



# Development Of Teachers In Education, DEVOTED

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## Abstract

### ***Developing a European centre of excellence in 2nd chance education***

*In the past numerous initiatives and projects have been implemented which produced valuable strategies, didactic and methodological approaches, practical tools or learning materials for adult educators who work with disadvantaged groups. They all aim at preventing disadvantaged youngsters from dropping out, at keeping them in the education system, or motivating them to engage again in lifelong learning activities. Many of these valuable tools and methodologies produced by committed practitioners and researchers, however, have never found their way to the users they were designed for: the disadvantaged learner groups and teachers and trainers working in formal and non-formal education institutions.*

*The European project "Devoted" aims at making these materials available in the educational community and taking them to a European area of lifelong learning. Measures of standardization and quality assurance are put in place to guarantee direct usable, result oriented and transparent tools for professionals working with disadvantaged target groups.*

*DEVOTED considers itself to be the first step towards a European Centre of Excellence for teachers and trainers of disadvantaged target groups. To this end, the project collects, standardizes and improves existing good practices in thematic fields like intercultural communication, gender and diversity; social and citizenship competencies; creative skills and ICT competencies.*

*These good practices can be used to raise awareness and upgrade the competencies of professionals to improve the teaching and learning process. The good practices are the first content of the multinational Centre of Excellence for professionals working with disadvantaged target groups, where assertive dissemination and active training will lead to improvement of the quality of the professionals and their working processes. The challenges of the (revamped) Lisbon and Europe 2020 are thus taken aboard within DEVOTED.*

## **1. Rationale of a Centre of Excellence**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Since the establishment of the European Association of Cities, Institutions and Second Chance Schools "E2C Europe" by the end of the 1990's, the activity in the field of adult education increased concerning policy making( local and regional), the development of skills and competences of teachers and trainers, the mobility and exchange of teachers and students and the organisation of meetings and events. These activities produced new contacts and experiences for all members. Permanent contacts with individual members of other networks have been established, cooperation with actors in the field of young adults at risk in new EU member countries developed, the dissemination of knowledge and experience actively supported.

Awareness of the importance of the improvement of the quality of adult education and second chance schools in the struggle against early school leaving and social exclusion has risen in the past years. Although there was and there still is no coherent quality development and information system for the workers in this field (the most problematic, difficult and deprived young adults) on a European level.



The exchange of knowledge and best practices is organised on a small scale, knowledge and experience is not well organised and not easy accessible, despite many (European) projects to develop tools, methodologies and curricula to access and work with the target group.

The need for multilateral action, cooperation and innovation in order to improve the quality and efficiency of education and training, especially for young adults at risk, is felt everywhere. Labour markets in some of the nations and regions in Europe face the "risk" of full employment: everyone, even the social and economical excluded, is needed in order to keep up the economic growth and the ambitions of both local and multinational enterprises. Further, from a sociological and political-philosophical point of view, it can be argued that it is right and obligation together to take part in society, even those whose chances are not of a first order.

The problem of (socially, culturally and economically) disadvantaged youngsters and of early school leavers exists in all EU member states, in the so-called new member states as much as in the so-called old member states. Everywhere one is looking for good prevention actions. Everywhere various kinds of second chance measures have been tried out over the last 10 years, with tangible success but also with ups and downs.

## 1.2 Role of adult education

The role of adult education is present when it is considered that adults learn most effectively when there is an intrinsic motivation to develop skills and knowledge. That is why there is a necessity to have good tools to work with the target group; but having tools is simply not enough. Professionals working with disadvantaged learners should have interest in the target group, recognize their needs and be able to motivate them. Also the tools developed should "fit" to the target group: pragmatic and practical are requirements for tools within adult education to prosper the benefits of the use for the target group. These last sentences match the idea that the tools developed for the target group mentioned should have the appropriate level of difficulty, suiting the needs and the goals of the target group. In any case the triangle of education, working, living/housing is regarded relevant and essential for the target group to be included in today's society and in meeting the demands of today's society.

Life experiences and knowledge of the target group are used to empower the target groups themselves. Experiments with e-portfolio are not only used for CV-building, but also to showcase relevant skills and knowledge to feel empowered and strong enough to be included in society. This might also be seen as positive reinforcement.

## 2. Recent developments

Today's society puts strong demands on the citizens (individuals) participating in it. It is obvious that separated, single level approaches are not longer sufficient to meet these demands and prepare citizens for their current and future role in society.

Therefore it is regarded necessary to have a multilevel approach. Multilevel does not only mean to have curative and preventive actions combined. Also decompartmentalization is necessary to use resources and possibilities of institutions effective and efficient. In the case of socially, culturally and/or economic disadvantaged youngster an integrated, multilevel approach combines curative and preventive actions in the triangle of education, working and living/housing. Institutions working in this triangle need to share their knowledge of the target group and combine their efforts and resources to prosper an effective and efficient social, cultural and economic integration of this target group.

Digital, standardized resources are more and more a common good in (adult) education. Both in teaching resources as in learner development systems the introduction of these resources takes a high lift all over Europe. The possibilities to provide individualized, tailor-made, learning offers increase together with possibilities to insert a more businesswise approach into the education system. Result orientation, transferability, quality assurance and transparency are items to measure and compare the level of success in education. The creation of the European area of lifelong learning is of great importance in this respect: local teaching and learning methods need to be respected, but it is of a common interest to prevent the continuous reinvention of the wheel. The urge to use the best practices fitting optimal to the target group is therefore a cultural and moral obligation to the target group itself. It is also a matter of confronting (local and national) teaching and learning methods that exist in the European area of lifelong learning in order to use the best of possible, an economic purpose for teachers, learners, institutions and society.



The network society exists. People move around the world, goods are produced and consumed everywhere and services provided and accessed just in time. Within the environment of education the sense of urgency to connect to this 24 hours a day global society is not as manifest as it should be. The need of sharing knowledge is prominent as we recognize that today's learners also have multiple environments to act in and multiple challenges to face. Knowledge, experiences and network are in need to be connected as global product and service providers already do.

### **3 Devoted**

#### **3.1 In general**

In earlier projects and network activities, a lot of knowledge and experience have been brought together. Within two projects, EXACT and DEVOTED, a consortium of partners tries to gather good (training)practices in a systematic way and set up an Excellence Academy for Trainers. During the last decade a lot of effort has been put into the improvement of the education and training of young adults at risk. The pace of this development has been very different in the EU Member States. Furthermore the exchange of best practices has taken place on a relatively small scale and the link with other aspects of live (for example housing and work) have been weak and incidental. Still it is recognized that a lot needs to be done to adapt the quality of teaching and training for disadvantaged target groups in order to realise an inclusive learning system that matches the today's challenges in a globalizing Europe.

The innovative force of the centre of excellence will be directed to the creation of regional centres with similar activities and targets, although based upon specific needs in the area and the possibility to exchange knowledge and experience on a European level. This leads to a situation in which the available knowledge and expertise in the daily work with deprived young adults is accessible and at hand on a regional and European level together with assured quality.

In that way the aims and objectives of DEVOTED are not project based aims and objectives but they summarize and share in fact the aims and objectives of the participating organisations and the national and European strategies to improve teaching and training, raise educational standards and levels and reduce the number of school leavers.

#### **3.2 Relation DEVOTED - EXACT**

The projects EXACT and DEVOTED are both essential for the centre of excellence. Essential means that both have an inevitable and indispensable contribution. EXACT is, as a KA4-project, dedicated to the cross-sectoral contribution to the centre. This means that the project goes broader than only adult education and that for employability skills and mobility are part of the EXACT-project. Also the EXACT-project focuses more on the structure of the centre of excellence by answering questions like "who can benefit from the centre", "who can contribute to the centre", "what makes the centre unique and sustainable" and "what will be the organizational structure".

DEVOTED is however suited within the core of adult education. DEVOTED provides, during and at the end of its lifetime, good practices to work with socially, economic and/or culturally excluded target groups. More concretely DEVOTED delivers the core content of the centre of excellence together with first steps in dissemination and exploitation. Also evaluation plans for good practices and quality standard are present within the project, merely to provide and assure quality of the products delivered.

#### **3.3 Contribution of DEVOTED to the European area of lifelong learning**

As in the interest of the European Commission, Arcus College invests, together with the consortium partners, E2C-Europe and local authorities, in this infrastructure as part of its strategy to become a knowledge centre for teachers and trainers working with people at risk. EXACT and DEVOTED aimed to build a self-supporting centre of excellence, where education providers can update their knowledge, can contribute with own experiences and methodologies and where teachers and trainers can learn of well-proven concepts. The centre of excellence will provide, experiences, methodologies and tools in the field of lifelong learning to improve, deepen and broaden the competencies (knowledge, attitudes, skills) of professionals involved in teaching, training and guidance of people at risk.



### **3.3.1 Quality cycle**

Within DEVOTED a easy to use and transparent quality cycle has been set up to determine the phases for a practice to become a good practice. Five stages (pre-selection, selection, testing, reviewing, evaluation) have been distinguished in which practices need to show their value for money in terms of result orientation, usability, transferability and transparency. Each stage is accompanied by a template that provides heading to identify the relevant information out of the practice. This information provides the details for the further use and possible adoption as good practices. The formats however are not meant to be a bureaucratic base, but aim at providing feedback and interaction with the content, the practice, as focal point. Learner and teacher competencies hold a central role when selecting and evaluating a practice. A practice needs to be well-proven on improving learner and teacher competencies to be considered a good practice.

### **3.3.2 Good practices**

Good practices in DEVOTED all have adult education as their starting point. Intercultural communication, gender and diversity; social and citizenship competencies; creative skills and ICT competencies are in general the frameworks in which the DEVOTED consortium searches for practices to be incorporated in the project. The type of good practices can however vary very much. Curricula, training tools, teaching methods are for example all of interest for DEVOTED. Of course extra attention is paid to language and cultural understanding: these are elements

### **3.3.3 Dissemination and Exploitation**

A store of good practices however does not mean that they are automatically used. A few obstacles need to be overcome in order to make good practices indeed available for the European area of lifelong learning. First a good practice itself is not sufficient to improve learner and teacher competencies. Exploitation is therefore mostly dedicated to provide suggestions and identify necessities in the skills and competencies of professionals working with disadvantaged target groups. Train-the-trainer courses accompany the more theoretical part where suggestions are provided and necessities are identified to work with disadvantaged target groups. In terms of dissemination reciprocal contributions to guarantee a dynamic and up-to-date centre of excellence. Solely distributing information is not enough, although important; see for example [www.devoted-project.eu](http://www.devoted-project.eu).