About the educational discourse for 50^{+} people

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Résumé : La présentation considère comme point de départ les besoins principaux d'un adulte de 50 ans et plus socialement adapté: le besoin d'une adaptation professionnelle cohérente aux changements de la société, le besoin d'un lieu de travail pour valoriser correctement son potentiel; le besoin de sécurité financière et de dignité sociale. On ne voit pas les besoins d'une personne, qu'en corrélation avec les besoins de la communauté dans laquelle on vit. D'un côté, le groupe social pourrait bénéficier du savoir-faire et de l'expérience d'une personne de 50 ans et plus. D'autre part, la personne a également la possibilité, avec ou sans aide, de découvrir des moyens nouveaux et productifs pour contribuer socialement et professionnellement, mais elle doit avoir le courage d'essayer.

Nous considérons un moyen encourageant de former, d'informer et de mettre au défi de manière constante la génération de 50 ans et plus par le développement de leur créativité professionnelle et socio-économique. Une personne peut remplir le sentiment social d'appartenance à la dynamique économique actuelle, tout en trouvant un moyen flexible d'intégrer ses compétences cognitives, sociales et émotionnelles personnelles.

Les programmes éducatifs pour adultes pourraient offrir des solutions simples pour accroître la créativité et aider les personnes de 50 ans à développer des stratégies, à utiliser des expériences éducatives et à avoir accès à des applications sur lesquelles ils pourraient compter et qu'ils utiliseront à l'avenir. L'objectif principal est de sensibiliser à ce que l'on est déjà capable de faire et à bien plus que de surcharger de nouvelles informations; être conscient de ses connaissances, de la manière de les utiliser et de les adapter à un monde en mutation.

Ces types de formation continue peuvent faire correspondre le savoir-faire d'une personne aux besoins socio-économiques de la région dans laquelle il vit. Ils peuvent également encourager et construire de nouvelles compétences, en lui permettant de développer la pensée indépendante, critique et analytique, afin de mieux comprendre et de s'adapter au monde qui change tous les jours.

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Le principal effet sera une harmonie sociale et la protection cohérente de la mentalité et de l'identité économique d'une communauté; on renforce l'autonomie culturelle de tout groupe social.

Mots-clés: *éducation permanente, 50 ans et plus, apprentissage tout au long de la vie, programmes d'éducation des adultes, interdépendance sociale.*

The starting point of this paper is considering the primary needs of people over 50: the need to adapt professionally to the rapid changes of society, the need for a job, the need to value their own potential, the need for financial security, but also the need for personal satisfaction, for social dignity and economic integration. At the same time, the needs of the individual are constantly seen in relation to the needs of the community people over 50 are part of. Every social group needs the experience and the creative thinking of people over 50, who can share what they have accumulated during their entire life. Nevertheless, it is the last chance of the individual to perform in new situations for which he/she does not know he/she is prepared, but can find out with a little help. An effective direction of continuing education addressed to people over 50 is precisely the development of their social-economic creativity. The social and professional creativity of people over 50 can solve their own needs by addressing the needs of the community, in the sense of the common social good.

In any approach regarding education, we need the *social interdependence* concept, in opposition to *social independence*. While we often and aggressively promote a culture of individual freedom, we need the others for any gesture of individual assertion. The human being is a social being. There is no independence in a social and emotional sense. We, humans, are constantly depending on each other. The continuous interdependence can be seen in the back and forth of being a part in the lives of the others. And education, of any kind, must abide by the need for interdependence.

We cannot assert that there is a moment in life when we can say: I have gained enough from my interaction with the world, so I am independent; I no longer need the others, and the others do no longer need me. To stop in this way would mean to die from a social point of view. There is no age at which we can stop being social beings. And if we look at all cognitive processes, at our emotional dynamic, we realize how strong this interdependence is, but also how unaware we are of it. Let's take into consideration the most common example: we do not get dressed just for us, for our own delight, but we relate to what is socially appreciated or not! We abide by or defy social norms and through this exact action we gain satisfaction. Our self-esteem has a measure within inside, but also (or mostly, for people with low self-esteem) outside. Comparison is not necessarily insecurity, but also social adequacy. Then, everything we eat, the music we listen to, the places we visit – all is related to continuously being informed and adapted to what society has to offer.Comparison helps us adapt, re-adapt, learn and progress, flow with the social movement.

From the very first years of our childhood we learn to find our place in the world by observing the environment we are part of, reaching subjective but strong conclusions about the others, about ourselves, about good and bad, right and wrong, about how we could fit among others and find a feeling of belonging. We nurture our need to develop ourselves or to accept our limitations also by observing our surrounding, others' behavior and reactions, not just at ourselves. We gather information, but also we generate it as personal conclusions, and therefore we mark the unique impression in our passage through

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life, that is the personal way of adapting ourselves to the world. In this way, we assert ourselves as social beings. This is making our contribution to the world.

Interdependence is a living phenomenon based on the complementary dynamics of two fundamental human actions: *contributing* and *benefiting*; *giving* and *receiving*. *Contributing* has also own benefits, and the other way around. We cannot be social beings just by contributing or benefiting from what we receive from the others. We cannot just receive, because giving develops the only truth feeling of belonging. And we cannot just contribute, because we need to regenerate ourselves and have our presence and participation to the world confirmed. Both extremes break the bond between the others and us and produce psychological disturbances.

Contributing to social dynamics means to overcome mere survival, to break out of isolation, and most of all, to overcome the temptation of selfishness and social enclosure. This way, the contribution finds its primary use. The purpose of our actions directed towards the others is also to live for the community, following social rules. When someone develops an antisocial behavior, based on taking advantage, using others without giving something in return, that person is positioned *against the others*, in a continuous struggle with them. And if that person chooses not to contribute because of discouragement, with a deep feeling of helplessness and social inadequacy, (for example, a person with depressive problems) he or she is placed *outside the world,* avoiding it.

We strive for significance in order to belong to the world by enriching it with our effort. And true happiness and inner fulfillment, the true reward, are not generated by the process of receiving, but by giving. The high feeling of accomplishment comes when we have done something for the others or with the others, not when we have received something from them. True reward coincides with the moment when we receive something in exchange for something we have done. Foe example, we are not satisfied because someone tells us we are intelligent, but because the others acknowledge our intelligence and regard us as intelligent persons. It is the inner quality of the feeling that matters. Moreover, social implication leads to the inner need to use intelligence for purposes useful to the world.

Throughout our lives, as we contribute professionally, we may get the feeling that we could stop when we get old to reap the fruits of our effort. This motivation is used especially in situations in which we feel that our effort is greater than our emotional willingness to share, when we are stuck in professional activities that we are not passionate about or when we feel that we do not receive what we deserve. In other words, we are pushing ourselves to an end: we make great efforts, we work, we sacrifice free time and holidays with the hope that at some point in a few years we will stop and enjoy what we have gained. This is a vision that can do more harm than good to the individual. It helps to find motivation on a short/medium term in a no-escape situation that also limits the ability to seek alternatives in the immediate reality. Why yet? The moment we say that we will rest and enjoy when we get older, we automatically correlate unconsciously rest with old age and lack of power. That's why many people die as soon as they retire, because they do not know what to do with their spare time they suddenly receive, because they have unconsciously programmed themselves to resist until the moment of "freedom", but they did not consider, even for a second, their life afterwards. Freedom without a plan is dangerous. They have not allowed themselves, in their youth, to learn how to handle their own time. In other words, they were self-programmed prisoners in a reality they did not identify with. They forgot to be free.

In order to have the necessary energy to reinvent ourselves when we reach old age, to be young again, emotionally and socially speaking, we need to envision the life that

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we either have gained by our own will, or we have appropriated with the help of other after we turn 50. We can say that this way of putting it is an awareness process. It manifests simultaneously in relation *to ourselves* and *to the others*. We are talking about the interpenetration of the energy needed for *survival* and the energy spent for *connecting* with the world, and therefore, with the others.

A. In relation to ourselves, our minds after we turn 50 should open towards new information and experiences - desired and planned. People over 50 need to live connected to the future, as they did when they were young, making plans for five, ten or even fifty years. Often, life expectancy is measured in relation to the length of these plans and the steps we create to fulfill them. Plans mean not only the certainty of material comfort and fulfillment of desires, but maintaining mental flexibility, the capacity to adapt to the rhythm in which the world is changing, in order not to feel inadequate to the dynamics of our world or outside the world we live in. As such, to make new plans after we turn 50, we need new information and the optimal inner availability to open ourselves towards it. To learn new things is to move in an unknown space that our mind maps for the first time. All the information already accumulated often gives us the false feeling of superiority. Many of the jobs in which we have found our place in order to contribute to the world have limited some of our plans, and moreover, we have been imposing our own limits in others. We are thus getting to know less and less, or to stop at a certain level, in the conditions in which the world is always on the move.

Self-sufficiency generates our cognitive rigidity, which is exactly the slow death of brain cells. How can we defend ourselves? What kind of help do we need? The easiest and most effective method is to force our brains to develop new neural links by learning new things and, in particular, by engaging in new experiences. The more we limit ourselves to the old information we have and the experiences we have already consumed, the more we expose ourselves to cognitive self-limitation. Imagine your brain as the infrastructure of a country. The less we use the secondary roads, the more they are forgotten and die. If we are limiting ourselves to certain behaviors and old information, we are condemned to isolation and mental stiffening. Infrastructure starts to aberrantly reduce the use of motorways only after we have invested a huge effort over our lifetime to build a complex network of roads which we give up without estimating the costs... The price of such an attitude is very high for those over 50: we no longer have access to personality flexibility, we no longer keep alive the tolerance and the preparedness to see things from different perspectives. In this case, individual discourse becomes just a story about oneself. Thus, we remain prisoners of our own cognitive limitations. The conclusion is simple and comes as a natural consequence: for people over 50, just as at the age of youth, it is important to learn – by themselves or with the help of others - to develop their minds in several ways, by traveling, working, or doing new things; in one word, by continuously learning. Any new experience, any old thing done differently keeps the brain alert, the mind works and accumulates, and the goal is achieved: the individual over 50 develops mental flexibility and controls the risk of cognitive limitation. During a new experience, the brain processes, analyzes and adapts itself. Adaptation means flexibility. This process of adapting our minds, triggered by a new experience, transmits the degree of availability that we have in a flexible situation to a reality different from the one we are accustomed to.

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B. In relation to the others, we always seeking *social interaction*, which would mean completing our sense of belonging. The mind regains its youth at over 50, when we work and contribute to the production of economic, cultural realities in our world.

Only contributing in a useful way develops the feeling of social communion. The reward we receive is that we do not feel socially useless, but that we can contribute to the progress of our world. We all need unconditional love, but we also need the feeling of fulfillment, the feeling that we are really contributing to the birth of reality in this world, and that others are aware of this. This is the social reward that our mind is looking for. When we are young, the reward is manifold: we earn money, we are asked for help, we get bonuses etc. But as we get older and especially after we retire, there is a gap in this area of our relationship with the world. If we do not compensate this gap, after we turn 50, we are at risk of emotional and psychological fragility. This is how the disorders of the third age appear: anxiety, depression, the feeling that the person no longer finds a place in the world. Therefore, the state of social inadequacy, sometimes doubled by the vulnerability rendered by organic degenerative disorders (dementia) and psychosomatic disorders, is born.

Every man builds his life story about how he saved the world. The need to save the world is in each of us. It is the metaphor of our need for meaning and the construction of meaning that gives us the inner conviction that we have achieved our purpose in the world. It is the story of how we created a life-long reality - economic, political, cultural, and spiritual. On the other hand, each man is faced with a moment in life when he can no longer create reality. It may occur at 50, sometimes later. Then the person needs his/her story about the past, from which to feed his/her self-esteem and from which he/she takes the feeling of communion and fulfillment. But the healthiest way would be for somebody over 50 not to feed on his/her story about the past, but rather on what he/she is doing, from his/her continuous participation in creating a reality. The past should be used as the energy for the present, not as an excuse for powerlessness.

Mental health is extremely important and interdependent with physical health. There cannot be one without the other. At over 50, we should allow ourselves to try to be young again in the social sense, because this gives us the chance to stay healthy and balanced inside. For those people who feel socially rejected because of age, this is often a challenge that they cannot complete without help.

Why? More than ever in life, when we get old, we need to feel that we belong to the world we have worked for and in which we have evolved. We need recognition. We need to receive encouragement and confidence from our world. But when we feel socially rejected and inadequate to the rhythm of our world, and reinforce this feeling of inadequacy through retreat and lack of involvement, the world becomes a hostile place. At that moment, for any person touched by this crisis, the idea of being there means fighting this overwhelming force. Or give up. On the other hand, in the minds of those who feel socially rejected, there is the feeling that they are struggling with a hostile force, too strong for their power to react. If a person over 50 lives with the perception that the world does not want him or her anymore, it's hard for him/her to defeat this energy and position himself or herself within a world he/she fundamentally sees against him/her. And this can accelerate the process of aging and self-destruction, both physically and mentally. In this case, we are destroying our own alarm signal towards the world, waiting for the world, to come, notice and save us. The world, however, is a too abstract concept. The significant author, the author of our salvation, always comes from within us. But he/she must receive help in order to generate us within the dynamics of the individual's mind.

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In Romania, traditional culture used to value the elderly of the community. They were highly respected. They were the ones who ensured the perpetuation of memory, the transmission of teachings, and the legitimation of life rules. The new postmodern culture, based on a kind of cult of youth and self-centeredness, with a lack of social openness, easily excludes people over 50 from social life. In this dramatic context, social integration of people over 50 is a process that has just begun. And continuing education offered to people over the age of 50 almost does not exist, except a few postgraduate programs for seniors. Instead, there are more and more people over 50 who lose their jobs in order to be replaced by young people who accept minimum wages. These people are thrown into an uncertain social area, which the community does not care about: the area of those who cannot yet receive a pension, who do not have social help and which apparently are no longer needed by their own society.

C. For the social and professional integration of people over 50, continuous education is a real chance. Often, continuous education is the only tool through which people over 50 succeed in reinventing themselves and discovering a new place for themselves in the world. In my opinion, a series of courses for encouraging and supporting people over 50 can be organized. Courses should serve the need for interdependence, in the individual's relation with himself and with the community. The main purpose of the courses would be to encourage people over 50 to rediscover or reinvent their social role. The content of the meetings, the topics of the debates and the sequence of the courses should be based on a simple logic: identifying problems, analyzing problems, discovering individual solutions and transposing solutions into concrete scenarios for each person involved. The significant immediate help would be social support and creating a sense of belonging. How can things happen? We can call them meetings for communication, support and encouragement. These meetings take place in groups so that the person benefits from group support. It is always a good idea to have a group defined for courses and the same group to attend the whole series of courses. Team preservation gives the individual the feeling of intimacy. Public space is simultaneously perceived as a private space. Every person evolves together with the others, knows the stories of the others and can be supported by the others. A person collaborates with the group without going into competition with the people in the group. Competition, especially in this case, is not a means of developing personal solutions. This way, a sense of comfort and engagement is created. Each learner uses several events to compose his/her own story. He/she tells and retells the story from several perspectives, the personal testimony being directed by the trainer's questions. The perspectives on their own story are multiplied by the visions of the other learners. Thus, the learner is helped to understand by himself/herself the solutions to his/her problems related to social-professional integration, but also to help others find their own answers. Each one becomes the mirror for others and can be seen in the objective mirrors of the other participants. The trainer has the role of moderating and directing the energy of the group towards encouragement and insight.

In a first stage**,** the theme of the *Me and the World* courses can be. Learners are invited to choose a single event to tell about, as a metaphor of their connection to the world. The chosen event and its interpretation by the group will be mirrored in sets of questions ordered as follows: *What does World mean to me: family, city, village, Facebook friends group, colleagues, society? What matters most? Whose opinion is the most important for me? In what way does the world I live in constructs me as a person? How do I see the world I live in? How do I feel in the world I live in today? How do I like the world I live in? In what way does the world I live in construct me*

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as a person? What things would I improve in this world? How can I contribute to it? What do I need to feel better in this world? What is my place in this world? What can I do to keep/find/take back/change this place? The chosen event is meant to spontaneously put together a vivid image of the personal connections between the learners and the world in which they evolve. The trainer has the role of giving each learner the opportunity to self-express with the support and acceptance of the group. A first picture of the learner's mental space occurs. Representations, emotions, frustrations, nostalgia are verbalized. Fear or temerity, responsibility or unawareness under the sign of which each learner lives his connection with the world can be generated. With the help of the trainer, the group reacts to answers and can try to show each learner:

- What is the dominant feeling under the sign of which the learner lives his or her connection to the world, generated by the story he/she has told;
- The optimistic or pessimistic content of the personal connection to the world.

Each learner will realize how his/her image is reflected in the world through the eyes of the others and through their reactions.

The theme of the second stage would be: *What Have I realized in this world until the age +50?* Learners are invited to tell a new significant story for a new theme. Their choice and the group's interpretation will be directed towards other sets of questions: *What have I wanted to realize? What have I realized? What have I not succeeded? Am I pleased with what I have done? Am I proud? Why? Could I have also done something else? What else do I want to do in this world? In what way do I need the world? In what way does the world need me? How can I open up towards the world, with respect for my own person and my needs?* At this stage, the trainer will try to help learners become aware exactly of the social interdependence we live in.

The third stage, concerning the implementation of solutions after the identification of resources: *What do I know to do? What do I like to do? What can I do?* This final stageleads towards identifying individual solutions for adaptation, with the help of group debates.

The main idea I support is that through continuing education programs people over 50 can discover and develop their ability to create their own job or even more jobs in line with society's requirements. They can also develop their ability to integrate their powerful cognitive and social-emotional skills into the existing economic dynamics. We start from the following reality: most often, people over 50 have either lost their jobs or encounter difficulties in keeping a job, or have a creative energy they want to express through work but don't know how.

Developing creativity through lifelong learning can be done through programs designed following a few simple principles. Courses such as those listed above can help people over 50 to develop their socio-economic creativity. First of all, continuing education made with this perspective will focus less on providing new information. The main priority will be that people over 50 become aware of what they already know what doing and what they understand and do not understand regarding the world they live in. Furthermore, the programs can demonstrate through concrete applications how interconnection is achieved between what a person over 50 knows is capable of doing and what are the socio-economical requirements in the region in which he or she lives. Continuous education programs of this kind can help people over fifty discover their professional skills and competences that they use little or not at all. But most of all, the person will be guided to see a different addressability of the competences on which he/she relied in his/her work until the age of 50. A person who has been a 30-year-old teacher can find out that he knows how to organize a farm for cultivating and capitalizing medicinal herbs. Another person who has worked in construction can decide to practice beekeeping.

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And a former accountant can choose to cook and open a family restaurant. In this way, we help people over 50 to build trust in their own capacity through an empathic educational relationship that can provide motivation and inspiration. This kind of continuous education is based on encouraging the autonomous, critical and analytical thinking of people over 50, thus oriented towards knowing and accepting the current civilization. Developing the creativity of people over 50, in order for them to adapt by their own to the socio-economic environment, should be backed up by proper European laws. It has a strong social sustainability effect because it participates in preserving the mentality and economic identity of a community and legitimizes the cultural autonomy of any social group. All they need is a basis to create awareness and encouragement.

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