ADULT EDUCATION BETWEEN ETHNOCENTRISM AND ALTERITY

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Abstract: *In a context marked by unpredictable changes, it is obvious that adults' access to education is a necessary requirement for (re)adjustment. According to Roger Mucchielli (1982), the adult can achieve performance in learning if: he/she focuses from the very beginning on a well-defined purpose (a), by participating and being made responsible during all of his/her preparation stages (b), one is part of a learning group (c), and one's life experience is appreciated. These principles will be detailed in the hereby paper and supported by the relevant theories that justify the need to observe the teaching rules of Mucchielli, from the viewpoint of the intercultural education.*

Keywords: *adult education, intercultural competencies, previous experience.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The times we live in is marked by the speed of the information, beliefs and the divergent attitudes attacking us that should worry us. We do not have the privilege to stop and let the messages settle down, or to decide whether they are relevant or not. These moments of reasoning lead to maladjustment and to the incapacity of keeping pace with another person. The relative and consensual truths have replaced the solid and irrevocable ones. The realities are built and deconstructed in order to be reconstructed in a convenient and easy to assimilate manner.

Eduard Spranger [22] considered that a nation's culture depends on the space. The education also catches up the patterns of the territory, and thus the content becomes the dissemination instrument of values in a specific area.

The school is no longer seen as a simple place for instruction and acquisition of knowledge, but it becomes "a space for living, experience, solidity and mutual acceptance" [8]. Moreover, the role of the teacher has also changed. Having in view that the teacher's cognitive superiority - due to the multiple sources of information -, and the epistemological authority - since he/she is no longer the sole owner of the knowledge he/she

cannot provide a global, absolute, encyclopedic and referential vision of the truth anymore - are more questionable nowadays, the teacher simply mediates the access to information, by decoding and interpreting it, due to his/her verified and certified credibility.

In this context marked by unpredictable changes, it is obvious that adults' access to education, in its different forms, is a necessary condition for (re)adjustment, because "education has to draw the maps of a world in permanent movement, but in the same time, to make available for people the tools of orientation which lead to finding one's way" [8].

In 1982, Roger Mucchielli [17] identified the rules necessary to design a set of adult teaching procedures. According to Mucchielli, *the adult achieve performance in learning if: he/she focuses from the very beginning on a well-defined purpose; by participating and being made responsible during all his/her preparation stages; he/she is part of a learning group; one's life experience is appreciated.* These principles will be detailed in this paper and supported by the relevant theories that justify the need to observe the teaching rules of Mucchielli, from the viewpoint of intercultural education.

In this article of synthesis, we attempt to contribute to the elaboration of a framework

favorable to the development of adult intercultural programs by highlithing and classifying theoretical and conceptual aspects.

2. THE RE-INTERPRETATION OF THE TEACHING NORMS PROPOSED BY ROGER MUCCHIELLI, FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION THEORIES

2.1. The adult achieves performance if he/she focuses from the very beginning of the learning process on a well-defined purpose

It has been scientifically proven that the perception of learning results has a positive impact on the adults' performances. Learning takes place when the adult understands that one's needs can be satisfied by specific ways of action. The subjects who have been informed about the expected results from the beginning have recorded a significant progress in the learning activities, proving that the efficiency is conditioned by the acknowledgment of the purpose of an activity that requires a "specific situation, a practical well-defined behavior" [14]. Moreover, a context in which the adult's interest in learning is based on satisfying a need, regardless the importance of that need, will lead to performance in teaching. At this level, it is possible to invoke George Leonard's [15] theory of ecstatic education. Satisfying the need for knowledge determines the voluntary and unconditioned learning.

In this respect, according to *The Recommendation of the European Parliament* [26], the development of axiological, value or intercultural competencies represents one of the educational objectives. The capacity to communicate, to socialize in various contexts represents a transversal competence which should be integrated in educational actions.

In this context, Poland's experience is relevant and proves its undeniable educational aspects, because its curriculum includes specific topics which enable students to determine their identity and cultural background. Students are asked to design their family tree, even from their first study years, so they become aware of their cultural,

emotional and material inheritance from their predecessors, and to make them responsible for how to develop the inherited gifts. Education should make individuals "aware of their own roots, so that they have landmarks when they are supposed to integrate themselves in any place on this Earth" [8].

This permanent reference the roots enables the definition of one's identity. Lee Rainwater [19] introduces the concept of *valid identity*, which is at the crossroads between *who you are and what you feel you are, who you are and what you show to the others*, being thus defined by four elements:
- *how we see ourselves;*
- *how we behave, so that we are known by the others;*
- *how we are perceived by the others;*
- *how we are treated by the others.*

The access to alterity is not possible without knowing your own identity. Shapour Rassekh, UNESCO consultant, was asked about what we should do to become European and he answered: "Before doing anything else, be Romanian!" Thus, it becomes possible to reduce the tension between global and local, and "people should become citizens of this planet, without losing their roots" [8]. By constant reporting oneself to the evolution in time, it is possible to go through the phase of knowing oneself; once this stage is over, the person gains access to the phase of knowing and accepting the others, in order to achieve autonomy.

To summarize the above theories, we propose the following evolutionary perspective, in establishing intercultural competencies in adulthood:
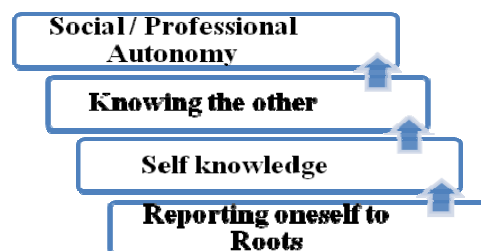

Fig. 1 Evolution of Identity towards Social/Professional Autonomy

To learn how to live together is one of the pillars of education, underlined by The

European Commission [26], and *the understanding of the others* becomes a specific form of self knowledge: "every form of identity is complex, because individuals are defined in connection to other people" [8]. The relationship with the others usually involves the adoption of a responsible behavior. The first thing to do, in order to restore education its central role among the social powers that act in a society, should be "the preservation of its function as a melting pot, by fighting against any form of exclusion" [8].

The followers of the individualist current consider that it is necessary to permanently compare oneself to the other; the quality of the relationship among participants represents a condition for efficient learning. The adult's insertion into a learning group represents an opportunity for practicing the social roles, the skill of participating through cooperation to the personal education, thus determining the progress.

2.2. The adult achieves performance in learning if he/she takes part and becomes responsible for all the preparation stages.

In the 5th century B.C., the Chinese philosopher Lao-Tse defined the experiential learning: *If you explain to me, I will listen, I will understand, but if you let me experiment, then I will learn.*

The adult learning process is reported to the changing tasks or roles a person has to deal with. The evolutional changes vary: "the adult becomes independent, thus identifying and maintaining one's existence means, one chooses a life partner, one becomes a parent and behaves accordingly, one interacts with community and society, one enlarges one's citizen responsibilities, getting satisfaction later, when one becomes old" [14]. Every such change of one's economic or social role requires learning through deconstruction and reconstruction.

The use of such strategies determines opportunities for involvement, participation, making the adult responsible by discovery; knowledge validation is the basic step for the active learning in adulthood.

Relevant studies confirm that the capitalization of the previous experience plays an important role in the development of intercultural competencies.

The intercultural education is not "an extension of the curriculum for teaching cultures, nor a process of transformation into folk culture" [7]. The teacher who provides intercultural teaching "must effectively take advantage of the presence of students having different roots in order to re-put value on their root culture and to make other people aware and sensitive to cultural diversity" [7]. By reporting oneself to the social and cultural experiences outside school, the teacher takes into account "the emphasis on every participant's acquisition which may help one find one's personal ground, which is familiar for a new process of elaboration of knowledge" [7].

Shifting the focus of interest from *how much it is learned* to *how it is learned*, the responsibility of the *followed path* finally determines the self-instruction, self-teaching. The path and the target coexist. It is recommended to have a logical transformation instead of an individual-based one. The priority, in this case, is represented by the eternal truths, defined as movements of active reversible search: "no individual, no group will be judged based on a fixed result, but according to the direction towards which their actions are oriented" [9].

2.3. The adult achieves performance in learning if he/she is part of a learning group.

Recent studies (CEDEFOP, 2008) show that the adults with poor theoretical knowledge are seven times less open to participating in a lifelong learning program compared to those with higher degrees of education [25]. These realities lead to an unequal education: the individuals with the highest level of initial training are more likely to continue their studies, while people with lower competencies face difficulties while attending a learning program *(Matthew Effect)* [27]. This is one of the reasons why "educational systems have the mission to become more open and relevant, this happening in the context of a predicted lack of balance between the level of competencies and demands at job, this process will be present and frequently met before 2020" [25].

In 1999, Micheline Rey said that "the formation of social and socio-cognitive representations" depends on the contacts established among cultures or cultural groups" [7].

Based on the economic changes that have taken place in the last years, it has been noticed that there is a tendency of societies towards closing, for the purpose of maintaining monopoly on resources, thus contributing to the appearance of exclusion and social alienation.

On the other side, recent studies (Ballard and Clanchy, 1997; Jin and Cortazzi, 2006; Jones, 1999) emphasize the fact that the individuals themselves, through their cultural membership, choose to adopt an active or passive behavior when starting an intercultural dialogue. Thus, the studies conducted by Jones [12] prove that students belonging to cultural environments where the teacher-student dialogue is not encouraged will consider free discussions, based on interaction, as disturbing and capable of influencing in a negative way one's cognitive balance. Moreover, Wong [29] establishes the connections between the teaching style and the students' approach to learning. Thus, Wong states that the societies which do not encourage the teacher-student dialogue have academic objectives centered on evaluation, results, products, and passing the exams.

In this way, memory and attention are being favored, without paying too much attention to creativity and critical thinking.

These realities generate a social phenomena based on exclusion/self-exclusion, alienation /self-alienation, and the role of education systems is to show responsibility when dealing with them.

2.4. The adult achieves performance in learning if his/her life experience is valued.

In adulthood, the experience of the past becomes a source for increasing knowledge. The individual introduces specific notes in his/her educational development. This is why the new knowledge of adults should be permanently connected to the previous life and learning experiences.

To learn to know and *to learn to do* are "aspects which cannot be separated" [8]. The development of knowledge reduces the importance of professional qualification in favor of competencies. Instead of a special skill, of a particular "know-how", the competence is highly appreciated, meaning "a specific skill obtained through training, regarding social behavior, team spirit, initiative and ability of taking full responsibility for actions" [8].

The term of *globalization* seems to have gained more advantages nowadays than the *mono, ethnocentrism*. Therefore, more and more people, mostly from the poor countries, emigrate to the regions of a wealthier world in their search for a new job and successful opportunities. In 2004, the number of persons living in the countries, other than their native ones, was 175 millions, i.e. double, compared to the number recorded in 1972. These real facts request for the immediate re-thinking of the programs designed for adults, focused on the development of intercultural skills and the ability to work, productively, with persons with different values, background, and customs.

The major objectives of adult training systems should be the provision of real opportunities for acquiring practical experience, and the direct contact with the professional life. In this respect, the learning process at the work place, in internships and under programs based on voluntary actions are not only real ways of matching the demand and offer of competencies, the real situations of interaction, knowledge and mutual acceptance.

Starting from the variety of learning situations, the paradigm of lifelong learning education assesses the necessity for reaching educational goals through permanent reporting to different circumstances: formal, non-formal, informal. Though non-formal and informal education does not necessarily involve an official qualification at the level of The European Union policies, there is a clear tendency of recognizing the knowledge, abilities and competencies acquired, through the identification, recognition, crediting and

certifying results regardless the time, place or way they have been obtained.

In the same time, the experience of countries that have already used complementary methodologies for measuring results, such as the portfolio of competencies, individual plans, project-based evaluations, should be analyzed and used as resources in the national curricula.

The evaluation is not limited to the information acquired, but it also applies to the attitudes and abilities developed as a result of attending a training course.

The elaboration of a flexible curriculum through educational programs focused on the development of competencies, the approach of *inter pares* evaluation methodologies*, the use of educational portfolios to assess the learning progress and last, but not least, the encouragement of schools and universities to assume the role of a centre of lifelong adult education are the provisions of the education law in force, in line with the Community tendencies [26].

3. CONCLUSIONS

We believe that our analysis will contribute to a better understanding of the need for formative approaches focused on the development of intercultural competences of adults, for a real social and professional integration.

The educational practice encourages reconstructions and deconstructions, in the same time supporting reflexive learning that makes people aware of the constructive character of their world.

The usage of those strategies that stimulate teaching and learning as processes, which encapsulated the participation of educational actors, the solving of problems and the discovery of them *being together,* conditions though its own experience the final phase of knowledge, being qualities which favour the attainment of social and professional autonomy for adults.

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