

A CURRICULUM FOR THE INITIAL TRAINING OF ADULT EDUCATION STAFF EVALUATORS

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Abstract

A curriculum for the training of the professionals involved in the evaluation of AE staff is the main output of the EduEval project, an EU project part of the LLP Grundtvig Program started in January 2014 and coordinated by University of Milano-Bicocca, Italy (<http://www.edueval.eu/>). The training curriculum was designed by the University of Bari "Aldo Moro" (Italy) using blended learning methodologies. The methodological principle in training activities is the triangulation (Denzin 1989, Greene 2007, Hussein 2009), therefore a complex process conceived with different criteria (i.e., educational tasks) cannot be evaluated by means of a single perspective, but it needs multiple analyses and complementary perspectives. The training curriculum has been planned using self-assessment triangulations, external and context evaluations. The EduEval project aimed at defining the initial training of Adult Education Staff evaluators in order to promote a European culture of AE assessment systems.

Keywords: Training, Evaluation, Adult Education, EduEval, Curriculum.

1. INTRODUCTION

The evaluation of professionals involved in Adult Education, the quality of the Adult Education system and the competences of Adult Educators have a crucial role in European policies (EC, 2001; 2006; 2007, 2011; ECETIS 2011; AGADE; Research voor Beleid 2010; SEALLL 2005-2007; Carlsen & Irons, 2003; Jääger & Irons, 2006; VINEPAC 2006-2008; CAPIVAL 2010).

AE staff evaluation has a social relevance, as it can support the professional training of operators, the quality of educational actions and the promotion of non-formal learning processes within complex professional contexts, in which problems and emergencies are managed on a daily basis. Notwithstanding it is a central issue, AE staff evaluation is carried out via non-official procedures by professionals with disparate training and professional experiences (educators, trainers, supervisors, consultants, coordinators; they may have a long-standing experience in AE contexts, but they lack a specific assessment-based training), or by quality certification authorities or by external institutions following pre-set standards. However, they often lack a thorough knowledge of the specific educational context to be assessed (See *Public Research Report*, EduEval Project). There is also a lack of service and typology mapping of professional figures involved in educational practices, thus resulting in a fragmented and complex evaluation procedure. EduEval, a European Grundtvig project started in 2014 and coordinated by University of Milano-Bicocca (Italy) has been

planned in order to overcome this situation by defining the professional profile of AE staff evaluators on a European level thanks to the creation of a training curriculum for AE staff evaluators.

2. EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK

Some recent European policies dealing with AE underlined the central role of quality assessment of educational systems, of staff professional training and the competences acquired in formal, informal and non-formal learning contexts (Research voor Beleid, 2010, Carlsen & Irons, 2003; Jääger & Irons, 2006). Lifelong learning, professional development and learning validation - as well as the competences acquired in non-formal and informal contexts - represent some important priorities at European level (Jarvis, 2009). The involvement of adults in non-formal and informal contexts is greater than in formal contexts. Nevertheless, any form of competence acquired in the former are often not certified and recognised, therefore they cannot be used in professional contexts. The most recent European documents [Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality, EC, 2001; Adult learning: It is never too late to learn, EC 2006; Action Plan on Adult Learning: It is always a good time to learn, EC, 2007; Resolution on a renewed European agenda for adult learning, EC, 2011; Renewed Agenda for Adult Learning 2012-2014; EC, 2011] require the need to develop a quality assessment of AE services (by means of validation systems, standards and guidelines) and people involved in AE contexts (by means of a more precise definition of profiles and professional competences to be considered in the initial training and during the professional activities).

The international debate concerning competence-based profiles of educational tasks underlined that is very difficult to get a well-defined model of all assessment procedures and methods. Furthermore, the syntagm "educational work" is difficult to define because it concerns a varied target of users and an action, which is carried out in different contexts (communities, prisons, centres of aggregation, therapeutic centres and so on) and for different purposes (accompaniment, training, supervision, etc.). Therefore, educational tasks are a complex "object to be evaluated" and the evaluation of the educational work requires different perspectives, methods and practices [Perla, 2004; Perla, Vinci 2015].

In the definition of the AE staff evaluator profile and in the creation of the relating assessment model, not only observable and measurable actions should be taken into consideration, but personal behaviours and actions carried out during this kind of experiences should be considered as well. The theoretical framework used in the EduEval project considers educational tasks "a complex form of action through which tasks and projects are carried out" (Harré, 2000, p. 74). A "competence for educational tasks" only refers to the specific education practices. In the project there is also a strong reference to the so called multidisciplinary competences (Rey, 2012) (Problem solving, group management, creativity, relational skills, coping with anxiogenic situations) which are fundamental in the definition of the profile. All these models are consistent with the assessment of educational practices and use information triangulation methodologies, that is a process that can interconnect objective, subjective and intersubjective competences to be assessed.

The EduEval project entailed an assessment perspective that includes: a) the collection of information (documentation) as well as reliable and relevant evidence that may be used as markers of educational competence; b) the personal opinion of those assessed based on self-assessment procedures; c) an external evaluation based on the approval by those involved in the evaluation process. The EduEval approach considers the assessment of educational tasks as a way to recognise and validate AE staff evaluators' competences relying on motivational features like self-assessment and reflective practices (Perla, 2004).

3. BEFORE THE CURRICULUM

The EduEval project, an EU project part of the LLP Grundtvig Program started in January 2014 and coordinated by University of Milano-Bicocca, Italy (<http://www.edueval.eu/>), involved six partners from five different European countries (Italy, Latvia, Poland, Greece and Spain) and aimed at redefining the professional profile of the evaluator of Adult Education (AE) staff at a European level, in order to guarantee the quality of AE. The methodology used was based on a collaborative approach for the development of knowledge that arises from the importance of a cooperation between practitioners (holders of practical knowledge) of the AE staff and academic researchers (holders of theoretical knowledge) [Perla 2010; Desgagné, Bednarz, Couture, Poirier, Lebus 2001; Anadon 2007; Phillips, Kristiansen, Vehviläinen, Gunnarsson 2013].

Unlike research-action stages, this part has been designed as a co-equal relationship between professionals and researchers (Day 1996, p.32; Biémark, Dejean & Donnay 2008, pp. 71-84; Desgagné, 2001; Lieberman, 1986a, 1986b). This stage entails a mutation of researchers' roles, as they create knowledge

together with operators (Biémar et alii, 2008, p. 71-84). This is why the term *co-equal* is used in this stage. In Research-Action procedures operators "learn and do" what researchers theorise (for example they tend to observe and reuse the methodology set out by researchers at the end of the research stage), while in Research-Co-Build procedures researchers and operators are "partners" in the research stage even though they are driven by different needs. While researchers tend to create general knowledge to be shared with the scientific community (therefore educational practices are only their starting points for research), operators "enter" research procedures in order to favour practice-based knowledge (Donnay & Charlier, 2006) that can be used in professional settings.

In this methodological frame, the EduEval project designed and carried out an investigation stage that included a desk research on the AE system and a series of interviews with practitioners involved in the evaluation of AE professionals in each of the partner countries. A mobility workshop (Crete, 14-17 July 2014) and a wiki-collective workgroup (<http://wiki.edueval.eu/>) aimed to share knowledge, ideas, theories and practices about the Evaluation of the AE staff between professionals (educators, consultants, mediators, etc.), consortium partners, stakeholders and researchers. Finally, a Pilot Training Course, designed and realized by University of Bari "Aldo Moro" (Italy) for the training of the professionals involved in the evaluation of AE staff, aimed to understand the evaluation and training role in order to enhance the organizational improvement and to develop a deep awareness of the AE staff evaluator profile.

3.1. The Pilot Training Course

A Pilot Training Course, started in February 2015, was designed and lead by University of Bari (Italy) for the training of the professionals involved in the evaluation of AE staff. It was focused on the following objectives:

- understanding the evaluation formative role aimed to the organizational improvement;
- understanding how data collection instruments can be used, according to EduEval evaluation purpose;
- developing a deep awareness of the Adult Education staff evaluator profile;
- developing knowledge about the required and expected professional competences of Adult Education staff evaluator;
- developing a more complex view of work processes in Adult Education contexts.

The course was addressed to participants aged 25 to 65 years (the minimum number of participants in the course was 10, the maximum was 25 for each country). Each partner freely chose the participants (with open calls, selections, etc.), by following some project-related criteria: the age of participants (25-65 years); to have a role consistent with the project group (evaluator of Adult Education staff; students attending Courses to become Adult Educators and/or evaluators; consultants who carry out staff evaluation; researchers involved in the evaluation of Adult Education).

The course participants were selected by each project partner in order to guarantee the heterogeneity of the professional profiles and the exchange of expertise and acquired competences within an Adult Education Organization. They have been working as evaluators within different educational services (intercultural integration services, inmates custody services, homeless people services, extra-scholastic educational organizations - cooperatives, recreation and social-educational centres - community centres, cultural services - libraries, cultural centres, etc.).

The training course has been designed with a combined structure and divided into didactic unities. The 30-hour course was divided in two modules: a 20-hour "in presence" module and a 10-hour "e-learning" module. Trainers used different group methods and strategies to promote a thoughtful reflection about one's own professional experiences: maps; case studying; brainstorming; writing, professional practices' enhancement and empowerment; assessment activities simulations; reflective activities.

The methodological principle in training activities was the triangulation (Denzin 1989, Greene 2007, Hussein 2009), therefore a complex process conceived with different criteria (like educational tasks) cannot be evaluated by means of a single perspective, but it needs multiple analyses and complementary perspectives.

As a result of the training activities and group debates, the educational work has emerged as a complex framework to be assessed, in which many variables are included connected with one's personal and professional life, the community life, with micro and macro variables.

The result was the development of knowledge (general, specialized, and context-based), abilities (both general and referred to specific evaluation work processes) and competences to strengthen the professional

role of Adult Education staff evaluators. Thanks to training activities and outcomes, the AE staff Evaluator has been defined as a professional figure with different competences, having specific multi-functional characteristics to work in different contexts. The detailed description of the relating profile underlines his/her training period, knowledge and expected competences (methodologies, techniques and tools that he/she should master), intervention areas and the ethical principles that lead his/her professional practice.

4. DEFINITION OF THE EDUEVAL CURRICULUM

The aim of the EduEval project was the definition in a curriculum of a flexible training model that could be applied to AE staff evaluators, together with the creation of a Handbook for the participants and some Guidelines for trainers (in press).

The training curriculum has been planned in order to gather different professional figures so that different specific evaluation-related competences and multidisciplinary educational competences could meet and in order to define the complex issue of AE staff activities completely.

4.1 Educational stage

The training course for AE staff evaluators has been planned using blended learning methodologies. It is a 100-hour course: 70 in presence (64 hours + 6 hours for individual supervision) and 30 hours in e-learning mode. The blended learning methodology has been carefully planned in order to interchange in-presence and online modes, using the following schedule:

- In-presence activities begin with the introduction and aims of the course; creation of the training group, metacognitive and reflection-based activities in order to trigger implicit representations and beliefs about the assessment of educational tasks (Perla 2010). This in-presence stage (more details in section 4.2) is very important to share EduEval training with previous personal and professional experiences and to create a common interpersonal space within the group of participants.
- Activities have been carried out via an online platform (Moodle), an open-source Course Management System (CMS) designed using the principles defined by social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) and aimed at enhancing educational and learning processes. The online training entails some aims: 1) analyse the contents provided by means of: *SCORMs (Sharable Content Object Reference Model)*; a Glossary in order to create a common specific lexis; an online repository for training documentation; a Wiki page (collaborative writing platform); a Forum and other e-learning activities managed in an online environment; 2) peer assessment activities (Limone 2012, Baldassarre 2011) such as workshops, tests, Jigsaws and other group activities that could be assessed (e.g. simulation: creation of assessment tools such as rubrics, portfolios or audits). The e-learning module has been planned with the cooperation of Prof. M. Baldassarre and Dr. V. Tamborra (University of Bari "Aldo Moro", Italy).
- The third stage entails in-presence activities once again. Here, the core activities were the analysis and critical reprocessing of the concepts learnt also by sharing different points of view, the support of participants in the learning process, peer assessment procedures, learning new concepts (see section 4.2 for details concerning training methods and tools used).

4.2 Methods and tools

Training activities have been planned following some methodological frameworks, such as:

Reflectivity, meta-cognition and analysis of practices: the pragmatist framework based on reflective thinking comes from Dewey (1938) and Schön (1983, 1987); according to them, some rational technical-instrumental methods may show flaws especially in educational environments. Here, professionals do not apply theories or consistent solution, but they put forward intervention hypotheses that consider the ongoing complex processes as well as their critical features and flexibility. AE staff educational tasks are many-sided, unpredictable and require heuristic, reflective and metacognitive rationality, that is the ability to meditate during actions and tasks, to analyse problems and pre-set solutions in order to adapt them to the specific case. The reflective paradigm overcomes rational-technical models, in which professionals only execute standard procedures; here, any experience is integrated, models and theories are tested and operators are directly involved in the creation and documentation of their own professional tasks. This professional model, based on the figure of a "practical-reflective expert" with specific competences arising both from scientific-rational and experience-based knowledge, had a great impact in school contexts (Perla 2010, 2011, 2012b; Mortari, 2003, 2009; Fabbri 2007; Striano 2001; Altet ed Paquay 2002; Fabbri, Striano, Melacarne, 2008; Montalbetti, 2005; Brookfield 1995; Jarvis 1999; Korthagen 2001; Perrenoud 2001).

Together with the reflective and metacognitive frameworks, which enhance professionals' expertise while in action, a core framework used in the EduEval course is represented by the analysis of educational practices, or the analysis of real situations in order to deduce a theoretical, a *posteriori* model from the professional practices (Altet, 2003). Educational practices are the only way to provide information and problems to be analysed; therefore, educational theories are always proved in effective situations (Dewey, 1967).

The EduEval training course uses two reflective-metacognitive tools for AE staff evaluators that are used to understand a complex and unpredictable system and to build assessment tools for specific contexts by sharing knowledge among AE professionals, trainers and evaluation professionals.

An example is represented by the analysis of a case study dealing with AE contexts. Case studies are defined as a deep analysis of a situation or an original event in its different levels and dimensions (Yin 1994a, 1994b; Mortari, 2007; Riva, 2007). Used as an effective research method to analyse and understand complex realities, case studies are also writing models used to support professional training activities about one's own professional experience (Damiano, 2007). The EduEval training curriculum entails the analysis of AE staff evaluation cases. Here, participants analyse assessment tools, modalities and criteria used in an AE context.

Another tool used in the EduEval course is represented by mind maps as a useful tool to highlight participants' representations concerning the assessment of educational tasks: mind maps allow a graphic representation of the implicit features of beliefs dealing with such a complex topic. Mapping activities are one of the most effective and functional representation of knowledge; maps represent the ways in which minds organise and apply knowledge by relating ideas and concepts dealing with a specific field: in other words, maps represent the way knowledge is organised in human minds. Maps are tools that are placed between reality and representation, and transfer direct experiences in analogical scenarios, thus reducing the gap between those who learn and the object to be analysed. They are logical-iconic mediators used to represent concepts and are highly representative tools for the self-reflective analysis of implicit, emotive, motivational, ideological, cultural and experiential dimensions in a profession (Vinci, in Perla 2012b). Mind maps are graphic representations of information arranged in a hierarchical structure, in which the learning and development of cognitive concepts are based on free mind associations starting from a core element. Images, colours and connection lines used in mind maps are more representative than words: they stimulate a deep network of associations, suggestions and ideas, enhancing creative (both personal and group) skills, imagination, memory, unconscious mind resources, mindsets and confidence (Novak, Gowin, 1995; Novak, 2001; Buzan, 2006; Buzan, Buzan, 2003).

Narration is another quality-based tool used in the EduEval course because of its epistemic (Lyotard, 1981; Clandinin & Connelly 2000) and training-related nature (Formenti, 1996; Demetrio, 1996, Bruner 1992; 2002). Perla (2012a) states that through narration activities it is possible to analyse the inner psychical, existential, emotive, motivational and relational processes of a narrator; to analyse meanings of events by triggering reflective and experience-based processes; to explain knowledge deriving from actions; to reconstruct the past and to preserve (individual and common) memories by means of writing practices (Perla, 2012a).

The EduEval course for AE staff evaluators entails training narration-based tools used both in in-presence and online modules. Reflective writing activities, that is a professional writing used as a self-training tool for adults (Perla, 2012b) represents an example. Professional writings represent a tool that can develop professional competences by means of the analysis of working processes and by means of "an overview on the complex nature of organisational contexts" (Perla, 2012b, p. 10; Pastré, 2002; Habboub, Lenoir, Tardif, 2008; Pastré, Lenoir, 2008; Pastré, Mayen, Vergnaud, 2006). By means of reflective writings, the participants could analyse their experience by reflecting on it and intertwining it with their personal, relational, ethical and ideological beliefs that distinguish their professional actions.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The EduEval course allowed the mapping of AE staff competences within the countries involved in the project, thus comparing cultures, models, methodologies and evaluation tools used in social and educational environments.

The assessment of educational works requires a threefold perspective (Pellerey, 2004; Castoldi, 2012) concerning a subjective, objective and intersubjective dimension that could interpret the complex range of processes in Adult Education. The methodological principle used in the EduEval model was represented by

triangulation (Denzin, 1989; Greene, 2007) because a complex reality made up of different dimensions (like educational contexts) needs a series of perspectives and complementary comparisons.

Project results, drafted in a Handbook and some Guidelines (in press), explain this curriculum in order to develop flexible training activities meant for evaluators in different EDA contexts.

The long-term aim is to include this professional profile in a more precise legislative recognition at an international level, by means of specific training activities, which are part of the *European qualifications network* that can set definite criteria for the creation of a recognised register for EDA staff evaluators. This figure would be defined as a specialised professional, which works in formal and non-formal educational fields, using assessment tools and methods in order to enhance the educational tasks carried out by those involved in AE contexts.

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