Self assessment of key competences in Adult Education

From the Status Artis in Europe to a methodological framework proposal

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Abstract

The paper presents the main results of the Grundtvig Project VINTAGE, an European Project aimed at developing an online digital tool for self evaluation of key competences in Adult age, funded by the Lifelong Learning Programme (Reference: 527349-LLP-1-2012-1-IT-GRUNDTVIG-GMP).

Laura Vettraino and Eleonora Guglielman present here the results, yet the whole partnership is the collective author and owner of the project outputs. The "Status artis" research of the European background of existing strategies and approaches for the assessment and self-assessment of competences in adult age education, offers the starting point. The research report inspires a methodological framework, based on a self-reflective pathway, offering a set of indicators and descriptors and a checklist to guide Adults in the self-assessment of key competences. This framework is at the base of an online digital tool for a guided process of self assessment of key competences, easy to use, available for adult learners, that can be enacted also without the support of evaluation experts.

1. Introduction

Key competences in the shape of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to each context are fundamental for each individual in a knowledge-based society. Recalled and described in the Recommendation 2006/962/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning, these competences provide added value for the Labor Market, social cohesion and active citizenship by offering flexibility and adaptability, satisfaction and motivation. Yet key competences are often acquired in non-formal and informal contexts; this makes them often not assessed and recognized for personal and professional improvement of Adults.

With the support of European Commission (EACEA - Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency) a group of seven European Adult Educational Institutions and Educational Research Institutes form Italy, Sweden, Germany, Ireland, Austria, Netherlands, decided to tackle this problem by developing an online tool for self-assessment of key competences in adult education. Actually VINTAGE, that stands for "online tool for self eValuatIoN of key competences in adulT AGE" is an ongoing European project funded through Grundtvig Lifelong Learning Programme [1]. In order to meet this challenge the Project Partners realized a "Status artis" research describing the European background of existing strategies and approaches for the assessment and self-assessment of competences in adult age education. On this base they designed a methodological framework, based on a self-reflective pathway, offering a set of indicators and descriptors for the assessment of key competences and a checklist to guide the self-assessment.

A beta version of the online tool, mirroring the methodological framework, is available for a piloting session, planned for Summer 2014. The final edition of the VINTAGE digital tool for self-assessment will be available by the end of 2014.

2. Research on key competences: a source for an empirically based tool of self assessment

By the analysis of the National evaluation approaches and systems, the VINTAGE partners found several decisive elements for the development of VINTAGE assessment tool in a European Perspective. The proposed self evaluation framework therefore is well founded in the analysis of literature, other projects and practice examples in the field of defining Key Competence definitions, assessment methods and tools including Levels of Mastery, assessment items such as, for example, indicators, checklists and questionnaires. It seems that the main evidence of the Vintage State-of-art research on assessment of competences is that no previous approaches, projects or tools specifically developed for the self-assessment of Key Competences in adult education can be reported. The research also shows that a very common way of defining and assessing competences is to evaluate a person`s skills, knowledge and attitudes.

The matrix analysis of the "Status artis report" [2] at the base of the proposed self-assessment framework includes the following headings: Tools, Approaches, Functions, Levels, Arrangements, Contexts, Users. We highlight here the most relevant

for the development of VINTAGE framework. Several approaches to assessment have been detected in the instruments: Biographical, Self-diagnostic, Diagnostic, Orientation, Learning, Evidencing, Guidance/coaching, Validation/certification (etc.).

In most tools there is no information available on levels of mastery, but in the cases in which there are, references to the EQF [3] and national derivate of that can be reported. There are attempts to create hierarchies of learning outcomes and ways to rate them.

The functions closely relate to the approaches described above may be summarized in: raising awareness of one's potential; empowerment; support in one's learning/development process (formative assessment); providing evidence of competences and achievements; summative assessment to identify learning outcomes; validation, certifications, employability/mobility; self-direction (etc.).

The assessment arrangements may be either: individual computer based tests, or arrangements involving peers, assessments involving assessors in the educational setting, assessors on the job, closed or open items of assessment, in educative, work, HRD, and community settings, involving various intensities of evidence (from answers to questions to in depth interviews or serious case studies etc.).

Adults are not the main target group. That highlights the importance of the proposed analysis and design of a self-assessment framework for non-vocational adult education. Many other targets indeed have been recognized in the research report: for example Pupils/young adults in transfer from school to vocational training and/or from training into professional life/job, Students in the course of study or in transfer period towards work, Professionals in companies/schools/universities, (etc.).

A very detailed review of indicators and descriptors of the 8 key competences supports these findings and offer the base for the development of the self-assessment items.

3. VINTAGE Framework

Vintage assessment framework focuses on actual behaviour a person is demonstrating in a realistic context, or rather a reconstruction of a realistic context (due to the preconditions of a self-assessment process through an online tool), in a particular situation and evaluating the quality of the performance [4]. This chosen approach towards the assessment of learning outcomes and competences is as well supported by research that highlights the importance of the performance side in demonstrating (Key) Competence within the field of education and Lifelong learning.

Of course, the traditional tests were insufficient to evaluate a complex set of components. To be effective, the Vintage assessment set up and process assigns an active role to the user, calling on the user's responsibility and autonomy in an evaluation process that is based on self-reflective attitude. Engaging the user in such an active and responsible way additionally improves the self-assessment competences and aims at raising motivation of the adult learner and supporting the idea of self-directness of Lifelong learning. It is a process that requires involvement and participation by the user, and a good dose of reflection, bringing into play meta-competences typical of the self-assessment process and therefore particularly suited to an adult context.

The Framework provides, for each competence, a guided procedure that invites the user to read the description of a common situation he has experienced before, and choice one of the 5 possible behaviors that follow the description, each one corresponding to a level of mastery. The user starts by choosing the level he considers appropriate to describe his mastery in that competence. The user is requested to recognize him in a given behavior, recalling to his memory a similar situation he managed at his best. Then, the user is invited to estimate his behavior in a quality scale from 1 to 5 for each of the following dimensions of the action: 1. Critical thinking, 2. Creativity, 3. Initiative, 4. Problem solving, 5. Risk assessment, 6. Decision making, 7. Constructive management of feelings, 8. Adequate use of resources, 9. Effectiveness 10. Impact.

The same procedure must be repeated for each of the area of the competence, including different areas or clusters, which should be all evaluated to obtain a complete result. The output of the self-assessment process of each competence is the description of the competence profile, resulting from the combination of the level of mastery and the quality rate expressed for all competence clusters. This self-assessment model is grounded on the approach of self-diagnosis in the contest of adult education and reverses the traditional evaluation pathway: the adult learner is asked to recognize himself in a profile, activating self-reflection and self-direction capabilities. This recognition is the starting point to carry out the self-assessment process, and to acquire awareness to draw a self-portrait that fully represents the person and the possessed competences.

4. References

[1] http://vintage.euproject.org

[2] van Lakerveld J., Gussen I., de Zoete J., *State of the art of Key competences and assessment in Europe*, PLATO, Leiden, September 2013.

[3] European Commission, *Key Competences for Life Long Learning, European Reference Framework*, Bruxelles, 2010.

[4] Dochy, F., Heylen, L. & Van de Mosselaer, H., Assessment in onderwijs. Nieuwe toetsvormen en examinering in studentgericht onderwijs en competentiegericht onderwijs, Uitgeverij LEMMA BV: Utrech, 2002.