Counseling Learning. From Knowledge to Learning Methodology Choice

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Abstract

Based on the inventory of the main categories of methods, procedures, techniques, learning tools for memorizing, for reading, based on analysis, for problem solving, using of experience, as creative learning methods and techniques, interactive learning methods, cognitive-constructivist learning tools, we intended to demonstrate the importance of the knowledge and the use of various methods, adapted to the context. The study presents the choices of certain educational counselors who participated in a training program on the theme of learning counseling strategies. The counselors enter into a relationship with the pupils and may propose learning projects focused on the methodological issues.

Keywords: methodology; methods; techniques; learning; counseling; choice; context;

1. Paper rationale

The learning process is related to change in experience and is considered to be a process of knowledge acquisition and the building of skills, abilities, capacities, attitudes, behaviors etc. Learning outcomes – expressed in terms of knowledge (concepts, ideas and norms), skills, abilities, capacities, attitudes, values, behaviors – have a relatively stable character and show an increase compared to prior stage. In modern approaches, learning is understood as: a complex process of assimilation of social experience in generalized shapes; new purchase in behavior due to internalizing external experience; information processing; an individual process that requires the

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participation of the individual in construction and deconstruction, disintegration and restructuring, integration and reintegration of cognitive and operational structures; a process of assimilation of a system of knowledge, cultures, behavioral patterns, skills, capacities, abilities, attitudes, values and competencies, that will be used as tools in activity. In a postmodern interpretation, learning becomes the meaning of one’s own construction of knowledge and understanding of the meaning of learning is linked to its extended sense, as social learning.

The educational and vocational guidance and counseling are activities organized in well established methodological contexts in order to offer support to a person or a group of persons, in order to make responsible decisions, according to both the individual needs and the social requirements. We intended to demonstrate the importance of knowledge and the use of various methods tailored to the learning context, starting from the assumption that people who are psycho-pedagogical counselors enter into relationship with the parents of the pupils, with their teachers and may propose learning projects focused on the methodological issues, i.e. how learning is approached, indicating the various methods and adapted to each learning style. So, our general hypothesis was that the school counselors participating in training courses on the issue of learning determines the improvement of the pupils’ learning results.

2. Paper theoretical foundation and related literature

The learning methods, as a response to the question of how we learn, are part of a coherent ensemble for approaching the learning, together with means, forms of organization and relationships with others: the learning strategy. The learning strategies contribute to our understanding of how learning occurs and its regulation, but also to achieve understanding during learning, to improve the concentration, the application of the emotional control, motivational and voluntary support.

The approach to develop a teaching strategy (Parent and Nero, cited by Cerghit, 2002) comprises two phases: the analysis and the synthesis phase. In the analysis phase are examined the variables of the actual teaching and the psycho-pedagogical factors which influence the activity. In the synthesis phase, the examination of the variables or existing resources leads to the establishment of certain approaches, methods, forms of activity, materials, resources, equipment, environmental organizations, and from assessing the psycho-pedagogical factors results the ways of conceiving the participation of the teachers and pupils, the organization of the contents, compliance with the paces, the application of knowledge, maintaining learning motivation.

In the school learning we consider as important the knowledge, both by the pupil and the guiding teacher the concrete ways/methods of learning, which in their turn are part of the cognitive strategies, meta-cognitive, motivational, affective, note-taking, reading, study, adjusting or regulating strategies in learning (Pintrich, 2000). The learning strategies can be determined by the teaching strategies (belonging to the teachers), the latter can be understood as: approaches to teaching/learning/assessment; ways in which the teachers combine: the methods, means, modes and forms of organization of the instructive-educational activity, the relationships and interactions in the classroom. Also, the learning strategies can be built by the learner, especially at the students’ level, requiring the presence of some guidance on how to learn. The learning methods are paths followed in order to achieve the instructive-educational objectives, many of the training methods could being converted by the trained person in learning methods.

The most known classifications of the learning methods refer to: the memorizing methods, methods and techniques of information, the reading techniques, learning methods based on analyses, the problem solving methods, methods of use the experience, methods and techniques of creative and interactive learning, constructivist methods (Neaçu, 1990, 2006, Bernat, 2003):

a) Methods of memorizing:
   - The global method (memorize all the material);
   - The partial method (the fragmentation in logical units);
   - The combined method or the progressive learning method.

b) Methods and techniques of information:
   - Learning through conversation;
- Learning with graphical representations (diagrams, representations by curves, graphic profile, by the figures, by visual diagrams);
- Reading (critical reading, of interpretation, parallel, explanatory, problematical, analytical, synthetic, of information, for completion);
- Development of study sheets (individual, of reading, of quotes, ideas);
- Collection and graphical organization of the information (charts, handouts, summaries, essays, reviews).

The reading techniques include exploring the whole, the interrogation/questioning, unfolded reading, recapitulation, reconsideration of reading, integral fast reading.

c) Methods of learning based on analysis:
- The analytical or sequential learning method, with steps of fragmentation of the material in logical units, and then applying the synthetic learning;
- The progressive learning method with repeated recurrences.

d) Methods for solving problems:
- Learning through reflective questioning and problematizing;
- Investigation;
- Solving problem-situations, the practice;
- Questioning;
- Case study;
- Research project;
- Reflexive writing exercises.

e) Methods of using the experience:
- Observation;
- Experiment.

f) Creative learning methods and techniques:
- The brainstorming;
- The mosaic;
- The Cube;
- The five-minutes essay;
- The thinking Hats.

g) The interactive learning methods:
- The mutual training;
- The debate;
- The interaction observed /aquarium;
- The focus group;
- The role play;
- Participation in debates, using the argumentation.

h) Constructivist tools (Joita, 2006):
- Usage of the direct experience;
- The independent study of the information sources, the stepped conceptualizations, the data essentiality and logical systematization, the highlights of data and relationships, suggesting new approaches;
- The exercises of primary processing and construction;
- Resolving cognitive conflicts, the constructivist solving of problems (built weak or wrong);
- The scientific explanations, the mental experiments;
- The reflection, the decision making.

By practicing the procedures, meaning the ways of realizing the methods, it appears the ownership of certain learning techniques. Negreţ-Dobridor and Pânişoară (2005) inventoried a number of learning methods by reporting the categories of methods to the core theories of learning:

- methods derived from theories of conditioning: programmed instruction, techniques for prospecting, the technique "The barriers Map", personal characterization paper, the circle of the "compliments", the learning based on the emotional intelligence;
• methods derived from social learning theories: learning with each other help, through cooperation, Socratic seminar, mentoring micro-groups, the mosaic method, the reflexive teaching, the paper technique, the method of the observed interaction, the tutorial discussion groups, Philips 66 reunion, the nominal group technique; - learning methods that use the conflict in learning (the creative controversy, the decisional controversy technique, the technique of the debates, focus groups;
• methods based on solving problems: prioritization techniques, analysis of the causes and consequences, the method of the tree with errors, the analysis of the segments of the interactive decision, the cards with tasks, analysis of the field of forces, Venn diagram, obtaining data matrix, immunization method, the technique of reading and writing, personal reflection, problem solving, learning by categorizing, the method of extraction, creative problem solving method, census of issues, panel discussion, brainstorming;
• methods of developing the communication skills: the technique of the theater, role play, the game of the thinking strategies, creative dramatizing, ice-breaking games, personal definition;
• methods based on the actual or simulated experience: the double-entry journal, the systematic and independent observation, investigation method, experiment, case study, critical incident, simulations etc.

3. Methodology and results

For the practical knowledge of how pupils choose the learning methodology, we developed a micro-experiment with 23 councilors (for the levels of preschool, primary, secondary and high-school education) from the mass education. The research method belongs to the experiment method realized with a fixed sample (Panel). To the councilors, participants in the training course "The counseling as Educational Resource for teachers in the pre-university education", Craiova, 2014 The County Center for Resources and Educational Assistance, we asked to speak with some of their pupils, specifically those who need guidance in learning, about the learning methods known and preferred by them.

Such problematic, subjected to our research aims to increase the motivation and thus the learning result of the pupils and is related to the Information and Learning Management, and in general, the learning management, which involves the self-regulation by the pupils of own learning is a lever for the personal development. This aspect is confirmed by the declared goals of counseling programs for Romanian high school, classes IX to XII (Ministry of Education and Research, National Council for Curriculum).

Our specific hypothesis no. 1 was that pupils do well in learning whether they realize the explicit methods and if they address the methods as a whole, within the learning strategies. In a common agreement it has been applied the experimental measure: the scholar counselors resorted to stimulate the meta-cognition of their pupils through reflection on how to choose the methodology (each councilor advised one pupil). The secondary specific hypothesis focused on the fact that the development of some learning projects is a solution to improve learning outcomes. Therefore, the counselors have implemented learning projects and synthesized the views of their pupils, as direct beneficiaries.

The self-directed learning (self-directed learning), as Knowles (1985) is the learning process where the initiative belongs to the individuals, with or without the help of others. It consists in: diagnosing their learning needs; formulate the goals; identifying human and material resources; choosing and implementing the appropriate learning strategies; assessment of the learning outcomes.

Also Gibbs (1992) argued that the pupil-centered learning "gives the pupils a greater autonomy and control on the study disciplines, learning methods and the pace of learning".

The self-directed learning frameworks for analysis, by the authors who have dealt with this form of learning (Long, 1989, Merriam and Caffarella, 1991, as cited Dumitru, 2001) are: a) The social dimension: to learn independently on their own; b) The pedagogical aspect: the procedures used are the diagnose of the needs, identify resources and choosing the learning methods; c) The psychological dimension: the self-directed learners have control over the learning processes.

In our opinion, the learning management is the process of leading to learning, priority applied for: diagnosing their learning needs, formulating goals, identifying human and material resources, choosing and implementing the appropriate learning strategies, the assessment of the learning outcomes (Frăsineanu, 2012).

In learning appear actions of management of this process realized both by the teacher and the people who learn
on a scientific basis in order to get an efficient learning. Management of learning requires the particularization of the management activity to the learning field by the settlement of the objectives, the identifying of the resources, the application of a strategies or techniques of learning, the realisation of the learning assessment and the setting of the learning activity.

The management of learning can be realized to the level of learning resources and to the level of strategies, inclusive to the level of the setting of the learning activity and this contributes to the efficiency of learning and to the self-efficacy. As an applied solution, it was aimed to optimize the learning, i.e. adapting this process to the personal, internal learning resources and also to the external ones, including the support of the authorized persons (such as scholar counselors).

By Barna 1995, the main modalities of self-education are: the self-education program – the personal rules, motto, personal diary, self-observation, personal reflection, self-control and self-report, self-believe, self-command, self-esteem, self-suggestion, communication, example, game, self-practicing, self-disapproval.

The new roles of the teacher, in terms of focusing on the pupils and their learning activity are: the designer of activities; tutor, organizer, manager of the training experiences; mediator between pupils-pupils, pupils and the subjects; partner, facilitator of the learning and self-training; counselor on the learning problems.

We present below the structure or the framework of certain learning projects that school counselors have been practicing with their pupils in order to respond to the request to contribute to the success of the learning projects (Table 1).

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>The teacher, colleagues :</th>
<th>Pupil/Pupils :</th>
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<td>Objectives( what is to be learned) :</td>
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<td>Activities(how will be realized the objectives):</td>
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<td>Tasks :</td>
<td>Proposed methods:</td>
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<td>Mean/Own resources :</td>
<td>The solvings of tasks; self-proposed tasks:</td>
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<td>The assessment ( how can be demonstrated that the learning occured):</td>
<td>Self-assessment criteria :</td>
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<td>Reflections, difficulties, questions, solutions :</td>
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When pupil learns alone with help of teacher, is respected the own pace, interests availabilities in learning. Self-conducted learning is informal, and hence, easy, flexible with control possession, with the free manipulation of the material. There is independence in decision making, there is initiative and self-organization, occurs opportunity to explore, to make their own selections. But, supportive learning contributes to personal development, stimulates self-didacticism, a time management better. By personal involvement, learning becomes solid. Pupils acquire freedom, personalizing their learning according to own style, discover some strategies, techniques, tools, learning and even assessment procedures.

Learning competence includes knowledge of: preferred learning methods, strengths and weaknesses of skills and qualifications, opportunities for education and training. Also, it requires skills and attitudes of efficient self-
management of learning and career in general, the ability to dedicate time to learning, autonomy, discipline, perseverance, and knowledge management in learning. This means the ability to focus the attention and effort over long periods and short periods of time, the ability to critically reflect on the purpose and objectives of learning, the ability to communicate what was learned, using appropriate means, competencies to understand and produce different messages.

4. Discussions and conclusions

The counselors in the sample reported the results obtained from the application of the experimental measures that students are encouraged to reflect on the methodological options and use learning projects. In summary, the ideas/opinions outlined confirmed the hypothesis and led us to the following conclusions:

Regarding the choice of the learning methods, the methods are combined. We may conclude that it depends on a number of criteria: the knowledge of strategies, methods, style, situation, but other factors are the efficacy and efficiency, motivation and autonomy, satisfaction, accessibility, contribution to the personal and professional development, the modern character, time, the versatility of each method.

Regarding the reasons for selecting the methodology, it can keep into account of what Constantin Cucoș (2000) argue about the logical criteria generally followed; “The methodological quality is a matter of opportunity, dosage, combination between methods or instances of methods; it is more a matter of a qualitative joining and less matter of priority or extension of a method in against to another.”.

The applied instruments, an inventory of the learning methods and a learning project (framework) have proved their utility, being easy to apply: the councilors declared that is needed to achieve, even only mental, learning projects, in which pupils relate better with the objectives, with the resources and learning methodologies and then with the assessment of the results. We should not however, neglect the limitations of these tools, limits reported by the very teacher counselors, who declared that the learning projects are time consuming and add a formal character to the activity with pupils, create attitudes of skepticism from the participants.

The issues presented were trying to valorize a professional experience from the Project “The Counseling, Educational Resource” developed by the County Resources Center and Educational Assistance Dolj. The most important limitations of the present research are related to the assurance of the representativeness of the subjects’ sample, to the methodological diversity, the quantitative interpretation of the data so that the results become meaningful and can be generalized later.

References