TEACHING METHODS AND TOOLS USED IN THE ADULTS' EDUCATION

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Abstract

The conception concerning the adults' education, even also in defining the term, was always tributary to the social and individual needs during one period or another. Due to the rapid changes which have occurred on the labour market in the last decades, the adults' education has become an interest of the society, first due to the fact that the principle, „I learn today, I produce tomorrow", has turned into „I learn today, I produce today".
These continuous changes have led to modifying the school position within the society, the school being forced to direct its attention not only upon the students but also upon the adults' education. In the adults' education, the main role is held by the capacity of learning achieved before, the type and reasons of learning and not the age as such. For the adults, school is correlated with work.
The modernizing of the adults' educational activities has been made with practical-demonstrative methods which got a particular importance due to the use of the heuristics principles, the discovery of new ideas, significances or skills of major interest. The active participation in the one's own education represents the main course of these methods, this explains the strong extent they knew in the last years and the desire of those who organize courses for adults to know and use mainly such methods. The diversity of the methods used is very large, a part of them being used successfully also in the students' education, the most frequent being: debate, symposium, test and grids, examination, round-table, project, sharing of experience, industrial training, team-work, work with computer.
The evaluation tools of the acquirements the adults gathered from their former experience, formally or informally, used successfully are: portfolio, teaching practice notebook, case study.
The courses of training organized and the international projects carried on this theme in our school allowed us to apply successfully these methods and promulgate them.

Key words: the adults' education, active methods, evaluation tools.

The term of adults' education has appeared for the first time in 1919 when in Great Britain was born the *Board of the Adults' Education* but it is strongly used in the educational sciences after 1960 when the number of institutions of such type began to increase all over the world. Until the introduction of the adults' education concept, it was considered that education could accomplish in childhood, the other periods in man's life being used for work – the maturity period, respectively for rest, after a great period of work – the old age period.

It was longtime considered that, at the old age, education is not compulsory, especially the adult has to accomplish a series of social roles – employed, parent, unemployed, grandfather, pensioner, etc., for which he was not prepared in school.

A more distinct delimitation of the concept appears at R. Mucchielli (Muccielli,R.,1982) and then at M. Knowles (Knowles,M,2005) who considers that the syntagma is difficult to define due to its complexity as it covers the adults' learning process, the set of activities organized by a series of institutions with the aim of reaching the specifical educational objectives but also the social practices ones.

The major changes of school education are owed first to the changes in society, and this thing can be noticed first in the fact that the paradigm – **I learn today, I produce tomorrow** – is replaced by – **I learn today, I produce today** – which is available in the case of the adults' education, the characteristic feature being that the state and the role of that who learns is totally different.

The desire or need, imposed or not, to participate in a form of education after the proper period of schooling, in a formal or informal background, is still present as well nowadays in our Romanian society. For this reason, the Romanian school had to find ways to promote this type of education and to adapt it as institution to this new provocation.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The training courses and the **Leonardo** project **New European Agromanager** organized at the „**Vasile Adamachi" Agricultural**

Highschool level allowed us both a verification and a clearing up of the theoretical notions that the specialized literature uses.

The courses and project implementation led to the conclusion that the adults' education has always reference to the capacity of learning of these. Also, this type of education is made with students' active participation each of them working with specific cultural significances and symbols.They started from the known principle that both the adult and the child have a fundamental mutual characteristic – learning, but concerning the child we speak about accumulation and reorganization and, for the adult, deepening and creation.From this reason, the passivity methods, the traditional techniques and means used in the children' s education did not give results considering the specific conditions where learning takes place in the adults' case.

The personal experience of each student was a point which we had to consider important, because they consider that the scientific dimension is not sufficient, informational but we must also take into consideration the cultural factors, the social relations and their elevation within the group the adult is part from.

We permanently took into consideration the fact that the adults' education is reported to one of the fundamental precepts of the permanent education – **learn to learn**, as the continous learning leads to a continous development.

Not in the last, we took into consideration that the previous experiences from the adults' education field showed that the essential role is kept by the learning abilities achieved previously, the type and reasons of learning and not the student' s age.

To accomplish the qualifications courses but also to implement the **NAME** project, the trainers used diverse methods and techniques which allow the objectives proposed initially – debate, symposium, examination, round-table, project, sharing of experience, team-work, etc.

The results evaluation of learning and the acquisitions the adults have from the previous experiences accumulated formally or informally was made using portfolio, teaching practice notebook, case study, etc.

The application and use of these methods and tools were made together with classical methods which could not miss in these activities – exposure, practical exercise, project, solving problems and tests.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The use of methods and tools in the adults' activities started from a set of questions the trainers had to answer initially:

1. What do we try to get by these methods or in other way which are the results expected?

2. Which resources do we need to apply these methods?
3. What previous acquisitions of students can be pointed out or are necessary?
4. What is the interval of time necessary to apply these?
5. Can I also use another method to get the same result?
6. What method of evaluation can I use to measure what the students have learned?
7. How can I assure an optimum didactic background to use each student' s potential?

As the methods and tools diversity was very large, each trainer had to make a distribution of these concerning the scientifical content of each module. The most used methods were:

1.Debate – was used to value the experience accomplished by the students.We realized that the most important step for the debate to be efficient is how we raise the problem/question to stimulate the answers but also the reactions of more students.

2.Brainstorming – allows the practising of the persons' creativity implied in activity but also the development of interpersonal relationships by rendering valuable their ideas.

3.The project – is based on making some complex actions, on a theme given or chosen.The project can be accomplished individually or in group, in a longer period which supposes a bigger effort of information, investigation, collect data and elaboration. The project always ends with a final product which must be evaluated, for this reason it is found as a complimentary method of evaluation.Using a project was a frequent method in the courses with the adults because they could value the previous acquisitions and also those within the courses. It is also very used in the activities with the pupils as it permits an interdisciplinary approach on a theme given, a consolidation and a development of the techniques of collecting, processing and presentation of information from the natural environment, namely, out of the classroom.

4.Case study – favors the investigation of some real cases, permitting thus rendering valuable the students' own experience. If in the pupils' situation the teacher' s help is vital, in the adults' case the previous acquisitions are well revaluated and the guidance must be more circumspect. Also, it develops the ability of analyses, interpretation, anticipation and decision-making, of argumentation of the proposed sollutions and mostly to find an optimal sollution recommended. It is one of the methods used successfully both individually and in group activity.

5.The Poster – permits to achieve a composite with a major visual impact on the lookers. In the adults' education we noticed that it is a method preferred by the persons with artistical abilities better developed and also by those with a better capacity of synthesis. The final quality of a poster is better if it is achived in a team.

6.Sharing experience – is used successfully especially in activities with applied practical character. It is a very efficient method as it exploits the applied part of some theoretical contents by illustrating them in real situations of production. This type of activity can be used as a modality of practical illustration of theories learned but also of comparison of efficacy of utilisation different techniques in real life. Also, it permits the comparing of the diverse modalities of transposing the theory into practice.

7.Teaching Practice Notebook – was successfully used in the implementation of the **Leonardo** project **NAME**, both in our country and in the countries partners – Italy, France, Portugal, Hungary, Belgium. It was decided by mutual agreement to be used as a tool of final examination of the students' activity, because they found a structure accepted by common consent which supposed elements specific to each partner but also elements generally available in the students' activity. This use permitted an efficient revaluation of the activity from the students' practice place that, in some cases, coincided with the working place of them but also an application in the real life of knowledge capacities acquired at the theoretical part. It was a complex element which finally allowed a comparison of the partners peculiarities implied in the project.

8.The Portfolio – very often met in the pupils' education too, who leave school with the so-called portfolio for permanent education. It is a tool of revaluation of the students' activities. Its elaboration which is made after a communicated structure supposes the collecting of proofs in a wide file. Its elaboration is made in time, the proofs being added step by step, its revaluation being accomplished as usual at the end of the activity.

As the persons who participate in the education courses form heterogeneous groups concerning age, training, experience, culture and they meet for a short period of time in different conditions, it is necessary to use initial methods for the group homogenization and knowledge, known as methods of breaking the ice. The aims of using these methods are to encourage the active implication of all the students, the expectations identification but also the participants' fear, the facilitation of work-team, interknowledge and

creation of an open atmosphere, optimal for learning, identification of knowledge level and previous capacities connected to the theme proposed, identification of the level one can start from and what methods are the best. Regarded with much scepticism at the beginning both by the trainers and the students, considered sometimes too ludic for the adults, these methods showed their efficiency at the end of the activities when they accomplished the feed-back of their activities.

The methods of breaking the ice, the most useful within the courses were:

- **99 questions** – they introduce questions to which they answer raising the hand or write on papers which later on are posted up. It is a method by which the other one learns general information about each participant but also about the level of knowledge of the proposed theme, these information are necessary as the participants know nearly nothing about one another.The atmosphere the lector creates is very important because nobody must feel on view.

- **I introduce myself** – each participant in the course introduce himself first to the person with whom is in pair and after to the rest of the group achieving a familiarity step by step with the whole group. After the level of knowledge they notice a competence of the rest of the activity, because each student can manifest more easily.

- **Small Cards Method** – each student receive two small cards, one for personal information the other for information about the course. It is completed and after presented to the group. Like the previous method, this one permits the knowledge step by step of the whole group and offers at the same time important information about the trainers.

- **I was also** – is used for the relaxation atmosphere within the group being at the same time an occasion of practising the students' creativity.

The diversity of these methods is very large and each trainer can adapt them according to the group of students, the most important aspect being that finally they create a necessary atmosphere of carrying on an activity of quality.Sometimes, due to the group heterogeneity and reticence manifested by some students, the application of these methods fails, being necessary much pedagogical tact for the activitities revaluation.

The evaluation of the activities carried on with the students can be done using classical tools-written test (items correctly formulated to respect the scientifical criteria) and grids of correcting, the creation of a practical work which must be evaluated rigorously after clear and known criteria but also with alternative methods-project, portfolio.

CONCLUSIONS

The carrying on the training courses and the implementation of **Leonardo** project **NAME** along several years permitted some important conclusions:

- The training is very important to carry on the activities which attain the aims proposed.

- The methods used by the trainers must be chosen and used with much power of discernment, to attain the aim.

- The trainer is a partner with the participant at the course within the learning process, not having the main role.

- The trainer' s roles are more various than in the lesson with the pupil.

- The trainer must adapt all the time to the group needs to create optimal opportunities of learning for the student.

- The use of didactic methods, the most adequate, can lead to the use of previous acquisitions to obtain maximum results.

- The methods used require the student' s creativity practice and the trainer' s at the same time but also an open attitude.

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