

COUNSELLING AND SELF-EDUCATION

GABRIEL ALBU ^{a*}

^a “Petroleum-Gas” University of Ploiești, București Street, no. 39, Ploiești, 100680, Romania

Abstract

As surprising as it may seem, we can establish a (co)relationship between counselling and self-education. Unfortunately, there has been little talk lately about self-education and its role in self-knowledge and self-building. The study tries, in the first instance, to circumscribe the concept of self-education and then capture the ratio between counselling and the self-formative steps.

Key words: client, counselling, counsellor, self-education

Introduction

Unfortunately, there has been little talk lately (formally and in passing) - in the literature - about self-education and its role in self-knowledge, in relation to self and self-building. We believe the time has come to stop and think about dealing more consistently with its significance in our lives (as individuals), in the life of the community and in the life of new generations. We believe, moreover, that it is worth discussing how our lives would (or might) look like when absorbed in personal, uninterrupted, and lively pursuit of self-education. It is both important and wonderful to be preoccupied with a life based on self-education, namely that type of existence led in agreement with this. It is, we believe, formidable that our lives and that of future generations identify with self-education, *be self-education*. We feel we are permanently self-developing, in order to grow inwardly.

* Prof., PhD, “Petroleum-Gas” University of Ploiești
E-mail address: gabrielalbu04@yahoo.com

Possible dimensions of self-education

So saying, it means that it is necessary and useful to insist (for as far as the powers of thought and our inner urge can carry us) on this moment and on this particular preoccupation with self-adjustment, fulfilment and self-actualization. First and foremost, there are three things we would like to say about self-education.

Firstly, it is the time and the place where we are *alone*. We no longer have an (external) educator, we no longer interact with an educator (according to their wishes and requirements), we are no longer conditioned, warned, guided, punished. We are no longer subject to authority, power, or love. It is just us, alone with ourselves: *we're engaged in intra-communication and intra-relationship*. We are face-to-face with ourselves, the same breath, heartbeat and unmistakable destiny. And because we have arrived (and we are) here, nobody requires us (or urges us) to become educated in order to adapt to the conditions (and the specificity) of the market, to acquire all sorts of skills that are more or less necessary to our socio-economic integration and survival.

In a way, self-education is a detachment from external imperatives, emergencies, norms, constraints and rhythms. We are no longer letting ourselves be carried away and surrounded by the (loving and nurturing) attention of others. We no longer belong to those next to us (at home, school, church, work). We are no longer their responsibility. *We are responsible for ourselves*. Self-education is when nobody else prepares a curriculum for us (to be administered according to our “individual peculiarities and age”); when nobody else evaluates us (through formative evaluations) based on scientifically developed objectives standards, approached in a didactic manner.

It is the period, the territory and the process by which we grow up to our soul's desire and where our minds search and imagine. It is an expansion and a deepening in understanding (outer and inner) world and our reflections on life.

Self-education has no objectives:

- When cohabiting with ourselves, *searches* result from anything and may lead anywhere. We let ourselves be carried away by it; we discover that our searches edify us, and that - as a matter of fact - our identity is closely linked to our searches. As human beings, we (always) have our searches, and with every new inquiry we follow one direction and reach something: *what we really are*;
- As a territory and time for searches, self-education is also *a horizon of clarifications*; as many clarifications as there are steps in self conquering and, at the same time, in self-

configuration. Clarification after clarification, we will end up in a continuous impulse to acquaint ourselves with what we are, with what we *discover* that we are.

We realize, therefore, that self-education is the faithful and closest ally of self-knowledge. By searches and clarification we grow ever closer to ourselves, in our alleged and presumed depth. By self-education, we give ourselves the chance to delve into our inner world and expand our existence. We conquer from within, we disturb our inner silence - so to speak - in order to become more familiar with ourselves. We threaten the self-understood status quo to take up (self) investigation, (self) discovery, and (self) creation.

In all this self-disclosure, self-knowledge and self-configuration, self-education does not come with more (or too much) love for oneself. Neither narcissism, nor histrionics is its healthy effect, but lucidity and self-clarification. By self-education, we have an opportunity to escape the unspecified, misunderstandings, inner disturbance, the perpetual lava flow of internal awareness. It gives us an opportunity to grow, not in the outside world, but within our inner world. *Self-revelation comes - simultaneously - with self-formation.*

Briefly, self-education brings, together with self-discovery, an increasing awareness and strengthening of self-consciousness. It is the support and spring of our conscience, the source of conquering the unknown in ourselves and of development from within.

Secondly, we know, or at least we suspect, that there is self-education. Sometimes, we talk about it. J. Dewey (1972) argued that self-education is when an individual perfects his education (or that the real accomplishment of an individual's education is self-education).

More and more frequently, we are now talking about the need for education throughout life or lifelong learning. This trend tends to confiscate our concepts, approaches and attempts, to limit our searches and - also - throw us at the mercy of interpellations, requirements and arguments of the existing (formal education) ideology.

We are so urged to take up lifelong learning that we have almost ruled out what *self-education throughout life* or *permanent self-education* might be. It seems that, finally, lifelong education designates that activity in which we remain, for the rest of our lives, at the mercy of *external* interests, objectives, courses and training methods designed and used by specialized institutions, required by the trends, operation and preservation of a certain society, at a particular time in the history of humanity (Paloş, Sava, Ungureanu, 2007). They insinuate as more/ most useful and effective - the most appropriate, anyway - the objectives, directions, searches and clarifications that we would be capable of and to which we would eventually arrive on our own.

We might, instead, realize that *self-education throughout life is, as a matter of fact, the only real lifelong learning*; that it is the one that can restore us to ourselves (after a long and difficult period of formal/institutionalized education), that it is - essentially - our chance to belong to ourselves (together with our lives). Thus, the alleged and enhanced care of those who cultivate and support lifelong learning is transformed, by self-education, in an organic (self)care and permanent self-clarification. Self-education thus appears as the great chance to recover our life, understand its uniqueness, constantly reveal our own purpose and the (camouflaged) meanings of our existence.

Thirdly, if approached from this angle, we might be able to understand that self-education is one of the most important conquests of a teacher. Maybe crossing the realm of self-education would happen during his/her human and/or professional life. This situation can lead us to a distinction to be made between: *teacher with education, but without self-education*, on the one hand, and *teacher with education and self-education*, on the other hand. Searching deeper along this path, we may find that the big secret of didactic grace, pedagogical tact, is precisely the self-education of the individual behind the desk.

If triggered and if teachers become aware of it and wish to pursue it/ develop it, they enter not only a new stage of their life, but also a new stage of their professional life. It is also possible that only after discovering self-education, teachers no longer manifest an interest for outward development, for the institutionalized "steps" of ongoing training, but for inward progress, the "steps" of self-clarifications, self-training and growing from the inside, toward prosperity and spiritual well-being, to the benefit of the moral health of their students.

In this unusual context, we can reveal that the pinnacle of our human and professional fulfilment - as theoreticians, researchers and practitioners of education - is not being successful in a formal, compulsory examination, but that we have succeeded - if we indeed have - to touch upon the moment, the concept and freedom of self-education.

Briefly, an essential, decisive, and significant moment in our lives is the conquest, activation, and practicing of self-education. It is the chance to cultivate our inner nature.

Dimensions of the counselling - self-education relationship

From the analysis above, we can deduct the following dimensions of the relationship between counselling and self-education:

a. *Counselling may trigger the process of self-education – in case this hasn't already started;*

- b. *If it has, self-education may support and facilitate counselling;*
- c. *Self-education can operate (also) as a process of (self) counselling;*
- d. *Both - counselling and self-education - support each other; each comes to meet the other;*
- e. *The counsellor's objective may be getting the client out of the existential crisis by self-education; in fact, this is achieved by internal growth and development, by the client's tending to and growing his own soul.*

a. In most cases, it seems that people are not too preoccupied with self-education. They understand neither its meaning nor its gain. Not only do they not have time for such things (their life is led and organized around completely different priorities), but also self-education seems to them if not useless, then at least an extra problem in their much too crowded life: external care is necessary and sufficient; the inner one only a (simple, and possibly, beautiful) artifice; it is not self-education that lacks in our daily lives, with its tensions, stresses and challenges.

This attitude can change when people undergo counselling. Their interlocutor, a specialist in existential, professional, relational crises etc., seeks to create (the most) appropriate environment to facilitate the client's availability and ability to overcome the condition in which - for the moment - they are caught. The counsellor helps the client to clarify their inner world, options, strengths and weaknesses, and the subsequent possible steps in living a honest/satisfying life.

Gradually, supported by a counsellor, the - more or less young - client manages to get out of the shadows, of his existential downfall and discovers his own path to follow, *the meaning* of his presence in the world. But, the result of concentrating on one's life, one's inner world, is discovering self-education and its great benefit.

There are signs that counselling may continue - for the client - in the form of self-education. The individual may reveal to himself what he had neglected until then; he can realize that the lucidity he gained can be stored and used in searches and self-clarifications, subsequent self-developments. Since his inner world is no longer indifferent to him, he would be able to rise, to focus on his own spiritual-axiological universe and become - more solidly - his own ally. However, the counsellor may encourage/support his client in order to enhance and elevate his existence.

b. If it is already present in the client's life, self-education can facilitate counselling. Even if rarely encountered, we cannot exclude such a hypothesis. Life does not exempt anyone from problems, dilemmas, frustration, crises, hardships, deception, kicks, disappointments and self-disappointments.

A clever, skilful, wise, and well-prepared counsellor may quickly find out if the client is self-educated (or, rather, in the midst of the living act of self-education); a client interested in self-accomplishment. He uses such an opportunity to comprehend the problem as accurately as possible, and to place the client in as favourable an inner environment and outer climate as possible.

Practically, this means *integrating the counselling process in the process of self-education, taking it over into the self-formative approach*, toward a more vigorous psychological and social maturity of the client, refining his self-conscience and increasing the number of life options. So, in addition to his specific objectives, the counsellor can (also) contribute to the consolidation and extension of self-education.

c. Considering the possibility of accepting the approach of counselling to self-education, we believe we can also adopt the point of view according to which self-education may constitute itself as a necessary, useful and complementary act of counselling. It is a novel aspect, which is worth focusing on with more interest and on which to reflect most thoroughly.

As we are talking about times when we are the confidant, the enabler, emotional support, clarifier and organizer of our own thoughts and feelings, it means that we can admit self-education can play the role of support activity. In its case, it is about self-confession, self-explanation, self-organization, self-comfort and self-support.

Even if this is not its main purpose, self-education can come up with solutions, venting our emotional states, refreshing our inner environment and feelings. We may go as far as to argue that self-education has - by its intrinsic vocation - counselling valences as well: *who is (self)educated is also (self)counselled* (although, as we have seen, the reverse is valid only under certain conditions and at a certain time in performing the support activity).

Consequently, by self-education we have an opportunity to know ourselves better, get closer to ourselves, take more freedom in shaping ourselves according to our searches and clarifications, but also - constantly - help ourselves.

Self-education comes - soothingly - with self-help. We are aware of the fact that we can be our own best confessor, our most faithful ally, but also our most reliable support - in difficult, fragile, confusing, unfair, adverse situations, when solitude could transform - in certain circumstances - if not into a nightmare, then in a terrible burden.

d. From the above, it appears that we have grounds to state that both - counselling, and self-education - come to meet one another, as they support (or might support) each other.

On the one hand, counselling may promote the emergence and maintenance of the self-formative exercise; it can open paths to be followed in/through the inner world, it may result in objectives of self-construction and - more or less anticipated - discoveries, it can encourage the development of thoughts/ideas, the refining of life, deepening the understanding of the genuine direction of life, of relations with others, of our relationship with eternity. On the other hand, self-education can facilitate or create the best possible (internal) conditions for performing an act of counselling: richer, more sensible, more comprehensive, more consistent. Partners can understand each other much more clearly and on sympathetically impregnated wavelengths.

e. We can also encounter situations where the counsellor himself will have, among the objectives, the self-education of the client. To the extent that he has the concept and awareness of self-education at heart, in case he is convinced of the support and convenience of self-education in the client's life (and of individuals, in general), it is possible that the counsellor himself be targeting the exit from the existential crisis of the client through this self-formative process. Also, he may recommend that approach as viable for subsequent deadlocks in life.

Possible conclusions

Among the numerous and various problems of counselling, self-education deserves (much) higher consideration. It can manifest under the form designed and tailored by any of us. It is our creation as unique human beings. *Self-education is a charming and attractive spiritual exercise with ourselves, a long expected and welcomed partnership with ourselves (or intra-partnership).*

As unusual as the relationship between counselling and self-education would appear, at a quick and superficial glance, it nevertheless seems to be not only a possible but also a meaningful duo. In addition to inner development and the (ever deeper) self-explanation, self-education can be

understood and treated as a gesture of (social) support. From a certain point in time and/or in certain circumstances, it becomes a context for facilitating the work of the counsellor.

Self-education is or may become the framework within which the client shall consider his situation, shall clarify it, look for solutions, decide upon the best of them. It could become the exercise by which he manages to get out of the existential impasse in which he fell and he may return/belong to himself again.

Also, if - fortunately - the counsellor has the concept of self-education, he may make use of it (when the client also has it) or he may recommend it as the possible way to live life serenely and confidently. Obviously, self-education may constitute, for a counsellor, an opportunity for growth, self-professionalisation and self-empathy.

References

Dewey, J. (1972). *Democrație și educație*. București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică.

Paloș, R., Sava, S., Ungureanu, D. (Eds.). (2007). *Educația adulților*. Iași: Polirom.