

THE RELATIONSHIP AMONG FORMAL, NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL EDUCATION

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Abstract: While formal education is typically provided by formal education institutions and is sequentially and hierarchically structured leading to certification, non-formal education is an organized educational process which takes place along the mainstream systems of education and training does not typically lead to certification. Students participate on a voluntary basis and as a result, the learner takes an active role in the learning process. Unlike informal education where learning happens less consciously, the student is aware of the fact that he/she is learning through non-formal education. Non-formal education gives students the possibility to develop their values, skills and competences other than the ones developed in the framework of formal education. What is special about non-formal education is that students are actively involved in the learning process. The methods that are being used aim at giving young people the tools to further develop their skills and attitudes. Learning in an ongoing process, one of its crucial features is learning by doing. Non-formal does not imply unstructured, the process of non-formal learning is shared and designed in such a way that it creates an environment in which the learner is the architect of the skills development.

Keywords: formal education, non-formal education, informal education, lifelong learning, learner-centred

The present article looks at the concepts of formal, non-formal and informal education, trying to provide their definitions, features, limitations and advantages. The relationship among the three types of education is discussed as well, trying to highlight the importance of correlating them. Students learn and acquire experiences in many different ways and we need to take into account the fact that formal education cannot cope alone with the demands of our society. We need to guide students in their process of learning and help them become promoters of lifelong learning education.

Learning is a process that is not only related to the process of learning in schools or other organized educational setting. A considerable number of our meaningful learning experiences happen outside the formal educational system: in families, libraries, different organizations and different youth clubs and youth organizations. Nowadays, students take part in a wide range of activities outside the formal educational system, and this counts as non-formal learning.

According to the definition given by I. Jinga, formal education (or official) is “institutionalized education, hierarchically structured, chronologically graded, led by the center” (Jinga, 2000: 37). As common characteristics, apart from its institutional character, formal education is performed through the educational process, which involves a set plan, a national syllabus, textbooks, schedules, evaluations and the presence and action of specialized teaching staff. Formal education is consciously organized, systematic, institutionalized, regulated, coordinated and planned, the expression of an education policy with common goals.

Formal education is well organized and structured, implies explicit didactic projection, defined objectives and resource allocation, it takes place in an institutional framework and has a determined duration.

Formal education, as the official form, is always socially evaluated. The assessment in formal education must pursue the development of students' self-assessment. Formal education is extremely important as it provides access to the values of culture, science, art and literature, to human social experience, with a decisive role in the formation of human personality, according to individual and social aspirations. Through this form of education, the student is introduced to the knowledge of large areas of the human existence. This allows the acquisition of knowledge as a system, while providing a methodical framework of exercising and developing human capacities and skills. Formal education becomes a genuine instrument of social integration.

Formal education is considered to have its own limits, it can induce negative educational effects, generating undesirable dissonances to students' personality. Two of the negative aspects of formal education are the focus on performance and the predisposition to subjectivity in evaluation. Moreover, formal education is insufficient. There are many educational institutions and educational environments which may be complementary or competitive to schools. Formal education cannot take over all the educational functions of our society. Taking into consideration the principle of lifelong learning, formal education is complementary to the other forms of education: non-formal and informal. The development of formal education takes place in the context of overcoming the classical interpretation according to which the role of formal education is a priority. The education that students get in formal institutions is extremely important, it helps them acquire knowledge and shapes their personality. However, formal education by itself cannot cope with the needs of the students, it needs to work together with non-formal and informal education. Postmodernist theories highlight the expansion of non-formal education which takes over some tasks of formal education, diversifying activities and stimulating the motivation of the participants to a greater extent.

While formal education is typically provided by formal education institutions and is sequentially and hierarchically structured, non-formal education is an organized educational process which takes place along the mainstream systems of education. Students participate on a voluntary basis in non-formal education activities, and as a result, the learner takes an active role in the learning process. Non-formal education gives students the possibility to develop their values, skills and competences other than the ones developed in the framework of formal education. What is special about non-formal education is that students are more actively involved in the learning process. The methods that are used aim at giving students the tools to further develop their skills and attitudes. Learning in an ongoing process and one of its crucial features is learning by doing. Non-formal does not imply unstructured learning, the process of non-formal learning is designed and shared in such a way that it creates an environment in which the learner is the architect of the learning process.

Formal education became part of the international discourse on education policy in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It can be seen as related to the concept of lifelong learning. Malcolm Tight suggests that whereas lifelong learning has to do with the extension of education and learning throughout life, non-formal education is about "acknowledging the importance of education, learning and training which takes place outside recognized educational institutions." (Tight, 1996: 68). Fordham (Fordham, 1979) suggests that in the 1970s, four characteristics were associated with non-formal education: relevance in relation to

the needs of the different target groups, concern with specific categories of person, clearly defined purposes, flexibility in the manner in which activities are organized or methods chosen.

The argumentation on the importance of non-formal education in the general educational context is also realized by Fordham. He adds an economic perspective to education, beyond any aspects related to school, as an institution. As Fordham relates, in 1967 at an international conference in Williamsburg, USA, ideas were set out for what was to become an analysis of the world educational crisis (Coombs 1968). There was concern about unsuitable curricula and the fact that educational growth and economic growth were not necessarily in step, and that jobs did not emerge directly as a result of educational input. Many countries were finding it difficult to pay for the expansion of formal education. The conclusion was that formal educational systems could not cope by themselves with socio-economic changes around them and with the new demands of developing societies. Change would have to come not only from within formal schooling, but from the wider society and from the other sectors. It was from this point that societies began to make a distinction between formal, non-formal and informal education.

Fordham also asserts the importance of directly involving the target group in planning and organizing curricular contents, on the basis of the bottom up principle, in a given social context and over which they can generate change. One of the most frequent themes in the literature of non-formal education, according to Fordham (1993), has been that the education provided should be in the interest of the learners and that the organization and the curriculum planning should preferably be undertaken by the learners themselves, that it should be bottom up. It is often argued that this should empower learners to understand and change the social structure around them: *"Examples where there is a genuine sense of ownership are not easy to find; and almost all have an element of community outreach as part of the general organization."*(Fordham, 1979: 57).

From the perspective of children and young people, the most significant move (Hoppers, 2006) during the 1970s and the 1980s was the development of a wide array of alternative forms of formal education, those that provided the same curricula, but by different means, at the elementary and secondary levels. These included part-time schools, correspondence schools, evening classes for adults, and later other forms of distance education using radio, television or cassettes. Their popularity as substitutes for formal education grew fast. Stepping towards the 1990's, UNESCO (1997) defined non-formal education as being constituted of *"any educational activities, organized and supported, which do not correspond to what we name formal education. This can be realized inside or outside educational institutions and is aimed to persons of all ages (...) Non-formal education does not follow an hierarchical system and may vary depending on duration, without necessarily involving the certifying of learning's results."* (<http://www.unesco.org>). In the same direction, the terminological glossary proposed by Cedefop (Glossary, 2011), describes learning in non-formal contexts as a semi-structured type of learning, which reflects the way in which the process refers to the need of the one who learns but also the person's intentionality of participation in learning.

Non-formal education was defined as every educational activity outside of the formal system: *"non-formal education is any organized, systematic, educational activity carried on outside the framework of the formal system to provide selected types of learning to particular subgroups in the population, adults as well as children."* (Coombs and Ahmed, 1974: 8). At that moment, this definition was imprecise and every country interpreted non-formal education

in their own way. For some, it meant educational programmes like schooling provided by non-governmental agencies. For others, it meant every educational activity apart from schools and colleges, including radio and television programmes. Others included within non-formal education the individualized learning programmes for different and specific learning groups. Non-formal education is carried out as an educational institution, with a degree of independence and differentiated objectives, with the participation of other social factors, and in a partnership relation with schools. Non-formal education refers to all the activities systematically organized outside the formal educational system in order to meet a wide variety of learning needs, such as complementary education, additional or supplementary education.

Informal education is not organized, it is spontaneous and presents the information perceived unintentionally coming from the environment (natural, social, cultural), but in relation with the individual. It is the product of the life experience of the individual. Informal education includes the experiences we live in everyday life. The most significant informal influences are the activities of the media, some aspects of family life (parents' example, the attitudes manifested by them), the influences of groups of friends, colleagues, and various cultural institutions (museums, theaters, libraries etc) and religious, political or military institutions. An example of informal education is when young children learn to speak. They learn this by listening and imitation. Parents correct spontaneous mistakes and encourage correct speech. The same thing happens when parents or teachers discuss with children every day experiences in their lives. Evaluation in informal education is done in a different way, it is achieved through the personal opinions and the achievements of the individual, it is based on behavioral analysis. We analyze things depending on our beliefs and set of values.

In any society, people receive multiple educational influences, the behavior and the abilities a person develops through informal education are the result of a multitude of factors. To explain this behavior only through the influence of one factor or another (e.g. school, media, friends) means to reduce the education phenomenon to one of its forms. Ideally, all forms of education in a society should promote the same values. Sometimes, there are contradictions between the values promoted through formal or non-formal education and informal education. If we were to answer to the question "Who has the most important influence on the individual?", we could say that all three forms of education and the entire society.

The integration into the educational system of the three forms is one of the current concerns of our society. The three forms of education should be viewed from the perspective of lifelong learning: education cannot be reduced to the learning process that takes place only in school. Therefore, formal education should function in relation with non-formal and informal education. To coordinate the three forms of education is a complex and rather difficult task, given the fact that the school may not be aware of all the events that students experience in a different environment. Nowadays there is both an extension and a close interrelation of all these forms, which increases the educational potential. The school today cannot ignore the rich experience gained by students in their leisure time spent outside of school. Naturally, formal education has one of the most important impacts, its process takes place in special institutions, which benefits from the other forms of education. All three are the product of our times and respond to the real needs of education.

The formal educational system alone cannot respond to the challenges of modern society and therefore welcomes its reinforcement by non-formal educational practices. The non-formal educational system is an autonomous field of learning that enriches formal learning environments through its emphasis on social learning and learning oriented processes of critical reflection. It represents an effective method of communication, being a powerful instrument of

social integration. Students make new friends in the non-formal environment and become more communicative. Another benefit of the non-formal educational system is that it is based on personal choice. When students can choose the activities in which they participate, they are more engaged in the learning process and they have opportunities to practise and develop decision-making skills. They develop interpersonal skills in non-formal settings, they learn how to interact with peers outside the classroom. Motivation will increase when lessons are more applied and contextual, when they experience and understand the notability of learning contexts, when they have authentic experiences while experimenting.

Non-formal education promotes the learning of essential skills and competences. Psychologically, students gain commitment, involvement, responsibility, solidarity, initiative, empathy, intercultural awareness, self-esteem, pride, respect, motivation, tolerance, confidence and creativity. Intellectually, students learn and practise leadership, teamwork, cooperation, problem-solving, organizational skills and public speaking. It is a rich system with flexibility and resources that engages students and supports their interest and motivation outside of schools.

Conclusions

We may be tempted to think that formal education is sufficient, but we have seen that formal education needs to work together with non-formal and informal education. Educating students is not only the task of schools. The successful conduct of life and social integration depend on what the students learn in all the three mentioned environments. In a non-formal or informal environment students may learn different things from what they learn in a formal environment and vice-versa. All the three forms of education complete each other and work towards the student's benefit. Non-formal and informal learning activities are complementary to the formal education system, have a participative and learner-centred approach, are carried out on a voluntary basis and are therefore connected to the students' needs, aspirations and interests. In non-formal education, the process is a communicative and cooperative activity where students, together with others, acquire knowledge. Communicative activities is what students need in order to gain self-trust and become successful.

Learning cannot be limited exclusively to formal processes taking place in schools and universities. Learning goes on in these institutions as well as in daily life and also comprises, besides the formal ones, non-formal and informal processes. Learning lasts a lifetime and is not tied only to formal institutions. One thing is certain: none of these forms of education cannot be neglected; all three are contributing to the formation and development of the students' personality.

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