THIRD AGE EDUCATION IN THE FUNCTION OF DEVELOPMENT AND SELF-REALIZATION OF PERSONALITY

Abstract

It is not uncommon for aging to be seen today as a crisis and as a deficiency, although in the study of aging the so-called deficiency theories are considered overcome. Aging is manifested not only in losses but also in gains. Third-age people are becoming more aware that they are finally having time for themselves and meeting their needs and interests. One of them is certainly the need for education. In this paper, we will just deal with the education of third age persons in the function of their development and self-realization of personality.

Key words: third age, elderly, educational programs, personality development
Lifelong learning is considered an important concept in the development and self-realization of one’s personality. The third age is seen by some as a period of life in which it should be talked about personality development and self-realization of the person. Some of the dominant theories show active aging as a life span in which an individual can acquire new knowledge and skills and as a period of wisdom and/or experiences by which the elderly can compensate for any deficiencies in different areas such as cognitive functioning. The elderly possess a set of specific characteristics as well as unique reasons for joining the educational programs intended for them. When they hear about the concept education of the elderly, people often wonder why someone in old age would decide to take on further education, different education programs, lectures, exams, obligations. Throughout life people tend to run away from the obligations that formal education offers, so it is not surprising that the society’s reactions to the education programs for the elderly are various, most often negative. However, as stated [3, p. 7], organized forms of education in the third age have a new meaning - "they satisfy interests for which there was no time in working life, they meet current needs in communication with the world, society, the immediate community and oneself"

The concept of lifelong learning with an emphasis on the third age

During the working life, we are often in a situation where the working part of the day consumes most of our time, including commute to work, followed by caring for children, leaving little (if any) time to devote to ourselves. When younger, we can fully focus on ourselves and our education, which is the only obligation at that moment. However, we often see this as a great
burden and dedicate only the minimum that is required to progress through the system. These are precisely the reasons why the third age is ideal for attending educational programs and why educational programs have increased in number and quality in the last ten years. The elderly have plenty of time to do what they want or have always wanted but have not had the opportunity / financial resources / time. One of the most important reasons why the elderly decide to attend educational programs is to avoid stigmatization in which they are labelled as inactive, old, with a low standard of living, without motivation and such. "One of the most painful facts for the elderly is that they do not feel that the community holds them equal in value to other members of the community." [5, s. 7]. From the above, a negative attitude towards the elderly is by no means a recent phenomenon. For many individuals approximately twenty years pass from the period of retirement (third age) to the age of dependence on other people (fourth age) that need to be lived well. "It is lifelong learning that can make this period of life very useful because intellectual activity maintains psychophysical vitality, prevents various brain dysfunctions, provides the opportunity to create new experiences and meet other people. And it is something that the whole developed world has opted for" [1].

When it comes to lifelong learning, interdisciplinary educational discipline or gerontogogy can be mentioned as crucial. Its goal is education or self-education of the elderly. The concept of lifelong learning and its purpose, especially focused on the development and self-realization of personality, can be grouped within several basic categories. According to [4, p. 21] we distinguish: pre-retirement education (used as preparation for the post-retirement period); education for the old age (biological, psychological, sociological and legal aspects); education for a second career that every person should choose in the third age without coercion,
different from a professional career and with a higher level of initiative; education to meet specific interests for the elderly to fulfil their free time (cultural, sports, recreational, hobby interests, etc.)

Some of the goals of educating the elderly are to enable the transfer of knowledge and skills that will preserve health, maintain or improve mental capacity, enable the elderly to use their competencies more effectively and to make the most of the opportunities offered by the environment. It is important to enable them to accept learning as something fun and stimulating and as a means to achieve a richer social life and new experiences.

Speaking about the theoretical basis for the inclusion of the elderly in educational programs, we come across several dominant directions and concepts. First, it should be noted that the concept of active aging is increasingly accepted in the world. It speaks of a society vision that is inclusive and enables the elderly to use the potential they possess. Life span theory says that it is never too late and in the role of a senior we can still learn and acquire new knowledge and skills. The elderly possess a high level of wisdom, which helps them compensate for any deficiencies or slower cognitive functioning. The last dominant theory is that of quality of life, which states that the elderly through the macro and micro levels can act in the direction of meeting their own needs [7].

Over the years, the concept of active aging has been closely linked to the health and importance of healthy aging. [2] This
approach focuses on a wide range of activities that advocate for the participation and inclusion of the elderly as equal citizens and community members. The essence of the active aging concept combines an element of productive aging with an emphasis on quality of life and mental well-being of an individual. The strategy of active aging must be viewed in a broader context, meaning it should include members of all ages, not just the elderly. The vision of a society that operates according to the idea of active aging includes all ages and is not exclusive. Such society is pictured in a way that all its members are valued and each of them has the opportunity to participate and contribute regardless of age. In the third age, after retirement or during partial retirement, people should have the opportunity to contribute in different situations (occasional paid employment, voluntary and volunteer work, participation in community activities, spending free time within the family, etc.). This approach maximizes the potential of each senior, raises many aspects of quality of life and creates a society that is more inclusive, tolerant and homogeneous.

During the 1980s, a new approach to human development was constructed that focuses on the study of an individual’s developmental processes throughout a lifetime. "Life span theory emphasizes, arguing with empirical data, that development takes place throughout life over the dynamic interaction of the processes of growth, maintenance of a certain condition and loss of opportunity" [6]. The key features of life span theory are multidirectionality (decline in one function and simultaneous growth in another function), plasticity (improvement of skills through practice), historical context (historical, cultural and social context conditions individual development and mutual differences) and multiple causality (way in which people develop is conditioned by various factors as biological, psychological and
sociocultural). Life span theory contains developmental aspects that are described as three adaptive processes: selection, optimization, and compensation [6]. Selection in this case means that participants in educational programs for the elderly will choose programs that will help them most to reach their full potential. Optimization allows participants to improve and enhance their competencies in a particular area, while compensation seeks to stop or slow down the process of declining functions or maintaining functions at a certain level.

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References: