Teaching methods in adult education. An appraisal of the effectiveness of methods used in training future teachers

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Abstract

This paper’s focus is to emphasize the most effective methods in educating adults to become teachers. By attending a teaching program in universities, participants experience intensive courses in a short period of time – one or two years depending on high school and university teaching requirements. The general assumption of the study is that interactive methods - focused on practice - create better learning situations than classic lectures. The study is focused on identifying the techniques that match with the desirable initial formation of adults to become teachers.

Keywords: adult education, expository methods, interactive methods

1. Introduction

Adult education is a very controversial topic; the fact that the adult learning method is to a great extent different from the system in which pupils/students of various ages are schooled is felt in the assimilation of knowledge, in the means which they put into practice and understanding at a conceptual level of the theories and models proposed in the course program.

Altogether, adults do not think classical methods used in teaching courses (both in presentations materials and in applied exercises during seminars) are engaging and valuable enough - thus the lack of focus on understanding the

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information that often looks flat, devoid of substance. Assuming all students are adults and should be treated accordingly, universities take fault in using alike teaching methods regardless of age. According to the social segment that we relate to, maturity in modern society is sensed differently. The higher education system considers teaching / learning / evaluation methods as being suitable for every student, without a clear distinction based on age. This may raise the following question: what differentiates the students aged 19 (adults according to the legal system) from students aged 29? The logical reply is life experience, both professionally and personally-base. From a general point of view, both types of students are seen as adults regardless of the way they assimilate received information – based on their life experience. Thereby, experience reflects on the way students conceptualize and use information in a practical manner; the most relevant example is the corporate policy of selecting candidates based on expertise: junior, intermediate and senior. A junior - whatever results he may have had in school will retain his junior title until his exposure will give a higher degree of proficiency. Experience brings a capacity to understand / conceptualize much higher, and thus change the way to treat a subject, a theory or a task (both in a teaching career and in all other social environments).

Adult skills are not necessarily more developed than those of younger students; however they are easily implemented in real life due to experience gained through exposure. A student of an average age may have far greater potential than an adult; still it is necessary to have the basic principles of assimilation, understanding and conceptualization in order to achieve performance in college education. Instead, an adult will need a more practical perspective to link concepts to actual situations. Though an adult’s IQ can be lower than that of a younger student, his mindset will be more oriented towards concrete examples and thus a way of teaching interactive, focused on practical issues.

This study reports to adults following the psycho-pedagogical module in University. This topic stands out due to the fact that adult education raises questions about the differentiation of teaching methods from adults to younger students, the development of adults to in becoming teachers being a current issue in educational paradigms.

The psycho-pedagogical module mastered in universities spans three years and includes teaching basic concepts needed for primary, secondary and tertiary education (grades 1-4, 5-8 and high school). The subjects taught include educational psychology, theory of pedagogy, curriculum theory and classroom management, and include classic presentation skills that require ongoing support seminars and practical workshops in a school class. The three-year cycle ends with a thesis certifying the skills needed to teach students in a pre-university context.

The intensive form of the psycho-pedagogical module merges the disciplines taught in the initial training of teachers in two semesters, and is addressed exclusively to faculty graduates. In the current context, faculty graduates who will finish this intensive form of education are considered adults and their profession requires acquiring all concepts necessary for teaching in the school system in an alert form. The difference between the usual learning of the psycho-pedagogical module (in the faculty) and the delivery in an intense form stands to be only the length, the curricula being identical.

In the following lines we will try to expose the possible reasons why an adult may wish to pursue the intensive psycho-pedagogical module, its constraints and how these issues impact the assimilation of knowledge he may gather from attending the courses.

Withal, the central point of the paper represents revealing the efficient patterns of teaching the psycho-pedagogical module to adults at the regional level. To highlight these issues we conducted a quantitative study at the University "Lucian Blaga" of Sibiu, which took 68 study participants-students following the first psycho-pedagogical module - intensive level.

2. Theoretical facts on the choice of following the intensive psycho-pedagogical module

Malcolm Knowles’s ‘The Modern Practice of Adult Education- from pedagogy to andragogy’ states that the difference between younger students learning mindsets and adult learning mindsets are that younger students need structure and adults require self-assertion and individual learning. The purpose of the policy used for adults is not only to teach – simple presentation of information – but to aid them in learning. Knowles names the method which consists in helping/mentoring adults, andragogy, differentiating it from pedagogy at the operational level.
The main focus remains teaching concepts and gaining certain competences for the alleged occupation (in this case a teaching career) yet at an operational level conceptualization of acquiring information and skills must differ from pedagogy.

Adults who attend this form on tuition (the intense psycho-pedagogical module) are obviously going through a significant process of change in conjunction with their career. Students aiming for a bachelor's degree are not bound to follow this type of schooling this being optional. Generally speaking, students do not see themselves working in the education system, this being the reason why they do not attend the module. This malicious thinking towards teachers in Romania – due to low salaries in the education system compared to private business segments and other political factors, determines students to follow a different career path. The fact that adults (former students) return in universities to follow the psycho-pedagogical module – in a form which consists in paying for the courses – represents a major change for them. They take these courses in a shallow manner (not attending lectures / not performing the tasks they are given, papers, projects, etc.) due to the change of status that comes with the entry into the classroom. Once entering the classrooms and participating in lectures, adults become again students thereby losing their title as graduates. In Knowles's terms, this can generate frustration – an adult’s demand for recognition of his status. The classical presentation (used in classic pedagogy) cannot be moulded on the elements which compose Knowles's andragogy due to the lack of impact it has on adults, because of their social status.

The economic status of the country which generates the need of adults to change their role in society affects the way they acquire new knowledge. It should be taken into consideration that the availability of adult students to benefit from a learning system sufficiently well is reduced; therefor the information they have to define in order to graduate the module needs to be recalibrated.

Studies on adult education highlight the experiential method (Hardy, 2005) in which they can best assimilate the knowledge taught. Adults make connections between concepts not by memorizing or learning structured but by reference to an experiential context. Thus, subjective ideas, presumptions and opinions are generated towards the curriculum which can enhance the teaching method and improve delivered content.

Addressing the issue of an adult changing his occupation to teaching, we can assume that the choice to follow this career and therefore tuition program required is due to certain financial constraints. Adults who have not completed the program during college turn to teaching position because of professional dissatisfaction. Thereby, some cognitive blockages are enabled for adults following the late stage of basic schooling (the teaching profession).

All these factors lead to the following hypothesis: late schooling of adults in universities needs to be done in a manner customized to their needs, oriented to experiential learning with a strong focus on practice.

Corinna Kleinert and Britta Matthes in ‘Data in the field of adult education and lifelong learning’ raise the question of adaptability of the education system on a framework focused on continues learning (Kleinert & Matthes, 2009). According to cognitive psychology paradigms, continuous learning - the setting of adult education can take two connotations, namely: adaptation to a particular set of information / to a particular model and improvement of a specific skill set by adding new datum or a distinctive conceptualization. In terms of capacity development for a teaching career, lifelong learning relates to the first definition - adaptation information. From a practical standpoint, adults generally do not learn theoretical models and practical behaviours from the education system but rather adapt their own vision on a standard context (that of the classroom). Once the initial training is understood and internalized by future teachers entering the education system, the framework is based on the continuous learning based on improvement. The acquired skills are filtered and applied subjectively by the relevance they have to the method used by each teacher.

The intensive psycho-pedagogical module for adults who have previously completed a higher education is addressed largely to the middle class or lower class of society. The regarded social aspects that determine adults to follow a teaching career (as a second option) are mainly financial – as mentioned previously (Wolf, 2009). Being a teacher in contemporary Romanian society is perceived negatively by most classes. School education is not a major concern for stakeholders, upgrading tools and teacher training methods are not treated as such. The intensive initial training of teachers is conducted in a manner similar (if not identical) to the one developed in undergraduate
university. The adults do not benefit from a custom program but a pooling of information, the only difference being the shortened program.

The study conducted sought to reveal the importance of differentiating teaching methods - between young and adolescent students and adults following their initial training program – and adult predisposition for oriented learning experience that sets a general framework applicable for assertive ongoing educational activities, beneficial for the students.

3. Research context

This study aims to show the opinion of adults attending the psycho-pedagogical module in the teacher training department of the University ‘Lucian Blaga’ - Sibiu on relevant courses taught, the methods used, and the degree in which the necessary teaching skills were acquired after the first half of the program.

The study was conducted on 68 subjects-students in the program and consisted of a questionnaire with 14 indicators and identification data. By applying this instrument the goal was to emphasize the respondents’ opinion on practical applicability of information acquired in the course and the degree to which they considered relevant following courses for the teaching career. The design of the survey Noted that current legislation requires to be enrolled in the psycho-pedagogical module (not to be completed) in order to practice in a pre-university education, in this sense, some of the people surveyed are employed in the education system.

The study indicators refer mainly to the method of acquiring the necessary skills for a teaching career - by an exhibition or an interactive method, respondents were asked to give their opinion on the degree to which these skills are acquired (by which method) and present their observations on these issues.

The graphics presented are outputs that show the obtained results after statistical processing of the data gather in the survey. The numbers enlisted are a percent value of the number of respondents (from those who were interviewed) which believe that the methods used in teaching adults to become teachers are relevant and/or important.

![Fig. 1. The degree in which the information gained in the courses will be useful in the respondents teaching career](image)

Figure 1 shows the opinion of the interviewees about the information received in courses. More than half of the respondents (56%) think that the information gained in the course of preparation for a teaching career is relevant in a large extent and 23.50% in a great extent.

Most of them are inclined to believe that even in its primary phase of development, the information from the program for preparing future teachers is applicable to adults.

Figure 2 shows what is the percent in which expository method of presenting information seem to have positive implications in the accumulation of the skills necessary for a teaching career.

More than two thirds of the participants in the study think that expository methods are important for a future teaching career, and only 1.50% believe that expository methods are not at all suitable for obtaining useful information and teaching skills.
Almost two thirds of respondents believe interactive teaching methods are thought to be relevant in acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills required for future teachers; none of the respondents claimed that the interactive methods are not at all important in the process of learning.

The majority of respondents believe that all of the listed competencies can be learned generally through practical work and through case studies of diverse situations.

Given that all respondents have a bachelor degree and are adults, as defined in this particular study - we can assume that interactive methods of teaching are more relevant in learning the skills that are necessary for becoming a teacher.

The highest scores of learning through practical methods can be seen at the indicators Communication and positive relationships with students (57.40% of respondents) and Equitable assessment and evaluation of students (58.80% of respondents); therefore, the participants believe that practical work is necessary for achieving competencies in the field of communication and relationships and also in acquiring the expertise necessary for a correct evaluation of each pupil.

Case studies are thought of being relevant for motivating students to study each particular discipline by 57.40% of participants. Also, the ability to relate with particular concepts can be attained through simulation of situations and case studies according to 47.10% of the respondents.

The fact that interactive methods of teaching are more relevant for continuous learning and for the initial formation of adults in becoming teachers than presentations oriented methods was demonstrated on this study, referring to this sample of participants.

Adults indeed have a practice oriented approach, therefore being interested in methods of fast experiential learning. Through applying a questionnaire on a sample of adults that attend the intensive psycho-pedagogical module the aim of the study was not only to see if interactive methods are more popular among adults then
expository methods but to enlist the competencies and skills which they consider to be the quickest to attain by interactive methods.

Communication with pupils seems to be a skill that could be obtained by adults through practical activities – exposure to groups of pupils in order to understand group dynamics. Also, creating a relationship with pupils is considered to be attainable through practical activities. In this particular cases it seems valid to assume that skills regarding communication may not be thought in a classroom, but need to be experienced first hand in order to understand what is the best way a teacher can relate to pupils. Explaining specific concepts thought throughout the course is also considered a skill which can be acquired to constant exposure to classroom activities; the fact that a teacher (or a future teacher) can assimilate the theoretical framework of a method does not mean that he has the necessary experience to put it in practice; the explanation of concepts is considered to be one of the hardest endeavours in teaching- depending (among other things) on the age of the pupils.

4. Conclusions

This paper’s purpose was to present a general viewpoint regarding the importance of actualising adult education in university – with a particular reference to the intensive psycho-pedagogical module. The fact that teaching methodology used in Romanian universities is focused on presentations and not discussions on factual topics are thought to be undesirable especially for adults who follow short term university program – like the module discussed in previously in this paper.

The subject of the paper was to raise awareness on the fact that adults can assimilate information through a system based on experiential learning; the study has shown that at “Lucian Blaga” University from Sibiu interactive methods based on practical activities and case studies are considered far better than expository methods in acquiring skills and competencies. Other studies may in fact reveal that a different approach on teaching methodology can easily shorten the module’s duration and have even better results – if the focus of teachers is pointed to interactive methods.
The present study shows that – at least at a regional level – differentiating the methods of teaching according to age categories can produce significant improvement in the understanding of concepts which are related to education. Conducting such studies shows that even if results are somehow intuited at an empirical level, they can also demonstrate the need for change in teaching institutions that deal exclusively with adults. The methods use are similar (if not identical) to those for students of younger age. Conducting such studies in several regions of the country according to a random sample can show that the general perception in the country is to treat education in universities without differentiations based on age. Of course in practice, the teachers who teach in such institutions will behave differently from adults that they would with younger students, but the central aspect that the present work has proposed to highlight was that teaching methods should address different formats of teaching between adults and younger students.

5. References:


