

BOOK REVIEW

Mária Machalová. *Psychológia vo vzdelávaní dospelých* (Adult Education Psychology). Bratislava: Rádioprint 2005. 223 pp.

In the introduction to her book, the psychologist M. Machalová writes that “for many adults, education may be a way of searching for the ‘water of life’”. The author has had the courage to skate “on the thin ice” of the interdisciplinary theme of the application of psychology in adult education (p. 12). This conviction of hers is present throughout the text, which provides the reader with a knowledgeable introduction to the subject in five comprehensive chapters.

Psychological maturity, as Machalová emphasizes, is not a state but an aspect of the development of the personality and since it is subject to developmental laws, it is a process. In spite of the fact that the adult personality tends towards psychological balance and stability, it is also characterized by a flexibility and creativity in its ability to adapt. It is resourceful and adaptable within the limits of its authenticity (p. 62). The various stages of a person’s mental development cannot be understood without considering the continuum of the journey of human life. In this, M. Machalová relies upon the approaches of theories of personality development where the emphasis lies not on the personality structure but rather on the process of the development of this structure. In her opinion, the process of individualization—the process of the separation, differentiation and elaboration of particular aspects of the personality—continues during adulthood (and to a greater degree than during childhood or adolescence). This highlights the psychological differences amongst individuals. During the course of their lives, human beings undergo the superior process of individualization, whereby they begin to develop as personalities whose final goals include stability, integrity and uniqueness. The personality is created progressively within the environment it finds itself, through its attempts to adapt, even as the environment itself may be changing (although periods of regression may also occur in the developmental stages). The qualitative changes that result from the process of individualization help shape the psychological identity of adults that differentiates them from others.. The mission of adult education is to help individuals as they attempt to determine the nature of their own psychological identity. Developmental tasks are aimed at the social development of an individual. In social psychology, socialization is understood to be the process of social learning, and, according to M. Machalová, expresses, that part of the life of an individual within a social setting that is determined by the material and spiritual aspects of the life of the community. By investigating the phylogenetic (or evolutionary development) aspect of socialization, we can also determine the way in which the gender characteristics are formed, and by exploring its ontogenetic aspect, (the origin and development of the individual) we can also determine the way in which socio-psychological types of personalities are shaped. (In ontogenetic development an individual interiorizes group norms, values and social behavioural patterns).

The author emphasizes that from a psychological perspective, education can be understood as an important means of implementing the developmental tasks of life. It should be based on the dispositions of individuals—their own abilities and limitations in terms of their personality development. The content of education is determined by the skills required by the individuals and their ability to socialize: professionally, in their vocational education and during their career; socio-psychologically—in relation to other people and groups; culturally—in identifying with cultural patterns, norms and the traditions of a community). It can help teach people how to orientate themselves amid the abundance of information, the complexities, contradictions and controversies found within the social setting, in the contradictory demands of a variety of social roles. The importance of education lies in the fact that it shapes the cognitive and emotional capability to evaluate reality in such a way that humans are able to identify and realize constructive procedures in solving work-related, and social and personal problems (p. 159).

According to the author, these days, education as a means of permanently acquiring knowledge leads not only to an awareness and exercising of one's rights and intellectual accountability but also to a moral responsibility for life in general.

The book also contains various models on how to organize education for all age groups, which are linked to the different types of social systems (northern—state controlled; peripheral; conservative—based on the model of social partnership; the liberal market-led model). The author considers that adult education should be a priority of social development and therefore integrated into the whole spectrum of policies (employment, cultural, social, and educational policies).

M. Machalová considers active participation in seeking out new target groups in adult education to be invaluable, as it avoids a situation where individuals are faced with a series of missed opportunities with regard to their education and provides them with help in ascertaining the importance of education within their lives. In adulthood, it is the process of moving towards psychosocial maturity which is important. This refers to the search for identity (a feeling of uniqueness, the desire for a meaningful role in life and for integration into society, the struggle to define oneself and one's aims in life); the relationship between our own identity and that of the people around us (the search for common relationships); the need to create (to create things, ideas, relationships, products, because if this need is not expressed, the personality is at risk of stagnation and psychological deprivation); achieving a feeling of satisfaction (that life has its order, sense, and continuity and this in turn leads to the integrity of the person). The author stresses that, in this kind of programme, it is important that the personalities of the participants and the independent decisions they take are respected, just as their autonomy and experiences should be accepted. She pays close attention to the problem of educating the unemployed and elderly. She states that the general objectives of education in the "second half of life" are to improve access to further education that is focused on the developing individual potential and on coping with new situations in life; to support and help improve the quality of life and provide opportunities for self-realization, with regard to the fact that this group is exposed to the risk of economic, social and psychological discrimination and stigmatization. The elderly have to face changes in their lives, which often extend beyond their individual abilities to cope with them. Education is the best way of revealing a person's potential and of channeling that into the ability (primarily an adaptive one), to find an opportunity to develop that individual potential. It is in fact a challenge to "take one's life into one's own hands" (p.201).

The book is excellently presented in terms of the graphics and the qualified analysis enables us to look deeper into the issues which (as reading the book persuaded us) are increasingly important today. The author uses a systematic and consistent approach that leads us through the whole context of relations and a wide range of concepts found within adult education psychology.

Blanka Šulavíková

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