Projects developed by older adults within the educational field

Analysis of a Program of Permanent Education of University Extension of the UNLP

Natalia Ciano*

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This paper intends to approach the conceptualizations about the permanent education and the contributions of Maria Teresa Sirvent in the different degrees of formality of the educative processes.

In light of these contributions, a Permanent Adult Education Program of the University Extension Secretariat of the Faculty of Humanities and Educational Sciences of the National University of La Plata will be analyzed.

This analysis has been of interest because of the prevalence of educational projects developed by older adults and within them those developed in what has traditionally been called the "non-formal" educational system.

Key words: Guidance – Permanent education – Aging - Projects

Introduction

"... old age is not only a new social phenomenon from a quantitative point of view, but is particularly original from a qualitative point of view, which is why we are witnessing a strong process of re-elaboration of the system of social norms and roles. Therefore, we think that education can itself be a tool to construct new roles for the elderly and not only to adjust them to the social roles prescribed" (Yuni & Urbano, 2005, 22).

Throughout different research projects as a fellow of the Science and Technical Secretariat of the UNLP and then as a PhD student in the Doctorate in Psychology[**],

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*   Docente del Programa de Educación Permanente de Adultos Mayores. Investigadora. Facultad de
     Psicología, Universidad Nacional de La Plata. E-mail: nataliaciano@gmail.com.

along with my director Dr. Mirta Gavilán, the articulation of the Theoretical Operative Model in Guidance (2006) and the Active Aging Model. Such articulation allowed us to ask ourselves how the new projects elaborate the elderly, how is free time used after retirement, what kind of preparation or guidance is offered to the retiree, or those who have not circulated through the system Educational and / or labor, to develop new projects? What are these projects (of what type)? And In what institutions do they materialize (in case they need inclusion in an institution to carry them forward)?

The Theoretical Operational Model in Guidance conceives the Guidance as the "set of strategies and tactics used by the psychologist and / or psychologist specialized in Guidance so that the orientated or subject of the Guidance, individually or collectively, through a comprehensive, reflective and committed, can develop an educational, work, personal and / or social project throughout life "(Gavilán, 2006: 194). It is based on three axes that make up the "Guiding Trilogy" and revolve around the guidance articulating with each other (Gavilán, 2000), these are: process (in its three aspects: macroprocess, microprocess and specific process), social imaginary and prevention. It also includes the fields of health, education, labor-economics and social policies, and disciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary knowledge.

Given the increase in life expectancy and therefore the years remaining after retirement through the articulation of both models we promote the design of interventions that rescue the subjectivity of the aging and that is the protagonist, once more or perhaps for First time, a subjective choice. Among the types of projects developed by the elderly, we have observed four types: personal, work, social, educational, with prevalence of the latter; so it is interesting to clarify the characteristics of those projects that were frequently considered to belong to the field of "non-formal" education. Reason why, for the purposes of this work we will focus on the educational field. We will say that it includes the educational characteristics of a population, the insertion in the formal and non-formal education system, the level of attrition, accessibility, training and strategies implemented in that field.

Non formal education

The concept of non-formal education emerged in the 1960s as a response to a series of demands and educational needs that the school failed to meet. The context of this emergence is given by the "Global Crisis of Education". Crisis that, more than education in general, was of its formal character in two main aspects: on the one hand, the inability of the school to respond to the educational needs of the entire population and, on the other, against its role in the Socioeconomic and cultural reproduction. As Sirvent puts it, "Historically, the concept of non-formal education, whose use

spread between the late 1960s and early 1970s, was relevant in allowing the nomination of a wide and growing area of experiences and educational practices" beyond Of the school, "in front of the identification of the crisis of the school" (2006, 3).

Coombs and Ahmed (1974) establish a tripartite classification of the educational universe: formal education, non-formal education and informal education. They understood as Formal Education the understood in the educational system, highly institutionalized, chronologically graduated and hierarchically structured, that extends from the first years of the primary school until the last years of the university. Non-Formal Education referred to any organized, systematic, educational activity carried out outside the official system to facilitate particular learning classes for particular subgroups of the population, both adults and children. Finally, Informal Education was considered as a lifelong process in which people acquire and accumulate knowledge, skills and attitudes through daily experiences and their relationship with the environment.

 This classification has been criticized. Subsequently, some of them will be analyzed, from the contributions of Sirvent.

In order to understand what non-formal education referred to, some of its characteristics are mentioned below (Luque Domínguez, 1997, 316):

Objectives: intentionally educational process, distant from school conventions. Try to respond to basic learning needs. It seeks the acquisition of skills and knowledge oriented to immediate action.

Target: great diversity, based on demands and specific educational needs. In local areas, intended for particular individuals or subgroups of population.

Periodicity of activities: usually of short duration, depending on specific needs. Look for short-term effects. Greater flexibility in schedules.

Spaces of action: basically out-of-school and local. More versatile and adaptable than formal space. Greater diversity of educational roles.

Types of learning: basic contents: skills, skills, technicians. Less structured than formal programs. It facilitates selective types of learning, based on specific needs. Often integrated into programs with broader social objectives.

Degrees of institutionalization: although organized, it does not have a complete and formal institutional form. More decentralized than formal education. Promoted by a variety of economic, political and social institutions.

Characteristics of non-formal education practices: they develop their own theories or principles. They adapt to their recipients or contexts. They are designed, planned in every moment. Participation is voluntary. They are developed in different spaces, not confined to a classroom. They use diversity of means and resources. They are participatory practices. Relaxed learning environment. Collectively, the overall process is evaluated.

As mentioned above, María Teresa Sirvent performs a review of the concept of Non-Formal Education. As for the intentions and ideology with which it has emerged, the author points out that non-formal educational experiences have not fulfilled the democratizing expectations that drove its emergence. Based on research, he observes

that the so-called non-formal education reproduced the injustice, poverty and discrimination that it tried to revert in its beginnings. It confirmed the "principle of cumulative quantitative and qualitative progress in education": the more formal education is obtained, the more and better education is demanded and appropriated throughout life.

With regard to the terminology used to refer to the different fields of education, there is a clear disagreement with the tripartite classification, since such classification hides the specificities of each field and restricts the possibility of appropriate interventions.

In the aforementioned conceptual review, the author identifies a series of unfavorable consequences of this classification:

- the effect of simplifying and disqualifying the complexity and specificity of experiences beyond school which are reduced to the negation of the scholar;
- the definition by the negative implies a contraposition and atomization of the educational phenomenon that ignores the richness of the dialectic relation between school and beyond the school; The tripartite classification does not function as an exclusionary classification in logical terms;
- the complexity of the reality of the field of education makes the same experience can be placed in one and the other class depending on different aspects or criteria, so that activities that could be considered as non-formal education are carried out within the school;
- the negative semantic load shared by the adverb "no" (in non-formal) and the prefix "in" (in informal) also does not allow to apply a classificatory criterion in an appropriate form, since both signify the negation of the formal.

This expression implied that this universe had to be defined only negatively by opposition to the formal, as if this field had neither form nor structure, without its own identity and specificity, only in opposition to the formal, that is, to the school. It completes the characterization of their specific traits as well as the identification of the pedagogical challenges that emerge from them: the young and adult population with deep educational needs, voluntary attendance of the participants, the immediacy of the learning demands with which they They arrive and the challenge of promoting from there a process that facilitates the recognition of new needs and demands. In sum, this tripartite classification was not useful to understand the educational reality or what happened in the educational universe, nor was it to intervene in it.

The educational processes previously denominated as formal, non-formal and informal, are included within the Permanent Education.

Permanent Education and degrees of formalization

Permanent Education was defined as: "a global project aimed both at restructuring the existing educational system and at developing all possibilities of training outside the educational system. In this project man is the agent of his own education, through

the permanent interaction of his actions and his reflection. Lifelong education, far from being limited to the period of schooling, must encompass all dimensions of life, all branches of knowledge and all practical knowledge that can be acquired by all means and contribute to all forms of personality development ". Finally, he points out that "educational processes, which continue throughout the life of children, young people and adults, in whatever form, should be considered as a whole" (UNESCO General Conference, 1977).

It includes within it: Initial Education (Primary Education, Middle and Higher Education (university and non-university), Youth and Adult Education and Social Learning. Sirvent uses the expression "beyond the school" for Refer to the learning that occurs outside the same but that does not necessarily have less formality.

This paradigm of lifelong education is based on a series of principles and theoretical and methodological assumptions:
- the conception of education as a permanent necessity and as a human right;
- the recognition of the capacity of individuals and groups for learning and transformation throughout their existence;
- consideration of life experience as a starting point for processes of continuous learning;
- recognition of the existence of multiple forms and educational resources emerging from a society, operating in school and "beyond school";
- the assumption of the enhancement of educational resources through the constitution of a network or network that articulates them;
- recognition of the importance and necessity of social participation in issues related to education and the democratization of knowledge.

In order to achieve an adequate understanding of the educational phenomenon, Sirvent proposes to analyze the "degrees of formalization". That is, the characteristics of structuring or organizing an educational space, an educational experience. This perspective crosses two axes:
- the different degrees of formalization (low, medium, high),
- three dimensions considered for the description, interpretation and intervention in the educational experiences, where these degrees are represented: sociopolitical, institutional and the space of teaching and learning.

The socio-political dimension refers to the relationship of the educational experience with the State. It considers the inclusion of such experience in the framework of public policies and legislation; The regulations governing the operation of the experience; etc.

The institutional dimension refers to the formalization of the institution that receives the educational experience, the institutional framework, what type of institution it is, what its aims and objectives are.

The dimension of the teaching and learning space refers to the triad that defines the educational act or space, integrated by the interrelation between the one who teaches, the one who learns and the content. It refers to pedagogical formalization.

The location of the field "beyond the school" within the permanent education and the analysis of the degrees of formalization facilitates the substitution of the previous classification and allows to understand that the formalization is not exclusive of the school.

On the other hand, an interesting aspect of the conception of degrees of formalization consists in the possibility of increasing or decreasing them, as the experience requires it and by the same action of the actors involved.

The clarification that the different degrees of formalization are not good or bad in themselves facilitates the dissociation of the "beyond school" from the negative characteristics attributed from the "non-formal" or "informal" expression.

Perhaps, the difficulty of this contribution is that "degree" would imply measurement and are not easy objects to measure or quantify.

Permanent Education Program for Older Adults (PEPAM), Secretariat for University Extension, Faculty of Humanities and Educational Sciences

Created in 1994, from the initiative of older adults who took as reference educational programs from other cities.

It depends on the Secretariat of University Extension of the Faculty of Humanities and Educational Sciences of the National University of La Plata.

The program is sustained in the concept of lifelong education as a continuous process that is carried out throughout life and that promotes the health of the elderly through their participation and integration in different activities, seminars, workshops, open talks, etc.

The other pillar is the concept of positive aging, understanding that older people can re-formulate a vital project within the framework of the transformations they undergo.

Aimed at people over 55 years. No previous studies are required as a requirement for inclusion.

Objectives: promote a new option to integrate creative activities; provide the opportunity to continue to grow and learn throughout life; create cultural spaces; support comprehensive and inclusive information; develop new interests; reformulate a life horizon; actively participate in the community.

Location: the headquarters office is located in a central area of the city of La Plata. From agreements with different institutions (Municipality of La Plata, Union of Private Teachers, etc.) has extended its location to different localities of this city (Tolosa, Abasto, etc.) allowing people to attend for various reasons (economic, mobility, etc.) had no access to headquarters.

Educative offer: most courses are quarterly, often weekly. Each meeting lasts an hour and a half. The modalities implemented consist of workshop and seminar. The courses are taught by university teachers, in some cases an observer (psychologist) is included who registers the group production.

The curriculum of the program is ordered based on three axes / areas that are articulated:

- Area of General Knowledge: includes proposals in relation to History, Literature, Sociology, Philosophy, etc.
- Area of Movement and Expression: the proposals cover the different expressive languages, such as music, dances, painting, drawing, vitraux, photography, dramatic creation and body work.
- Area of Transformations of Aging: the activities developed within this area address the biological, psychological and social changes that occur in aging. Also included are computer courses.

Denomination: in choosing the name, it has been preferred to use the Permanent Program *from* Older Adults, rather than *for* older adults, as a way of indicating the inclusiveness and social integration it promotes. Carballo and De Diego, in the prologue to the book "New Dimensions of Aging. Theorizations from practice", referring to the beginning of the same article: "that proposal that justified the denomination of a program for Older Adults, gave way to an experience in many cases self-managed - as evidenced by the monthly newspaper and travel organization Of each year-that allows to speak with property of a program of older Adults"(2002, 12).

At present, this aspect has been achieved through the organization of anstudent commission. It reinforces the social aspect of the program by organizing activities open to the community. Composed of PEPAM students, structured in interrelated subcommittees:

Subcommittee of the Magazine of the PEPAM "The older adults inform us", of semiannual publication.

Subcommittee on Culture: organize talks, conferences, etc.

Subcommittee of Tourism: organizes trips, trips, etc.

Solidarity Subcommittee: collaborates with different institutions, based on donations received from students and / or the community in general.

Subcommittee of the Library: organizes the library that owns the program in its central headquarters.

After this description will analyze different aspects and dimensions of the program, considering the contributions of Sirvent.

According to the organization of the educational field, proposed by Sirvent, the Pepam, would be located within the education for young people and adults. Many of the people attending the different venues have not finished initial education (as the author proposes), which, through the program can approach knowledge that in other stages of life have been inaccessible. In the case of those who have completed university studies, the contents of the program allow them to recover "pending subjects" in terms of knowledge or knowledge.

Another peculiarity of this program resides in the fact that the aging as an area of daily life is included or forms part of the curriculum, expressed in the courses of the area "Transformations of the aging".

The technological advances and the need and interest to adapt to them result in hundreds of students interested in learning how to use the computer and its different programs, as well as digital cameras. This is why, more and more courses in this subject, which, in the context of this program, address the teaching of these contents contemplating the specificity of older adults in terms of learning and distance with these objects of knowledge.

Another of the courses with the greatest demand are the memory training workshops, due to the fear generated by forgetfulness at this stage.

From the courses mentioned, it is observed how these areas, for various reasons, begin to be included within the curriculum of the program.

Dimensions and degrees of formalization

As for the socio-political dimension, the program has a direct dependence on the Secretariat of University Extension of the Faculty of Humanities and Educational Sciences of the National University of La Plata. The management is carried out by a Director, an Academic Secretary, a Psychogenetic Advisor and a coordinator for each area mentioned above. The charges are designated by that institution. The rules and norms are established in the Statute of the UNLP.

If one considers the direct relation with the State, in this aspect the degree of formalization would be low.

An average degree of institutional formalization can be estimated if one considers that it forms part of an educational institution, and responds to one of the primary functions of the University, university extension, understood as "a two-way *non-formal**educational process" Planned according to the interests and needs of society, whose purposes must contribute to the solution of the most diverse social problems, decision making and opinion formation, with the aim of generating knowledge through a process of integration with the And contribute to social development"**.

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*   The italics are mine.

**   Statute of the National University of La Plata (2009). Chapter III. Article 17.

The courses take place in different places: in a house of its own designed for this educational activity and in neighborhood clubs.

Perhaps the conformation and organization of the Commission of students serves to exemplify the notion of formalization processes. In this case, the increase of the degree of formalization in one aspect of the institutional dimension.

The dimension of the teaching and learning space in terms of educational intentionality presents a high degree of formalization. The educational processes present clear objectives, designed to be carried out in a determined educational space, with a determined duration and with a methodology previously designed that may or may not be repeated in the same way, depending on the group, context or Means with which it is counted. The programs of the courses are elaborated on the basis of the recipients and the situations in which they are developed. The topics covered are flexible, highly dependent on the interests, needs and demands of the participants. The practices are developed in different learning situations, and use a diversity of resources, but at the same time they are systematic, planned, clearly intentional. A careful didactic transposition is made, understood as the "process of successive adaptations of the knowledge by which scholarly knowledge is transformed into knowledge to be taught and taught to knowledge" (Frigerio&Poggi, 2). The knowledge to be taught must be accessible to all subjects with different educational courses (there are students in the classrooms who have not completed primary education, others who have entered a doctorate, 55-year-olds along with others over 90).

Within this same dimension, what refers to the evaluation presents a low degree of formalization. Although the three types of evaluation (initial, formative and summative) are present, they are carried out in a less rigorous way and without pursuing accreditation. As an initial evaluation, the previous knowledge on the subject in question is investigated at the beginning of each course, taking into account the heterogeneity of students. During the development of the course, the modality and the proposed topics, the achievements and difficulties, are evaluated to make the necessary adjustments. At the end of the course students can choose to do some integrative work. In the last class the students answer questions about different aspects of the course. Here the proposal is evaluated contemplating the development of the subjects, the dynamics of the classes, the proposed activities, the material used by the teacher, the interaction of the group, etc.

Final considerations

The analysis made allows to exemplify an educational practice where coexists a high formalization in some aspects and low or average in others. If we had to locate this program as a whole in one of the separate compartments of formal, non-formal and informal education, we would lose the particularities and various aspects that have been observed from considering the degrees of formalization and the different

dimensions. That is to say, the notion of degrees of formalization allows to capture the complexity of the educational phenomenon and, in particular, of these educative experiences beyond the school.

Through lifelong education, opportunities are offered for older adults to explore and enhance those skills and abilities that are undiscovered, either because of personal limitations or because they do not have opportunities to do so (for example, those women who have dedicated themselves exclusively to fulfilling the wife's mandates /mother).

With regard to educational projects the motivation that originates them is not to be formed for the labor insertion nor to "obtain a title for ..." but to obtain knowledge as an end in itself, to integrate into a group and to share with peers, to be active and Stimulate cognitive functions. Technological advances and the need and interest to adapt to them result in older adults interested in learning how to use the computer and its different programs, internet, as well as digital cameras. With regard to the lack of knowledge in the use of the computer they mention to feel "illiterate" to ignore the computer language and not to accede to these technologies.

(Woman, 66 years old) *"... buy me a computer and learn how to use it. When they ask me about my email I feel like a dinosaur"*(it does not).

Two activities are mentioned by way of example. One of them is a reflection workshop which addresses the different aspects of aging, emphasizing the impact on identity and self-esteem. The participants point out as expectations:

"To relate to peer group", "to share common goals", "to be in contact with peers", "to understand what is old", "to know how to take care of myself".

From the final evaluation of the workshop the following evaluations are recorded:

"Allowed me to deepen and to make an inward look, more reflective and critical that in the future will allow me to review situations and maintain or modify attitudes"; "I felt very integrated in the group, we share a common goal: autonomy, self-esteem;"these great values that even older adults should not lose"; " taught me to understand many things in life and to reflect that life has many stages with different things each"; "served me to appreciate that I can still continue"; "allowed me to recognize in other pairs situations and reactions or solutions similar and sometimes equal to mine".

There is a great demand for workshops on cognitive stimulation, especially on the exercise of memory. The interest arises from the forgetfulness that the Elderly people suffer, that because of the ignorance they confuse with pathological forgettings (own

of the dementias); but the majority, unknowingly, experiences other types of forgetfulness, those considered benign, typical of the aging process. These are, for example, forgetting names of people, places where objects are left, etc. Forget that they are present in other ages but they disturb in too much the older adult to be associated in the social imaginary with some dementias, for example the Alzheimer.

Here are the recurring expectations when starting this type of workshop:

> "To return to work with what one may have learned a long time ago"; "to be with other people, to meet new people, to have a better quality of life"

> "To maintain my active cognitive capacities to maintain my self-determination and independence".

At the end of the workshop they stated:

> "I had the opportunity to rewrite, think and open the dictionary"; "I shared the exercises with my grandchildren, who loved them, I wanted to solve them"; "I liked to work as a group, since I never did".

According to Yuni&Urbano (2005, 57) the education of the elderly is the result of the convergence of several processes:

> "... the education of the elderly as a social practice is the product of several convergent social processes. Among them can be mentioned the demographic increase of the aged population; The tendency to prolong life expectancy; The emergence of new generations of older people with a positive vision of aging, better standards of quality of life, better education and better health; The establishment of the pension system and the revaluation of lifelong education and lifelong learning. "

Finally, I would like to add a comment on the absence of these contents in some degree courses.

I believe that topics such as adult education and aging and old age are part of the null curriculum of many careers in the area of Social Sciences.

In the last decades a new generation of students has emerged: the elderly. Contemplating this phenomenon and the increase in life expectancy,it is necessary to incorporate the contents of Gerontology, Psychogontology and Gerontagogy into the curricula of careers in the area of Social Sciences and Health.

Gerontagogy, an interdisciplinary educational science whose object of study is the elderly person in a pedagogical situation, besides allowing the knowledge of the learning processes that are put in play in the elderly, allows approaching the prejudices and negative attitudes around old age. Which could affect the teacher who is in charge of a higher student body.

Beyond the discussions on whether the education of older adults should be included in the field of Education Sciences or Gerontology, the need to identify and analyze the specificities of educational practices with older adults cannot be ignored.

The education of older adults should contemplate the general elements of all education and others that are their own, such as those derived from old age as an evolutionary stage, the characteristics of older adult learning, the purposes of education, the characteristics of the type of institutions Providers of educational opportunities and their permanent education.