

THE EDUCATION FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN FRENCH CLASSES FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES

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Abstract

The concept of sustainable development has become an integrant one, meant to establish the balance between elements with *a priori* different operating modes. It is, firstly, a way to tackle the solution of the problems affecting all living beings on our planet; the sustainable development means awareness of the fragility of the world, changing of our vision of the world and, especially, changing human behaviour. School mission is to educate individuals so that, in contextual approach, it aims to build to the young people the ability to objectively analyse the current situations, to reason and to imagine necessary changes when confronted with problems. The foreign language classes on specific purposes constitute a convenient environment to achieve education for sustainable development. Our work turns to good account the experience gained from personal teaching activities with the students in 1st and 2nd years from the Agricultural University of Iasi, in French language seminars. The practical activity is supported by theoretical and methodological works that deal with the education for the sustainable development from multiple angles. By using various but additional resources and didactic strategies (authentic documents, on text and video format, group work, research of information on the internet, evaluation forms etc.), the activity we carried on allowed us to develop not only linguistic skills of the students, but also to provide objective marks, scientifically grounded, for the problematization and the re-evaluation of the link between the individual-society and the environment; this paper focuses on discussing the civilizational formative component of the didactic process in French classes for specific purposes.

Key words: education, sustainable development, foreign language classes.

The concept of sustainable development is seen as an "integrant concept" which "aims to establish a beneficial balance between the spheres that have *a priori* different objectives and operating modes (François-Xavier Jacquin, « Comment, à la faveur de la réforme de la voie professionnelle, l'éducation au développement durable s'intègre dans l'enseignement du secteur de l'aménagement paysager? » in Michel Vidal (coord.), 2010, p. 40) The human being stands in the centre of these spheres since he is the source of the arisen dysfunction, because of his beneficial or harmful in various degrees actions, but he is also the consciousness "capable to analyse these problems and to imagine solutions" (François-Xavier Jacquin, in Michel Vidal (coord.), 2010, p. 41). For the latter, it is a question of taking into account as many aspects involved as possible (social, economic, cultural, environmental, political etc.), while offering solutions which prove their long-term validity. More than finding *some solutions* (because the sustainable development must not be perceived as *the solution*, the panacea), it is important firstly to undertake an analysis of the problems, having for result a change in our thinking and a change in our behaviour. Any change is due to an awareness and passes by

education. Since the school's mission is to educate students, and that such education has to be in agreement with the period, the education for the sustainable development (ESD) finds its well justified place among other courses. It should nonetheless be noted that the scholar education means, first of all, "giving the keys and the ability for individuals to think and imagine the changes necessary to face problems identified (François-Xavier Jacquin, in Michel Vidal (coord.), 2010, p. 41); it is only then that we obtain a change of the behaviour.

The main part is to aim at the formation of the judgment, of the autonomous and critical thought, which will allow the individual to behave in a responsible and comprehensive way towards the others and towards the living environment.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The relationship between education and sustainable development is envisaged in several ways:

- * Education *for* the environment, which "works to make individuals responsible of their environment" (David Kumurdjian, « Eduquer à la citoyenneté, éduquer à l'environnement? » in Michel

Vidal (coord.), 2010, p. 63); through education, we can know, manage and preserve the environment;

* Education *by* the environment, this last one serving as a support of the formation;

* Education *to* the environment, which synthesizes the previous two directions, namely, the first one, by allowing individuals "to acquire the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to take part in a responsible and effective way to the preservation and to the resolution of environmental problems, and to the quality of the environment" (David Kumurdjian, *in* Michel Vidal (coord.), 2010, p. 63); it is also a question "to promote a education of the individual, a sensitive and intellectual development of persons, to find in the education by the environment a tool which offers a motivating, implying and universal support" (David Kumurdjian, *in* Michel Vidal (coord.), 2010, p. 63).

If the aims of the education to the environment are well defined in the national and international legislation, it is not the same for the modalities of implementation. This leads to a large pedagogical freedom afforded to teachers. The teaching approach adopted is therefore motivated by "the nature of knowledge involved" (Francine Pellaud, « *Approches didactiques et pédagogiques au cœur de l'éducation au développement durable* » *in* Michel Vidal (coord.), 2010, p. 150).

According to Francine Pellaud, the didactic approach must take into account, first of all, the complexity that characterizes our situation with regard to the environment and especially to the sustainable development (there are a lot of preconceived ideas, false interpretations, faiths, habits of thought and cultural habits). The difficulty is therefore that, "before being able to help the learners to construct their knowledge, it is often necessary firstly to provide them with the means to deconstruct what constitutes the anchor points on which they lean to explain the world around them" (Francine Pellaud, *in* Michel Vidal (coord.), 2010, p. 151). The education for the sustainable development means "instilling a change of mindset to reveal further, to anticipate the future and act accordingly" (Francine Pellaud, *in* Michel Vidal (coord.), 2010, p. 150).

The foreign language classes on specific, professional purposes constitute a convenient environment to achieve education for sustainable development. Our work turns to good account the experience gained from personal teaching activities with the students in 1st and 2nd years from the Agricultural University of Iași, in French language seminars. The practical activity is supported by theoretical and methodological works that deal with the education for the sustainable development from multiple angles (history, epistemology, educational tendencies, didactic approaches). This paper focuses on discussing the

civilizational formative component of the didactic process in French classes for specific purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The education for the sustainable development allows multiple approaches, which reflect the complexity of the topic. Some authors refer to an education for the responsibility, because the education for the sustainable development is not a simple learning of knowledge and know-how, because it concerns "the human being, the person, the human subject in his existential depth, in his relations with himself, with the others and with what surrounds him" (Sylvie Zénillo, Jean-Bertrand Paturet, « *De l'éducation à la responsabilité* » *in* Michel Vidal (coord.), 2010, p. 54) It is thus an education "to an ethical position", which should begin within the family and continue in the educational institutions that form the child. In a wider perspective, according to which "the environment is not only the nature" (David Kumurdjian, *in* Michel Vidal (coord.), 2010, p.66), the education to the environment becomes synonymous with citizenship education that takes place throughout life and including knowledge, values and particularly acts that embody them.

Each approach provides a significant gain in the progress of the education act intended to train the learners to the values of the sustainable development and all work together complementarily to accomplish the personality of the responsible being of tomorrow. Whether we speak about education to the responsibility, to the citizenship, whether about the education by or for the environment, it is always necessary to adopt a didactic approach, appropriate and sanctioned by "the nature of the knowledge in question".

We have already underlined the interest carried in the definition of the terms composing the "ESD" as well as the accent put on the purposes of this education, but we have also noted that the procedures for applying these objectives are rather vague or vast, since freedom is left to the trainers for its implementation. It results from this multiple ways mentioned / proposed by the specialists - the formal lectures, practical action within educational establishments or in association with the community, actions going from the simplest to the most complex from the point of view of the invested resources, but the watchword of which is, mostly, the voluntary work - the common and defining element of all these initiatives being the freedom left to the individuals to become conscious of the importance of their awareness

and, consistently, of the change of their thought and of their behaviour.

Given this great diversity of possible forms of the education for the sustainable development, we examined the link between this action - so important in this context, decisive for the future - and the classroom training in foreign languages, more particularly in foreign language classes on specific purposes (the French on specific purposes, in our case). In the teaching of foreign languages on specific purposes, professional, the teacher aims at the formation of the skills of understanding / expression - written / oral at a motivated public. These skills involve the specialization of the language field, with emphasis on the written component if the documentation is a priority or on the oral component where direct contact with partners is essential and dominant.

The student, as a future specialist use the foreign language as a tool that allows him to obtain information to complete his research and his scientific knowledge, a tool that will serve to achieve a higher level qualification in his career - a chance to enrich his professional skills. The current methodological directions for the teaching and learning of specialized French envisage the public whom they address. It is, in our case, an adult audience, defined by specialty books as "a public capable of reflecting by hypotheses and deductions, capable of realizing mental operations without having appeal to the material objects" (Silvia Burdea, 1980, p.11). The maturity of the adult audience joins his linguistic experience in order to facilitate the acquisition of a new specialized code. The adult public needs to be involved in the didactic strategies which are intended for him, to understand the motivations of the steps which he is the target, to be convinced of their utility and efficiency.

The integration of the education for sustainable development in foreign language classes for specific purposes seems particularly justified in the case of our public hearing: there are students in agricultural science and veterinary medicine, which often come from high schools where they followed a section of natural sciences, and they study subjects such as biology, sciences of life and earth and so on. It is consequently necessary, in agreement with the programs planned for the discipline of foreign language (French language, in this particular case), to propose to the students future agronomists, horticulturists, veterinarians, landscapers etc.. didactic activities that allow them to acquire language skills on the main theme - the environment, the environmental protection, the sustainable development. The resources that the teacher finds on these various

aspects of the problems are rich, whether journal articles, extracts from radio or TV, books, documentaries etc.. - authentic documents thus which will be adapted to the purposes and to the skills aimed.

Our teaching experience, acquired during the French classes on specific purposes, showed us that the use of authentic materials in order to teach students the lexicon of the environment is very useful and important in the context of their training as specialists and researchers, but simplistic, since the language class can expand its mission and contribute to education for the sustainable development. Reading the articles or watching a documentary - as was the case in our activity - can cause moments of strong emotion, followed by an intense reflection, awareness and ... change of gesture and thought, towards the environment and towards its development. The teacher can take advantage of the three "drives" of the learner that we have outlined above and to accompany him towards a change in his references, habits, so he is capable of "seeing farther." The action is and just and equally risky, because it is about habits, traditions, a priori, which are necessary to revisit, to revalue, and for a certain part, to modify.

The didactic environment favourable to this type of approach is also complex, with moments of contextualisation and of questioning, which enable students to find meaning in the knowledge acquired, with moments of confrontation - that will help them to realize limits of their conceptions, as well as with time dedicated to the creative imagination and to the innovation (Francine Pellaud, *in* Michel Vidal (coord.), 2010, p. 152).

The didactic strategies which we adopted were modern and active:

- * the teacher stopped the documentary along the way, by asking questions on a passage, on an image, by noting on the blackboard the difficulties of understanding;
- * the students then received a questionnaire on the documentary, as homework;
- * the students have looked for more information on the realities described in the movie;
- * organized by groups, they shared the results of their own research;
- * an argued debate was organized in the form of round table;
- * in order to stimulate their creativity, students were encouraged to propose scenarios for a possible continuation of the documentary, which they had to place in a more or less near future.

CONCLUSIONS

The education for the sustainable development maintains complex relations with the other disciplines and participate to form the capacities of the learner to conceive the complexity of his environment, to question this reality and to bring to it viable changes. The classes of foreign languages are a favourable frame for the implementation of strategies which aim the education to the sustainable development.

By using various but additional resources and didactic strategies (authentic documents, on text and video format, group work, research of information on the internet, evaluation forms etc.), the activity we carried on allowed us to develop not only linguistic skills of the students, but also to

provide objective marks, scientifically grounded, for the problematization and the re-evaluation of the link between the individual-society and the environment.

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