LEARNING IN CONTEXT AND
RESPONDING TO LEARNERS' NEEDS

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Rezumat. *Formarea bazată pe punerea în situaţie şi învăţarea în funcţie de nevoi se dovedesc a fi mult mai eficiente decât alte tipuri de formare care nu sunt explicit legate de scopurile urmărite. La nivelul producţiei şi al activităţii în întreprinderi, trebuie să se ţină cont de anumite aspecte practice definitorii: variaţiile interne ale pieţei muncii şi frecvenţa situaţiilor problematice şi a contextelor problematizante. La nivel educaţional, aceste coordonate impun crearea unor cadre formale stimulatoare, un ritm dinamic, ca şi o varietate de metode care să-i determine pe studenţi/persoanele supuse formării să se implice cu adevărat şi să participe în mod activ în procesul de formare. Un profesor care predă limbi străine, de exemplu, are menirea asumată să-şi înveţe studenţii să aibă mereu iniţiativă, să întreprindă ceva nou, sau într-un nou mod, să răspundă provocărilor societăţii în care trăim. Formatorul are datoria să-i înveţe pe cei cărora li se adresează să aibă o gândire critică, să-şi folosească creativitatea pentru rezolvarea tuturor tipurilor de probleme din ştiinţele aplicate sau din lingvistica aplicată care apar în şi pentru noile contexte ale societăţii noastre pluraliste.*

Abstract. *Learning in context and responding to learners' needs is more effective than learning that is not clearly tied to the purposes it intends to serve. In the field of work and enterprises, there are practical basic issues that have to be taken into account: internal variation of the world of work, and frequency of the problematic situations and contexts. At the Education level it means to create an incentive formal frame, a dynamic pace, and a variety of methods that make students/trainees to be really involved in, and to actively participate to the training process. A Teacher-trainer in foreign languages, for example, has to teach his students to have permanent initiative, to do something new or in a new way, to answer our challenging society. A trainer has to train his trainees for having a critical thinking, for using their creativity in solving all sorts of problems of applied sciences or applied linguistics in and for the new contexts of our pluralist society.*

Keywords: *Learning in context, learners' needs, field of work, internal variation, problematic contexts*

1. Introduction

The training and teaching activity takes place in several contexts: first class is offered to pupils/students, others take the training of trainers, parents, community, at work/on-the-spot training, business or political environment, and so on.

To meet the demands imposed by the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), and the National Qualifications Framework (CNC), including the Life Long Learning (LLL) and the Learning outcomes-centered instruction, general training

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and individualized learning activity have to take in due account some basic elements such as:

- Principles of transparency and communication in both directions;

- Information given responsibility and respect for the style of its transmission;

- Respect to the consumer of information, and its absorbing his/her style;

- Responsibility for the quality of information and citing sources.

2. Learning in context

In the context of qualitatively new set, learning in context and responding to learners' needs is more effective than learning/training that is not clearly tied to the purposes it intends to serve. [1]

2.1. Making the situation

Making the situation is when the trainer is acting on the motivation of people training, time to be created a permissive climate, favorable to the educational act. The basic idea is to capture the attention of participants and directing it to the subject of training. It is the time to activate the prior knowledge, and by acting on the sense of competence to strengthen the individual motivation.

Brief overview

Making the situation/context can be realized in various forms: presentation of a problematic situation experienced by subjects, a fact of life, a current news event, a recent or a present value history, an image with eloquent rhetoric, a playful creation, and so on. Audiovisual support become a classic one or use of a computer software are beneficial in this case, because they serve to stimulate the motivation for the extent that they provide a better connection between the content of training and the lived reality of participants. What is important is to make sense of training by creating useful and sustainable knowledge and skills

Learning in context means knowledge and awareness of the training objective. "What", "how" and "for what purpose" are all questions to what more the trainer clearly responds with the unveiling of the objectives, through simple but custom language, more he can create the expectation, the level of each student, to develop new skills and competencies. By training in situation, questions are often formulated which challenges attitudes of students participating, early in training activity. Relevant and directly sent questions allow reactivation of passive contents, following a shorter or longer-term storage in the working memory of subjects undergoing training. So the trainer has a chance to check or to conclude what they already know his students and to start acquiring new knowledge or behavioral content.

Proposal of didactical activities based on implementation of the Learning in context belongs to a specified sequence of teaching-learning, being enrolled in a continuity, in a chain of activities and representing the beginning or end of a series. Essential for the success of this approach is to establish links with other previously appropriated or set to follow training contents: thereby anchoring the practical reality is situational valued by prospective vision.

Stages of development

Training in situation involves several steps: placing the situation, actual activity, awareness, formative assessment and evaluate forming, use of new knowledge and skills. We use in our presentation a model inspired by an ongoing research at the University of Montreal, Canada. [2]

1. Placing the situation. At this time point training activity is triggered by putting the situation represented by a meaningful and motivating context for the trainees. In this way activates the initial knowledge to facilitate the structuring of the new ones, based on an audio-visual support - offer including the preferred Internet, the ludicrous situation or an event from the immediate reality.

2. Actual activity. Are described in detail activities aimed formative, placing emphasis on the following components : transformed trainer's role in a moderator or a "personne ressource"; changed role of the student which becomes his/her agent training, thanks to the high degree of autonomy and responsibilities; overcoming the limits of the formal framework based on the opening towards the non-formal, informal and virtual one, by creating multimedia libraries and research & multimedia training centers; modern pedagogical approach, with all the different charges that it implies, including training required prior to use new technologies.

3. Awareness. At this stage activities must be provided aimed at establishing links between the original/ previous and new knowledge. Trainer stimulates his students to communicate and exchange ideas and information in order for them to realize both learning outcomes and formative approach.
Awareness-raising is a time to be present and constantly repeated during the Learning in context activity.

4. Formative assessment and evaluate forming. Traditional assessment has been until recently successfully replaced with formative assessment in which, however, the rule of the game is made by the teacher/trainer. It was seen as a tool controlled and conducted from outside by the trainer, and in this regard it remained a passive element for the student.
Our today option is to use evaluate forming - some other languages make clearer the difference between terms: *évaluation formative* vs. *évaluation formatrice* (fr.); *evaluarea formativă* vs. *evaluarea formatoare* (rom.), which, born from the

formative evaluation has the advantage that makes the students to impose their own rules. Such an option requires the trainer to completely rethink the pedagogical approach: he is the one that should promote self-assessment and a much more committed to student involvement in the training by putting the situation and learning in context.

In that regard we must teach our students to self-assess, making them to become more responsible and more independent from their own training. We must consider their own cognitive processes.

5. *Use of new knowledge and skills.* Successful completion of training allows transferring knowledge, acquired skills and working behaviors to other created situations. May be provided so enforcement and problem solving activities based on the theme of work changed from the starting situation.

We consider also extension of the basic situation in related contexts which allows deeper knowledge or furtherance of new knowledge.

2.2. Learning in context

To aim at the training efficiency in general is even more important, and has long term effects at the production and enterprises activity level. For that reason learning in context as a better method based on being connected to the practical reality is a way to answer to the current modern needs. In this specific context, some basic practical aspects have to be taken in due account: internal changes in labor market and frequency of problem solving situations in many of today's jobs and professions.

Internal changes in labor market

To illustrate this concept, we will refer to particular training in languages for special purposes (LSP) example. In this case, internal changes aim to language between specialists in routine situations under time constraint. Thus, if we see an airplane pilot language, it differs from that used in normal conditions to the moments when those specialists schedule a departure or solve a complex flight incident; his language is different from that of a supervisor of a worker explaining how to handle some electronic components such as flight apparatus, or that one of some members of the administrative team faced with the problem of automation of their duties.

It is, depending on the context of custom work done, the ability to adapt to the interlocutors and the types of problems and actions, as a component of communicative competence in specific activity. This change implies also the classification phenomena where languages for special purposes play the role of sociocognitive processing operator.

Problem solving situations in different professions

In terms of frequency of problem solving situations emerging in productive work (stages of apprenticeship, damage, various incidents), based on the examples of the same application domain of the languages for special purposes, design solutions must usually belong to the production units themselves: verbal behaviors to repeat the message and explain, to compare, to oppose and object, in other words the whole arsenal of natural reasoning and argumentation prove to be as important resources of language.

If the production staff of the units need a specialist from outside, for example for maintenance work, competence appears necessary to explain the problematic situation for a "third party", and to implement some complex instructions despite the summary assumed expertise or just overall specialized knowledge.

We must point out also that the language for special purposes is essential during the length of apprenticeship training for, both in terms of technical skills training and, especially, in adapting to permanent changes in labor dynamics that characterize the modern era. Recent studies in the fields of communications in productive areas already allow a glimpse of how the formation of developed communication skills involves updating the various language resources to cope with the complexity of work, from the plan of action and significance point of view.

Developed for this purpose, the ethnography of communication proposes the global framework to tackle this problem, but only interdisciplinary perspective can respond to the scale of this new field of research.

2.3. Pedagogy of creativity and implementation of Learning in context

A pedagogy of creativity [3] aims to provide the trainers a formal incentive framework, a dynamic rhythm and a great variety of formative approaches, including Learning in context. Each student should participate actively and consciously in his/her training, must always be involved by always having "something to do", using all the relevant guidance: observing a phenomenon, solving a problem, carrying connections, confirming a hypothesis. It may be noted that all these training exercises must be strictly related to a clear endpoint – at the macro level of applicability, and to one or more identifiable "milestones" – at the micro level of implementation.

For example, in the specific training in and for languages for special purposes in a foreign language, based on Pedagogy of creativity and Learning in context, nothing is done at random or abstract level. We are dealing with learning strategies, results of which consist of increased efficiency of formative approach, as mentioned in A.L. Wenden's writings: "*Learning in context is more effective than learning that is not clearly tied to the purposes it intends to serve*". [4]

On the other hand, should be noted that, in parallel with the emphasis on initial training, there are not a few types of "on-the-spot training " – as an urgent response due to profound changes currently recorded, or announced for next steps, at the majority of occupations and trades level, and which amplifies the phenomenon. One of these activities is represented by the "mediated training", in which a trainer or a professional moderator is currently undergoing training with trainees, helping them to understand a situation, to formulate rules, to recreate a forgotten or neglected concept, to build their own understanding of new situations by putting in context.

Relevant studies in the field – as those undertaken in the American Sociology Association analyze, in terms of interaction between monitoring factor/moderator/trainer and worker/subject matter training/trainee, the interdependence between language and visual as a means of transmission of information, at "training at work." In relation to this topic for example, since 1987, Chantale Hétu [5] is based on her statements on case studies occasioned by the installation of electronic components so "en vogue" today.

If we again refer to the trainer of language for special purposes, a teacher of foreign languages – like all other trainers in various fields, and especially in the technical field, must teach his/her students to take initiatives, to undertake something new, to meet the challenges of the age, knowledge and communication society, at the time of internationalization and globalization. Every trainer should teach their followers to have a critical thinking, use their creativity, solve, through the case, the complex problems of applied sciences, including applied linguistics, in and for the new contexts of pluralistic society.

3. Learning responding to learners' needs

3.1. Learning Needs and Learner Needs

The usefulness of analyzing the learner needs of each student considered as a distinct entity and dialogue partner, as well as the adaptation of the pedagogical practices to these needs have been reported since 1978 based on studies of leading professors as: J.L. Munby [6] at University of Cambridge, or R. Richterich and J.L. Chancerel [7] at Council of Europe, Strasbourg.

There is an important condition, however, that these needs are really the student's or the group of trainees' psycho-socio-cultural ones, and not the purely cognitive ones. Distinction must be made between learning needs and learner needs. The actual learning needs are only one end of the chain of formative activities, researchers in the field focusing on the necessity of taking into account priority the "learner' needs" of all subjects matter training, then in view of these ones the "learning' needs" which can be arbitrarily set by the trainer.

3.2. Learner-centered Instruction

Recent research in science education allowed more accurate knowledge of the learning process depending on how individual cognitive system operating. A theorization of cognitive architecture has been achieved since 1983 by J.R. Anderson: the author proposes for this purpose using ACT logo for the concept of Active Control of Thought [8]. This translates into enabling each student to better use his/her natural mental strategies, and is the basic meaning of the so appreciated concept of "Learner-centered Instruction".

Increased effectiveness of teaching comes in this case from focusing on procedural method, and not only on the declarative one, in acquiring knowledge and skills training. Such a formative approach opens the way for high-level mental activities to students – inference, objectivity, organization, generalization, conceptualization, reaching metacognition. Increased efficiency also comes from awareness of their own cognitive and behavioral resources, as well as from their capacity of self-control in terms of used training procedures and techniques.

Basic condition to obtaining higher quality results is the systematic practice of personalized claim assumed by every student, and the accounted learning experience at each training session. At present, it is to mention that there is a special chapter in the new Romanian Law of National Education, entitled "*Promoting Student-centered University*".

3.3. Individualization of learning

A being not only acquires knowledge, but also acquires skills which will enable students to fulfill different roles; we must also consider another important factor in the teaching equation: personalized paced learning. If the concept of "self-directed learning and training " developed, among others, by Jennifer Walski and Jean Sabiron at University of Bordeaux II, and Gérard Vaysse at University of Toulouse, France [9], is developing faster than in other areas where language for special purposes training in foreign languages, for example, is only an auxiliary part, even in this case it bears the seeds of quality. Such an attention paid to learner-centered instruction especially imposes to put into practice the „learning to learn" concept; this one gains greater meanings provided that there is a relocated training, changing the formal framework of the classroom with the work, leaving the place of origin for a new environment, in order to learn how to live, work, and communicate in various contexts rather different from the origin [10].

Learner-centered education is the opportunity to learn better on the basis of learning to know yourself – the first of the principles promoted by the Socratic philosophy for a human being becomes such as. From this point of view, one could set that specialized pedagogies, including language for special purposes pedagogy, play a

very important part in the process of brain development and individual progress both for young people and adults involved in several educational programs. As a follow-up of the outstanding research results obtained by Piaget and the School of Geneve, and to support such theories we could also point to the ideas of L.S. Vygotsky and disciples, that "Mind in Society" published in Cambridge [11] spread all over.

3.4. Learning responding to learners' needs

The needs of a learner represent the gap to be abolished between what the learner wants to get out of the learning experience and his or her current state of knowledge, skill, and enthusiasm [12], in some different domains: cognitive, social, affective, and psychomotor. When facilitators establish a new learning environment, it is important that they assess preparedness of participants in all four domains to create its quality, stressing different learning styles that affect learning outcomes. Each learner is unique, and brings to the learning situation his or her own different learning style, knowledge set, pool of past experiences, and motivation. In learner-centered instruction, it is important for instructors to consider the level of knowledge and skill development attained by the learners prior to instruction [13]. To determine and support the readiness of participants for learning, the teacher/instructor/facilitator should decide how to collect and use data on learner needs. The process of collecting from and playing back to the learners these data can raise the level of participants' excitement about the learning experience. The teacher can use at a higher level this knowledge throughout the rest of the educational process to customize instructional strategies that enable learners to reach and exceed personal as well as shared educational objectives.

In the specific case of the learning in and for languages for special purposes in a foreign language, such an analysis has not got value but in the practical framework of a work or pre-work/preparatory given context. So that we deal with a real learning in "context" and an every learner-centered instruction in which every student is able by his/her acquired competences to distinguish between the trainer requirements and his/her own real needs. For giving an example, if an engineer in chemistry or an architect applies to a language for special purposes course in his field of activity, the teacher could prove he has got already the specific knowledge in the science domain corresponding to his job. On the contrary, the so-called act of speaking/communi-cating represents often a problem to solve, especially at the spoken level of communication, not concerning the message emission, but particularly to decode/intercept and understand an oral way received message. Although this is a true and highly frequent need, there are not many learners being able to identify it a priori at its real dimension. That is why the task of a trainer in his required quality of facilitator seems to be very important for creating consciousness and leading the training in accordance with the learner personal needs of live communication.

3.5. Customized learning programs

The main result of developing the learning responding to learners' needs concept is to set up customized learning programs in order to raise the skills and competences of all participants, trainers and trainees together. Speaking about didactical activities that such programs may involve, they could not be thought in rigid or final terms. There are a lot of external factors able to modify the structure of individualized programs or to change priorities to be given to an activity or another, such as: number of students, knowledge level, total duration of training, profile of subjects undergoing training, profile of trainers, etc.

Since it is perfectly true that all individualized programs have common elements – detailed analysis of objectives and needs, taking into account the resources and constraints of the education system/working environment, use of scientific and technic discourse and communicative approach analysis, priority given to activities that promote both procurement expertise and acquisition of working methods, is essential dynamics and flexibility of these programs, so putting them into their teaching practice, and choice of either academic activities in the continuous adaptation and change, impossible to define for all. Learning programs must respond to reality, and in addition to individual realities, and reality is in continuous transformation, is dynamic par excellence. Therefore, implementation of specialized learning programs means that they are the very reason to be created, namely the mobilization of particular features of participants, their creative ability and capacity to adapt permanently.

4. Elements of Educational Progress. Open Conclusions.

Learning in context and responding to learners' needs are bearing response elements in them for all trainers willing to meet the many requirements that a traditional training class can no longer meet.

The great advantage is the success of a teacher-trainer issued in formal traditional constraints, which can devote its time and energy to the performance of tasks requiring his personal intervention endorsed, can use and even create new teaching materials, including educational software sites for science and technical fields, as for the practical production constantly updated according to dynamic requirements, may introduce new training courses and programs and decide everything that is useless or not needed, without disrupting the whole.

These two aspects of formative approach decrease once more formally distances between teachers-trainers and students-trainees in training and Self-training, facilitate and enhance their relationship through a redefinition of another new perspective to practice their roles.

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