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How to design an adult education programme?

Andragogic theoretical background

There are several theories on planning and programming adult education programmes. There are theoretical assumptions and concepts that may help construct an adult educational programme.

History of planning and programming

First, why do we need planning and programming? A possible answer would be: To achieve coherence among the various elements of the programme.

(1) In the past programming was thought of as anticipating the steps to be taken in order to achieve goals. Thus the main programming strategy was goal oriented.

(2) Then a discussion started on how to adapt the goals in dialogue with the participants. As long as only goals were important, the structure of adult education programmes was clear,

(3) Later adaptation of goals and finding equilibrium of often opposed needs started taking place. Tyler (1969) defined an educational need as the difference between the actual and the socially desired or expected state or social norm.

(4) In the past focus was on structured contents and methods.

(5) Nowadays focus has been shifted to searching to identify the needs and to

negotiating goals. In Slovenia and former Yugoslavia this was not new since already in the 70th of the past century Ana Krajnc and Dušan Savičević in their theoretical discussions emphasised the importance of needs analysis as the main andragogic question. American authors Malcolm Knowles and Cyril Houle argued much the same. Consequently, both individual and community needs are to be taken into account.

In the case of the CINAGE course individual needs of the participants in the course (adult educators and older people) coming from the past, present and future are to be identified and taken into account as well and the community or society needs for active ageing (a different type of ageing: working longer and being a mentor to younger workers, using one's leisure time for transmitting culture to younger generations, caring for relationships, taking care of one's health, being open up to other generations, using new technology, working in civil society, etc.) are to be considered. Moreover, different social roles in later life, more adapted to contemporary society are to be referred to.

(5) An educational programme for adults or older adults is understood as a dynamic process dealing with knowledge and skills, of course, but also values, attitudes towards learning, the impact of social and cultural circumstances. This is particularly important in the case of older adults. They are a huge group of extremely different individuals with different life paths, having experienced different socialisation processes; therefore they have different experiential knowledge, values, etc. But they are also of different sex, health; they have a different social status. Their motive for learning differs. To sum up, older people are not a homogeneous group. Never people differ so much as in later life.

Planning and programming

Planning and programming is not a linear process based on just one methodology requiring building a plan gradually, one step after another. Quite the opposite. Planning and programming an educational course for adults is a rather creative, innovative process (where trial and error learning is present as well). Different methods, models and approaches are used. Therefore, in order to be successful in the CINAGE project our focus should be shifted from the active ageing policy to the participants themselves. It would be an error to primarily test the validity of active ageing policy but we should be interested in older people's reality, frames of reference, and the context in which they live. This is what has to be found out and disclosed and transposed into the course in order to find out how far or how close the active ageing policy is to real life in different socio-cultural contexts.

The programmer's originality and professionalism is of crucial importance for the results he or she may want to achieve.

Modern approaches to planning and programming are based on different theoretical systems. Quite often the systemic theory is useful here. They are based also on different concepts of knowledge, learning and rationalism.

Further, planners are interested in the relationship between truth, reality and knowledge. You would remember that there was a question in the CINAGE questionnaire asking about the reality of the film plot. The same quest for reality should be present in the educational programme we are supposed to devise.

Further approaches to planning are based on good practices and lessons learned from them.

At first sight planning an educational programme may seem to be a technique,

composed of different elements to shape a whole, but this is far from reality!

An educational programme means more elements, groups of elements or a whole system.

An educational programme can be a plan an idea and documentation that will help to run an educational course.

In some other circumstances, educational programme means all educational activities planned for the selected context. (programme of a third age university, of an adult education centre etc.)

An educational programme may also be a series of learning units, events, adventures that are planned in order to achieve goals in a given period of time.

It is impossible to plan education in detail and to plan the implementation of a course or programme in detail. Why?

It has been generally admitted that participants are different, that together with the teacher of adults or mentor or facilitator they create group dynamics. It is impossible to plan the results in detail.

Further there is a difference in planning a whole programme or planning a single programme unit (designing instruction). The largest is the planning of the whole programme, narrower is the planning of learning units, and the narrowest is the planning of participant's steps in the framework of learning units.

Thinking paradigms as a starting point for planning and programming

There are several thinking paradigms on which planning an educational programme may be based.

The paradigm of formal education

When planning an educational programme two modalities prevail: linear modality and modular modality. The linear modality means that planning is developed according to a given scientific discipline or according to the needs of a work station. Contents are ordered deductively. From more general to more specific whereas modular modality is based on setting up modules (programmes).

Personalistic paradigm

According to this paradigm, originating from humanist psychology) interpersonal relationships are important. The process of teaching and learning is not strictly structured; the participants and the teacher are taken into account. What is important here, especially in the case of older learners, is that the teacher and the students enter into their lives. In this thinking scheme the process of learning is important; planning is adapted to the adult participant who is supposed to be changing due to learning. (Transformative learning). In the planning based on the personalistic paradigm the focus is not on the contents but on the process. The underlying assumption is that knowledge, learning contents is less important than the process of learning. Adults and older adults have their own experience that has to be integrated in the programme. Therefore when writing the CINAGE programme we have to bear in mind this fact. A lot of room should be allotted to personal reflection and experience. The focus here is on initiatives, creativity, and communication.

Critical- emancipatory paradigm

It is also called research or developmental paradigm. The teacher and the learners use reflection when dealing with their life and social conditions. The planners want to induce changes and believe that education has a role in and that education can have an impact on social development. I believe that in the case of the CINAGE programme reflection should be utilised and participants should be encouraged by the programme to think in interaction.

Malcom Knowles, characteristics of older adults and Andragogical cycle

Malcolm Shepherd Knowles (1913 – 1997) was a, perhaps ‘the’, central figure in American adult education in the second half of the twentieth century.

For Knowles, andragogy was premised on the following crucial assumptions about the characteristics of adult learners.

1. Self-concept: In adulthood it moves from one of being a dependent personality toward one of being a self-directed human being.
2. Experience: An adult person accumulates a reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning.
3. Readiness to learn. An adult’s readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of his social roles.
4. Orientation to learning. The time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application. Subject centeredness is replaced by problem learning.
5. Motivation to learn: As a person matures the motivation to learn is internal (Knowles 1984:12).

Knowles further proposed a programming model called Andragogic cycle, that

can be repeated on and on and is not necessarily organised step by step.

1. Needs analysis (questionnaires, interviews, literature, studies., motives, etc.)
2. Planning (time, place budget, animation of learners to enrol)
3. Programming (contents, units)
4. Implementing (methods, techniques, approaches)
5. Evaluation (diagnostic, terminal)

In addition to Andragogic cycle a number of other models can be applied.

Conclusion

There are theories underpinning planning and programming adult education programmes. There are assumptions and concepts of learning that may help construct an educational programme for adults. Planning and programming are necessary in order to achieve the coherence of programme elements. In the past the main planning and programming strategy was goal oriented. Later there was a search for equilibrium between different individual and community needs. One of the most applied planning and programming models in Slovenia is Malcom Knowles's Andragogical cycle. Because it is a cycle it can be and it is repeated and in fact it is not necessary to follow its phases step by step. Focus is on analysing needs and on the process of education.

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