

The teachers in the non formal system of Adult education in Italy¹

Introduction

The selection and role of the teachers is an area in which we can find the biggest difference between the formal and the non formal education.

But the largest gap is the role that the teachers/trainers have related to the learner. As a matter of fact in the formal system we talk about teachers, in the non formal system about trainers. The difference is not simply a matter of terminology, but of contents.

The teachers' validation

In the formal system what is important is the school concept of the teacher who has to carry out a programme which has to be the same for all the students, regardless of their background and needs. Therefore it is the student who has to adapt to the methods and contents, while in the non formal system there is the opposite situation.

In the formal system the selection of the group of teachers is ruled by very strict State laws; legal graduate university studies are required, and after that a teacher has to stand selective examinations, but there is not any specific training for Adult Education trainers. There is no specific training for each typology of learner, only for competences in the different subjects.

As soon as they pass the specific examinations, the teachers try to enter into the most prestigious schools, which guarantee them working hours, more suitable mainly to the female teaching class. The schools for adults are necessarily evening schools and, for different social and cultural reasons, they are less regarded. Furthermore, as said, no specific training is required. In this way the teachers enter into the schools for adults because they have lost their job within the morning classes, and not because they choose to do it and, being used to teach to teenagers and without any training to meet classes of adults, they often mistake the approach, establishing a kind of hierarchical relationship that cannot be proposed to people who already have a consistent life and baggage of experiences and knowledge.

These two elements turn out to be disruptive: on one side the teachers feel as a kind of downgrading their evening job, on the other side they are not prepared to move from the hierarchical relationship adult-teenager to the adult-adult one.

In the non formal system this problem does not exist. It is true that, because of its features and other political – economical reasons, the teaching in the non formal system can be considered like a second job, as it does not guarantee suitable incomes, but it is equally true that the trainer is extremely gratified by this experience.

There are other elements in favour of the non formal system. First of all its structure is flexible. It is usually composed by associations, local bodies, or other subjects of the socio-cultural life, that do not have other obligations apart from assuring a suitable service to the citizens and meeting their training needs. Even when the teaching normally requires a specific training (languages, mathematics, literature), it is not necessary to match the binomial competence-academic training. It is possible to choose the trainer just because it is considered right for this task: to teach a foreign language, for instance, it is possible to call native speakers who have studied and have specific experiences in their countries, even if they do not have recognized qualifications. For some subjects, not normally taught in public schools, it does not exist even a qualification. Just think about all those artistic and handicraft competences for the free time.

There are other reasons which contribute to increase the value of teaching in the non formal system and motivate the teachers.

¹ Giuseppina Raso, Università delle LibereEtà del FVG. Italy

The relationship with the adults, if adequately prepared, is extremely rewarding. The free teaching makes it possible for the teachers to feel that they have been chosen at each lesson.

The students in compulsory education, have to attend classes and study all the compulsory subjects; the adults instead make a conscious choice that includes all the teaching activities: they choose the subject, then, directly or indirectly, they choose the teacher, they are free to choose if they want to continue or leave the course. If they keep on attending the course, they surely are satisfied of the teaching they have received.

And with the contribution of their experience and knowledge, they can also support the orientation of the teaching. On the other hand the teachers, not having other obligations than carrying out a thematic training path, motivated by the pleasure of being chosen at each lesson by the learners, they find it rewarding to adapt themselves to the needs of the students, fitting the topics and methods to the single learner.

Conclusion

Personal competences, gratification, flexible didactical methodologies, adult-to-adult relationship: all this, is the strong point of the non formal system that, considering the above mentioned introduction, has a category of teachers highly enthusiastic and motivated. And this, of course, facilitates and enhances the motivation to learn and therefore the quality of life of the learners.

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