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Slow Pedagogy and Contemporary Teaching Strategies

Abstract: In this paper, contemporary teaching strategies are discussed in the theoretical and practical context of slow pedagogy and contemporary curricular planning of the teaching process. Emphasis is placed on the importance of raising awareness of the need to slow down in the teaching process so that students can fully develop in the experiential learning process, i.e. that each student can acquire knowledge and construct meanings, think in critical, creative, and reflective way, form and express attitudes, and develop psychomotor abilities and skills at her/his own pace through practical activities based on her/his interests. Based on the curricular approach to teaching in the context of slow pedagogy, this paper argues the need for careful planning and choosing learning and teaching strategies to achieve the goal using appropriate teaching content, in appropriate social forms and working conditions, and with appropriate ways of (self)evaluation. As a synthesis of knowledge about slow pedagogy, contemporary curriculum and learning and teaching strategies in the teaching process, the paper argues the importance of teachers' professional development and their role of action researchers who continuously evaluate and improve the quality of the educational process for the benefit of all of its stakeholders.

Keywords: Action research, Curricular approach, Experiential learning, "*Knowledge-in-action*", Learner autonomy

Introduction

Slow pedagogy refers to a concept that emerged in the 1980s when journalist Petrini criticized the opening of McDonald's fast food restaurant in Rome because of its commercialised, industrialized and standardized approach to food. The beginning was in the idea of 'slow food', that referred to values opposite to 'fast food' and everything that fast food represents (Petrini, 2001) but eventually Petrini's idea spread as a Slow movement that entered all aspects of one's life. Parkins and Craig (2006, as cited in Bozalek, 2017) consider Slow movement to be:

"a process whereby everyday life – in all its pace and complexity, frisson and routine – is approached with care and attention ... an attempt to live in the present in a meaningful, sustainable, thoughtful and pleasurable way" (p. 45).

This paper proposes possibilities of incorporating elements of 'slow pedagogy' in higher education, emphasizing contemporary teaching and learning strategies and the need to consider them in relation to the student and the course aim and content. The main Slow movement postulate is to slow down in all aspects of our lives, so slow pedagogy proposes strategies focused on students' learning process and enabling enough time for students to learn at their own pace (Shaw et al., 2013), with deeper understanding, enjoyment in learning and quality interaction between teacher and learner (Holt, 2012).

Slow pedagogy developed as a kind of a response to the standardization and homogenization of education (Holt, 2002), so the question is how to incorporate ideas of slow pedagogy in the contemporary European educational system. The Republic of Croatia has also implemented a competency-based curricular approach to teaching according to which all qualifications in Europe should be unified (Ćatić, 2012; Lončar-Vicković & Dolaček-Alduk, 2009). According to the competency-based curricular approach, we strive to help students develop their competencies so that they can actively and dynamically apply their knowledge, abilities, skills and attitudes in different contexts, and we try to verify the development of those competencies through the students' achievement of learning outcomes (Lončar-Vicković & Dolaček-Alduk, 2009). So, as teachers, we organize the teaching process by setting the course's goal, determining the expected learning outcomes, choosing relevant content, appropriate teaching and learning strategies and a classroom environment that will help us achieve that goal. Finally, we determine the kind of evaluation that will allow us to check on the achievement of set goals, learning outcomes and students' competencies.

An analysis of the competency-based curricular approach reveals both its advantages and disadvantages. The advantages include the constructive alignment of the curriculum (Loughlin et al., 2021), learning and teaching process transparency, as well as setting aims towards the quality of education and effectiveness of students' accomplishment (Kerka, 1998). Doghonadze (2016) concludes:

"This is generally positive; as equitable education has to be based on standard requirements.", but also "(...) this system of education is sort of faceless. It puts not only students, but also teachers into rather rigid frames, making them run like in a squirrel cage to catch up with requirements, which are getting harder and harder" (p. 65).

Economization and competitiveness of education, setting aims towards outputs, standards and external evaluation of education, uniformity and behaviorist approach to teaching and learning can be singled out among disadvantages of competency-based education (Kerka, 1998). In addition, it is important to notice the fact that in the teaching process we cannot measure everything important for one's holistic development; especially we cannot measure certain aspects of upbringing. Thus, very important outcomes, difficult to operationalize, often do not find their place in closed and rig-id curriculum (Jukić, 2010). Bracey (2001, as cited in Holt, 2002, p. 6) also points out the fact that "creativity, critical thinking, resilience, motivation, persistence, humor, reliability, enthusiasm,

civic-mindedness, self-awareness, self-discipline, empathy, leadership, and compassion", qualities important for one's moral development, cannot be assessed through standardized tests. Sadly, practice shows that most of the learning outcomes in curriculums refer to student's cognitive development, while his/her conative and psychomotor developments are often neglected. From the point of slow pedagogy, disadvantage of a standards-based approach to education is its focus on the pressured and hurried realization of achievement instead of one's self-realization, as Holt (2002) noticed:

"The pressure to proceed from one targeted standard to another as fast as possible, to absorb and demonstrate specified knowledge with conveyor-belt precision, is an irresistible fact of school life. Parents are encouraged to focus on achievement, not self-realization" (p. 264).

Is it possible to combine a '*slow approach*' in education with a competency-based curricular approach that represents our mainstream educational policy? It is. But we should take into account both positive and negative aspects of these two approaches and very carefully plan the teaching process, always having in mind not just its purpose, but also its unpredictability. And, yes, we should *slow down*. As Petrini said (as cited in Shaw et al., 2013), being slow refers to our right to determine our own tempos:

"Being Slow means that you control the rhythms of your own life. You decide how fast you have to go in any given context. If today I want to go fast, I go fast; if tomorrow I want to go slow, I go slow. What we are fighting for is the right to determine our own tempos" (p. 319).

We must be aware of the fact that students are individuals with their different potentials, different needs, different interests and different tempos. Therefore, there is a need for us to reconsider the educational process in higher education from the perspective of slow pedagogy (Simmonds, 2020; Van der Sluis, 2020), because slow pedagogy advocates students' self-realization, their learning process at an individual pace, in a way that leads to in-depth understanding (Holt, 2002, 2012).

Slow Pedagogy and Competency-based Curricular Approach: Which Teaching and Learning Strategies to Use and Why?

Aim and Learning Outcomes

In the competency-based curricular approach to teaching, the starting point is always the *aim*. All other questions, as well as the question of teaching and learning strategies, are determined by the teaching aim. If the aim is based on the idea of individual's self-realization, as it is in slow pedagogy, then the *learning outcomes* should be set in a way they relate to higher qualitative levels of student's development and include his/her whole personality: its cognitive, conative and psychomotor aspects. Outcomes should require creative and critical thinking, argumentation and critical assessment of students' attitudes and expression of students' practical skills that are relevant to their self-actualization. According to that, teachers can agree with students on which teaching and learning strategies are going to be used in order to achieve needed competencies.

Content and Teaching and Learning Strategies

In the competency-based curricular approach, the chosen content determines the choice of teaching and learning strategies, and both, content and strategies, should enable the achievement of the set goal and learning outcomes. In slow pedagogy, a deeper understanding of the content is proposed (Holt, 2012). Therefore, the emphasis is on strategies such as project learning, problem-based and collaborative learning, service-learning, *just-in-time* teaching, flipped classroom (Shaw et al., 2013), and other interactive strategies and approaches that focus on students'

learning process and enable active acquisition of knowledge, construction of meaning and deeper understanding:

"Slow pedagogy replaces the direct transmission of knowledge with collaborative and individual procedures promoting critical thinking, reflection, and introspection" (Shaw et al., 2013, p. 327).

Pana and Escarlos (2017) cited several studies that showed a positive effect of using some of the above mentioned contemporary strategies on the following: students' academic achievements (Akınoğlu & Tandoğan, 2006; Fatade, Mogari, & Arigbabu, 2013; Odoh, 2013; Zare & Othman, 2013), conceptual development (Akınoğlu & Tandoğan, 2006), reading comprehension (Ghabanchi & Behrooznia, 2014), critical thinking skills (Ghabanchi & Behrooznia, 2014; Zare & Othman, 2013), speaking abilities (Zare & Othman, 2013), and their attitudes towards the course (Akınoğlu & Tandoğan, 2006). All those strategies put students in active role that enables them to reflect and contemplate on important topics and tasks through experiential learning. As Holt (2012) noticed:

"Instead of breaking the curriculum down into measurable, bite-sized chunks, we should encourage students to consider a situation or a problem, look at it from various angles, and ask questions that need answering. Students might work in groups, and teachers might work in teams: instead of classroom boxes, we need flexible spaces, and ways of linking subjects that enrich learning."

Similar to the competency-based curricular approach, slow pedagogy also accepts usage of information-communication technology (ICT) in teaching and learning. In that context, Tanti and Kennedy Clark (2010) and Shaw et al. (2013) point to the importance of using ICT in slower settings of virtual environments by giving students enough time to collaborate and discuss the virtual learning experience, instead of understanding ICT as a mean to get fast information and 'fast knowledge'. Teachers can organize individualized and individual work, work in pairs and in groups, but the focus in slow pedagogy is on cooperative learning, as slow pedagogy proposes a classroom environment that nurtures cooperation and learner's autonomy. As Holt stated (2002, 2012), we need to give students enough time to gain an understanding of what is being learned, without rushing students in that process.

Evaluation

In slow pedagogy, according to Shaw et al. (2013, p. 328), assessment criteria should be discussed at the beginning of the teaching process and continuously revised. Moreover, "procedures and tools for students to document all of these interactions and reflect on learning outcomes from both the content and the form of their experiences, covering cognitive, performative, and affective domains" should be used, so the authors put emphasis on formative assessment that includes portfolios, peer-evaluation, and self-assessment. In the competency-based curricular approach, summative and formative evaluation are both needed, and they should be used complementary to assess students' competencies.

Slow Pedagogy and Contemporary Teaching and Learning Strategies: Possibilities in Higher Education

How to realize 'slow approach' in the existing competency-based curricular approach in higher education? Is it justified to combine them? Again, it is, since those ideas can contribute to the quality of higher education. Every approach has its positive and negative aspects, its supporters and critics. If we embrace a certain approach, we should be focused on maximizing its positive and minimizing its negative aspects. Moreover, we should always re-question and re-confront our understanding of the educational process to other opinions and other approaches, and be flexible in our planned actions. Here, Aoki (2004) well noticed that teachers balance between *curriculum-as-planned* and *curriculum-as-lived*. In that balance between our curricular plans and the real situations in classroom, teacher's *pedagogical tact*, in a way Muth (2020) sees it, is of high importance:

"Tact is not subsumed to the planning intention of the teacher. Therefore tactful action cannot be realized in a pre-planned educational operation, but always only in the unforeseeable situation in which the educator is engaged" (p. 5).

Slow pedagogy and competency-based curricular approach both emphasize the importance of *time* and give us the freedom to choose *how* to achieve our goals. Shaw et al. (2013) noticed that:

"calibration of the difficulty of learning tasks and materials, on the one hand, and of the time available for completion and mastery, on the other, is tricky" (p. 325).

These two issues should be well balanced, as the whole curriculum should be well balanced and carefully planned, but, with its openness for flexibility. The need for flexibility can be supported by Malaguzzi's arguments (1994), as there is the same need in a higher education context:

"Of course, many things that happen in school can be seen ahead and planned beforehand. But many things that happen cannot be known ahead of time. Something will start to grow inside the child and suddenly what is happening in the school will move in that direction. Sometimes what happens starts inside the adults. School can never be always predictable. We need to be open to what takes place and able to change our plans and go with what might grow at that very moment both inside the child and inside ourselves."

When connecting slow pedagogy and contemporary teaching and learning strategies in the context of the competency-based curricular approach, we can think of '*curriculum as conversation*' that allows interaction (teacher-student, student-student, student-media, etc.) and building 'knowledge-in-action', instead of acquiring 'knowledge-out-of-context' (Applebee, 1996; as cited in Shaw et al., 2013). We can also think of '*curriculum as lived*' (Aoki, 1993, 2004). That kind of curriculum considers teachers' and students' personal characteristics and their experiences, and enables us to "*experience and apply what really matters, such that it might become sustainable*" (Simmonds, 2020, p. 34). In those views of the curriculum, emphasis is more on the process of teaching and learning and creating meaningful experiences than on the results and implementing knowledge transmission, and that is essential in higher education.

Giving students enough time to learn at their own tempo and to reflect on the learning process is a key element in slow pedagogy. To achieve such a teaching and learning process, the university course curriculum should not be understood as a linear, unified and predictable process. Instead of that, it could and should be understood as a creative, divergent, diverse and open process, full of choices and possibilities for teachers' creative teaching and students' autonomous learning. Thus, students are co-creators of the course, so they can, together with teachers and according to the set course's goal, agree on relevant content and appropriate learning and teaching strategies, and appropriate evaluation. Therefore, they can create a learning process in line with their interests, needs and possibilities, but also in line with the course aim and learning outcomes.

Where to start? How to do it? Here are some possibilities. Teacher can present the course aim and learning outcomes to students, discuss with students the importance of these concepts for students' present and future, their values and culture, their knowledge, attitudes and experiences. Furthermore, teacher can identify the course's main concepts with students so that they can, with the teacher's mentorship and guidance, individually, in pairs or in small groups, search for literature and find relevant authors, select relevant content using different sources (scientific articles, books, videos, documentaries and movies, etc.). They can investigate those concepts in different contexts. As van der Sluis (2020) noticed, 'slow Higher Education' can enable students to develop their self-efficacy and self-confidence, courage, mindfulness and cooperation, it can enable them to be civically engaged, and to "understand the relevance of their profession and vocation within its ecological, social and cultural context" (p. 8).

In thus organized teaching process, students can decide when and how much time they will devote to a certain topic and its analysis. In that context, Huang (2014) emphasizes the importance of pursuing "an appropriate education, namely democratic education where students are provided freedom, responsibility and respect without coercion, authority or unnecessary strictness" (p. 33).

Students can investigate the topic at home, at their own pace, with their own preferred learning strategy, and then, in the classroom, through discussions, they can compare their understanding with other students' understandings by working in pairs or small groups. In that way, the model of 'flipped classroom' is used (Millis, 2010, as cited in Shaw et al., 2013). But, here we should be careful so that our students do not engage in meaningless activities and, in that manner, acquire superficial knowledge, something that McGuire and Gubbins (2010) point out as '*info-tainment*'. Also, as Shaw et al. stated (2013), we should guide students in that process, prepare and encourage them for '*slow learning experiences*' (p. 331) because they can feel insecure in new learning conditions.

Through problem-based, research-oriented, project and collaborative learning, with their teacher's mentorship and guidance, students can deepen their understanding of certain concepts by critically re-examining what they have learned and understood. They can take control of their learning process and also the process of (self)evaluation. Each individual, pair or group of students can make personalized projects and share their new knowledge, new (or enriched) attitudes, and new abilities and skills with other students and with their teacher.

Although the activity of learning is emphasised in slow pedagogy, "the quality of the engagement between teacher and learner is supreme, and it lies at the heart of the slow school" (Holt, 2012). In the context of the relationship between learning and teaching, we must be aware of Biesta's questioning the culture of the 'learnification' of the educational process (2010a, as cited in Biesta, 2012, 2013). The author states (2013):

"(...) 'learning' generally denotes a process or an activity. This means, however, that the word 'learning' is in itself neutral or empty with regard to content, direction and purpose. To suggest that learning is good or desirable – and thus to suggest that it is something which should go on throughout one's life or which should be promoted in schools – does therefore not really mean anything until it is specified what the content of the learning is and, more importantly, until it is specified what the purpose of the learning is" (p. 6).

In addition to the *content* and *purpose*, Biesta (2012, 2013) indicates the importance of teachers and the process of teaching, emphasizing teachers' *relationship* with students in the teaching process. According to Žarnić (1999), teaching and learning strategies should be discussed focusing on the aim, the content and the student, since teaching and learning strategies depend on them and should be chosen to be appropriate and relevant to the aim of teaching, the content that is being learned and the characteristics of the student.

In this kind of teaching process, the teacher, together with the students, can agree on the method of evaluation which will check the achievement of the goal, learning outcomes and student's competencies. Although learning outcomes are standardized for all students in the course, the type of evaluation does not have to be uniformed for everyone. According to the competency-based curriculum approach, it is important that the outcomes are accomplished and verified, but if we think 'out of the box', the way to achieve the mentioned does not have to be the same for everyone. For example, an outcome related to critical evaluation of a certain concept does not have to be evaluated with a classic written or oral test. Instead, it can be evaluated through an essay or group discussion. Some students can create review papers on the topic, others can show their understandings creatively, through role playing, or by asking relevant questions on the topic, instead of giving expected answers.

This approach to the teaching process in higher education requires openness of teachers to think critically and creatively and to go beyond the framework of traditional and classic teaching. It requires readiness for permanent professional development and taking on the role of action researchers who will, together with their students and according to the curriculum and students' interests and needs, carefully investigate and *plan* new approaches in their teaching, *act* according to that plan, *observe* the teaching process by using different instruments and, finally, *reflect* on it in the context of their values. In that way, teachers can scientifically examine and establish effective new approaches to teaching in a certain context, develop new educational theories and implement them in teaching (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). Naturally, in accordance with the all above mentioned, in action research, 'slow approach' should also be implemented:

"All forms of research should be undertaken with care and thoroughness. However, self-study action research, Living Theory research and all forms of values-based research need even more time because they draw on the identity and emergent values of the researcher in a slow and reflexive manner" (Glenn, 2021, p. 4).

Conclusions

This paper emphasizes the importance of raising awareness of the need to slow down in the teaching process. The main argument refers to the notion that slowing down could enable students to fully develop in the experiential learning process, i.e. that slowing down could enable each student to acquire relevant knowledge and construct personal meanings, think critically and creatively, and to think in a reflective way. By slowing down in the teaching process, we could enable each student to form and express his/her attitudes and develop psychomotor abilities and skills at her/his own pace through practical activities based on her/his interests. We could, if: we carefully plan the teaching and learning process, we carefully set our educational goals that strive for student's self-realization, we carefully set learning outcomes for students and choose relevant content for achieving that goal, we decide on teaching and learning strategies that are appropriate to those contents, that goal, and those students, and we plan educational process and its evaluation with our students as co-constructors of our courses. If. But, the equally important *if* is the next one: if we as teachers take responsibility for our teaching process in a way that we always question it, if we become action researchers who always question educational theories and investigate ways to improve pedagogic theory and practice. If we do all that, we can organize a purposeful educational process that meets individual and societal needs, i. e., we can continuously evaluate and improve the quality of the educational process for the benefit of all of its stakeholders.

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