



Self Evaluation of Key Competences Fostering Adult Lifelong Learning

Laura Vettrano¹, Eleonora Guglielma¹, Marco Guspini²

¹Learning Community srl (Italy), educommunity – ²Educational Community (Italy)

¹info@learningcom.it, ²info@educommunity.it

Abstract

“Key competences are the foundation for lifelong learning and success in individuals' careers and professions. The development of key competences has to continue beyond compulsory education, in both initial and continuing VET. [...] The challenge is to achieve the best possible combination of vocational skills and key competences both to a high standard” (Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament - 2011). It lacks a culture of Key Competencies among common people, and their value is not enough valorized. Key competences are often acquired and developed in non-formal and informal contexts; this makes them not assessed nor recognized and consequently not used by adults for their personal development and professional improvement.

A great work has been done at a European level about the strategies and tools for assessing skill and competences; nevertheless, adult educational Systems are still mainly based on traditional models of external evaluation, assessment is often made by trainers and teachers on the basis of quantitative tests and assigned tasks. This is a critical point, since adult learners often refuse this kind of assessment, that they tend to associate to past school negative experience. This affects also the lack of motivation of adult learners to come back in the educational system, both in continuing education and NVAE pathways (European Guide Lines for validating non formal and informal learning - 2009).

The improvement of self assessment culture (for trainers and learners), the development of a tool able to make visible learning outcomes deriving from informal experiences, a framework to describe and acquire awareness of owned key competences, improvement of culture of key competences, addressed both to trainers/experts and learners in NVAE, promotes high performance and represent an innovation in systems and practices in this field.

The proposed digital tool represents an innovative service for self assessment of key competences of adult learners supported by an easy to use ICT based tool for self assessment of key competences, that shall be used to support the design of a plan of personal development of low qualified individuals to face new learning challenges and to support trainers and adult education Institution in their orientation services.

That is what the GRUNDTVIG VINTAGE project “Online tool for self eValuatIoN of key competences in aduT AGE” (Project Number: 527349-LLP-1-2012-1-IT-GRUNDTVIG-GMP - Agreement Number: 2012-4192/001-001) www.vintage.euproject.org aims to achieve by involving relevant Adult education Institutions at European level: Learning Community (IT); WISAMAR Bildungsgesellschaft gemeinnützige GmbH (DE); die Berater® (AT); STPKC Swedish TelePedagogic Knowledge Centre AB (SE); Meath Community Rural and Social Development Partnership Limited (IE); PLATO - Platform Opleiding, Onderwijs en Organisatie (NL); FORMAZIONE 80 (IT) and starting from the sharing of knowledge and practices about self evaluation of key competences at European level.

1. Introduction

There are many references, documents and guidelines looking towards the Future of Education, in order to determine how education and training policy can adequately prepare learners for life in the future society, to envisage which competences will be relevant and how these will be acquired in 2020-2030. Among these we want cite the 2011 JRC report “The Future of Learning: Preparing for change” [1] that designs the conceptual map for the future of learning, focusing on three key words related to Education and Training: Personalization, Collaboration, Informalization. Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are presented as the strategic support of the conceptual map, fit with these three key words, and are also highlighted as a support for the documentation and validation for informally acquired skills. Previously the 2010 Joint Progress Report of the Council [2] and the Commission on the implementation of the Education & Training 2010 work Programme, highlighted Key Competences (KC) as a reference model for education and training in Europe and the ET 2020 “Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training” [3] presented the acquisition of transversal KC as a strategic objective. In 2009 the “Communication Key Competences for a Changing World” [4] took stock of the state of play of the implementation of the Recommendation of



the European Parliament and of the Council on KC for lifelong learning [5] and suggested the areas for further work.

The project idea of GRUNDTVIG VINTAGE - "Online tool for self eValuatIoN of key competences in adult AGE" (Project Number: 527349-LLP-1-2012-1-IT-GRUNDTVIG-GMP - Agreement Number: 2012-4192/001-001) www.vintage.euproject.org takes origin from these debates and indications with the aim to bring them in to practice in the field of the Adult Education.

Indeed, experimenting an approach of self assessment and validation of key competences in NVAE represents a possible realization and integration, in a unique tool, of the three key dimensions of the envisaged future for learning: personalization, collaboration, informalization.

The improvement of self assessment culture (for trainers and learners), the development of a tool able to make visible learning outcomes deriving from informal experiences, a framework to describe and acquire awareness of owned key competences, improvement of culture of key competences, addressed both to trainers/experts and learners in NVAE, promotes high performance and represent an innovation in systems and practices in this field.

The digital tool proposed by VINTAGE represents an innovative service for self assessment of key competences of adult learners supported by an easy to use ICT based tool for self assessment of key competences, that shall be used to support the design of a plan of personal development of low qualified individuals to face new learning challenges and to support trainers and adult education Institution in their orientation services.

In the actual European economic frame, the potential impact of the diffusion of the culture of key competences and self-assessment appears more meaningful and also connected, even indirectly, to the Continuous Education and VET. This assumes more value if related to the progressive extension of the working life, due to the reform of policies of retirement operated in several European Countries.

The project VINTAGE started in January 2013 and actually it is at the stage of the "Status Artis" analysis, then here we can describe the planned phases, actions and expected outputs. The strength point of this initial condition is that whoever (adult learners, practitioners, experts, etc.) is interested in can experience the tool and can take active part in the piloting of the proposed solutions.

1 Self evaluation of key competences – fostering adult lifelong learning

The actions of VINTAGE project, by developing Online tool for self eValuatIoN of key competences, will support adult learners assessing the owned key competences, and so identifying the areas in which they need to acquire/develop/improve a cluster of competences. The proposed self-assessment tool is based on one of the main liberal principle of adult education: the diffusion and implementation of self-assessment culture. The online tool for self-assessment of key competences represents indeed an instrument to guide adult learner to acquire awareness of the owned competences and Learning Outcomes whether acquired in formal, non-formal or informal contexts. The exercise of self evaluation indeed helps person to become a critical thinker; to be able to identify skills and abilities that need to be developed or acquired; to make visible the owned attitudes and competences; it is a support for the continuous improvement, in order to better interpret the world, to be more flexible and afford continuous challenges, with an increased awareness and capacity to take decisions. This appears more effective if the key competences are evaluated.

Self-assessment, instead of formal evaluation focused on external judgment, places the person in the core of the learning processes and Systems, valorising the biographical history of the whole person. This is most important if adult learners are addressed. To make it possible it is necessary to build a level of awareness of the personal identity, in order to better answer and react to the learning stimulus proposed by formal, non-formal or informal experiences. Self-assessment represents a support in order to motivate adult to learn: adults will mainly learn when they feel they need to. The digital tool for self assessment also gives a method that can be spent by adult learner as a support for identifying new area of learning and personal development. That can contribute to make nearest people to the NVAE System and to improve the efficacy of the policies for the Lifelong learning on the single persons [3][6].

Before describing phases of development and components of the proposed Online tool for self eValuatIoN of key competences in adult AGE, it deserves to explain why and how it will be developed.

1.1 Why an "Online tool for self eValuatIoN of key competences in adult AGE"

The development of an "Online tool for self eValuatIoN of key competences in adult AGE" moves from the consideration that it appears necessary to develop approaches and instruments for the



development of self-assessing methods and tools. The self analysis of KC can: help adult learners recognizing the possessed competences, making them transparent and measurable; the assessed competences can be recorded in the CV, with the mastery level resulting after the self e-evaluation, and consequently they can be spent in learning pathways or in the labour market; a self-assessment tool, especially if user-friendly and disposable online, can be used autonomously by the adult learner, and can constitute the first step of a more complex process, where the adult can choose to be helped by teachers and counsellors for further steps (e.g. the balance of competences); this tool, developed on the basis of European common standards, can be successively developed in direction of the validation of KC.

Moreover, the implementation and diffusion of a self-assessment culture, attitude and familiarity could represent a good opportunity to overcome adults' resistance and lack of motivation, and to give them real opportunities to develop and update their key competences throughout life.

"Key competences are the foundation for lifelong learning and success in individuals' careers and professions. The development of key competences has to continue beyond compulsory education, in both initial and continuing VET. [...] The challenge is to achieve the best possible combination of vocational skills and key competences both to a high standard" [4]. Nevertheless KC are often acquired and developed in non-formal and informal contexts; this makes them not assessed nor recognized and consequently not used by adults for their personal development and professional improvement. Some Countries are adapting school curricula in this sense, but there is still a big work to do in the field of adult education, especially about the strategies and method for the assessment of key competences. It lacks a culture of KC, and their value is not enough valorised. This is confirmed by the Council conclusions of 11 May 2010 on competences supporting lifelong learning and the 'new skills for new jobs' initiative [7], that invites to "Develop the Europass framework in line with the implementation of the European Quality Framework and with a view to recording and highlighting more effectively the knowledge, skills and competences acquired by citizens throughout their lives in a variety of learning settings, including by considering the development of a 'personal skills passport' based on existing Europass elements". Actually, for example, the Europass CV format includes sections for the recording of Digital Competences, or Social competences, but differently from the description of foreign language competences, specific descriptors still lack for the description of these KC. A great work has been done at a European level about the strategies and tools for assessing skill and competences; nevertheless, adult educational Systems are still mainly based on traditional models of external evaluation, assessment is often made by trainers and teachers on the basis of quantitative tests and assigned tasks. In self evaluation of communication in mother tongue or in foreign languages, or of mathematical competences, it is common to find set of self assessment tests, also ICT based, mainly structured with objective items of assessment such as multiple choices or "fill in the blanks". Nevertheless, as highlighted in the OECD Project DeSeCo "The complex nature of key competences requires data from multiple sources, including, but not limited to, the collection of large-scale assessment data through paper and pencil or computerized instruments" [8]. Only few experiences can be cited about the implementation of self-assessment practices within adult education system, particularly with reference to the self-assessment of key competences, and no one online tool of self-assessment of key competence can be still cited.

A first analysis underlines that in NVAE is used the "balance of competences" method, but it requires the intervention of experts, a specific procedure, and it is still privilege of few people, especially in continuing education contexts for the managerial roles. Alternative solutions have been developed and experienced by groups of experts, but they are not enough known or widely diffused. European educational Systems are still mainly based on model of formal evaluation, focused on external judgment. This is a critical point, since adult learners often refuse this kind of assessment, that they tend to associate to past school negative experience. This affects also the lack of motivation of adult learners to come back in the educational system, both in continuing education and NVAE pathways, as noted in the European Guide Lines for validating non formal and informal learning [9]. Indeed, participation rates in adult education (25-64 year olds) still now doesn't reach the fixed objective of 12,5%; the European average is 10%, and seventeen Countries (including Italy, Belgium, France, Germany beside the countries of recent access in EU) are still under this average [10].

1.2 How to develop an european Online tool for self eValuatIoN of key competences in adult AGE

Key competences and self-assessment are the focus of a lot of experiences at European level. That is why VINTAGE does not retrace from a zero point pathways previously realized, but refer to effective



outputs and realized experiences. VINTAGE contributes to create more opportunities for the educational sector by developing new solutions and increasing the value of the sharing of European pedagogic strategies of self-assessment in adult education focused on Key competences. This is the aim of the first stage of the Project that is the "Status Artis" analysis. This stage allows to fix the bases for the adaptation and transferring of self-assessment approaches, tools and strategies already existing, as for example, the Finnish experience for planning self-evaluation in Adult Education Centres of eastern Finland [11], the SEALL procedure for Self evaluation in Lifelong learning (www.seall.eu), the German "Selbstgesteuert lerner" activities, the Italian "@ of self evaluation" [12], the set of descriptors of key competences resulting from the RINASCIMENTO Project, the features of commercial tool of self assessment of personal and social skills like ProfilPass (http://www.profilpass-online.de/index.php?article_id=1&clang=1), the adult learning personalization approach designed in LEADLAB (www.leadlab.eu/project.org); the questionnaire to determine the level of learning to learn competence, and the related computer based application to measure the level of competence of SKILLS project (http://www.faea.es/G1_SKILLS/).

By collecting and integrating previous practices and devices, an innovative service for self assessment of key competences of adult learners, supported by an easy to use ICT based tool for self assessment of key competences, will be developed, that shall be used to support the design of a plan of personal development of low qualified individuals to face new learning challenges, and to support trainers and adult education Institution in their orientation services.

1.3 Phases of development and components

The online tool development starts with the "Status Artis" analysis aimed at describing the European background and valorising existing strategies and approaches for the assessment of skills and competences.

On the base of the results and evidences acquired through this research phase, the VINTAGE partnership will design a framework, with a set of indicators and descriptors for the assessment of key competences and a checklist to guide the self-assessment according to standardized levels. A framework of indicators and descriptors shows common standard and criteria for the evaluation of key competences as for the foreign languages; the online tool will allow assessing the competences acquired in non formal-informal contexts, otherwise not recognizable or certifiable.

The framework consists in a description of the 8 key competences, with a set of descriptors to assess the level of mastery in each competence; these levels will be defined in accordance to the existing European standards and criteria. The framework will include a checklist for the self-assessment of the key competences; the framework will be used to implement the online tool.

The framework should include: a general description of the 8 key competences; for each competence, a set of descriptors of mastery. For each competence a checklist will be realized that will allow the adult learner self-assessing the level of mastery of each key competence. The descriptors will refer to different values, for example not adequate, adequate, good, excellent. The framework will be implemented with reference to existing standards and criteria. In this phase the framework is considered a prototype, since it will be perfected on the base of the evidences of the first pilot run.

The framework will be used to implement the online tool.

Beside the framework, a draft of basic portfolio of competences will be produced. The basic portfolio will allow recording and resuming the results of the self-assessment.

The basic portfolio will support registering the owned competence and the effective completion of European CV with the recording of the key competences; it will guide adult and elderly people to visualize, describe and valorise the owned key competences, to better describe them in the section of the Europass CV format assigned for example to "Computer skills and competences", "Social skills and competences", "Other skills and competences".

The basic portfolio consists in a format (grid or other) where adult and elderly learners can record the results of the self-assessment of key competences. It is intended to be a tool guiding people to complete with awareness the section of the Europass CV, valorising the owned key competences. The basic portfolio will be synthetic and address the necessity to make the key competences of its owner transparent.

A first piloting session, addressed to NVAE teachers, trainers, counsellors, adult learners and stakeholders, is planned in order to test the framework and improve it.

On the base of the achieved results and feedbacks, the online tool will be developed. The online tool for self-assessment of key competences will mirror, on a digital support, the designed framework that of course could be used also with traditional supports.



The tool for the assessment will be online, allowing the self-assessment practice, and easy-to-use; it is conceived to be used autonomously by all adult learners, regardless of their expertise in ICT. A second pilot session of the digital tool will be carried out, involving adult learners. Each one of the two piloting sessions will include 20 to 50 people from each Country (IT, NL, DE, SE, IE, AT) involved in the Project.

Perspectives

Thinking to the Future of Education we should think to perspectives more than to conclusions. VINTAGE Project, with the development of a framework for self assessment of key competences and of a basic portfolio for their recording, contributes to the development of the Europass framework, developing and experiencing a tool aimed at recording and highlighting more effectively the knowledge, skills and competences acquired by citizens throughout their lives in a variety of learning settings. By this way the proposed digital tool represents an innovative service for self assessment of key competences of adult learners supported by an easy to use ICT based tool that shall be used to support the design of a plan of personal development of low qualified individuals to face new learning challenges, and to support trainers and adult education Institution in their orientation services. The digital tool for self assessment also gives a method that can be spent by adult learner as a support for identifying new area of learning and personal development. That can contribute to make nearest people to the NVAE System and to improve the efficacy of the policies for the Lifelong learning on the single persons [3] [6].

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