

FROM TEACHING TO ACTIVE LEARNING

Daniela NAGY, Diana ILIȘOI

“Henri Coandă” Air Force Academy, Brasov, Romania

Abstract: Starting from the hypothesis that learning is co-evolving with teaching, to bring up the quality of learning stands for an inherent analysis of the teaching activity. Knowledge of mechanisms, as well as of the power and limitations of the human learning represents the condition for creating specific and efficient learning situations through teaching. The dynamics of the contemporary world, together with the information explosion impose the promotion of an active, innovative learning, as the only one capable to provide the contemporary individual with an adjustment to the accelerated pace of changes. The implementation of the heuristic-type strategies, of active-participative methods, intended to cultivate the critical thinking, transforms the classroom into a place where a better future for humankind might be prepared and designed.

Keywords: teaching, active learning, maintenance learning, innovative learning, shock learning, active listening, individualized education.

1. INTRODUCTION

"The authority of those who teach is often an obstacle to those who want to learn"
(Cicero)

The quintessence of teaching is one and the same with the didactic performance: it is both the science and the art of teaching others.

To ignorant people, it may appear as an easy and at everyone's hand task. To others, yet, people involved in the didactic career and devoted to it, the activity of teaching represents a continuous challenge, a state of freshness and intellectual activism, capable to contaminate everybody around, and firstly, students. Teaching is the activity carried out by a teacher during the lesson and meant to provide students with the skill of learning.

By observing and analyzing the contemporary education's realities, we can notice that there is a tendency to show less interest in teaching and much more in learning, although these two are interdependent activities.

2. FORMATIVE FACTORS OF LEARNING

Among the determining factors of learning is the very quality of teaching. There are fewer and fewer teachers to be aware of their teaching deficiencies, yet, there are many more to bring accusations to their students' quality of learning, thus ignoring the fact that learning is co-evolving with teaching.

Should we accept this truth, certified by experience, then it means that learning chances depend to a great extent on the quality of its conditioning on teaching, on forming positive attitudes toward learning through the teaching performance.

Similarly, the evolution of learning detains the value of a corrective, ameliorating criterion for teaching.

Progress or regress at each level of the didactic performance will hold consequences over the others, the system functioning as a unitary whole.

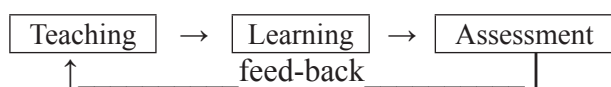


Fig. 1 The educational process perceived as a system provided with self-adjustment

Nevertheless, the leading role is taken by teaching, which determines the entire process, and by education's agent – the teacher. Consequently, teaching confirms its efficacy provided it induces learning, which presupposes that it should be adequate for the concrete processing of the human learning. Hence the necessity of the psycho-pedagogical training background of the teacher, irrespective of his or her area of expertise and specialization.

Knowledge of mechanisms, as well as of learning's power and limits, represents the premise of creating efficient learning instances, through teaching. Being designed on psycho-pedagogical grounds, teaching has to convert the contents of learning, its methods and didactic techniques into accessible elements for each and every student. The accomplishment of science's logic is doubled by the didactic logic and by the logic of the pedagogical discourse. Other elements that define the quality of teaching are various methods, strategies, didactic styles etc.

3. LEARNING STYLES

Mircea Malița (Botkin *et al.*, 1981) observed that behind each of the teaching methods there is a hidden hypothesis related to the student's learning mechanism.

In 1979, a group of researchers drew a Report for the "Club of Rome", with the title of "The Unlimited Horizon of Learning". This report argues that the human gap, including that between societies, occurs due to the fact that people do not learn as much or as well as they should. If, to former epochs, maintenance learning (predominantly reproductive) used to be sufficient for assuring the social adjustment and reproduction, under the circumstances of the information explosion and of the perishability of information, there is need for a new style of learning – the *innovative learning*, distinguished by specific traits, among which the most relevant is its anticipative and participative character.

The non-critical acquisition of deeds and the mechanical imitation of behavior patterns, the disregard of significances and contexts, when transmitting and receiving information, lead to the alienation of the human being, to an estrangement from the self and from society. The French sociologist Georges Friedmann, concerned about the effects of the modern technologies over the human psychic, analyzed the deteriorating process of the human condition. He coined the phrase "the driver's civilization" (Paris, 1986), in order to reflect the limitations and dangers of the reproductive learning, of a mechanical type, emptied of significances and taken out of context. This phase must be surpassed. Ignorance of contexts and meanings impedes learning and leads to *shock learning*. The unpredictable character of the actual world imposes the assimilation of some vast collections of contexts, so as to avoid, if possible, surprise events. This is a requirement of the innovative learning. From the didactic perspective, the accomplishment of this learning style involves the promotion of active learning methods, able to stir the student's curiosity, self-confidence in his own powers, his capacity of communicating and interacting with people around him, all of which may confer him a greater liberty of thinking and acting.

The *active learning* is the one able to take students out of their status of object of forming and to transform them into active, co-participating subjects in their own becoming. From the teacher's perspective, strategies of the heuristic type need to be promoted, together with active-participative methods and methods of developing the critical thinking. To activate stands for muster, animate all psychic forces of knowledge, understanding and acting in students.

4. LEARNING THEORIES

Jean Piaget and Robert Gagné, two of the most important scientists who contributed to learning theories, supported and promoted education based on active discovery. At the same time, they criticized the excess of verbalism in teaching, its supplying ready-made truths, which condemned students to passivity and intellectual laziness.

Similarly, the Romanian psychologists and pedagogists Ion Albulescu and Mirela Albulescu stated: "It is not sufficient to speak to students for teaching to be achieved" (Albulescu & Albulescu, 2000:9).

Traditional pedagogy fostered the "knowledge bucket" theory in association with the "funnel theory", as theories of the learning process: "Our head looks like a leaking bucket, through whose holes, information coming from the wide world seeps inside". Moreover, "the bucket is attached to a funnel, through which knowledge is poured in" (Stan, 2004:28).

In the post-modern society, among all explicative models of learning, *constructivism* is the most prominent. Based on the constructivist paradigm, learning is the "process of readjustment of mental patterns for the purpose of their putting up with new experiences" (Stan, 2004:115). To George Hein, learning stands for constructing meanings (Hein, 1991). This is why, the teacher who confuses teaching for 'talking' is not modern, nor is he efficient. From the constructivist viewpoint, the efficient teaching implies the understanding of mental patterns used by students for perceiving and decoding the world around them, a world of presuppositions on which these mental patterns rely. The purpose of learning turns into stating a personal meaning: "by reflecting on own experiences, each individual constructs his own conception of the world, draws his own rules and mental patterns, which he will use for understanding his own experiences" (Stan, 2004:114-115).

In this theoretical context, assessment becomes itself a part of learning, providing students with data about the quality of their own learning. The constructivist model highlights the capital role played by the "learner's behavior and experience" (Mackenzie *et al.*, 1975:54) in the dynamic, interactive process of learning. Learning is no longer reduced to internalizing some explanatory patterns or existent meanings; on the contrary, it leads to new constructions, intimately connected with already existent mental structures and with one's experience.

This approach has generated the phrase "individualized education", which currently brings up the necessity of following the students' individual particularities (not only age related particularities) for the accomplishment of quality education. Each human being learns in his or her own style, capable of revealing his or her own uniqueness and specific singularity.

The American trait psychologist, Gordon Allport noticed the fact that when an individual takes part in various actions, he discovers that his deeds hold a meaning and that his social attitudes are understood by others and his contacts are appreciated. Participation affects the human personality to a great extent; it determines one's essential values. Participation is also one of the challenges addressed to education by the transformations of the contemporary world. Therefore, within the area of pedagogy, it generated the "creed of active learning", an adaptation by a Japanese teaching:

What I hear, I forget.

What I hear and see, I remember a little.

What I hear, see and ask about or talk with somebody, I begin to understand.

What I hear, talk and do, I learn and get used to it.

What I teach to someone, I learn it.

What I apply into practice changes me.'

The theory of active learning is associated with the *active listening*. The active listening has the purpose of offering an individual the possibility to help himself, through a creative thinking and by walking different paths from traditional ones. The theory was initially fostered by the American psychologist Carl Rogers and taken over by different schools. The purpose of active listening within the school boundaries consists of helping students to help themselves, thus proving that the plurality of the human condition, and its infinite resources, lies in talking and doing.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Living in an epoch of technological and information outburst that affect the very human condition, we wonder to what extent learning might contribute to smoothing crises or to annihilating the humankind's spiritual and existential regress. The answer was given by the chairman of the Club of Rome, Aurelio Peccei, almost half a century ago, but it still preserves its veracity: "What we all need at this point in human evolution is to learn how to learn what is to be learnt and even... to learn" (Botkin *et al.*, 1981:13). And the avant-garde of this message's believers is represented by teachers, to the extent to which they accept that the classroom may be the place where future is prepared and designed, through the quality of people teachers form.

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