WAYS TO STIMULATE SELF-EDUCATION IN ADOLESCENCE, IN THE CONTEXT OF A SOCIETY BASED ON LIFELONG LEARNING

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Abstract: *The issue of self-education is of paramount importance in adolescence, a period in which there are major changes in the evolution of the individual's personality and in the relationships s/he builds, both with himself/herself and with the others. Against this background, against the strengthening of the self-image, of self-consciousness, there is also an intensification of self-education concerns. The present paper aims to investigate the possibilities of stimulating these concerns of adolescents, through models, methods and tools, proposed by prospective teachers. The sample of prospective teachers involved in this empirical research consists in Master's students at the Faculty of Letters, University of Craiova, who attend, in parallel with the specialized Master's, the corresponding Teacher training programme. The research methods used are the questionnaire-based survey and the analysis of the outcomes of the activity. As research tools, we used the interview guide and an assessment grid of the students' activity outcomes. The toolkit proposed by the students can be useful in the educational activity carried out with adolescent students.*

Key words: *Self-education; Lifelong learning; Adolescence.*

1. Introduction

Self-education is one of the fundamental, essential factors of the formation and psychic development of the human personality. Dependent on the education, which creates the premises, the necessary basis for its onset, self-education becomes, from the moment of its "activation", a constant concern of the school, social, professional life and activity of any individual, the source of its evolution, the possibility of adapting to the social context which is constantly and rapidly changing.

The possibilities of defining self-education are numerous and varied, imposed by the perspective approached. Thus, if we look at the problem from an individual perspective, that of personality modelling, we can consider that self- **education** is the process by which the individual, consciously, models his own personality, in all its aspects, performs actions meant to contribute to personal development (Mogonea, 2013) or, as mentioned by A. Barna, self-education represents the activity of the human being, carried out in order to improve one's personality (Barna, 1995). According to Moore (1984, apud Sagitova, 2014: 273), self-education can also be seen from the perspective of training, in this context representing "the extent to which in the teaching-learning relationship, it is the learner rather than the teacher who determines the goals, the learning procedures and resources, and the evaluation decisions of the learning program ".

Also, self-education can be defined by reference to the social context. Thus, Brockett and Hiemstra (1991, apud Sagitova, 2014: 272) consider that self-imposed learning activities cannot be separated from the social context in which they take place, because this context represents the space in which they occur.

Attempts to define self-education also trigger other concepts / processes, related, subsumed to it or with which it interacts or relates. We can mention some of these: *self-training, self-learning, learning management, self-directed learning, learning autonomy, self-training.*

As it can be seen, most related concepts are in connection with the issue of self-organized learning. The transformation of each individual into a modelling factor of his own personality is one of the major objectives of education and instruction in any educational system, regardless of its specificity and level of development. Acquiring autonomy in learning are conditions for the formation of a personality that has as essential attributes to cope, in a flexible and creative way, with the ever-changing social requirements.

Self-education is also closely linked to the formation of self-awareness, self-image, and the process of self-knowledge. In this context, we can mention another concept / process related to self-education, namely *self-assessment,* which allows the individual to establish the measure of achieving the proposed objectives, the efficiency of activities, the tools of (self) learning / education / training used.
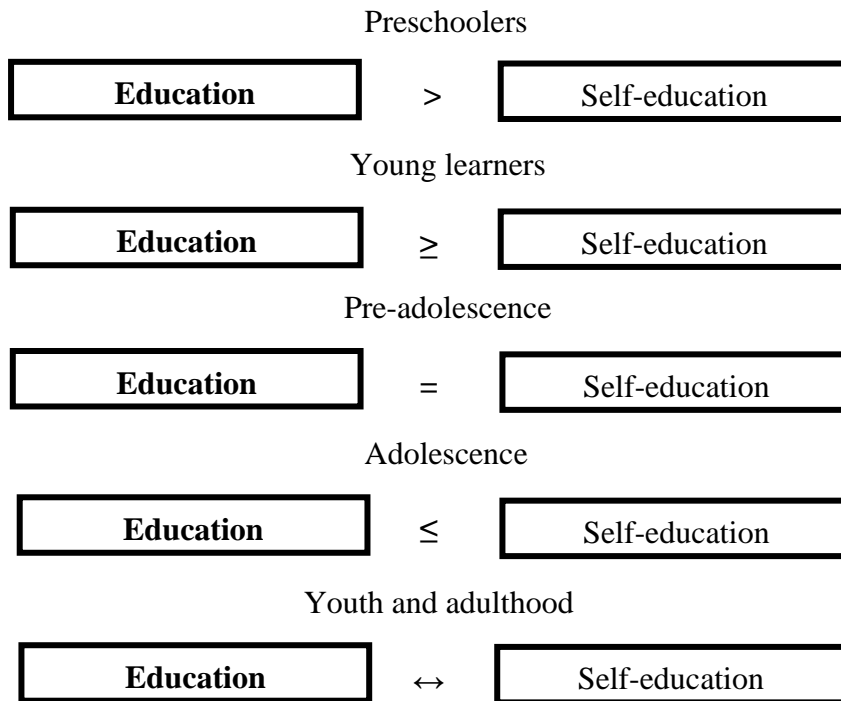
Viewed from the perspective of the relationship with self-knowledge, E. Macavei (2002, apud Mogonea, 2013: 64) identifies five important directions of self-education:

- Self-knowledge - a long and winding process of discovery, revelation of one's own person;
- Self-assessment - involves training the student so that he might be able to appreciate, to measure the volume, quality, operation of their own knowledge, skills, abilities;
- Diagnosis and decision - are approaches closely related to the self-assessment process, but also to the following self-training and self-transformation, which they prepare;
- Formation and self-transformation - are two processes that involve shaping one's personality.

We also mention that the issue of self-education arises, especially in the context of today's society, technological, computerized, in which important are not necessarily information, knowledge, but the skills to capitalize on them and society in which lifelong learning it is a priority.

The relation between education, understood as external action, exercised by a competent adult, and self-education is likely to change throughout the ontogenetic evolution of the individual (Figure 1). Thus, if in the early age, education plays an essential role, as the individual evolves, self-education begins to steadily gain ground until it achieves a crucial role in continuing professional development (especially in youth and adulthood).

Figure 1: The relation between education and self- education throughout the individual's development

Preschoolers

| **Education** | > | Self-education |

Young learners

| **Education** | ≥ | Self-education |

Pre-adolescence

| **Education** | = | Self-education |

Adolescence

| **Education** | ≤ | Self-education |

Youth and adulthood

| **Education** | ↔ | Self-education |

Source: Barna, 1995: 33

        The question that often arises is when is the beginning of self-education. Most opinions converge to the view that it takes place in preadolescence. However, apart from the general landmarks, each individual has his/her own rhythm of evolution and distinctly assimilates all external influences.

        There is also the issue of the possibility that educators have to stimulate the children's self-educational pre-occupations, to encourage them to get involved in activities that have formative and educational effects on them, to provide them with role models.

        What are the most effective ways, how they can be integrated into the child's curriculum, the extent to which non-formal and informal activities, and institutions serving these education modes can contribute to trigger the needs of self-awareness - these are open questions and topical issues for all those who directly or indirectly play a role in the education of children and (pre)adolescents.

2. Characteristics of self-education
        Some scholars analyse the concept of self-education in the context of building a healthy life style (Vaivada, Žydžiūnaitė, 2018).

        Self-education is considered an important direction of modern education, being framed in the broader, more general context of lifelong learning and having the role of helping the student to gain autonomy in the learning process (Sagitova, 2014). We emphasize the idea that self-education is not limited to the independent acquisition of knowledge, but to the development, building of one's own personality, in this context,

being able to even postulate the existence of *self-education competence* (Kniazeva, 1990, apud Adaryukova, 2017).

According to Samuseviča, Strigun (2017), self-education competence is the foundation for the development of many skills: to formulate value judgments and action strategies, to analyze and evaluate one's own activity, to constantly capitalize on one's own experience, to develop the ability to self-regulate and plan one's own evolution.

Learning autonomy can be translated by (Kibataeva, Satygliyeva, Arynhanova, 2015):

• the ability to find and use information;
• analysis, evaluation of alternatives;
• logical approach to ways to solve a problem;
• orientation in unforeseen situations, identification of ways to solve these unforeseen situations.

Schmuck (2011) considers that, in the process of developing autonomy, the child's parents have an important role. Although the foundations for the development of self-educational competence are laid early, the factors that contribute to this development are diverse and complex, the issue attracts a special interest during (pre)adolescence, due to the major changes and accumulations that occur. In this endeavour, the development of self-organization and self-regulation skills are particularly important. In adolescence, they presuppose (see Murray, Rosanbalm, 2017: 1):

• Persisting on complex, long-term projects;
• Problem-solving to achieve goals;
• Delaying gratification to achieve goals;
• Self-monitoring and self- rewarding progress on goals;
• Guiding behavior based on future goals and concern for others;
• Making decisions with broad perspective and compassion for self and others;
• Managing frustration and distress effectively • Seeking help when stress is unmanageable or the situation is dangerous .

The issue of self-education should be correlated with self-awareness, image and self-counsciousness development, the level of self-esteem, which is important in terms of undertaking tasks, responsibilities, accepting the consequences of one's actions and achieving success (Dobrescu, 2013, apud Sandu, Pânișoară, Pânișoară, 2015; Bharathi, Sreedevi, 2016). In adulthood, *cultural awareness* is a priority, culture being considered of utmost importance in the context of lifelong learning (Stancikas, 2019).

For the current generations of adolescents, young people and, why not adults, self-education is closely linked to technology, new communication technologies, the Internet, etc. (Călin, 2015; Abdessettar, Hotte, Gardoni, Abdulraza, 2016).

Mainstream literature lists many ways and methods to stimulate self-educational concerns, especially for pre-adolescents and adolescents, because, once the competence has been developed, later, these concerns are steady in their professional and social life.

In previous works, drawing on Barna (1995) and Comănescu (1996), I made a synthesis of the categories of self-education methods (Mogonea, 2018: 98):

• Methods and procedures for specifying the content of self-education: design of a self-education programme; appeal to reasoning, as a way of self-stimulation; establishing guidelines and one's own maxims; writing a personal diary;

• Methods and procedures of self-control: self-observation; introspection; self-evaluation; reflection; self-control; self-reporting;

• Methods for self-stimulation of self-training concerns: internal conviction; self-control; autosuggestion; use of compensation; use of real or ideal models; use of the design of personal guilt; practice; using communication with other trustworthy people;

• Methods of self-constraint: self-disapproval; self-commuting; self-imposition; self-abandonment; resignation; deliberate self-regression.

In addition to these methods, there is a very wide range of tools that can be used for self-educational purposes.

The development of students' self-educational concerns and the formation of their competence to manage their own learning activity is achieved progressively, through a permanent encouragement from teachers. According to Amirkhanova *et al.* (2015: 785), we can identify the following stages of this process of acquiring students' self-educational autonomy:

- Organizing educational activities, under the guidance of the teacher, in which all the elements (objectives, actions taken, self-control and self-education) are performed and understood under the assistance of a teacher;
- Carrying out some independent activities, by the students , these being possible when one or more components of these activities can be initiated by students, without direct involvement of the teacher, but communicated by the teacher, in a special time allocated to this aspect ;
- The independent accomplishment, by the students, of some self-educational activities, in which all the component elements are assumed and realized by them, from the establishment of the objectives to the possibility to evaluate the efficiency of the respective activity.

3. Research design

The empirical research conducted **aimed to** identify the role of self-education, in the broader, more general context of lifelong learning. We considered some specific objectives:

• Identifying the opinion of prospective teachers on the possibility of stimulating the self-educational concerns of adolescents;

• Integrating students' conception of self-education to the more general context of lifelong learning;

• Identifying concrete ways and tools through which self-evaluation competence can be stimulated.

In order to achieve these research aims, we investigated the truth value of the following statements with presumptive, hypothetical value:

1. Stimulating self-education is an important objective of the activity of the teacher inside and outside the classroom.

2. The teacher possesses concrete ways in which s/he can accelerate the manifestation of self-educational concerns of (pre) adolescents.

The sample of subjects consisted of 32 Master's students at the Faculty of Letters, University of Craiova, in the first year of various Master's programmes and also enrolled to the Teacher training programme, level II - post-high school or university pre-service teachers.

Research methodology

The research used the **focus-group interview**, conducted online via the Zoom application, which was attended by 20 students from the sample of subjects, as well as

the analysis of the students' activity outcomes, the access to these being provided via the Google Classroom app.

The interview guide included seven questions that addressed the issue of self-education in adolescence, the ways in which the teacher has to stimulate the students' self-educational concerns, the personal experiences of the students in the target group being related to the proposed topic.

On the other hand, for the evaluation of the students 'activity outcomes, we used an assessment grid, its 12 items underpinning both scientific and psycho-pedagogical and aesthetic criteria, while also enhancing the students' creativity.

4. Results and discussions

The findings of the investigation will be presented from the perspective of their possibility to contribute to the validation of the hypotheses.

4.a. Thus, in order to validate the truth value of the first hypothetical formulation, ***Stimulating self-education is an important objective of the activity of the teacher inside and outside the classroom***, we capitalized especially on the conclusions drawn from the interview with the Master's students included in the sample (20 students).

The students mentioned several arguments in favour of the importance of self-education in adolescence (and, incidentally, at all ages):

• It contributes to personality modeling;
• It helps improve the learning style;
• It enables accountability;
• It stimulates self-awareness;
• Thanks to self-projection, the individual establishes a set of rules, principles, goals, which contribute to personal growth;
• Self-criticism ensures development;
• Acquiring autonomy, independence;
• Exercising the decision-making skills;
• Stimulating the interaction, the interrelation with those around;
• Strengthening self-esteem;
• Enriching the general culture;
• Development of the ability to document, search for information and select it;
• It stimulates self-learning;

As ways to stimulate self-education, students mentioned general methods, such as: self-criticism, self-projection, self-suggestion, self-testing, self-organization, as well as more specific ones, such as projects; participation in literary activities; reading books; watching documentaries, movies, etc. Among the possible tools to use, most of the students mentioned: personal reflection diary / notebook, online interactive activities, inspiring poster, analysis and assessment grids, questionnaires. In addition to this well-known category of tools, some of the participants proposed some of their own, some examples being presented in this paper.

Other questions posed in the interview were aimed at identifying the students' opinion on the possibility of self-education competence, or on the controlling factors of the self-education of adolescents.

Unanimously, the Master's students believe that we can postulate the existence of self-education competence, whose training is achieved throughout the evolution of the individual, gaining stability during adolescence and beyond.

Regarding the factors that ensure/facilitate self-educational concerns, first of all, mentions were made, first of all, of those that have a direct, sustained, long-term impact: family, school, group of friends, media.

4.b. The students' activity outcomes, in relation to the students who participated in the investigation, allowed for the validation of the second hypothesis of the research: ***The teacher has concrete ways in which he can accelerate the manifestation of self-educational concerns of (pre) adolescent*s**.

The students proposed and developed tools to stimulate and train self-education. For their assessment, we used a grid containing 12 descriptors, grouped into three categories: scientific, psycho-pedagogical and aesthetic (Table 1). We mention that, for each descriptor, we provided the average score.

Table 1: Assessment grid of the students' activity outcomes

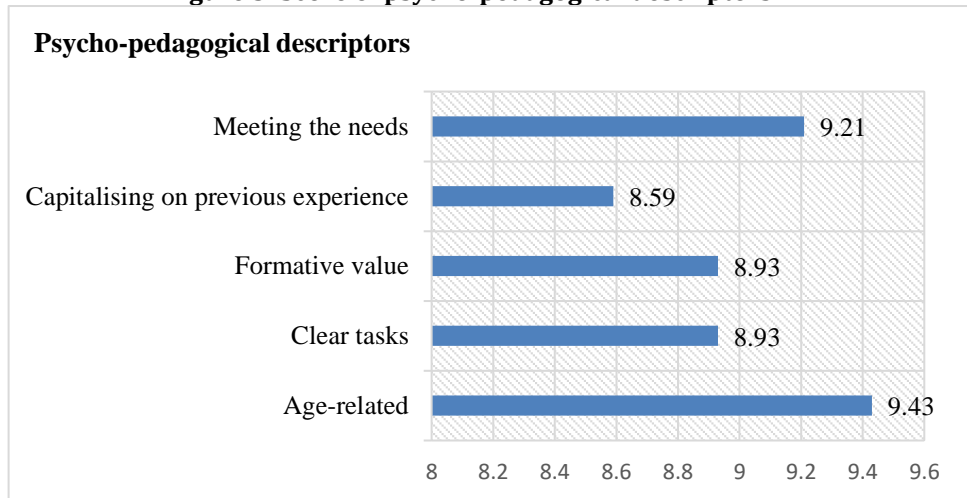| No.	Descriptors	Score (10-1)
1	**Scientific**	
1a	Topic relevance	9.18
1b	Concrete, feasible	9.21
1c	Accurate use of concepts, notoions	9.25
2	**Psycho-pedagogical**	
2a	Age-related	9.43
2b	Clearly formulated tasks	8.93
2c	Formative value	8.93
2d	Based on the adolescents' prior (life) experience	8.59
2e	Meeting the adolescents' needs	9.21
3	**Aesthetic**	
3a	Original graphic design	8.5
3b	Colourful	8.34
3c	User-friendly	9.18
3d	Original	7.65

For the category of scientific descriptors, as shown in Table 1, we aimed for the tool to be: scientifically accurate; applicable; relevant. As it can be seen in Figure 2, the highest score was recorded for scientific accuracy, and the lowest for relevance. Students used the concepts and the scientific notions accurately, even if the tool did not always prove to be topic relevant.

Figure 2: Score of scientific descriptors

The psycho-pedagogical descriptors taken into consideration were the following: age-related; clear tasks; formative value; capitalising on previous experience; meeting the needs.

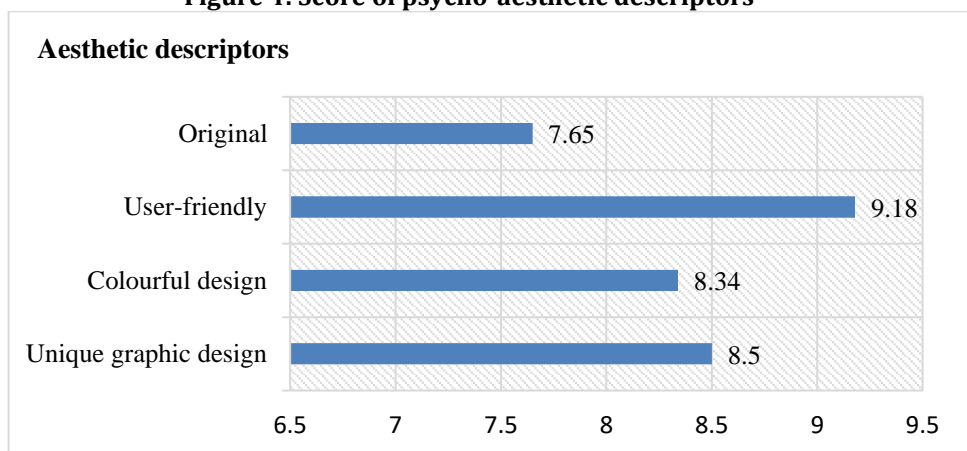**Figure 3: Score of psycho-pedagogical descriptors**

As indicated by Figure 3, students met, first of all, the criterion related to the adaptation to the age specificities and, to the lowest degree, the one regarding the capitalization on the previous experience of the subjects for whom the tool is intended.

From an aesthetic point of view, we aimed for the tool to be: original; user-friendly, colourful and unique graphic design/layout.

Figure 4 shows that originality and the unique graphic design were more difficult for students to achieve. Most of the students adapted the tools presented during the course or identified in the mainstream literature. We also identified situations in which students tried to achieve their own model.

Figure 4: Score of psycho-aesthetic descriptors

As mentioned above, we also identified attempts to design their own models - see below:

Figure 5: Timeline
(Andreea Burcă, 1st year Master's student, Faculty of Letters,
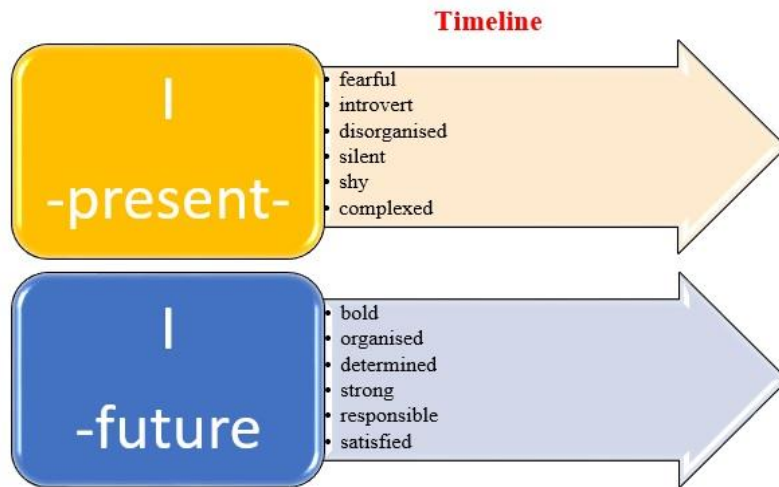University of Craiova)

Timeline

I
-present-

- fearful
- introvert
- disorganised
- silent
- shy
- complexed

I
-future

- bold
- organised
- determined
- strong
- responsible
- satisfied

Figure no 6. The globe of adolescent self-education
(Pîrvulete Elena Camelia, 1st year Master's student, Faculty of Letters,
University of Craiova)

The globe of teenage education

Self-evaluation of learning

What strategies will I adopt?

How will I know I have successfully completed the tasks?

How will I monitor and control my own leaning?

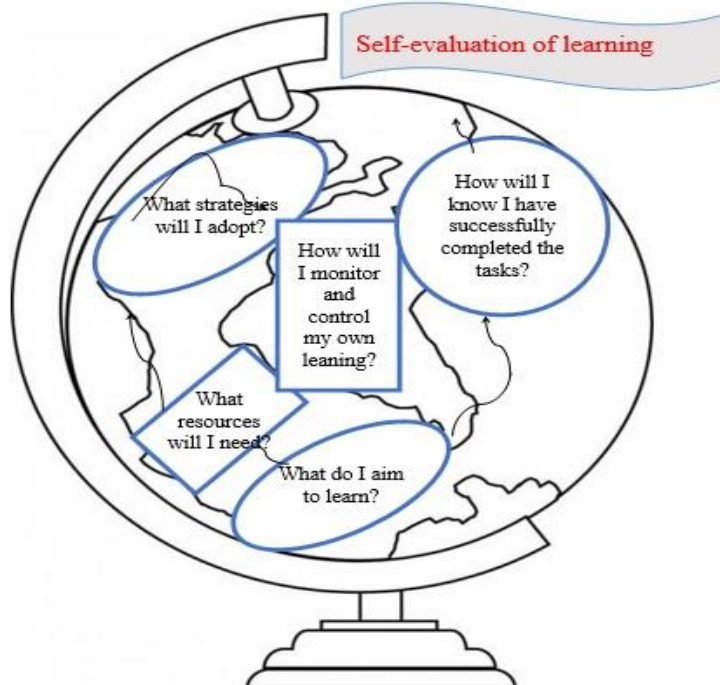What resources will I need?

What do I aim to learn?

274

Figure no 7. Bridge over time
(Fota Cătălina Maria, 1st year Master's student, Faculty of Letters,
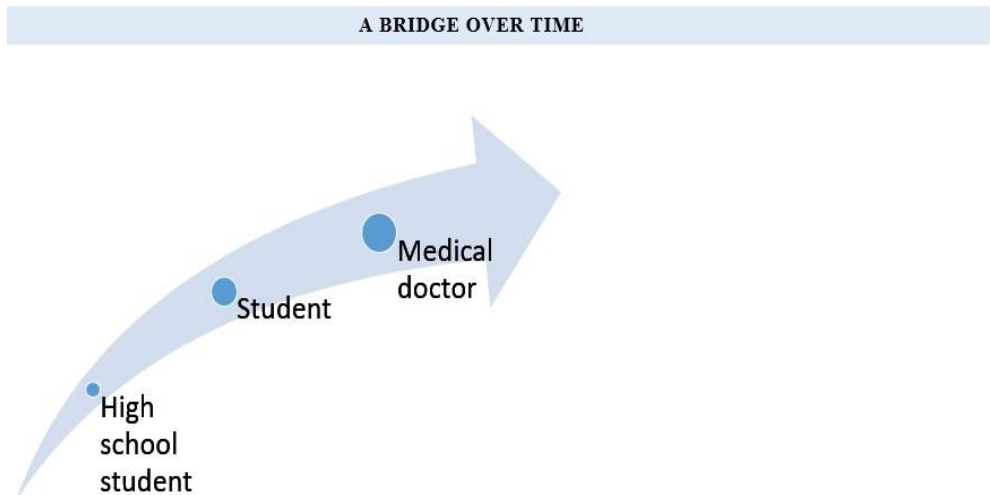University of Craiova)

Figure no 8. Pyramid of self-education time
(Popescu Georgiana, 1st year Master's student, Faculty of Letters,
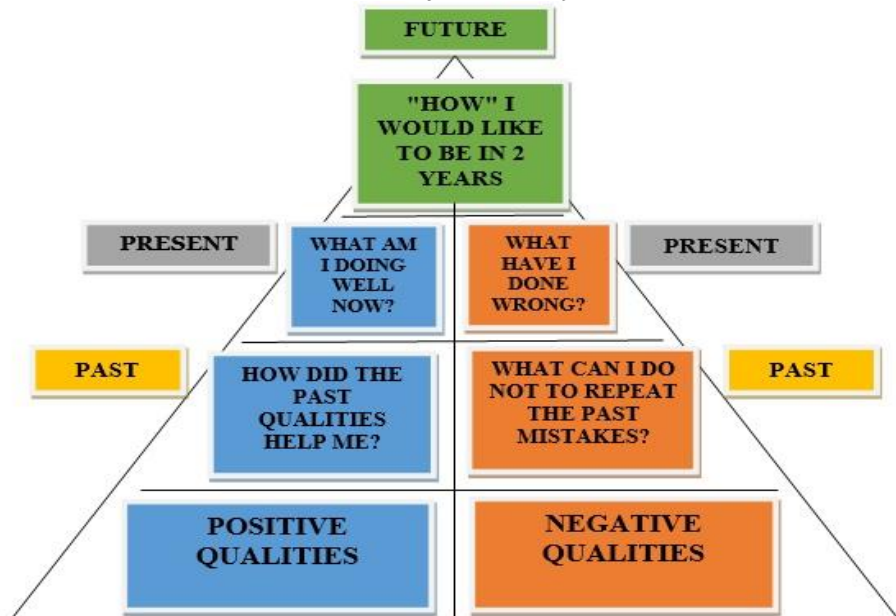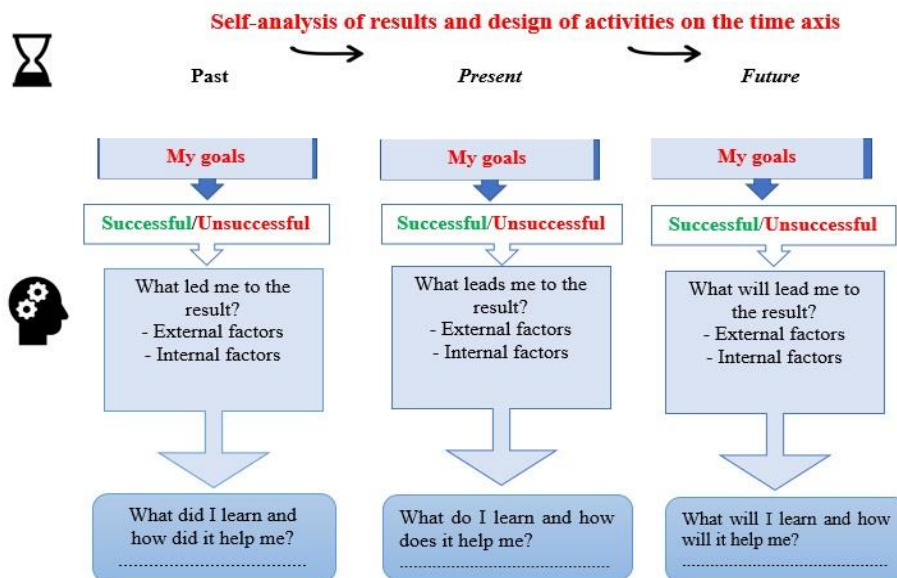University of Craiova)

Figure no 9. Self-analysis of results and design of activities on the time axis
(Ilie Raluca Madalina, 1st year Master's student, Faculty of Letters, University of Craiova)

The examples provided reinforce the idea that, beyond the models and tools of self-education, established in the literature, a teacher can adapt, process and create his/her own tools.

Conclusions

Self-education is a topic of permanent interest, which falls into the more general context of lifelong learning and continuing education. For each of us, self-education is one of the ways to cope with change, to adapt to it, to flexibly approach any new situation. For preadolescents and adolescents, it becomes an increasingly intense concern, which will be perpetuated throughout the life of the individual.

Self-education competence is more and more frequently on the agenda, which allows the individual to identify ways, means, tools through which to develop and improve. In this case, we should also take into account the possibility to foster this competence, to ensure its development. One of the mechanisms through which we can achieve this goal, I think, is the training of trainers, of those able to contribute to shape the personality of children, adolescents, and, admittedly, to shape self-education.

The paper addresses the issue of training prospective teachers in terms of developing the self-education competence their future students. Our research highlighted the fact that students are aware of the importance of self-education and their role in promoting it and in providing educational support and in motivating students.

Apart from identifying the opinion of the subjects included in the investigation on the topic addressed, we also aimed to train them in proposing concrete self-educational methods and tools that would be useful. The students 'proposals, even if they were not necessarily original, demonstrated a good understanding of the problem

and of the action lines they can take to encourage adolescents' self-educational concerns.

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