

PROPOSAL FOR FUTURE WORK

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL VALUES AND THE TRAINING OF ADULT EDUCATORS

Background

- The setting in which adult education has to operate these days is dominated by a view that it is the main - if not the only task - of education to contribute to economic development by improving the quality of individuals in their capacity as members of the work force.
- In adult education, however, a different view of human beings prevails. This view implies that social and political values, respect for others, active citizenship, responsibility for oneself and for the communities one lives in, as well as readiness and competences to deal with on-going change are essentials of adult education.

In its role as a promoter of democratic and social values and of competences needed in today's civil societies adult education has the task to assist individuals in a wide variety of learning processes, to prepare them for their role as active and responsible participants in democratic processes, to help them understand how individual actions relate to changes in the social fabric, as well as to empower them to be successful in their work and to cope with set-backs.

An Adult Education which aims at developing and strengthening democratic and social values and skills must devote time and effort to enhance their own understanding of the factors that play a role in human learning processes and, especially, in promoting readiness and capabilities to develop social and political values.

Thus, in addition to clarifying the substantive issues and the contents of what adult education offers to members of the general public, it must also critically and constructively review the procedures by which we try to assist learners in their own efforts.

Teaching models which assume that what is passed on in institutional contexts by linear transmission of knowledge is actually learned are found wanting.

Teaching models have to give way to models of how people actually learn.

Learners develop their own views and models of the world by being exposed to on-going processes in a wide variety of situations, by being confronted with a multitude of divergent views of others, and by processing all of that in the context of their own earlier experiences.

Values, attitudes, dispositions and the like are not developed by decree or by mere verbal transmission. It is rather by experiencing values actually adhered to in situations in which one is personally involved and by finding out that they make sense in the situation as it develops that one is led to accept and follow them on one's own.

As far as adult education is concerned such experiences must be brought about in (the most widely used teaching/learning setting, i.e. in) the classroom. Whether this can happen depends on the culture of supporting learning processes in class.

Adult education, thus, has the double task

- of developing the substantive orientation of the programmes offered and
- of developing a culture of learning well suited for promoting the values and skills of active citizenship.

A Learning Partnership

The focus of the envisaged learning partnership is on the role of the teaching personnel in adult education and on the kind of training we must offer in our efforts to actively promote such a culture of learning in our classes.

The exchange of experiences should lead to collecting, discussing (in expert meetings), and disseminating

- materials on experiences gained in trying to promote social and political values and skills for active citizenship, participation, and respect for others (including examples of "best practice"), and
- materials which convey or summarize results of scientific research both on teaching and learning processes and on processes of acquiring values within and outside of educational settings.

As the core capabilities of such a culture of support for learners in our classes can be assumed to be largely independent of specific subjects and fields of learning, such experiences and materials should not only be taken from the field of civic education but from a variety of other fields as well.

A two years "learning partnership" in the context of the EU-Programme Grundtvig 2 is proposed.

The Verband Wiener Volksbildung, Vienna, Austria, is getting ready to apply for this learning partnership. The operative coordination will be carried out by Mr. Andreas Paula.

We are now starting the process of looking for partners who are interested to participate in this project.

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