SKILLS FORMAL AND NON-FORMAL TRAINING

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Abstract

In recent years, it has been noticed the trend, having almost become a rule, to engage students, even from an early age, starting with pre-school years, in various categories of non-formal and informal activities. The school aims to build learning experiences formally gained and ensures the development of skills discovered in the student.

The training profile involves a collaboration between formal and non-formal/ in-formal educational factors, the training directions having a transdisciplinary character; they are expressed through seven generic categories and are each customized by sets of capabilities, attitudes and values.

The profile of the future graduate training is validated and subsequently carried out in accordance with the proposed development directions at European level through the key-competences areas of the European Qualifications Framework.

At the intersection of these milestones are identified the following key-elements, fundamental for the personal and socio-professional development of the graduate: the communication, the problem solving, the operations specific to different areas of knowledge, the socialization and civic responsibility, lifelong learning, the creativity, the entrepreneurship.

Key-words: non-formal education, informal education, skills training

THEORETHICAL FRAMEWORK

Learning one set of skills at school, a vocational/ technical college or at university is no longer sufficient preparation to equip people with the knowledge and expertise they will require for the duration of their working lives.

A major way to combine learning that happens in informal, non-formal and formal contexts is through recognition pathways. That is, using the prior learning, individuals gain, through experience in work or in other daily activities (informal learning) or in work-based or community-based structured training programs (non-formal learning), a way to identify training or learning gaps that need to be addressed to acquire formal qualifications (formal learning).

The European documents highlight the need to strengthen the human capital and the employability by increasing the level of graduates skills; (http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/?fuseaction=list&coteId=1&year=2008&p=5&language=ro.)

- the overall demand for competences will continue to increase in the future;

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- are required European /national policies guaranteeing labor adaptability to the needs of employers;
- it is required the diversification of the continuous training modalities and learning throughout life;
- the identification of some coherent measures for solving over qualification /under qualification;
- it is essential the correct assessment of skills, not just quantitative, but especially qualitative.

The main skills associated to the changes in work content and which facilitate the adaptation and employability are: use of information technology competences, problem solving skills, resources and communication management skills, including communication in a foreign language. From the same perspective, it highlighted the importance of developing transversal competences and non-technical competences (soft competences), such as: teamwork, language skills and communication skills. These types of skills enable the potential employees flexibility and adaptability at work.

The contribution of non-formal education to the forming/ development of student competences aims two levels: skills as interactional process in various social contexts and student competences as prescribed curriculum elements. In school are formed the key-competences (in various disciplines), but this it's not the only way of training/ developing them, the role of non-formal and in-formal education being relevant and included in the lifelong education.

The school curriculum offers suggestions of ways of teaching approach of the skills in teaching and learning process: discussion on a given topic, how and where they learned about an author, a historic event, a geographical area, a scientific experiment etc.; account of their own formal or informal experiences of learning which are associated with new acquisitions (what they noted in a trip/ vacation in the mountains on the flora and fauna specific to this area, in what movies or books seen or read they learned something new about the topic addressed etc.); reflections on how they exploit new knowledge, skills, attitudes, internalized in their daily activities in formal education.

NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL EDUCATION – AS COMPLEMENTARY DIMENSIONS

Non-formal education is a loosely defined term covering various structured learning situations, such as swimming sessions for toddlers, community-based sports programs and conference style seminars, which do not either have the level of curriculum, syllabus, accreditation and certification associated with 'formal learning', but have more structure than that associated with 'informal learning', which typically takes place naturally and spontaneously as part of other activities. This concept of formal learning being the socio-cultural accepted norm.

This learning was first challenged by Scribner and Cole in 1973 (Scribner, Cole 1973), who claimed that most things in life are better learnt through informal

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processes, citing language learning as an example. Moreover, anthropologists noted that complex learning still takes place within indigenous communities that had no formal educational institutions. (Lave, Wenger1991).

Non-formal education can be defined as learning that is not provided by an education or training institution and typically does not lead to certification; as an intention from the learner's perspective' (European Commission 2001).

Because it differs from informal learning in terms of its targeted, intentional and planned nature, non-formal learning still requires structures such as defined learning sites, curricula, teachers and trainers.

Objectives of non-formal education are (Nwachukwu Prince Ololube; Daniel Elemchukwu Egbezor2012):

- provides functional literacy and continuing education for adults and youths who have not had the advantage of formal education or who did not complete their primary education;
- provide functional and remedial education for the young people who did not complete their secondary education;
- provide education to different categories of graduates to improve the basic knowledge and skills;
- provide in-service, on-the-job, vocational and professional training to different categories of workers and professionals to improve their skills;
- give adult citizens of different parts of the country necessary aesthetic, cultural and civic education for public enlightenment.

Non-formal education today should be seen as related to the concepts of recurrent and lifelong learning.

Fordham (1993) suggests four characteristics associated with non-formal education:

- relevance to the needs of disadvantaged groups;
- concern with specific categories of persons;
- a focus on clearly defined purposes;
- flexibility in organization and methods.

Completion of non-formal learning programs may initiate individuals into the next stage of a desired life path. In industry, non-formal learning (often delivered away from the actual job or in industry training rooms or spaces) may be used to induct new employees into the culture of the company, to develop the technical and inter-personal skills of experienced workers, and hone the skills of managers and supervisors. (Misko 2008)

Non-formal vocational education and training is provided by a wide range of organisations, including non-governamental organisations, church institutions, profit-making education and training providers, companies, and employer and employee organisations.

The courses on offer cover a broad range of skills and take many different forms, including distance study programmes, integrated training and coaching,

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and classroom-based lessons at night school. Non-formal vocational education and training also involve a number of pitfalls.

Quality in particular is not always sufficiently high to generate real added value for learners, who sometimes lack reliable information to enable them to compare different offers. Employers are also very limited in their ability to assess the value of the education and training courses completed by applicants.

Against this backdrop, many countries are seeking to introduce recognition mechanisms for certifying skills acquired in a non-formal context**.** These mechanisms aim to make skills visible by having them identified externally on a standardised basis at the end of training programmes and courses.

Formal qualifications should make it easier for individuals to make the transition to the formal vocational education and training system or to higher-quality work. The most sustainable impact is achieved by including additional provision such as job placement, assistance for business start-ups and help for individuals in implementing what they have learned in their own company (Adam and Hiltmann 2013).

Informal education happens outside of the classroom, at home, in after-school programmes, community-based organisations, museums, and libraries. Informal education is the learning that goes on in daily life. Parents and other caregivers, for example, may show children how to prepare family food or tie their shoe laces.

This is informal education. Informal education can include the learning that comes from being involved in youth and/or community groups. Like friends or parents, these workers may respond to what is going on, but as professionals they are able to illicit special insights and ways of working (Nwachukwu Prince Ololube; Daniel ElemchukwuEgbezor 2012).

A renewed interest in informal workplace learning has been fuelled by a variety of changes in the way organisations have restructured and adapted to ,,shifting environments and … advances in … technology and global communication,, (Marsick 2006 in Misko 2008).

The aim of informal learning at the time is not to gain formal qualifications, it may be used to acquire formal qualifications in secondary, VET and higher education sectors. There are some cases, generally in the VET sector, where informal learning acquired throughout work and life in general has been recognised through formal recognition of prior learning (RPL) assessments to gain whole qualifications. (Misko 2008).

A radiograph of educational offers provided by the school environment and social environment highlights various non-formal and informal activities in which students can be integrated. Their selection depends on many factors: family financial possibilities to support these actions, skills and personal interests, age level, regional specifics etc. Some of these belong to the schools offers (*participation in cultural and sporting events* - performances, book launches, school competitions, school

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visits, school trips, events in the library, cultural projects; *civic actions* - debates; *volunteering*; *free time actions* - trips, hiking, reading, cinema and theater, *professional and career development* a*ctions*-symposiums, practical activities, *activities for personal development* - best manner courses, modeling, sports activities, p*artnerships* - participation in school projects), others from the community institutions offers (creative workshops, competitions on specific topics, dance/ music/ acting/ languages/ musical instruments/ sports courses).

At national and European level in the manual Classification of learning activities, 2006, it is proposed a map of categories of activities that allow the formation of communication competences (The Institute of Education Sciences. The Laboratory Curriculum 2004):

1. Formal education

2. Non-formal education

2.1. Non-formal education programs

2.2. Courses: 2.2.1. Courses conducted by classroom training (including readings) 2.2.2. Combined courses theory - practice (including workshops) 2.2.3. Courses conducted through open and distance education 2.2.4. Private tutoring (private lessons)

2.3. Vocational conducted training

2.4. Random non-specific education

3. Informal education

3.1. Learning that is teach 3.1.1. Taught learning. Training /informal tutoring 3.1.2. Guided visits

3.2. Non-taught learning. 3.2.1 Self-learning 3.2.2. Group learning 3.2.3. Practice. 3.2.4 Non-guided visits

In the developing world, the author (Latchem, 2010) found that non-formal education included:

- literacy, numeracy and basic education for adults, out-of-school youth and school dropouts;
- youth group and social development;
- community mobilisation and development;
- gender issues;
- knowledge and skills development in crop science, animal husbandry, fishing, forestry, nutrition, water supply and sanitation, family planning, childcare, healthcare, hiv/ aids prevention, gender equity, public safety and justice, reconstruction and reconciliation, computing and environmental, ecological and conservation issues;
- small-scale business and local enterprise skills development;
- inclusive education for those with special needs who are currently excluded, enabling them to become valued, contributing members of their communities.
- information about democracy, human and civil rights and constitutional and voting systems.

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The educational aims formulated in the school curriculum for the different levels of education are supported by formal, non-formal and in-formal education.

For primary education, educational aims, defined in terms of competences in the school curricula aim: training the child's personality, respecting his level of development; equipping the child with the knowledge, skills and attitudes that boost the creative and effective reporting on social and natural environment allowing further education.

For secondary education are taken into consideration: building the capacity to communicate effectively in real situations, using Romanian language, mother language, foreign languages and various specialty languages; training and developing the capacity to adapt and integrate into the community; formation of positive attitudes in relation with the social environment: tolerance, responsibility, solidarity, etc.; building capacities and motivations necessary for learning in the conditions of a changing society.

For high school education, the goals aim to: building the capacity to reflect on the world, to formulate and solve problems based on relating knowledge from different fields; value their own experiences, for an optimal vocational guidance for employment and/ or higher education; developing the capacity to actively integrate in different sociocultural groups: family, professional environment, friends etc.; development of essential functional skills for social success: communication, critical thinking, decision making, processing and contextual use of complex information; cultivation of the expressiveness and sensitivity in order to personal fulfillment and to promote a quality life; formation of moral autonomy.

Non-formal learning is perceived as being the opposite of the „formal" educational system, seen as institutionalized training, which represents compulsory education, variable as time period from one school system to another and that ends with a specific certification of acquired skills. At the systemic level, non-formal learning is the system of formal education institutions providing compulsory education in a country. (Tudor, 76 (2013) 821–826, page 822)

Examples of non-formal learning are training programs provided by social community institutions such as libraries, music schools, foreign language schools, community centers or other centers which organize training courses for various skills - musical, instrumental, dance, theatre, sports, painting, mimicry etc.

The contribution of non-formal education to the forming/ development of student competences aims two levels: skills as interactional process in various social contexts and student competences as prescribed curriculum elements. In school the key-competences are followed (in various disciplines), but this it's not the only way of training/ developing them, the role of non-formal and informal education being relevant and included in the lifelong education.

Developing the communication skills through non-formal activities (The Institute of Education Sciences 2004) develops language competences, creates

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various opportunities for practicing languages, forming skills of search and information processing, developing nonverbal communication competences and for using of specialized languages (including in the online environment, in the public).

The definition of informal learning is not fully supported, although it is clearer than the idea of non-formal learning. For example, some people would describe distance learning through individual purchase of books and study manuals and their individual study at home as informal learning. (Albulescu, 2008)

Unlike formal and non-formal education, "informal learning" is not deliberately organized to ensure student's learning. The learner often does so unintentionally. However, "informal" learning is a very effective method of learning and probably the most common among adults. (Tudor, 76 (2013) 821–826, page 822)

Benefits of informal learning:

- gathering and collecting the desired knowledge is easier today owing to the exhaustive media and devices we have. Informal learning does not require any prior learning experiences or prerequisites;
- learning informally is more relaxing and less threatening for most people. With no exams or projects to complete within limited schedules, many learners commit to learning a new skill or a concept readily;
- in an informal setting, you will find willing to share more knowledge than ever! so if you have a group of experts in your organization, simply arrange an informal meeting and have them share their expertise;
- informal learning is close to natural learning. People tend to follow the pathway that best suits their individual needs.

SKILLS FORMAL AND NON-FORMAL TRAINING

In December 2012 the Council of the European Union issued a Recommendation which recognised the importance of non-formal and informal learning pathways in engaging with disadvantaged target groups including the young, the unemployed and the low skilled – and called upon all EU Member States to make arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning by 2018.

Cross (2007) states that "Companies already use informal learning in employee development. It's an inevitable aspect of human behavior. Companies just don't do a good job of it as they might. Employees already learn more from one another than they do from formal programs" He also thinks that informal learning as of something that comes in programs.

Generally, informal learning is more spontaneous than that. An enlightened enterprise can benefit substantially from improving its learning ecosystem".

New educational models presume a change in the teaching-learning-evaluation relation, from informative to formative, from authority to liberty,

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passing from the classical guidance of learning to the management of knowledge in the constructivist orientation.

The process of teaching is replaced with those of facilitating, counselling, guiding learning (more learning – less teaching); from training and educating to learning (from education to learning); from the didactics of instruction to that of building up knowledge; from the culture of transmitting to that of learning; from training to assisting learning. (Tudor, 76 (2013) 821–826, page 825)

Sefton-Green (in Latchem, 2014) concludes that technology-enhanced informal learning is an integral part of children's education because it not only develops technical knowledge and skills but it is *constructivist* (enabling them to reflect upon and construct their own understanding of the world), *experiential* (involving behavioural and affective as well as cognitive dimensions) and *situated* (joining and learning from online communities through social media). These are the very attributes needed for learning for development, for self-directed individuals to break out of the confines of traditional learning and use, share or create information in innovative ways and, thus, become force multipliers in their own environments.

Among the advantages gained from using formative strategies (specially multimedia strategies) we include: facilitates the effective management of learning, allowing individualization and personalization of learning, provides rapid information, stimulates discovery learning, the interactive learning model, provides opportunities for simulation, problem solving, deepening knowledge.

Using these strategies stimulates cognitive confrontations, determines active and interactive training and gives the learner cognitive and informational autonomy. The student has an active attitude, continuously stimulating personal reflection capacities, critical thinking, imagination, creativity, but also an interactive one, being forced to interact with other to solve teaching tasks. (Tudor, 78 (2013) 682 – 686, page 683)

The application of formal learning (training) is an essential way of learning when it is necessary to systematically and with guidance adopt a set of knowledge and skills or specific methodology to be used in the work (e.g. Medium-term planning, Program budgeting and programming of IPA). Regardless to that, in support of the adopted competencies in the workplace informal methods are also important (coaching, networking, mentoring, job-shadowing, on-the-job training, e-learning etc.) in order to ensure the sustainability of the acquired knowledge.

Numeral advantages of informal learning (individual, voluntary, self-guided, economical), as well as disadvantages in the sense of absence of the possibility to plan, are reasons why this aspect of education may not be treated as self-sufficient or sole form of education, but complementary and compatible with formal and non-formal education. Especially, when having in mind the process of reforms and accordingly the need for appropriate, systematic and result oriented learning.

Hague and Logan (2009) observe that encouraging and supporting self-

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directed informal learning is important to development. It helps individuals and groups face economic, technological and social change, improve their health and life expectancy, achieve greater self-efficacy, self-confidence, well-being and happiness, and develop shared norms and values. Part of being an effective facilitator of informal learning (and non-formal education) it involves understanding how adults learn best.

However, in developing countries and traditional cultures learning for development not only requires adherence to these principles but appreciation of how beliefs, ideas, behaviours and practices are transmitted from one individual to another, from one community to another, and from one generation to another

CONCLUSION

Concept of lifelong learning connects individual parts of education and particular forms of education (formal, non-formal, informal) into a single composition. The growing popularity of proposals to increase government recognition of non-formal and informal learning pathways is based upon the realisation that such recognition makes this human capital more visible and more valuable to society at large (OECD, Pointers for Policy Development, 2012, page 1).

Like a well-cut diamond, eLearning has many facets. One facet is informal/social learning and another is formal learning. Both types of learning promote the acquisition of soft skills.

Continual investment in education and training is seen as essential for upgrading the skills of an ever-larger segment of the world's population in response to the growth of globalisation, broader markets and new technologies. Overall, within the OECD countries, over 40% of adults participate in formal and/or non-formal education in any given year.

They require reinforcement by non-formal educational practices and non-formal education needs to be a de facto partner in the lifelong process and accessible for all. These two collateral sometimes blurring forms of learning, informal learning and non-formal education, provide the basis for that critically important and enduring attitude: the desire to go on learning.

However, despite their importance, it is difficult to find research findings or case studies regarding these means of learning for development, particularly in the context of developing countries.

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