

A Short Presentation of Adult Education in Romania: A Psychopedagogical Perspective

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Abstract – The relationship between the adult student and the trainer is different than the one established in a normal formal educational context. It brings to the class a whole wealth of experience on both the adult and the trainer part and there are a lot of other elements (social, educational, cultural, etc.) that are to be taken into account. A description of the context is provided and some of the elements, which are specific to the Romanian context, are emphasized this way. At a moment, references to the educational policy, professional development, individual needs and social pressures are brought into discussion. In the end, this paper takes a closer look at some ideas for the improvement of the present situation.

Key words: Adult education, adult education in Romania, LLL programs.

Özet – Psikopedagogik Bakış Açısından Romanya'daki Yetişkin Eğitiminin Kısaca Sunumu – Yetişkin öğrenci ve öğreticisi arasındaki ilişki, normal bir örgün eğitim tasarımıyla yerleşen ilişkiden daha farklıdır. Bu durum hem yetişkin ve hem de öğretici üzerinde sınıfa tüm bir yaşam zenginliğini getirir ve burada göz önüne alınması gereken (sosyal, eğitimsel, kültürel vb.) bazı elementler bulunmaktadır. Bu yolla Romanya tasarımı özgün olarak, önerilen tasarım ve bazı unsurlar vurgulanmıştır. Şu anda eğitim politikasına başvurular, mesleki gelişme, bireysel ihtiyaçlar ve sosyal baskılar bu makalede tartışılmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, bu makale, mevcut durumun ilerlemesi için bazı düşüncelere daha yakın bir bakışı sağlayacaktır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Yetişkin eğitimi, Romanya'da yetişkin eğitimi, yaşam boyu öğrenme programları.

The Education of Adults in the Context of Romania's Present Development

During the period following the social revolution in December 1989, a great reforming process started in Romania. It covered all the sectors of the economic, social, cultural and political life. The dissolution of the social relationships system of the communist type and the setting up of the rules specific to the market economy had (and still do) important consequences on people's everyday behaviour, but also on their professional behaviour.

A feature of Romania's development in the present period is that it goes, simultaneously, through the process of replacing the communist socio-economic organization with the one based on the rules of the market economy, and through the process of fitting the internal organizing structures to the European ones.

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These deep internal and external structural changes pose a real challenge for the educational system whose main task is to find the most adequate ways and methods to train the individual (child, young man or mature adult) to deal with the complex requirements of the Romanian society which is in a continuous evolution.

The most important documents elaborated after 1989, regarding the internal policy, bring into discussion the necessity of replacing different social attitudes and behaviour with others, as a fundamental factor of the social change.

The stakeholders of this movement are aware of the fact that, in order to meet these requirements, not only some contents of the school education and/or those for adults need to be revised, but it is also important that the methodologies should be up-dated as a factor of the liberation and improvement of the relationship between teacher and pupil, trainer - student.

Within the present process of reforming the educational system, it begins from the necessity to maintain the cultural traditions and the positive experiences of the Romanian school, on one side, and on the other, to gradually and creatively assimilate the European cultural values.

A Short Insight into the History of the Adult Education in Romania

The traditions of the Romanian school emphasize the systematical concerns for the adult education since the second half of the 17th century. So, the first schools (first courses for adults) were funded in Iasi in 1860 and in Bucharest in 1867. In the same period it was also created the Society of Learning for the Romanian People, which has organized several schools for adults.

On the other hand, in 1896 *The Act for the Primary School and the Primary Pedagogical Schools* assesses for the first time the activity concerning the schools for adults.

The end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century are marked by the emergence of the first social pedagogical works. They promote the idea that adult education aims, on one side, to meet the society's needs, and, on the other side, to help the mature individual to develop responsibility and to adapt to social requirements. (I.C. Petrescu, 1929)

At the beginning of the 20th century, different sociologists (Dimitrie Gusti, Petre Andrei) and psychologists (C. Rădulescu Motru) showed a special interest for the adult education. They were concerned about changing the popular mentality, increase the cultural level of the popular people, discovery and development of the abilities that can help the individual to deal with the different social and professional requirements. During the same period, Spiru Haret (a great personality of the Romanian culture and Minister of the Public Education System in two distinct stages in the pre-communist

era) organized the first circles for school-masters whose purpose was to organize literacy courses especially in the countryside.

During the period which followed the setting up of the communist organization, in 1948, *The Act of Education* was adopted. It has imposed some patterns which were fit with the tradition but, unfortunately, the education was deeply ideologized.

A good measure for that period was that of creating a system for adult cultural and vocational education.

In 1972, *The Act on Vocational Training* assessed that vocational training was compulsory for each employee (once at 5 years).

Generally, we consider that the second part of the 20th century was marked by the influences of the communist society upon the educational system. These influences can be found, in a certain percentage, in today's people's daily and professional behaviour, in the passivity and suspecting attitudes, in the fear of expression and innovation, in the resistance that some people pose to changing, in the conservative demonstrations.

These features have marked people's personalities and they still generate negative effects within the educational domains and production relationships. Although, for more than 10 years, the Romanian educational system has been the subject of a broad reforming programme, there are sufficient clues that prove the fact that within the relationship teacher/trainer– pupil/student there are still enough problems to be solved.

Having this point into account, a relevant feed-back is given with the occasion of concluding different economical contracts, when foreign employers agree to offer jobs rather to young people, because, although they do not have professional experience, they show a better mental flexibility and they are more receptive to change. If we make a comparison, the population over 35 years old does not seem to have overcome the influences and restraints posed by the communist society on individuals as well as on institutions.

Some of these restraints were transferred upon the people's common behaviour, affecting, even today, the interpersonal relationships, and the quality of the interactions between teacher/ trainer – pupil/student. When doing these appreciations we mainly have into account:

- the dominative attitudes of the manager with his subalterns, of the teacher with his pupils/students;
- the promotion of the authoritative management, hyper-centered on the leader;
- the fear people generally manifest to make own decisions and to assume the responsibility of these decisions;
- the weak encouragement of subalterns/students' originality, creativity and initiative.

These manifestations have restrained people's freedom of thinking and expression and developed a certain resistance to behavioral change which seriously affects the socio-economical process of reorganization in which Romania has been engaged for more than a decade and a half.

Setting a New Social and Educational Climate during the Post-revolutionary Period

During the period after December 1989, the social, economical and educational policies have been fundamentally revised.

The educational context has been liberalized on its entire levels and the relationships teacher-pupil, trainer–student have become more relaxed, collaborative, warmer.

The national reports within the previous years emphasize the special concerns of the officials and institutional factors involved in the organizing of the educational system, in order to solve the differences within the education and training, and to create favorable conditions to eliminate the most important barriers in learning.

There is, also, a series of concrete facts that confirm the efficiency of the efforts to reduce the phenomenon of social exclusion, although it is admitted that some social categories are still affected by the discriminatory behaviors (for example, the Romany population and the unemployed).

An important step forward was accomplished through the development and modernizing of a great network of professional counseling and orientation, within which courses regarding the motivation for learning are offered (these are orientated especially to people who do not have a job yet).

The signs of developing a real culture of learning in Romania are obvious within all the professional fields, a fact which is proved especially by the number of those enlisted in the university education system, a number which is continuously increasing despite the fact that obtaining a degree does not guarantee obtaining a job.

On the other side, there are different surveys that state the fact that the period following the beginning of the reforming process of the educational system marks, in the first place, the increase of the interest to improve the quality of the educational services. The school institutions are asked to be not only providers of education, but also to change their way in providing education.

Under the new social conditions, the quality of the educational system is regarded as an opportunity offered to all the pupils/students no matter their sex, origin or residential area, to receive knowledge and abilities until they reach an acceptable level of educational achievement.

Within the contents of the educational system, there has been a change in the quantitative criteria towards the qualitative ones. If in the previous periods they pointed out and criticized the excess of cognitive-focused curricula, now they speak more and more often about the necessity to turn to diversified structures which should follow at the same time the psycho-behavioral determinations and the economical, social, cultural and contextual conditions.

During the last decade they analyzed into details the possibilities to improve the results of the educational process. Generally, it is considered that the improvement of the results of the educational process represents both an internal requirement of the educational system, which reevaluates the concept ‘*educational efficiency*’, and an external requirement that the work market poses regarding the educational system.

In the perspective of this long-term coming up over the events, the whole process of teachers’ initial and continuous training was revised and improved.

New models for initial training have already started to be tested as experiments: classroom management, integrated education, multicultural education etc. These will consolidate the training programs providing them with a high professional effectiveness.

There was also been proved the emergency of new and promising premises for teacher education development. First of all they appreciate that new professional roles have to be associated to the teaching career (Potolea and Ciolan, 2003):

- To get acquainted with students’ characteristics and to offer psycho-pedagogical counseling on this basis;
- To adopt a new approach on/upon design, management and evaluation of learning activities;
- To offer educational services adequate to community’s request;
- To participate to educational process innovation;
- To have good knowledge and understanding of students specific needs;
- To acquire special skills for a better communication with students or with other social partners involved in the educational process;
- To accept being introduced in the process of professional self-development and life-long learning.

In the last decade the teaching career is moving towards another type of professionalism. Taking this point of view into account, an element that is new for Romania is given by the configuration of the profile of the adults’ trainer. These concerns make up for the fact that, until recently, the profession ‘*educator*’ was associated exclusively to school education

It is only few years since they developed the conception according to which the people engaged in the process of adult training require a clear training in the domain of adults’ psycho-pedagogy. It was put into evidence that the success of the adult training policies, as well as, in particular, the success of a programme which has such an aim depend on the quality of the training, the ability of the trainer to manage the relationship that he/she has with his/her adult students.

The curricula of the training programmes of the trainers are adapted to these new orientations. Professionalism, quality, efficiency are terms which are frequently found among the purposes and objectives of these programmes.

If until now, this type of training was aleatory and optional, and it was carried on especially through European programmes such as Phare, Leonardo, within which different training seminars for adult trainers were organized, now an official frame was created in order to train, in this spirit, the whole teaching staff. That is the reason why there are more and more 'voices' who sustain the necessity of creating a clear professional status of the 'adult trainer', and the emergency of introducing this occupation in the Classification of Occupations in Romania.

Through this kind of actions they try to correct the perception of the public opinion regarding the fact that the adults' education does not represent a marginal type of training and that the adult needs more than the professional experience to solve the different tasks that he deals with in the professional field.

A sign that shows the awareness of the decisional factors regarding the importance of formal education in the process of adults' training is given by the elaboration of the Governmental Decree No. 129/2000. It stipulates that, beginning with 2010, all the providers of adult programmes will have to prove that they have achieved psychopedagogical skills specific to adult professional training.

They reached this conclusion on the basis of the poor efficiency of the continuous training programmes, carried on according to the old methodologies and in diverse professional contexts, where these had a rather formal character. Thus, following a research carried on several years ago, Schifirnet (1997, p.27) stated that 'The poor training of the human resources within the adult educational institutions, correlated with the lack of motivations (professional, salary, educational), contributed to the marginalizing of these institutions.' Within these 'a great part of the managers are those who worked in adult training institutions before 1989. Passing to the organization of the actions into the new context implied a change of method and even a change in mentality and behaviour'.

Further, we will try to make a comparison between the ways the adult programmes before 1989 took place and the way they are carried on now, when, inside the Romanian educational system we can notice the effects of the education reforming programme (Table 1).

Of course, the enumeration of the comparisons suggested above could continue. We are completely aware that it is very difficult to comprise *all* the existing differences between the two socio-political organizations and to synthesize the effects they exerted on the educational system. That is why the criteria used for this comparison are the same with that used as the basis for the educational reform in the post-revolutionary period.

Table 1: Characteristics of LLL Programmes

before 1989	under the effect of the reforming programme
- they were influenced, in any circumstances, by the ideological «concepts»	- they are obviously liberated from the ideological influences, even if they are registered in a governmental conception that differs, from certain points of view, from a period to another
- they were centered, mainly, on the task, on the needs and emergencies of the economic field	- they prove the significance and importance of the human resources as being a fundamental base for the change of the economic field
- they promoted the subordinating of the individual interest to the general interest (a fact which was seen as a state policy)	- they favor the accomplishment of personal training needs which increase the degree of the individual's access on the work market
- the trainer had a dominant role within the relationship trainer – student (she/he was very often the only provider of professional information)	- the trainer tends to become a facilitator of the learning process
- the training programmes had a preponderant theoretical content	- there is an increased concern for the contents with an applicative character and for the development of the ability to act efficiently
- the educational act was explicitly centered on product/ result	- there is an increased concern for the process of learning itself
- the relationship trainer – student had a preponderant formal character	- the learning within the non-formal and informal fields begin to be valued

Taking into Account the Differences: A Continuous Requirement of the Educational Programmes

Although, in particular, people feel liberated from the influences that the old regime exerted on their daily behaviour, the communist 'democracy' continues to influence the thinking of lots of Romanian citizens. One of these consequences is the maintaining of a certain conception regarding the rights equality of the woman and man. Beyond the rigid theories about the equality between sexes, the Romanian woman has taken over - through the daily exercise of this 'democracy' - a series of social roles, together with the complex effort of carrying on, almost entirely, the household activities.

The effect of this so-called 'equality' and of the completely perverted vision on the roles that are given to the woman by the society, was that the woman achieved, besides her common attributions within the family, the 'right' to access to the rough labors and to practice high risk professions. Consequently, women appear more and more frequently in the continuous training programmes to develop and to bring up-to-date their professional achievements, although the curricula of these programmes

completely lack in concern for knowledge and respect for the existing differences between sexes.

After the age of forty, women devote less time to their continuous training due to personal problems, family problems or different obstacles they deal with as a result of the misconceptions inherited from the previous historical periods.

A good aspect is that the today's young girls and women are much more involved in the economical, cultural and even political life, by assuming all the difficulties that occur from their entrance into different domains that require power and the capacity to make decisions. Their attitude towards the social roles that they can play is changed, despite the fact that women are still quite less represented in the higher leading structures.

Their expectations regarding the improvement of this situation are optimistic due to the fact that, within the adult educational programmes, an increasing interest is shown for knowledge and respect for the behavioral and learning differences between the two sexes.

Difficulties Encountered in the Development of Adults' Training Programmes

The process of adults' education from Romania is improvable from many aspects. Sometimes, pessimistic opinions, which claim the idea that the AE in Romania is still in the stage of seeking its social and institutional identity, are formulated.

The difficulties that arise from the internal organization of the process are increased by a number of external difficulties, namely the greatest efforts that are made for the allocation of financial resources which are necessary for the development of different training programmes for adults, although the labor market require them as an emergency.

On the other hand, a huge problem derives from the fact that these activities are administered by two ministries: the Ministry of Education and Research and Ministry of Labor, Social Protection and Family, whose actions are often uncorrelated. The actions of the Ministry of Education and Research are centered, especially, on psycho-educational strategies of training / developing of human resources, whilst the latter's are centered mainly on the thematic contents of the programmes.

It seems as if the two Ministries took only a part of the recommendations of the Lisbon European Council. The Ministry of Education and Research seems more preoccupied of the 'development of the individual, who can thus realize his or her full potential and live a good life', whilst the Ministry of Labor, Social Protection and Family is more preoccupied of 'the development of the economy, by ensuring that the skills of the labor force correspond to the economic and technological evolution'.

Anyway, both of the purposes are found among the intentions of all these programmes, but having a different importance depending on the initiator of the programme.

Having into view an exhaustive presentation of the difficulties that the initiators of adults' training programmes confront with, we can mention:

- the fact that the data base regarding the previous programmes or those developing is still showing a deficit and/or is less known to those who can benefit from it;
- the imperfections of the legislation (for example, the trainer's status and the mentor's status have recently been adopted-documents which are to establish the systematic process of training/developing the skills necessary for the adults' trainer);
- the shortage of training staff qualified for adults' psycho-pedagogical domain [A survey carried on by the Romanian National Observer shows that, generally, the role of trainer is performed by people that do not have the special training required for a didactic career and that the majority of the training providers (over 50%) prefer to hire specialists from the domain in which the training is taking place, but these have a rather practical experience. The didactic experience is appreciated only by 20% of those questioned, and the pedagogical skills regarding the work with adults are considered an important selection criterion by only 25% of these subjects. (Birzea, 2001, p. 45-46)];
- preserving, on the trainer-student level, the tendency of administering the didactic process only by the trainer, a fact which acts like a barrier to the students' free initiative and to their creativity;
- the maintenance of the theoretical character of many training programmes' contents, despite the efforts made to adopt visions which have into account the needs of adults' training and the qualification needs required by the labor force market.

Difficulties like these are often related to the fact that the expectations regarding adults' education are still confusing; they are not structured around one idea, a fact that sometimes proves the failure to recognize its exact purpose (Ionut Isac; cited in Sava 2001, p. 177-182).

The Improvement of the Present Situation

Despite the previous mentioned difficulties, it is important to state that the reforming programme of the educational system in Romania –intensified especially after 1998– caused a series of actions whose beneficial results are beginning to show their effects on all the subsystems of the educational system and on all its departments, including on the adults' education level.

The emergence of those positive effects emphasizes the fact that the political and administrative factors involved in the process are aware of the complexity of the released actions and of the necessity to correlate efforts in order to improve the present situation.

On a global vision, we consider that, even if by passing from a form of government to another, the rhythm of the changes within the educational system sometimes slowed down, on the whole, real successes have been registered; these are relevant for the present development of the Romanian education, as well as for the process of adults' training.

Some of these achievements draw our attention:

- The increase of interest and efforts regarding the development of the European dimension of the education.
- The forming of an inclusive conception type over school and professional curricula aiming to take into consideration the differences between people and groups that, at a given moment, can have different informing and training interests.
- The innovation and modernization tendency of the didactic process on all its department levels:
 - i. *On strategic level - through preoccupation for:*
 - training/ developing the human resources according to the new requirements of the labor force market;
 - the revision of the concept that lays at the base of projecting the activity of programmes for adults' education;
 - the elaboration of training programmes by researching students' real instructing and training needs;
 - projecting the products/results, as well as projecting the detailed development of the learning processes;
 - the improvement of informing services;
 - the clear outlining of the professional status of the 'adults' trainer' with the purpose to register this occupation in the Classification of Occupations in Romania.
 - ii. *On content level, with the sense that:*
 - students' informing in a certain domain of activity and the development of different procedural skills are no longer the only purposes aimed at, but especially the personal development, such as stimulating initiative and critical thinking, optimizing the communication skills, facilitating teamwork, are now taken into account;
 - the selection of contents is made according to the individual's informing/training needs, as well as the requirements of the labor market.
 - iii. *On teaching-learning methodologies level:*
 - by the increase of the interest for the innovation and diversity of the methodologies (an aspect also pointed out by the results of the survey carried on by the Romanian National Observer that shows the fact that a significant percentage of trainers, approximately 29%, use electronic materials and active teaching methods within their didactic activity). (Birzea, 2001, p. 45-46);
 - by intensifying the efforts to cover the deficit of trainers' psychopedagogical training: that is either by introducing different specific training modules within the initial training programmes of the future teachers, or by organizing specialty masters within the Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences.

iv. *On the level of evaluation of the training programmes through:*

- the refining of the criteria used in the process of evaluating learning results;
- the focusing on action skills;
- the rewarding, through the process of evaluation, the achievement of different behaviour which are opposed to rigidity and inertia, and, in the same time, are favorable for responsibility, collaboration and cooperation, teamwork, creativity and initiative.

At this point it is important to emphasize once again the fact that the achievements mentioned above are analyzed in this paper from a strict pedagogical perspective. Thus, the global image offered by this short presentation aims to point out only a part of the aspects which are characteristic for the development of adults' education process in Romania, in the period following the year 1989.

Conclusions

Lifelong learning is a real priority of education and training policies in Romania, and appear to be an important way of renewing the present Romanian society. Following this fact and as an answer to the Memorandum released by the European Council in 2000, an important strategy was adopted in our country in 2000: *Lifelong learning - a priority of Educational Policies in Romania. Survey on key messages of EC Memorandum on Lifelong Learning.*

In the spirit of these documents and of so-called trials - Bologna and Bruges (to which Romania has officially adhered), a lot of fundamental changes took place within the educational activities specific to adults' education.

What is extremely important to mention is that these changes have been determined not only by the necessity to correlate structurally and functionally the Romanian education system with the European one, but also by the internal actions of development, optimizing and innovation within the adults' education in order to adapt it to the new requirements of the labor market.

We consider that this phenomenon is normal under the conditions that the social system of values had been modified essentially by removing the communist organization and by individual's rediscovery of the freedom to manifest and express himself. Under this new context, the individual can take maximum advantage of the learning potential that he / she possesses.

By opening these perspectives, the adults' education programmes can provide not only *social profit*, which will enable the progress of the Romanian society, but, in the same time, they can provide *personal profit*, which one can recognize in the satisfaction that the individual reaches when he discovers and gets use of his potential.

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