

Conversation with Vasile Adamescu

Plenary Session: Introduction to the conference theme, Dbl World Conference, May 26, 2015

Please tell us a little about your life when you were a child. Were there schools for people with deafblindness?

Almost 70 years ago, I lost my main senses, hearing and sight, due to meningitis. When I was two years old, my family accidentally left me out in a cold autumn rain and I caught a terrible cold. There were rough times, just after the end of the war and my folks gave me the best treatment they could provide for me at home. My grandmother prepared all sorts of teas for me but it was all in vain. In a few months I was left in silence and darkness. My father took me to a doctor when they realized the severity of my condition, but there was nothing left to be done. I remained silent and unhappy until I turned 11 years old when I was taken to the school for the blind in Cluj Napoca. My condition was new for the school. A committee of teachers and school management were supposed to decide my fate. Many of them were not convinced that there was anything they could do for me. My luck came from Helen Keller, a case well known at the global level. Many teachers had read about her amazing life story and proposed to also try the impossible with me. This is how I ended up a student in the school for the blind. Romania had no specialists in this field, especially because the Romanian school system had never seen a similar case.

So without any specialist teachers, who was it who helped you?

A teacher Florica Sandu came to see me. She was very experienced, having worked in special schools for the blind and deaf. Back then, Florica Sandu was working as a third grade teacher for blind students. She used to take me to her classes where I would sit in the first desk near the teacher's desk. She gave me something to work in parallel with my other older colleagues. After school we would go to the school museum where we spent a long time studying new objects. The teacher's main target was to teach me how to communicate with others.

She realized the importance of pulling me out of the darkness and silence. After months of work she managed to make me utter the first sound, a and p. Then I began to form short words, apa (*water*), papa (*food*) and pa (*bye*). I was very happy. Whenever I met someone, I would tell them these words. It was also a great event for the school: Adamescu said 'a'!

For two years I worked with teacher Florica Sandu in her class for the blind. It was hard for her to work in parallel with me and she didn't have enough time to train me. The idea to make a special class where I would be the single student was proposed to the Education Ministry. After many tries, the ministry agreed and this is how they formed 'Adamescu Class'. It was one of the first steps ever made in the field of deafblindness in Romania. This was happening more than 50 years ago. After 6

years in school, I graduated from elementary school. I was supposed to study 4 years but I had to spend 6 years in order to finish the entire curriculum. I had learned a lot during these 6 years. Teacher Florica Sandu had succeeded to make me speak, to teach me to write and read both in Braille and Latin alphabet, and the most important thing, to communicate with others through Block system. I was very happy with these accomplishments. I remember that back home in Borcea, where I was born, nobody believed that I would ever function as a human being. The only person who believed in my success was grandmother Stanca, my father's mother.

After that successful beginning you had a dream to go to university. Was that possible?

I had a great dream: to go to university. Helen Keller was my motivation. I wanted to be like her. I had learned many trades in school, one of these being typography. Some teachers encouraged me to remain as a worker in the school typography but I didn't want to stay. I tried the entrance examination for Special Education department at the university and I accomplished my dream of becoming a university student. For 4 years I studied a lot, working hard. During my time at the university the Romanian state supported me with a scholarship which I used for my expenses. I started to write my diploma paper in the third year of study: 'Particularities of reality perception lacking hearing and sight'. I graduated from university with very good results and I became a teacher at my former school. I worked in the education system for almost 30 years, teaching children with deafblindness. I have joined the Art School for three years and I perfected my talent in modeling clay. I learned many important things there. I made many clay sculptures throughout the years and I've taught many generations of disabled students the secrets of clay modeling art.

But today have opportunities changed now for young people with deafblindness in Romania?

Throughout the years, many things have changed in Romania in the field of deafblindness. Back then, when I came to school I was considered blind deaf and mute, now I am considered a deafblind person. The state institutions have understood that deafblind people must receive special treatment compared to those with other disabilities. Of course, there are many other things to be solved. Now there are many special classes where deafblind children learn, protected workshops where they can work, specialists who guide them. Society begins to slowly accept us, to consider us more important than before.

We try, alongside Sense International (Romania) and specialists from our country to make as many good things as possible for this category of people. It is very important to identify deafblind children and to educate them from an early age so as to be able to become useful society members.

What a wonderful story of your achievements as a pioneer, of you, and your inspirational teachers finding your own way to overcome the challenges of deafblindness. Thank you very much for sharing this with us.

Note: Vasile Adamescu recently produced an autobiographical book titled 'Facing Life'. Mr. Adamescu spent 10 years working on this book which was written in Braille alphabet then transcribed by computer and printed for the general public. Check out more about Mr. Adamescu on YouTube:
(www.youtube.com/watch?v=eqnZ6pcipG0)