Andragogy and Adult Education- Project and Change

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The development of andragogy as a science and the education of adults as a learning process should be considered as a whole and inseparable. Their interdependence would appear to be obvious, and in essence it is impossible to examine each of these subjects simultaneously. Above all, this results from the fact that andragogy (just like pedagogy) belongs to the applied sciences. This means a close connection between theory and the research results obtained, upon which the theory is constructed. And although every science strives to create a theory of the widest possible scope, in the case of applied sciences one cannot ignore the context in which specific laws, dependencies and connections can be discovered, and upon which a broadly based concept can be formulated. This of course may suggest a higher accuracy of qualitative research methods, which may form some kind of limitation. We should be aware that although qualitative research methods seem to be the most suitable in researching the problems of adult education, they should not be regarded as the only possibility, because this type of research problem determines the choice of method, and not the other way round.

Science is advanced by constructing theories of the world about us, and then testing those theories through research (Angrosino, 2007). In the case of andragogy, some of the more important problems hampering its development are its theoretical dependence on other disciplines and the relative paucity of research (Andreski, 2002). Theoretical relationship depends on making use of theories created by other sciences. However, this appears to be essential if we take into consideration that andragogy as a science is a relatively young discipline, presently remaining a 'branch' of pedagogy. On the other hand, pedagogy itself draws much from related disciplines – not only from the humanities and social sciences but also from the natural and arts sciences. Such a broad base of "auxiliary" sciences means that academics engaged in andragogy must be familiar with many scientific disciplines and engage

themselves in fairly diverse inter-disciplinary issues. On the other hand, inter- and trans-disciplinarity provide an opportunity for researching problems from related disciplines. If we had to resolve marginal problems for other disciplines, then andragogy would be a science without much relevance. It is important that research undertaken by those engaged in andragogy should be original and specific. In that way it would acquire an innovative value (Dudzikowa, 2009).

Insofar as the interdisciplinary nature of andragogy can be perceived as an advantage and a challenge, the lack of important ground-breaking research in the field of adult education is a serious barrier. Unfortunately, andragogy as a science remains something of a niche discipline. The lack of research results from the fact that relatively few academic researchers are engaged in andragogy. Much research is done by independent researchers, working in the HR departments of corporations and private companies. However, such independent research is generally conducted by the institutions themselves and the results are regarded as private property. Either there is no possibility of making them public, or the results are either so diverse and fragmented that it is difficult to draw any broader conclusions from them, especially as independent researchers are poorly prepared in science. Additionally, such researchers take nothing into consideration other than the interests of the company they work for. In the meantime, if they could go beyond their own parameters, even if the research has a conducive aspect, such research could be valuable not only to science but generally. The concept of research and results can become an element of the promotional strategy of a company to show that it is specifically engaged in building the knowledge society and realising the concept of socially responsible business (Jashapara, 2004).

The most important reasons for the decrease in andragogy research include the lack of research funds, dispersal of researchers, lack of appreciation of andragogy as a science, poor public relations and a lack of communication with interested practitioners. Currently, research into the problems of adult education is more often carried out by private institutions than by academic institutions created for such research (Evans, 2004). In the latter case, it could be supposed that research still has a conducive aspect, and that "theoretical" reflection is more often concocted compared to reflection based on daily life. One may suspect that behind this is a conviction that other research should have funding priority, because adult education can somehow look after itself. However, private funding for developing research into adult education cannot replace stable state subsidies, which through grants and competition can set priorities as to which research should be carried out. It should also be remembered that the

research results of independent institutions may be subject to commercialisation, and that means patents and a limitation on widespread access to new knowledge (Juliá Igual, 2014).

The key to success is a change in the attitudes of those researching andragogy and adult education. First, it is necessary to identify the most important problems in developing these fields, and then to create an international network of cooperation between researchers and educators focused on developing the discipline (Brandes, 2018; Sennett, 2012; Tylor, 2014).

Unfortunately, the academic community is unable (at least for the present) to assemble and consolidate adult education researchers beyond their own institutions. Perhaps it is a problem of academic feudalism, perhaps a weakness of the system, or more probably it is some kind of neglect and disregard for the needs of the local community. It is difficult to imagine the development of andragogy without intensive cooperation with other communities, above all the research community and the field of training. It is worth noting that this is relevant not only on a local level (in the case of self-governing and non-governmental sorganisations operating at a grassroots level), but also on a wider level. Particular significance should be given to international cooperation and exchange of experience by creating new solutions to adult education in the form of teaching methods, programmes, handbooks, as well as research, all of which should be regarded as natural elements in the creation of innovative science (Elliott, 1998).

A start to such a long-term plan of revitalisation could be European Union projects in the field of adult education, which have hitherto generally concentrated on an exchange of experiences and creation of patterns of good practice. They can be a good incentive for developing the discipline, as long as they are enhanced by the theories and research of specialists in andragogy. Currently, these European projects are the only real source of funding in developing andragogy, and this source has the potential of combining the public sphere with the private, science with practice, and research with application.

Examples of Projects Developing Adult Education

Examples of multi-dimensional cooperation in the sphere of andragogy and adult education can be found in the many international projects carried out in Wroclaw and Lower Silesia, Poland, from 2010 to 2019.

One of the first such projects was Grundtvig project TANT (Third Age and New Technologies 2010-1-PL1-GRU06-11376 1), conducted from 2010 to 2012 by the University of the Third Age at the University of Wroclaw, in cooperation with PhD students at Wroclaw

University and students of the inter-disciplinary Variograf Scientific Club. It was not the first project of the newly-formed team. There had already been some minor projects for senior students, which cost less and were more localised, most often involving partners from Ukraine and Belarus. Thus, the team already had a little experience in tackling such tasks. Unfortunately the project itself had absolutely no support from the University of Wroclaw or the Institute of Pedagogy, which later led to the independent realisation of similar undertakings by the project team itself.

Of great significance here is the fact that ten years of Polish prosperity had given rise to a young, dynamic team, who wished to carry out their own concepts in developing adult education. Thus, the TANT project can be perceived as one in which a team of young people, without any support from research institutes, began their own experiments and investigations in the field of adult education.

At that time, European projects within the framework of the Grundtvig Programme were intended to provide an exchange of information and experience between European sorganisations operating in the field of adult education. The research and scientific dimension had no special significance, just as in most cases today. Thus, the scientific dimension was what differentiated this project from the thousands of others conducted throughout Europe at the same time.

Meetings took place between the partner countries over the course of two years, involving organisations from France, Spain, Poland and Turkey, and experimental computer courses for seniors were sorganised in each country. The Polish experiment was admirably described in an article by Jacek Gulanowski and Agata Kozak (Gulanowski & Kozak, 2012) and also by Luba Jakubowska (2012). The research results pointed above all to the particular difficulty of sorganising a pedagogic experiment in natural conditions for such a specific research group as seniors. Although the experiment was conducted in one of the largest and most prestigious institutions for senior education in Poland, and was enthusiastically supported by the director of the U3A as a member of the research team, the research programme encountered great difficulties. The greatest problem was the research subjects themselves, many of whom participated in the experiment only sporadically, which threw doubt on the validity and accuracy of the research results. However, this negative experience formed a valuable lesson for the young researchers, who prepared their next research projects with much more care.

The next research project conducted by the same team, although this time co-ordinated by the Pro Scientia Publica Foundation, was the education and research project GEM

(interGenerational Memories 2012-1-PL1-GRU06-27804 1). The coordinator of the whole team, which included educators from Italy, Austria, Spain, Turkey and France, was Aleksandra Marcinkiewicz, a young PhD student from Poland specialising in biographical research. This project also involved cooperation with many different environments. These were:

− educators and practitioners working with communities in remote areas through storytelling;

− specialist educators supporting social inclusion for immigrants in multicultural communities;

− university professors and researchers;

− specialists in the field of educating seniors;

− directors of non-governmental organisations;

− seniors, immigrants and others facing social exclusion.

The project created research material in the shape of *The Little Book of Memories* (Marcinkiewicz, 2014), in which seniors recorded their histories and memories. Thanks to this research and analysis of the results it was possible to connect and compare the common themes, threads, personalities and events which contribute to biographical education. Particularly important was the significance the seniors themselves placed on various people, places and events.

We should acknowledge two types of projects which are especially valuable in developing adult education. One type is research-educational, which test new tools and create new concepts on the basis of research well prepared factually and methodologically. Scientific research then becomes an in integral element of educational activity for the local community. An example of such a project is NEON (Needs of adults education stakeholders 2019-1-PL01-KA204-065792). The second type of project consists of activities directed at the excluded community. Among these, those which enable the construction of new learning communities using modern information technologies should be especially appreciated (van Mourik Broekman et al., 2014). Scientific research and the construction or verification of theoretical concepts is then marginal in relation to educational activities. However, research in this situation simultaneously gives additional value to the educational activities. An example of such a project is Cultural knowledge and language competences as a means to develop the 21st century skills (2018-1-HR01-KA204-047430) (Luka, 2019) .

Adult education itself faces specific scivilisational challenges, which can be perceived either as a threat or a challenge.

When it comes to formal education, some European countries are struggling with a relatively large percentage of the population who have not attended any kind of school. Added to this is the problem of immigrants, many of whom have to undergo appropriate training in order to function in the new socio-cultural reality. They also have to cope with the diversity of the European job market and are sometimes forced to learn a new trade or profession. Emigration and an increase in illiteracy mean that the compensational function of adult education has again become relevant, even for relatively well educated people (Roth, 2019).

Another problem is an increase in social ignorance, the rejection of science and the appearance of pseudo-science propagated by those who, for example, are against vaccination, believe that the Earth is flat, reject conventional medicine and are politically frustrated. Steering people away from such dangerous stupidity requires above all action to be taken at the basic stage of education. In the case of informal adult education, it is possible only to modify the range of values and convictions as it is too late to shape them from the beginning. Every political experiment, ideology and social engineering aimed at creating the "new man" were destroyed in the twentieth century, and we all hope that they will not be repeated. Boorishness, vulgarity and ignorance are reaping their harvest in the form of increasing dissatisfaction, grudges and absurd political choices, which in turn has led many humanists and political scientists to the conclusion that democracy as a political project is exhausted and that we are witnessing its end. It seems that even the most fundamental scientific truths, which should be obvious to anybody with basic education, are being challenged by a section of the population. Science has ceased to be understandable. We ourselves are partly responsible for this situation because the language of science has become too hermetic and impenetrable. The proliferation of science mixed with pseudo-science (for example, fake research and predatory journals) has not helped, so it is difficult for the ordinary person to distinguish between science and charlatanism. This situation can be improved through adult education when used as a tool for disseminating science.

Yet another problem in adult education arises from insufficient cooperation with the world of science. Currently, many interesting projects which are changing our views on adult education are being carried out in private institutions, companies and NGOs, which don't even realise that their modest contributions could enhance andragogy in a significant way. Probably only a small percentage of them have even heard of andragogy, and an even lesser number are able to meet the challenges of research at an appropriate level. Thus, the real

challenge for andragogy and adult education is to gather these two diverse scientific and research activities into one project which will show the real picture of change.

Final Conclusions

– Andragogy and adult education could be compared to the two sides of the coin. They cannot be separated. The quality of one depends on the other.
– We need more communication between theory and practise
– There are two different parallel priorities for adult education - compensation for lack of qualifications and building of awareness.
– Technology can be illusive and destructive for the Self, but we can use it as a tool for constructing strong, scientific, smart communities, supporting adult education activities. We see the demand of it especially in the time of isolation and for the groups with special educational needs but not only (*non solum sed etiam*).
– Projects in adult education are very useful for the educational practice itself, but without any wider impact. To make them great again ;-) and to create real change, we have to support them by the theory of adult education.

The area able to connect theory and practice can be analysis and projecting widely understood social change – from the local community level to global changes level. Thanks to this, one can go beyond narrowly understood educational phenomenon and analyse different phenomena and processes which, until now, were beyond the area of interest of andragogists, gerontologists and educators. Unique opportunities are created by analysing the educational potential of cultural phenomena, social and political activity/social psychology, human resources management and public relations. In such a case, an interdisciplinary approach and cooperation with representatives of different scientific fields is a necessity.

About the Paper

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