in the usual environment of classrooms for the learners of all ages.

The attitudes of the experts in education sciences, of teachers/trainers, but also of students/trainees to these new informational technologies are, however, quite different.

Some authors are quite suspicious as to the advantages that might result from the use of computer in the didactical process. Through the intermediation of inter-human relationships by the computer – as Albu G. (2009, p.24) states - "we lose the biggest gift mankind ever had: the national and international contact among people, ideas, information, opinions, creative works and connections".

Other authors (Cojocariu, V., M., 2010, p.137) also have certain doubts that they synthesize in analytical questions:

- By interposing computer between the trainer and the trainee, isn't the formative part at an inter-human level neglected?
- Aren't the trainer-trainable learner relations becoming too technicized?
- Have the trainers working with the computer higher professional satisfactions as compared to those not using it?
- Do the trainers working with the computer obtain better results in adults' education as compared to those not using it?

A satisfactory answer for this kind of questions could only be obtained based on a wide study still waiting to be made.

Adult trainees do not have a constant attitude regarding the advantages of using computer in the didactical process, either. Some of them are enthusiastic:

I cannot stop wondering how efficient the educational software that may be used in the classroom became!

(The comments of an adult trainee: higher studies in the engineering field, 45 years old)

Others are more sceptical, considering that only the trainer is advantaged by the use of such didactical means:

Teaching by means of computer is advantageous only for the trainer. Using power-point presentations, the trainer makes less teaching effort.

(The reflections of an adult trainee: higher studies in the socio-humanist field, more than 48 years old)

Beyond the attitudes which trainers or trainees have to the use of computer in the didactical process, it is important to highlight that, through the use of the new media technologies; many real problems encountered by the learning adults were solved:

- the supply of distance training programs, in remote geographical areas;
- on-line learning for the adult trainees completing their studies while already having a job;
- the creation of possibilities of individualizing training;
- the facilitation of understanding processes and phenomena to which there is no direct way of access;
- creating learning opportunities for people in their own communities.

As a result of becoming aware of such advantages, the process related to the preparation of learning software adapted to various didactical purposes is in continuous progress and gains more and more adepts day by day.

Is there added value brought by the new teaching methodologies?

Comparing the didactical methods and strategies traditionally used in Romania in the activities with adults to the innovative ones that were introduced as a consequence of applying educational reform programs and as a positive reaction to the Memorandum for Lifelong Learning, we note several essential differences:

| The period preceding the adoption of the Memorandum on LLL | The first decade of the XXIth century (post-Memorandum on LLL) |
|--|---|
| The adults' education field only started to create its own identity | The adults' education field indubitably acquired identity and status |
| Adults' training programs were usually made in enterprises by trainers not having any pedagogical training | Special focus on the trainer's qualities (the necessity of the special training of the adults' trainers was established by law and the trainer's status) |
| Adult trainees were treated as pupils | Special interest for adapting the pedagogical intervention to the specific nature of education for adults |
| Learning contents - prescribed, learning – of theoretic–reproductive type | Tendency to process contents to be centered on the learner and on the <i>development of competences</i> |
| Expositive pedagogical methods | Efforts to innovate didactical methodologies with focus on the active participative learning |
| Didactical means: traditional, especially the blackboard and the chalk | Accentuated trend of using the new informational technologies and multimedia means |
| Training space: either poor in learning means and materials, or exaggeratedly crowded with useless tables and charts | Modernized training space: adapted, ergonomic furniture |
| Educational relationship: rigid, dominated by the teacher /trainer | The educational relationship tends to become more flexible, more dynamic, more interactive |
| <i>Overall assessment</i> Pedagogical rigueur: reproductive learning style, domination of the pedagogical relation by the trainer, excessive authoritarianism | <i>Overall assessment</i> Innovative pedagogy. New paradigms: focus on the trainee, interactive methodologies, cognitive and social constructivism, focus on the process (not only on results), focus on the practical training and less on theoretical training |

The obtainment of the results illustrated in the right part of the table was possible as a result of introducing truly reforming measures in the adults' education system:

- national policies for encouraging investments in human resources;
- the drafting of occupational standards, among which: occupational standard for the adults' trainer, for the trainer of adults' trainers, for the training facilitator, etc;
- policies to encourage adults to participate in permanent education;
- the creation of the normative framework for the professional training of adults and for authorizing professional training suppliers;

- the authorization of professional competence evaluation centres and the certification of the evaluators of adults' professional competences;
- the creation of communitarian permanent education centres;
- the establishment of the mechanisms and methodologies to recognize and validate the learning results obtained in non-formal and informal environments;
- the professional training of adults at the workplace, through apprenticeship;
- the monitoring, evaluation, accreditation and control of non-university lifelong training suppliers;
- the accessing of European funds to solve strategic, methodological problems or problems related to financing adults' training programs;
- the development of partnerships putting education suppliers in a direct relationship with training beneficiaries.

Of course, the series of successes and progresses made in Romania in the last approximately 10 years in the adults' education field could continue.

The educational policy makers and the adults' trainers involved in the implementation of these new orientations are however aware of the fact that some success is apparent and that there are quite many reasons to analyze it with circumspection.

From among the quite numerous critical aspects which could be illustrated on the occasion of performing a rigorous analysis of the adults' education field, we only retain a few, which are waiting to be solved in the near future:

- the activation of an authentic pedagogical reform in higher education;
- the increase of the importance of practical training at the level of all the institutions making professional training;
- the evaluation, through practical tests, of the psycho-pedagogical competences of adults' trainers – especially of the teaching-learning methodologies they use;
- the use in the adults' training process of new modalities of professional training and development of the tutoring, mentoring, coaching type;
- the democratization of the trainer – trainee pedagogical relationship which continues to be dominated by the trainer's authority;
- the training, through special programs, of the evaluators verifying the learning results obtained by adults;
- the valorisation of the psychological and pedagogical functions held by the new media technologies for making learning processes more efficient;
- focus of the learning programs on well-defined competences corresponding to different professional profiles.

Conclusions

In the last decade in Romania, but especially after its integration in the European Union, we can see the intensification of the efforts to assimilate/adapt/implement the most innovative didactic methodologies usable in adults' education.

Although the progresses that have been registered in this field so far are considered insufficient sometimes, other times – little relevant, they inspire optimism about the possible evolutions in the very near future. Adults' trainers are, generally, aware of their

weaknesses in terms of their training as trainers, but are willing to develop these specific competences.

In our opinion, such mutations occurred at the conscience level constitute the most surprising results of education reforms, all the more so that they developed in a dominant culture which was, until recently, a culture of totalitarianism and disregard of differences.

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