

**DR. DUŠANA FINDEISEN: SEEING, HEARING, READING
TOGETHER: A student - centred learning and teaching project within the
studies of andragogy**

Abstract

Economic sphere requires competencies not only knowledge and skills and Student-Centred Learning (SCL) in tertiary education is a pedagogical response to this requirement. As concerns SCL, tertiary education has a lot to learn from adult education which is successful when put in relation with the learners' life, needs, interests and aspirations. SCL is about developing competencies or, to put it differently, it is about mobilising students who need a certain amount of academic knowledge, know-how and who need to internalise certain ethical principles. Teachers who have adopted SCL create learning situations, combine learning locations, apply learner centred methods, acting simultaneously as a good resource of knowledge and learners. Their role is to guide the learners thinking in the right direction, to be interested in what students have learned but also how they have been learning. Having been deeply involved in both tertiary and adult education, Dušana Findeisen presents how and why the project Seeing, Hearing, Reading Together was conceived and developed due to her own endeavours and those of her students of andragogy at University of Ljubljana. She is focusing on the meaning and role of single project stages, the contribution of different institutions as well as the highly important role of the final public event, leading competencies.

Contextualising the project idea

Economic sphere requires competencies not only knowledge and skills and Student Centred Learning (SCL) in tertiary education is a pedagogical response to this requirement. At the Faculty of Philosophy in Ljubljana I created a new subject. After the Bologna process creating a new subject does seem to be a rather normal enterprise, but twenty years ago university courses and subjects were "inherited" and they were very about disciplinary knowledge. There was sociology of education, psychology of education etc. Against this background I introduced my reflected experiential knowledge from a field that was more activist than researched. The course was entitled "Socio-cultural animation and education for local development". I had brought to this course my diversified disciplinary and above all experiential knowledge I gained introducing older adult education to former Yugoslavia, co-founding Slovenian Third Age University, a national association for education in later life, co-setting up and conceptualising Andragogic Summer School for local development in Ajdovščina, a small locality in Western Slovenia, conceptualising study circles etc. My student centred teaching was basically meant to make it possible for my students (1) to combine theories with "real" adult education activities and with getting a socio-cultural experience, (2) to be responsible for their project from the beginning till the end under my more or less explicit or better more or less hidden guidance.

Against this background each year I introduced my students of andragogy and adult education to project work which I related to my previous teaching of a number of educational, social, economy and other theories. *Disciplinary knowledge* can influence adult teaching. It definitely has an influence on the choice of contents and activities, planning of aims, the nature of illustrations, the linking of teaching with learners' everyday life, on

devising evaluation etc. but experiential knowledge gained in real professional situations is valid as well.

I was faced, like most university teachers, with a dilemma. In universities, there is scientific knowledge pertaining to the advancement of knowledge and on the other hand there is professional logic which is imposed by the need to form highly professionalised people for specific activities sectors Universities educating professionals to be are thus torn between the two types of needs. Professionalization means that a professional can perform. But do or how do we prepare our students for this task?

Anyway, I wanted my students to acquire *professional competencies* using a number of SCL methods. Thus SCL is about developing competencies or, to put it differently, it is about mobilising students who need a certain amount of academic knowledge, know-how and who need to internalise certain ethical principles.

About professional competencies in adult education

There is a huge difference between having skills and competencies. To illustrate this point: a brick layer does not have competencies, if he can build walls. He is skilled but he may become competent, if he is capable of *theorising from his experience and other sources of knowledge*, if he is capable of *applying skills and knowledge in professional situations within professional activities*.

Skills and knowledge can be more or less complex but competencies necessarily require to be used in *real professional contexts* and situations. Not just a context that can be simulated, not just a context with a limited number of variables.

A competent professional is able to interpret the requirements and limitations of real professional situations and is able to combine different resources in a pertinent and efficient way.

A competence is not about applying skills, knowledge and attitude. On the contrary it is about constructing.

Competent professionals, competent teachers using SCL draw their knowledge and skills from different resources. They themselves are not the only resource. A resource can be their colleagues, a professional network, a film, a newspaper article. In accordance with professional standards, they utilise different resources channelling them towards set targets.

Characteristics of adult education require Student Centred/Teaching and Learning

Adult education requires devising educational programmes responding to the needs, wishes, aspirations of adult learners as well as social needs and developments. Thus *understanding the adult learners and audiences is one of the basic competencies an adult educator acquires and improves whenever confronted with them.*[\[1\]](#)

Adult educators are required to create learning situations in tune with the learners' needs, wishes, aspirations as well as expectations, the groups of learners being ever more diversified and individual learners ever more self-directed.

Adult educators are also required to adapt their methods to the learning situations as well as the epistemological status of different kinds of knowledge (Charlot, 1977).

More student centred methods, new methods, and a combination of different learning locations and learning methods are important.

Adult educators should be trained to use dialogue and discussion as the most important methods in adult education, as well as other methods like *reciprocal* and *mutual learning*, co-operative learning.

Dialogue and discussion make it possible for adult educators to adapt themselves to their students, thus getting aware of both how the students learn and what they learn.

The educators on the other hand learn to what extent their work has been a valuable investment and also how much they themselves have learned from their students. Students' searching and their attempts to understand are a good source for educators to learn.

Adult educators should act as learners. According to Knowels (1990, p.43) each adult learner in their speciality know what adult educators do not know. Therefore adult learning is actually peer learning.

Lindeman (1926) argues that one of the major differences between traditional education and education of adults is in the process of learning. Managing this specific process is a basic competence adult educators should have.

Adult students *are not aware of the knowledge they have*. They know without knowing, though hidden knowledge does influence their opinion. It has become part of their representations.

Adult educators' task and competence is to clarify whether the adult learner's knowledge is valid, or less valid or not valid at all. An adult educator critically helps the adult student to put order into his or her representations. Questions are being put and knowledge is being questioned against the background of what the learners have learned informally through life phenomena and events.

Teachers who have adopted SCL create learning situations, combine learning locations, apply learner centred methods, acting simultaneously as a good resource of knowledge for learners. Their role is to guide the learners 'thinking in the right direction, to be interested in what students have learned but also how they have been learning

Seeing, Hearing, Reading Together - A student centred learning and teaching practice

It has been mentioned above that along with their students teachers are a valuable source of knowledge that is to be used in SCL. There are also other sources of knowledge of course.

Thus In the year 2010 I was directing a PhD thesis on functional literacy. Ljubljana was declared the capital of book. The *Bibliothèque Nationale de France* was offering a four year lasting socio-cultural animation project Things we have read, things we have seen (*fr. Choses lues, choses vues*). My research had been focused on intergenerational learning. So the decision to deal with the reading issues was basically mine. I introduced the reasons to my students and I delivered an additional lecture on the topic of reading in adult education. From the theoretical knowledge they set (after a long discussion) on the project title, **Seeing, Hearing, Reading Together**.

Students got acquainted with Večernice. They went to the flea market searching for them. Texts from Večernice used to be read in winter, the family sitting around the reader, listening carefully to his reading aloud.

Next, they decided to take part in the project of the Bibliothèque nationale de France <http://expositions.bnf.fr/lecture/>. They also picked up and modified some of the ideas from their web page like the importance of reading situations and environment depending on the text (walking and reading on a bridge, in a library, in front of a faculty, in a dancing studio, on a church square, at home, in bed etc.) Not all texts are fit for all environments.

They decided to create a video exhibition of situations of reading learning about reading, taking photos, team work, etc.). They learned that a text is meaningful only because of the readers, that a text depends on its material side, its support (paper, phone screen etc.)

In this project several institutions were involved like Slovenian Third Age University, the City Library, Faculty of Philosophy, Association of Students of Andragogy and Pedagogy.

In order to make the learning experience a real one a final public event was staged.

The outputs of the project were:

Inductive and deductive research into adult reading

Designing and distributing a leaflet

Web site

Letters of invitation

Letters to different institutions taking into account their situation and nature

A video exhibition of situations of learning “Reading happens where your heart chooses”

Intergenerational meetings with older students

Intergenerational rehearsals

Programming and organisation of a public event

List of participants

Press release

Timing and conducting a public reading event

Articles published in local and national newspapers <http://revije.ff.uni-lj.si/AndragoskaSpoznaj/article/view/878/695>

Arte TV programme

A national radio programme.

The students were asked to constitute a file and insert into it all templates and draft letters produced, literature and references, research questionnaires, photos etc. They were asked to reflect on their experience by writing a letter to the following student generation with their recommendations.

For me this was a valuable source of learning on what they had learned how they had learned.

They said: “You should start early and function as a team. It is not just another study exercise.”

“I did not like the experience because I was not told what to do”.

“We liked our older colleagues from Slovenian Third Age University”.

“I did not know the authorship rights were such a complicated matter to deal with” etc.

“We had many difficulties reaching a consensus”.

Conclusion

Developing an educational programme or event is a complex professional activity leading to professional competencies, requiring drawing on knowledge from different disciplines, experiential knowledge from different sources, establishing team relationships and relationships with institutions. It triggers significant learning and is due partly to non-directive learning, co-operative learning and mutual learning.

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[1] Being involved in older adult education means understanding older learners' past, present and future and the need to create social ties.