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Todorut, Amalia Venera

Constantin Brancusi University of Targu Jiu

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LIFELONG LEARNING – AN ESSENTIAL PREMISE FOR BUILDING A SOCIETY AND AN ECONOMY BASED ON KNOWLEDGE

Todorut Amalia Venera – *Senior Lecturer PhD*
“Constantin Brancusi” University of Targu Jiu, Romania
amalia_venera@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

The transformation of knowledge in an essential element of social activities, its multiple functions and economic roles – a quasi-universal starting material, a capital and essential way of work with the tendency of having a prevailing role in firms and product – is normally reflected in the permanent attempt to intensify the processes of obtaining them. Maybe the most conclusive expression of this tendency is represented, in the last decades, by the permanent lifelong learning outline or by the whole period of life as an essential component of realizing a favorable environment for the economy based on knowledge.

The object of lifelong learning is to ensure and maintain the individual skills and abilities and their improvement as the content of work, the technology and the professional requirements are changing, achieving the employees' carriers and individual development, making increases in productivity and aggregate incomes and, at the same time, the improvement of social equity.

The characteristics of lifelong learning are very significant: the universality of learning, the innovation in the content and method of learning and the environment of individual learning.

A fundamental change is imposed on politics and development in what concerns learning and education, thus, all the people should have access to the lifelong learning and the opportunity of using it effectively.

We propose, during our work, to identify the provocations at the level of education in an economy based on knowledge.

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About on the content of lifelong learning – the most used term in Romania – there is not yet a wholly accepted definition. In keeping with an OCDE study through lifelong learning it is designated an assembly of processes by which people learn all their life, no matter where, when and how.

In the opinion of many specialists, and of course in our opinion, too, this definition is too general and comprehensive and it does not point out the new and specific elements outlined in the last two decades.

Considering these elements, lifelong learning is limited only in the processes specially conceived to assimilate knowledge excluding the passive learning from experience. The specialists from the European Centre of Vocational Education and Training Development consider, in a study of this subject universally accepted, that the lifelong learning contains all the processes of learning, no matter their nature, content or scene of action, but having as a subject only the adults. We consider this definition to be the most adequate because the lifelong learning has as content the new elements from the last decades, taking into consideration the continuity of learning after graduating schools in childhood or youth.

The object of lifelong learning is – according to the conclusions of the debates from the International Organization of Work – to ensure the maintenance of individual skills and abilities and their improvement as the content of work, the technology and the professional requirements are changing achieving the employees' carriers and individual development, making increases in productivity and aggregate incomes and at the same time the improvement of social equity.

In the opinion of the British teacher Paul Ryan from the University of Cambridge the lifelong learning presents three characteristics or essential attributes:

1. the universality of learning;
2. the innovation in the content and method of learning;
3. the environment of individual learning.

a) The universality of learning which is two-dimensional refers to:

- all the people because this is a necessity for each and every individual who wishes to maintain his utility and efficiency within a social system, in the actual conditions of a quick generalization of a great knowledge volume, which is normally worn out in an accelerated rhythm and with a tendency of enhancement;

- all the life periods of an individual because the initial achieved knowledge in the basic formation period, in childhood and early youth, are not sufficient anymore and should be continually completed with new knowledge during an adult's life, by bringing them up to date and by formation in new domains. Although, the learning alternates from multiple points of view – content, modalities, progress in time, scenes of action etc – over the different periods of an individual's life.

The culture of permanent learning corresponds to the universality of learning, which is translated in new systems of values, symbols, behaviors, rituals and ceremonies.

b) The environment of individual learning refers to the fact that the involvement and realization of learning processes represent, with priority, a responsibility of each and every person. Therefore, it is considered that the learning term, which has in its centre the individual, is more adequate than the education or training terms, which suggest processes based on teachers, instructors or trainers, meaning people whose role is to send knowledge to other people and develop some of their abilities, behaviors etc. The individual responsibility for learning consists in the fact that each person should organize his own learning and support a part of the involved costs, considering that he will take part at the final benefits. Of course, the support of any form – financial, organizational, informational etc. – of the society is necessary. So, the accent on the essential role of an

individual in the learning processes does not mean the negation of the organizations' importance and of the society in general, in this domain.

c) The innovation in the content and method of learning, which according to Ryan takes into consideration, with priority, three aspects:

- the vocation of learning, meaning to focus over the achievement of knowledge which could be used in organizations, generating a value-added. A greater accent is put on the certifying of obtaining new sets of knowledge with applicative value, by diplomas, certificates, etc.

- new technologies and methods of learning, domains in which the changes were extremely spectacular in the last two years. The progress of the active methods, the distance and the interactive education are the main expressions of these educational evolutions. There are changes at their base in the pedagogic philosophy and also in computers and telecommunications proliferation, which facilitated and/or made possible the respective movements;

- the organization of learning based on market requests, which signifies the direction and realization of learning processes depending on the volume and structure of the request on the labor market. As a result, an accentuated dynamic of thematic, content, methods, modalities, forms and scenes of action of the learning processes is found – depending on heterogeneity and intensity of individuals and labor market requests.

From the things presented above, it results that the learning processes have a double character, being educational or formative and, at the same time, economic. This double nature is reflected in the outline of four criteria of politics and lifelong learning results evaluation. Actually, these synthesize the main contributions of lifelong learning at realizing a favorable environment necessary to the building of an economy based on knowledge:

- the criterion of efficacy, which indicates in what measure the new-created value as a result of the capitalization of the accumulated knowledge by learning is bigger than the involved costs;

- the criterion of equity, meaning assuring equal opportunities of participation at the learning processes and – afterwards – of capitalization of knowledge obtained for all the citizens;

- the criterion of personal developing, according to which by participating at the lifelong learning processes the individual can satisfy his own wishes and necessities of intellectual development and culture and not only those of efficacious participant to the economic processes; this criterion responds to the individual aspiration of being independent and advance on certain coordinates;

- the criterion of social development, meaning the increasing of people's capacity to participate actively and efficaciously at political and social activities, at a democratic government and at the assurance of political stability in the region or locality where they live.

These four criteria are complementary, although the criterion of efficacy tends to be predominant nowadays, which reflects exactly the specific of knowledge and processes which refer to the knowledge of creating a value-added in the conditions of passing to an economy based on knowledge. In the future, an intensification and an extend of lifelong learning can be anticipated, on the base of the increasing of the interdependence between the economic processes and the formative ones, which will

have a reciprocal potential. The lifelong learning, through its multiple direct and indirect effects, manifests itself as an essential component both for a favorable environment of an economy based on knowledge and for its functioning mechanisms.

New Educational and Learning Politics

According to the opinion of the majority of the specialists, the intensification and the generalization of lifelong learning cannot resume only to the addition of continual preparation of adults to the training already assured by the classic learning system. A fundamental change in politics and development referring to learning and education – a study made by the specialists of International Work Organization is underlined – is necessary, thus all the citizens should be offered the opportunity of access to the lifelong learning and they should use them effectively. From these specialists' point of view, a deep reform of politics concerning the lifelong learning is necessary, being focused on six coordinates:

- a) the construction of an adequate, institutional, politic and legislative background for the lifelong learning realization;
- b) the mobilization of the resources necessary to extend the opportunities' availability for lifelong learning;
- c) the construction of the lifelong learning fundamentals by focusing over the feature and development of learning ability. In the conditions of massive growth of available information in comparison with their own necessities and transform them in knowledge;
- d) the assurance of a large scale of partners and stakeholders collaboration in the conception, unrolling and capitalization of lifelong learning processes, at micro-, mezzo-, macro- and world systems level;
- e) the development of politics and institutions which recognize and take into consideration all forms of learning inclusive the informal ones;
- f) the conception of orientation and consultancy assurance for unrolling the lifelong learning, assisting people in choosing learning alternatives and in capitalization the training opportunities.

The statistics demonstrate that in the world a good part of employees are already involved in training programs.

In conclusion, at the world wide level, the practice of educational nature indicates a substantial growth of adult population who makes efforts unprecedented to actualize and amplify knowledge, as a response to the ample necessities of new knowledge generated by economic, social, technological and scientific evolutions.

In designing the new educational and learning politics, a special importance is given to establishing the educational principles for adults.

Malcolm Knowles used for the first time the term of “andragogy” to describe the education for adults. While the term pedagogy is being generally used to describe “the science of teaching to children”, the andragogy term is referring to “the art and science of helping adults to learn”. Knowles was the first who theorized clearly the way in which adults learn and described learning at adults as an auto-led process of investigation. Knowles formulated the following theses:

- Adults want to know why they should learn a certain thing. The adult should consider the achievement of new competences, knowledge or attitudes as being important.

- Adults want to be auto-didactic and decide themselves in what concerns the training programs they want to take part in.

- Adults have more numerous and different experiences than youngsters, thus the correlation of the new learning process with the past experience can amplify the signification of the new learning situations and can help the participant in achieving new knowledge.

- Adults are ready to learn again the moment they are facing a life situation for which they need more knowledge.

- Adults involve themselves in the learning process following to solve some tasks during learning.

- Adults are motivated to learn both extrinsic and intrinsic.

Knowles theories represent the fundament of most of the actual theories concerning adults' education. So, how can be these theories applied in the real world teaching background? As a teacher, you can use imagery or real experiences as examples by which the student can see the benefic aspects of knowledge and the negative aspects of the lack of knowledge. Teaching should start by creating a pleasant atmosphere of reciprocal trust and by elucidating the reciprocal expecting, together with the person who learns. In other words, an environment of learning based on cooperation should be created.

You can offer as many possibilities of choosing as necessary the moment in which a decision should be taken during the learning process. The professor should establish a mechanism of reciprocal planning to help the adults identify their formation needs. The objectives and the learning activities can be designed thus to correspond exactly to the needs of adults who learn.

You must encourage the students to speak about their work experiences. Try to make a connection between the new learning activities and the past experiences of the participants.

Positive attitude consolidates learning. The training can be correlated with promotions, adding new responsibilities, the increasing of authority and self-respect.

In his book, "Freedom to Learn", Carl Rogers, another pioneer in education sciences made the difference between two types of learning: cognitive (with a lack of signification) and the learning based on experience (with signification). The cognitive learning is considered a learning based on accumulating some theoretical knowledge, while the learning based on experience is equivalent with learning by action.

Rogers enumerated among the virtues of learning based on experience the personal involvement, his own initiative in the learning process, the evaluation of the things learnt by the student and the persuasive effect it has over the student.

In Rogers' opinion, the learning based on experience is equivalent with the change and progress at an individual level. Rogers considers that all the people have a natural ply to learning; the teacher's role or the facilitator's role is to facilitate learning. This supposes:

- to create a positive environment for learning;

- to clarify the goals of those who learn;
- the organization and the availability of the resources which can be used during the learning process;
- the equilibration of the emotional and intellectual components during the learning process;
- offer your own feelings and ideas to the participants, but not in a possessive manner.

In Rogers' opinion, the education process of adults is facilitated when:

- the pupil is involved in the learning process and has control over the type and direction of learning;
- he relies principally on the direct confronting with practical, social, personal or researching problems;
- self-evaluation is the main method of progress or success evaluation.

Rogers also underlines that is very important to learn how to learn and be open to changes. Rogers presents a series of factors which lead to the success of the education for adults:

- learning is significant then, when the studied object answers the personal interests of the student;
- learning which represents a menace for oneself (e.g. new attitudes or perspectives) is assimilated easier when the external menaces are reduced to minimum;
- learning is faster realized when the grade of self-menace is reduced;
- auto-initiated learning is the most lasting and convincing.

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