LLinE

3 | 2008

The 11th International LLinE Conference

Lifelong Learning as a Right? European Perspectives.

29 – 31 January, 2009, in Helsinki, Finland

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Peter Mayo Professor, University of Malta

Ari Antikainen Professor, University of Joensuu, Finland

The **rhetoric** of many national governments and international organisations views lifelong learning as a **right** for everyone. But what is the **reality** of lifelong learning – is it a right that is fulfilled in Europe today? How can LLL promote **inclusion**, **empowerment**, and **democratisation**?

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- LLL across the lifespan
- Inclusion, empowerment and democratisation of LLL

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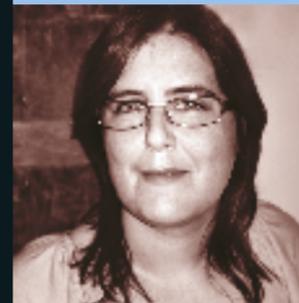## LIFELONG LEARNING IN EUROPE 3 | 2008

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LLinE offers practitioners, researchers and policy makers in adult education a forum for exchanging ideas and experiences. The journal introduces practical experiments and solutions in adult and continuing education disseminating information and knowledge, practical and theoretical, useful to policy makers and practitioners and presenting cases interesting to researchers.

The editors welcome articles on successful undertakings in adult and continuing education, future developments and changes in the field or values guiding adult and continuing education ranging from training and development in enterprises to liberal adult education in all parts of Europe. The style of the text should be clear and easy to read and have an anchoring to concrete practice.

The readers are practitioners, researchers and policy makers in adult and continuing education in many countries.

Papers can be accepted for publication if they have not been submitted to other publications in the English language but Lifelong Learning in Europe.

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LLinE journal is a trans-European journal dedicated to the advancement of adult education, lifelong learning, intercultural collaboration and best practice research.

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TEACHER EDUCATION IN EUROPE

This year LLinE is publishing a series of articles on the latest scenarios for development of teacher education in Europe.

Paulo Santiago

PROMOTING TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS THROUGH TEACHER MOTIVATION

The writer considers a number of directions which appear promising as means of enhancing teacher motivation and promoting the status of the teaching profession: transforming teaching into a knowledge-rich profession; supporting and guiding teachers' work; evaluating and rewarding effective teaching; bringing a sense of group to teachers; and making proper use of rewards.

Erja Syrjäläinen and Riitta Jyrhämä

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The University of Helsinki network of teaching practice schools aims at focused and strategic school-university partnership. The network has become an important part of the University of Helsinki teacher education. The writers present the teaching practice collaboration and one of its applications, the research practicum in primary teacher education.

Harnessing learners' multiple worlds via validation of competences

In recent years many initiatives have been taken at different levels to support the development of new approaches to validation of non-formal and informal learning. Validation of non-formal and informal learning has been identified as a European priority on several occasions. In all, these efforts and documents reflect a growing consensus of the fact that learning taking place outside formal education has crucial importance for individuals, adult education, workplaces and society at large.

Many critical voices have recently been expressed towards the policies and practices of formal adult education in valuing and recognising learners' multiple worlds and competences. The critics maintain that formal education does not acknowledge enough those experiences and competences that learners bring to educational programmes from other contexts, such as from their earlier work experiences. Critics continue that formal education should realise and acknowledge in more visible ways the fact that learning takes place everywhere. Learning in other contexts may even be more important or make more sense to the learner in his/her daily life than what is learned in the formal setting of the educational institution.

In addition to the importance of acknowledging learners' competences developed in non-formal and informal settings, there is also a clear need to understand better what learners take with them from the educational programmes to other settings. Are we successful as educators in providing learners with opportunities to construct experiences, attitudes and competences that are usable, helpful and productive outside the educational institution? Understanding and supporting the development of learners' multiple worlds, identity work and boundary crossing behaviour is vital in a world where barriers continue to block understanding and obstruct attempts to develop and implement policies to ensure the success of all learners in today's formal education, workplaces and society at large. Learners' competence recognition has implications for the quality of their lives and their chances of participating in education as a stepping stone to lifelong learning, and a meaningful life.

Making informal and non-formal learning visible and validated is an intrinsically challenging task. One of the reasons for the situation is that existing information about validation of non-formal and informal learning is, in most European countries, rather limited in scope. The present issue contributes to this knowledge gap by sharing insights to models and best practices regarding the validation of competences in different parts of Europe. This, we hope, will add to discussions on the need for the transparency and exploitability of competence validation policies and practices across Europe. What this issue also convincingly shows is that there is still much to be done in the field of competence validation as a common European standard. Among the big questions that need extensive, multi-disciplinary problem solving at many levels and sectors are: (a) Is the validation of competences flexibly integrated to formal adult education or is it a separate, parallel system?; (b) What is accomplished as the result of competence validation?; and (c) how can we promote the recognition and appreciation of competence validation in adult education, at workplaces and in other sectors of the society so that it can really promote the wellbeing of individuals and society? In this issue we begin to address these questions.

KRISTIINA KUMPULAINEN
Editor-in-Chief of LLinE
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Instruments for
lifelong learning and mobility across Europe

Related to the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs, the Bologna Process and the Copenhagen Process, the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) was adopted by the European Parliament and Council on 23 April 2008. The EQF aims to establish synergies between Copenhagen and Bologna and complements and reinforces existing European mobility instruments such as Europass and ECTS.

THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

The Bologna Process aims at creating, by 2010, a European Higher Education Area in which students can choose from a wide and transparent range of courses and benefit from smooth recognition procedures. The Bologna goals include easily comparable degrees, a system based on three cycles, and a common European system of credits and mobility of students and teachers.

THE COPENHAGEN PROCESS

The Copenhagen Process aims to reinforce cooperation in Vocational Education and Training through several outputs which include a single framework for transparency of competences and qualifications that brings together various existing transparency instruments. The aim is to develop a set of common principles to ensure greater compatibility between approaches in different countries and at different levels.

THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

The principal aims of the EQF are promoting citizens' mobility between countries and facilitating their lifelong learning. The goal of the EQF is to relate national qualifications systems to a common European reference framework to allow individuals and employers better understand and compare the qualifications levels of different countries and different education and training systems. National Qualifications Frameworks are now in development in most European countries.

The EQF hopes to ensure that all new qualifications issued from 2012 carry a reference to the appropriate EQF level. This would mean that the level of qualifications held by a job applicant from one European country would be better understood by an employer in another, for example.

The EQF applies to all types of education, training and qualifications, and includes eight reference levels. The reference levels are described in terms of learning outcomes in three different categories: theoretical and/or factual knowledge; cognitive and practical skills; and competences, described in terms of responsibility and autonomy.

Shifting the focus from learning inputs, the system is intended to encourage lifelong learning by promoting the validation of non-formal and informal learning. The focus on learning outcomes will make it easier for individuals to assess whether learning outcomes in these settings are equivalent in content and relevance to formal qualifications. Further, the framework will allow comparison of traditional qualifications awarded by national authorities and qualifications awarded by other stakeholders.

EUROPASS

Europass is a service for people who are looking for a job, whether in their own country or abroad. It allows individuals to present their qualifications and skills so that employers can understand and appreciate them. The service is provided through a network of national centres and an internet portal, and it provides a number of instruments to make this process easier.

Europass consists of five documents, two of which can be generated by individuals themselves. The European CV (ECV) enables individuals to make their skills and qualifications visible, including skills aquired outside formal education and training. Other Europass documents can be attached to the CV. The Europass Language Passport allows individuals to describe their language skills.

In addition to the ECV and the Language Passport, three documents can be filled in and issued by authorities.

The Europass Certificate Supplement explains the competences included in a vocational training certificate, so that employers can better appreciate what its holders can do.

The Europass Diploma Supplement has been developed jointly with the Council of Europe and UNESCO, and it accompanies a higher education diploma issued by a national organisation.

Finally, Europass Mobility records a learning experience abroad, such as an academic exchange or a stage in a company, making it more visible for employers.

The most popular of these instruments has been the Europass CV. Since the launch of Europass in 2005, already 3 million users have generated the ECV at the Europass portal. This target was originally expected to be reached in 2010. The portal – run by Cedefop and available in 26 languages – provides information and an interactive tool to complete the Europass CV and the Europass Language Passport with the help of online tutorials and guidelines.

SOURCES AND FURTHER INFORMATION:

The Bologna Process: http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/bologna/bologna_en.html

The Copenhagen Process: http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/vocational_en.html

The Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs: http://ec.europa.eu/growthandjobs/

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF): http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc44_en.htm

The Europass Portal: http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu

European Credit Transfer Accumulation System (ECTS): http://ec.europa.eu./education/programmes/socrates/ects/index_en.html

The European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET): http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/ecvet/index_en.html

National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARICs): http://www.enic-naric.net

European Inventory on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, including country practises, glossary of relevant terms and case study examples: http://www.ecotec.com/europeaninventory/2007.html

Lifelong Learning as a Right? European Perspectives.

The 11th international LLinE conference takes place in Helsinki 29–31 January, 2009. The rhetoric of many national governments and international organisations views lifelong learning as a right for everyone. But what is the reality of lifelong learning – is it a right that is fulfilled in Europe today? LLinE invites practitioners, researchers and policy-makers to take part in discussions about the equity of access to lifelong learning in Europe today. Conference keynote speakers include Professor Peter Mayo from the University of Malta and Professor Ari Antikainen from the University of Joensuu, Finland. See back cover for further information.

Call for articles and case study presentations

LLinE welcomes articles and case studies for issue 1/2009: Lifelong Learning and Sustainable Development. The deadline for materials is 9 February 2009. Articles and case studies for peer review need to be submitted latest by 5 January 2009. For further information, visit the LLinE website at http://www.lline.fi or email heidi.kivekas@kvs.fi

The next issue of LLinE will be out in December: LLinE 4/2008 Remote Areas and Lifelong Learning

Recognition of non-formal and informal learning in OECD countries:

A very good idea in jeopardy?

There seems to be strong agreement that a lot of learning takes place outside the formal education and training system. Less consensus exists about the extent to which this non-formal and informal learning should be recognised. Nevertheless, making non-formal and informal learning visible seems to be at the forefront of a lot of public policy in the European Union and the OECD countries. It is viewed as one of the possible options to making lifelong learning for all a reality.

Patrick Werquin[1]

This paper aims to address some key issues at stake when dealing with the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. (Technically, it is the outcomes of the learning that are assessed and that lead to some form of recognition but recognition of non-formal and informal learning will be used for short.) If the idea that individuals learn everywhere and all the time throughout their lives is not new – there is evidence since Plato and Condorcet, and throughout the twentieth century (OECD, 2007c; Werquin, 2007) – recognition of non-formal and informal learning as a field of research and a thorough policy option is quite a recent development.

There seems to be a consensus that individuals acquire skills, knowledge and competences outside the formal education and training system (formal learning). However, there is little or no consensus about the definitions of the terms, about value that should be given to this learning, about who should decide what is valued, and about the best ways to define the standards for the assessment of the outcomes of this learning.

Recognition of non-formal and informal learning is often considered a possible solution for promoting lifelong learning, especially for the adult population (OECD, 2007a). Together with mechanisms such as *Providing Credit Transfer* or *Establishing a Qualifications Framework* (see OECD 2007a or OECD 2007b for a full list of 20 mechanisms), recognising what people know or can do – regardless of where they have acquired these skills, knowledge and competences – is indeed likely to be a strong incentive for them to resume learning formally as they will not have to start from scratch. This also cuts the traditional costs (time, tuition fees, transportation costs, etc.) and opportunity costs (forgone earnings, etc.) of formal learning. If one would want to be a bit provocative, it could be said that this is about the only consensus regarding the recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

There seems to be room for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning beyond the lifelong learning agenda. Its current success has probably to do with the fact that it is also presented as a way of improving the efficiency of the labour market through increasing the mobility of workers; the visibility of skills, knowledge and competences; the opportunities for immigrants; etc. Recognition of non-formal and informal learning is seen as having the potential to foster the knowledge economy agenda by improving the level of qualifications of individuals, making them happier and better workers, and improving their standard of living.

This paper is divided in four sections. The first one attempts to clarify the terms without really providing a definition for each of them as it is almost impossible at the international level. The second considers the main rationale and objectives for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. The third lists the possible barriers and actual challenges that can prevent the recognition of non-formal and informal learning becoming a reality on a large scale. The fourth and last section considers the possible threats against recognition of non-formal and informal learning systems that are being designed or implemented throughout OECD countries. For the sake of conciseness, this paper does not describe country practice, a wealth of information on which is available at the OECD website (www.oecd.org/edu/lifelonglearning/nqs; www.oecd.org/edu/recognition).

DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

For years, research has been trying to clarify the different terms in use, an endeavour that has proven quite difficult, if not impossible, at the international level. A lot of uncertainty and disagreements remain about the meaning of non-formal and informal learning on one side and recognition on the other. There are still competing definitions for several terms and differences between them sometimes seem quite subtle; it is not worth spending time trying to reach a very unlikely consensus. (For a list and discussion of the main terms, see Werquin, 2007 or OECD, 2007c.) Definitions evolve over time and it is probably a positive feature. Therefore, referring to a publication older than a couple of years is quite a hazardous exercise (for an up-to-date glossary, see Tissot, forthcoming).

Definition of non-formal and informal learning: Is there a need for consensus?

The terms 'formal', 'non-formal' and 'informal' learning should be defined in relation to each other. Non-formal and informal learning should be defined as opposed to formal learning even if the boundaries of these terms vary across countries and over time. There have been major efforts and reforms to recognise most learning, whether formal or not, through a qualification or a recognised document (see http://www.oecd.org/edu/recognition). Three characteristics seem useful when defining the terms: whether the learning involves objectives, whether it is intentional and whether it leads to a qualification (the terms 'qualification' and 'certification' are taken as synonymous here, and they both refer to the process and the final outcome).

It seems that recent definitions focus more on the existence of learning objectives and the intentionality of learning. Definitions based on the last characteristic ('leading to a qualification') are not very useful and should be dropped since most countries are trying to have all kinds of learning certified. Most definitions using this characteristic are old and outdated. A more inter-

esting approach could rely on the fact that formal learning is always subject to registration. To that extent it seems agreeable to call it 'formal education and/or training'. However, it seems more difficult to talk about non-formal or informal education and training. Non-formal and informal learning is a better option.

Following from this, formal learning has learning objectives and is intentional whereas informal learning results from daily life and takes place everywhere, all the time, often without people even realising it. It results from experience, does not have learning objectives and is not intentional. There seems to be a consensus regarding these two definitions. Non-formal learning is probably the least consensual term. In most countries, non-formal learning is rather organised and therefore intentional even if the activity leading to non-formal learning may not be designed or designated as learning activity as such. Non-formal learning may have learning objectives but they are very broad unlike those in formal learning where learning objectives are spelled out and where the process to reach these objectives is formalised.

Recognition: One word, several meanings

Defining the term 'recognition' is somewhat more complex because there are many meanings for this term. First of all, there is *recognition of learning* in the sense that it is acknowledged that learning has taken place. The *recognition of learning outcomes* is the result of an assessment process which can be either formative or summative. Formative assessment often takes the form of portfolio development and its result is best characterised as self-recognition even if written documents exist (such as a portfolio or a competence passport). Summative assessment engages a wide variety of assessment processes, methods and tools, such as simulation, observation, written examinations, and so on. The recognition of learning outcomes requires agreed standards and a level is usually attributed according to the level of proficiency. It is the formal

part of the process and the way to communicate to the rest of the world about the knowledge, skills and competences one has acquired. Finally, there is *social recognition* of the documents awarded during this process. It requires standards that are widely agreed throughout the society. As the value of the qualifications and/or documents lies in social recognition, it seems most satisfactory to talk of *recognition* of non-formal and informal learning as opposed to *validation* or *accreditation* which only cover the technical aspects. In addition, it leads to potential policy recommendations on how best make non-formal and informal learning visible and usable. These three definitions hold for the recognition of formal learning too.

A summary: Being pragmatic

There are no unique (internationally agreed) definitions for key terms such as 'non-formal learning', 'informal learning' or 'recognition'. All definitions have drawbacks and there is always a country to disagree with definitions that seem to satisfy most others. A common definition would need to go beyond the words and include the culture and the concepts. This is too difficult an endeavour and probably not even a useful one. A more sensible approach is to try to propose a series of guidelines and principles clarifying the potential definition of terms and leave it to countries, regions and other entities to decide what they need in the short or medium run. There is a need for working definitions and not definitions carved in stone.

All in all, what is useful for policy-makers and for individuals (typically learners, workers or employers) is that a (recognition) system is created so that individuals can have what they know or can do documented in a useful and practical way, and receive social recognition. In other words, the key is to make learning visible through a quality assured assessment of skills, knowledge and/or competences. This requires a formal recognition of learning outcomes that leads to the awarding of a recognised document (certificate for ap-

plying for jobs, proof of proficiency for promotion, certification to meet salary criteria, etc.). In some countries, recognition of non-formal and informal learning may lead directly to a full qualification. In most countries, some additional top-up training is required for individuals to be awarded a full qualification. This documentation would help avoid repetition as individuals would be able to [re]use this evidence of skills, knowledge and competences in different contexts.

RATIONALE AND OBJECTIVES

Recognition of non-formal and informal learning touches on many different issues within the education and training system. It has an impact on the lifelong learning system countries or regions may want to adopt or implement because it opens up the perspective about where, when and how individuals learn; and which learning outcomes have value and need to be recognised. Deciding what has value is traditionally a source of disagreement between ministries of education and labour, or between employers and educationalists. Recognition of non-formal and informal learning involves many actors and the rationale developed in different countries systematically relies on a multi-facetted approach.

A strong rationale

The rationale for implementing a system for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning is systematically based on at least two main dimensions: a) promoting lifelong learning by contributing to its quality, quantity and distribution; and b) making the labour market more effective and equitable on the road toward the knowledge economy. These dimensions overlap. For individuals, qualifications or documents provided may have a double currency: in the labour market and in the lifelong learning system.

Most adult learning periods, whether formal or not, do not lead to a qualification or to the awarding of a recognised document. Not making skills, knowledge and competences visible hinders the effective use of human capi-

tal. This is especially the case when it comes to non-formal and informal learning, the volume of which creates a vast potential for routes towards qualifications.

In addition, people are usually awarded qualifications when they are young. Therefore, what individuals can display in terms of skills, knowledge and competences through their qualification(s), or any other document they may have, is blurred because these qualification(s) date back years, or even decades. Recognition of non-formal and informal learning makes skills, knowledge and competences visible. This is also viewed as potentially improving access to and mobility within the labour market. It will also help employers to better match jobs and workers and overcome skills shortages, and may indeed help to spot the gaps in the distribution of existing knowledge, skills and competences among the population, at the country, region or enterprise level. It is a powerful tool for planning training and learning activities.

As access to further learning for adults is tightly bound to initial education and training achievements, individuals with poor records from formal education generally do not make use of opportunities within the formal system of lifelong learning. Hence, many countries focus on ways of creating a second chance to obtaining qualifications. Systems for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning may open doors instead of erecting barriers for those who have not achieved their full potential (OECD, 2007a). In many countries the system goes hand in hand with the expansion of adult learning as poorly qualified but skilled adults are the natural targets of such programmes.

It is often argued that recognition of non-formal and informal learning improves applicants' self-esteem as they become aware of their knowledge, skills and competences. This may increase their confidence and productivity, as well as trust of others in the family, the enterprise or the community, therefore improving their employment and career prospects and access to further learning opportunities. Individuals

would directly benefit from individualised systems of recognition as learning paths would be optimised in terms of cost and duration.

The recognition of non-formal and informal learning mechanically improves the qualification distribution of the population (and not only the young generations), with little additional burden on the formal education and training system. Enterprises are often required to employ a certain number of qualified staff (for example hospitals, enterprises trying to meet ISO requirements or wishing to bid for certain contracts, etc.). The recognition of non-formal and informal learning, by itself or together with top-up training, may be an efficient solution when the skills, knowledge and competences exist but are not yet formally recognised.

Different and complementary objectives

The main objectives pursued through the process of recognition of non-formal and informal learning vary according to the individual and country in question, from exemption of all or a part of the entry requirements for a formal learning programme, to the awarding of a full qualification. Some countries offer all possibilities whilst others focus only on part of them. The objectives are important also because each of them is relevant to different actors in the systems of lifelong learning and recognition of non-formal and informal learning. For example, exemption from entry requirements is relevant to universities in particular, while employers are mostly interested in the awarding of full qualifications (for a discussion of all these objectives in the case of France, see Charraud, 2005).

The first objective is related to meeting the entry requirements for formal learning programmes. For example, in tertiary education a qualification from upper secondary level education is required. Vocational Education and Training experience and already existing skills, knowledge or competences may often substitute a formal qualification demanded upon entry. Sometimes associated with the exemption from entry requirements, some countries offer

exemption for parts of a formal learning programme. In other words, when entering a formal learning programme, learners may be granted some credits towards the qualification(s) they are a aiming for. This is often presented as one of the main breakthroughs linked to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning as it implies a clear reduction in the study time required for a qualification. These exemptions are often used in the tertiary education system. This implies a double assessment process: individuals are assessed upon entry on the exemptions of requirements and/or on the number of credits granted; and they are assessed again, just like the "traditional" students, on awarding the qualification(s).

Finally, it is more and more possible to be awarded a full qualification on the sole basis of the assessment of the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning. This is the most discussed objective since it is not necessarily socially accepted that qualifications are awarded to those who do not attend classes or are not assessed in exactly the same way as traditional students in the formal education and training system. When such mental rigidity exists, the most often adopted policy is to explicitly signal on the certificate that the qualification has been awarded on the basis of the assessment of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

It seems rather clear that, at a policy level, many countries are trying to establish links between the recognition of non-formal and informal learning and the formal qualifications, mainly because linking the two can cut the costs of learning and qualification processes; and to motivate individual learners who can begin learning at the level that reflects their actual skills, knowledge and competences. In linking the two systems, most countries are also looking for consistency. However, some countries have made the pragmatic policy choice to use recognition of non-formal and informal learning only when there is a need for certain qualifications in the labour market but this need is not met by the formal education and training system.

A key issue that should not be overlooked is that, whatever the objective, the key outcome of such a recognition process should be the awarding of a document that would ideally be recognised throughout the society, listing and describing the skills, knowledge and competences the applicant has demonstrated at some point in time – with limited validity if need be, in rapidly evolving fields for instance – so s/he does not have to do it again later in life if such skills, knowledge and competences are required for entering a formal learning programme or applying for a job, for example.

BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

Despite the differences in contexts and practice (see OECD, forthcoming), the barriers to recognition of non-formal and informal learning seem to be the same in many countries and systems.

Stakeholders

Recognition systems bring in a range of new stakeholders who have previously been outside the formal learning system (small enterprises, specific social groups such as immigrants, low-skilled people, etc.). This is good as recognition of non-formal and informal learning requires the active commitment and engagement of a number of stakeholders – in the education sector and in the labour market. However, the stakeholders' differing views about key issues may prevent reaching a useful and operational agreement on the best ways to implement recognition systems. For instance, there are potential tensions between social partners and governments: while the former are traditionally interested in the utilisation of skills, knowledge and competences developed in working life, the interests of the latter seem to be more focused on making public educational institutions more flexible, and reducing costs.

Assessment

Another main challenge is the assessment methodology. There is suspiciousness about the quality of qualifications based on the assessment of non-formal and informal learning outcomes and a concern that their recognition might undermine the status of formal education and training and the associated qualifications. There is strong evidence that qualifications achieved through recognition of non-formal and informal learning are barely socially accepted. The problem is that, in formal education and training, both input and outcomes can be quality assured whereas in non-formal and informal learning the input process is invisible and out of control by definition; only the outcomes are visible and assessed. Therefore, there is a strong need for innovation in terms of assessment methodology. This is true for both summative and formative assessment.

Standards

Further, there is a lack of parity of esteem between the systems of recognition and the formal education and training system. Linked to the issue of assessment is the notion of standards against which the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning should be assessed. Who decides what has value remains an issue. The standards of formal education and training systems are usually defined on the basis of the standards of Ministries of Education. With a lot of the non-formal and informal learning taking place at the workplace, employers and Ministries of Labour would probably want to be involved in deciding what has value in terms of learning.

This may lead to clear inconsistencies in the development and implementation of standards in countries where, for instance, recognition is meant to bridge the gaps between qualifications needed in the labour market and those offered by the formal education and learning system. Some countries have indeed chosen to move away from an explicit lifelong learning perspective and have implemented a recognition system basically to create qualifications which the formal education and training system does not deliver to the labour market. In such cases qualifications may not have value when the holder wants to resume learning in the formal education and training system. This goes against one of the main rationales described above: the flexibility of the lifelong learning system.

Other way around, qualifications achieved fully or partly through the recognition of non-formal and informal learning will need to achieve acceptance in the labour market. Even in the formal education and training system, there is no point in delivering qualifications that will not have value in the labour market. The pragmatic solution of using recognition systems primarily to meet some need in the labour market may seem an appropriate solution for generating interest toward recognition approaches and processes.

The issue of legitimacy, whether linked to assessment, quality assurance, or ownership of the standards, needs to be addressed. Maintaining consistency across the system may be at risk, for instance in decentralised systems, when there are many local or industry-specific variations in the way learning outcomes are assessed and recognition systems implemented. In federal countries, mobility across regions or provinces is sometimes more difficult than across countries. To ensure their legitimacy, it is important that recognition systems are built on commonly agreed principles, and measures and methods are structured and integrated as much as possible into existing quality assurance and assessment systems.

It seems that recognising non-formal and informal learning does not create skills, knowledge and competences. It just makes them visible. This apparent drawback is actually one of the most promising avenues as recognition processes can be designed so that they clearly and explicitly become learning processes.

Cost

The issue remains whether the benefits of recognition are great enough compared to the costs especially since the results may not have full social recognition. It is very likely that a recognition process is less costly for individual learners than a full education and training programme; but how about costs for the system? Some countries that have fees for recognition have decided that these fees should never be higher than tuition fees for the formal

education and training programme leading to an equivalent level or qualification. However, there is strong evidence that recognition of non-formal and informal learning is not cheap for the system because it requires individualised treatment. A major difference, in terms of assessment costs, is that the cost of accepting one additional student in a formal programme is not high because the procedures are already in place. In the case of recognition, assessment procedures cannot be easily standardised. Further, recognition systems require panels of assessors for each candidate whereas in the formal system there is one assessor for many students. In addition, some target groups require extra resources, for information and guidance for example. It is uniformly reported that it is also extremely difficult, and therefore time consuming and costly for the system, to have a low-skilled potential applicant to accept s/he has skills, knowledge and competences.

The cost issue is not necessarily a hindrance to implementing recognition but there is a need for clarity because all recognition systems incur infrastructure costs that are often initially subsidised by public finances. Alternatively, there are "hidden subsidies" through the sharing of facilities with local training centres, for example. These hidden subsidies should not be denied and costing exercises must be done properly. (For an attempt to formalise and model the cost of recognition versus the cost of formal education and training, see Werquin, 2007). Most countries with an apparently well-functioning recognition system report that they would not be in a position to rapidly scale up the take-up due to lack of (well trained) staff and/or facilities to organise the assessment of applicants. Costs in terms of time and money should be related to expected benefits.

Cost saving and cost sharing are obvious responses to these issues. However, cost saving arising from reducing the sensitivity of the system to the needs of individuals and other stakeholders and by limiting quality assurance procedures are likely to have a negative impact in the longer term. An-

other solution, despite above-mentioned difficulties, would be to rapidly reach a critical mass in the number of applicants so that recognition procedures become more affordable on average. Access could be limited in few domains and opened up to others as viability becomes less of an issue.

Many countries rely on expanded private capacity and increased competition in the provision of learning opportunities as a way to improve efficiency of the qualifications system and to meet the needs of users. The cost of recognition systems is inextricably linked with this expansion. During the 1990s the private share of the total financing of education increased, and there is a clear trend in favour of greater private contributions in many OECD countries. It is very likely that a market will develop. Another problem is that funding systems often do not provide incentives, particularly for educational institutions, to implement systems for recognising non-formal and informal learning since grants are much higher for traditional students than for recognition applicants.

Pure economic theory would lead to asking individuals to pay more because they benefit from the system and save a lot of money not having to pay for a formal learning programme. Nevertheless, such an approach may not be implemented in the short or medium run as recognition systems need to, above all, attract people: higher recognition fees for applicants will only be possible when recognition systems have proven more efficient than formal education and training programmes in achieving a qualification. Until then, it is likely that the promoters of recognition of non-formal and informal learning still try to convince individuals on the basis of a low cost.

Take-up

The issue of low take-up is a clear challenge for the years to come. Even in countries where the system is the most conducive to undertaking a recognition process, the numbers often remain very small. This is partly due to inadequate or badly targeted promotional activities. Also, among low-skilled people,

there is a clear fear of failure due to negative experiences with formal education. All in all, there is a low perception of the potential benefits. Ambassador programmes could help reach out and convince those who most need a (second chance) qualification.

By the same token, but on the contrary, another challenge will be to manage positive expectations. As seen above, it may well be that the society, the economy and the labour market are not yet ready for accepting qualifications fully or partly achieved through the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. Even successful applicants may not necessarily get immediate prospects in the job market or in formal education and training. And there will be unsuccessful applicants. The solution here will be to deliver interim recognised documents so that unsuccessful applicants have a chance later in life when they have accumulated more learning. The biggest risk is that qualifications are awarded to all applicants, which will contribute to the (wrong) image that recognition systems are unfair in comparison to formal education and training systems.

Data

Analysing these issues is a challenge because there is a limited amount of data available, whether quantitative or qualitative. This is mainly because existing systems do not require the method of learning to be recorded. It seriously slows down the access to decent evaluation and quantitative analysis. An obvious solution would be to require the learning process to be recorded in separate files, for analysis only, without anything of that sort appearing on the transcript of the qualification awarded. In addition to recording specific data for research and analysis within the system, some countries are carrying out (or planning to carry out) specific quantitative surveys. An affordable solution would be to implement specific recognition modules in well-established surveys such as labour force or adult learning surveys. The clear challenge will be to deliver longitudinal data.

Marginalisation

Finally, a challenge that may become an issue is the ghettoisation of systems of recognition. The risk here is that such systems become available only to specific groups, such as immigrants, indigenous populations or those with no formal education. This would isolate rather than integrate applicants. A possible solution is to leave open the door to formal education and training even for groups that are typically reluctant to undertake formal programmes (OECD, 2003 and 2005a). Targeting, if too systematic, may become an issue. And given the difficulties in recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes for low-skilled people, regular education and training may be a better option.

PERSPECTIVES – WHERE IS THE RISK?

Most countries have been reforming their qualifications systems of which recognition of non-formal and informal learning systems are an important component. An important goal of most reforms is to create a coherent and flexible system. Another goal is making transitions from one part of the formal education and training system to another as straightforward as possible. One of the devices for such endeavours is the system of recognition which is not only a mechanism on its own but also a catalyst for improving the effectiveness of other mechanisms (OECD, 2007a).

Therefore, recognition of non-formal and informal learning is high on many countries' agenda. These systems, despite being rather convincing in theory, seem to have trouble taking off and reaching cruising speed. On the positive side, there is room for recognition systems and there are islands of good practice. On the negative side, there is little evidence that these systems work, and they seem to be mostly based on faith.

There is evidence that only a little group of people supports recognition of non-formal and informal learning in most countries. Until there is clear evidence that recognition systems do work and are sustainable, they rely on this small group of champions that constantly report about the difficulties they encounter when trying to promote this approach to lifelong learning. There is a risk that, in trying to convince all the stakeholders and the society as a whole, these champions oversell the recognition system that, in the end, does not deliver.

Is it reasonable to claim that recognition of non-formal and informal learning is the appropriate solution for a hundred per cent of the population? Do countries really have the tools and the budget for implementing such systems? How can a fundamentally flexible system cope with the rigidity of most existing education and training systems? Even the most optimistic champions of the systems of recognition of non-formal and informal learning agree that this will require a culture shift. How much time will be necessary for such a shift to happen?

The purpose of this paper is not to demotivate the champions, visionaries, or the reader. Recognition of non-formal and informal learning is a very good idea. But it may well disappear if some precautions are not taken to communicate it, evaluate it and move away from deadly optimism. The purpose of this paper is to motivate all the stakeholders so that countries firmly enter an era of pragmatism. Recognition represents a clear breakthrough in the relatively rigid world of education and training, but a lot of work needs to be done. The opportunities for individuals are endless but for this to become a reality, we need to move from faith to evidence-based policy in order not to jeopardise systems of recognition of non-formal and informal learning even before they reach maturity.

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FURTHER READING ESPECIALLY ABOUT COUNTRY PRACTICES:
http://www.oecd.org/edu/lifelonglearning/nqs
http://www.oecd.org/edu/recognition

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ENDNOTES

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2 Here again, the many alternative terms in use, and their different meanings will not be presented but they mainly are validation or accreditation as in: Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL), Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL), Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR), Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), Validation of Prior Learning (VPL), and so on (OECD, 2007c).

Validation
in the Nordic countries:
A comparative analysis

"Validation of knowledge and competence" for the promotion of lifelong learning has attracted more and more attention not least in the Nordic countries – Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

Per Andersson and Åsa Hult

In relation to validation, different concepts are used in different countries with somewhat different meanings. Common terms in English are also 'recognition/accreditation of prior (experiential) learning', and 'prior learning assessment'. In the Nordic countries the term 'real [actual] competence' is used frequently. In this article we mainly use the term validation as a generic term for the somewhat different meanings of the phenomena we describe.

Regardless of which concepts are used, the fundamental idea is to make visible and value prior learning, knowledge, and competence acquired in different contexts, often in informal learning processes. Validation aims to make visible informal learning, increase the possibility of adapting education to what the student already knows, enhance employability, and make better use of the already existing competence in working life. Validation is mainly a matter of making the transfer of individuals and competence within and between contexts (e.g. workplaces, education) and countries easier. Validation can be an initiative for unemployed persons, or a measure for development in the workplace, better integration of immigrants, or extended recruitment to education programmes. In the context of education, a central idea is not having individuals study what they already know, which means economic gains for both the individual and the society. Although a complete validation process is frequently understood to include documentation, assessment, and recognition of competence, more limited processes might also be regarded as validation in a broad sense.

Valuing and recognising knowledge developed outside the formal education system is not a new phenomenon. For instance, it has been done for a long time in different vocations in the form of journeyman's or master's examination. However, it is only in the last few decades that the notion of validation has become more clearly expressed. An important starting point were the ideas about extended admission to higher education, with the selection based on 'prior learning', which were formulated

and put into practice in the United States in the 1970s. In the Nordic countries, the development has started later (even if there was an interest in widening admission to higher education already in the 1970s). An example can be seen in Finland. Early by Nordic standards this country created a formal validation system for the assessment of vocational competence – a national competence-based qualifications system for vocational examinations was introduced in 1994. In Sweden the concept 'validation' was introduced in 1996, before the large-scale adult education initiative *Kunskapslyftet* (1997–2002), and the National Commission on Validation worked 2004–2007. In Norway the development project *Realkompetanseprojektet* – an important part of the Norwegian competence reform (*Kompetansereformen*) – included systematic attempts to value real competence in working life, the education sector and the third sector. In 1997, Denmark introduced an individual competence clarification (*kompetenceafklaring*) in the professional development courses for adults with a job but with a low level of formal education. In 2001, an adult education reform was yet another important step in the Danish development. In Iceland the testing of different methods of validation has been ongoing since 2004.

The purpose of this article is to compare and analyse the policies for validation in the Nordic countries. The focus is on validation in three different sectors: the adult education sector, the labour market, and the third sector (e.g. folk high schools, study associations and volunteer organisations). However, the validation carried out at universities and university colleges is not dealt with. Thus, when we discuss the education sector we refer to adult education.

PRIOR COMPARISONS

Comparisons of validation in the Nordic countries have been made before. Bjørnåvold (2000) describes the situation at the end of the 20th century in Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden in relation to the rest of Europe. He does not want to speak about a 'Nordic model' in the strict sense of the

word, but he still sees a common denominator in the openness to change that exists with regard to recognising informal learning. A possible explanation that Bjørnåvold offers is that the Nordic tradition of popular adult education implies that these countries are open to recognising the value of learning taking place outside formal education.

The Nordic Council of Ministers has drawn up descriptions of the situation in the Nordic countries (Nordisk Ministerråd, 2001; Nordiska Ministerrådet, 2003). The 2001 report is a survey of existing initiatives in the five countries concerning '*realkompetanse*' in education and working life. There is a general discussion about validation of '*realkompetanse*' in the 2003 report and more emphasis is put on valuing and giving recommendations in relation to different countries, and to the situation in the Nordic countries as a whole. However, the rapid development in this area means that there is a need for new comparisons and analyses of policies and development concerning validation in the Nordic countries.

Further comparisons have also been made at the European Union (EU) level. Colardyn and Bjørnåvold (2004) present a European inventory on validation, including Denmark, Finland, Norway (not EU member), and Sweden. They compare aspects such as the stages of development, standards, modules, methodologies, documentation, and links to formal learning. They identify three developmental stages: 1) experimentation and uncertainties (Denmark and Sweden), 2) national systems emerge (Norway), and 3) permanent systems exist (Finland). Another interesting matter is the variation in approaches, which Pouget and Osborne (2004) also identify when comparing the French and the British approaches. The development in France represents a broader and more holistic approach than that in Britain which focuses on vocational qualifications. The more holistic approach includes and assigns value to a broader spectrum of experiences and competences, compared to the more specific approach in the vocational qualifications frame-

work. Colardyn and Bjørnåvold (2004) also state a need for European 'common principles' and specified requirements for assessment tools with a variety of methods to collect evidence for different competences.

THE DESIGN OF THE STUDY

This article is based on a study of validation in the Nordic countries that was commissioned by the Nordic Network for Adult Learning, NVL. NVL is commissioned by the Nordic Council of Ministers to develop lifelong learning in the Nordic countries, and validation is one of its focus areas. We mainly describe the development up to the end of 2006 as this was the timeframe of the study. Descriptions and analyses are based on data provided by the representatives of the Nordic countries in the special expert network for validation initiated by NVL. The validation network, and thus the informants of this study, were selected to represent their respective countries because of their expertise in different aspects of validation.

The study has been accomplished in three phases. In the first phase the representatives delivered written descriptions of validation in their country and in different sectors. These descriptions became the basis of a preliminary analysis and the results were discussed with the network group. On the basis of this pilot study, a questionnaire was drafted in order to obtain information, if possible, from each of the five countries in areas that the pilot study indicated as interesting, thereby acquiring a basis for making comparisons. Representatives from each country answered the questionnaire in writing. In addition to the answers to the questionnaire, the written material also included certain reports etc. In a third step the written answers were completed by oral and written contacts in order to clarify some of the answers to the questionnaire. These materials constitute the basis for the analysis. Furthermore, bills concerning validation were being prepared in some of the countries, intended to be in effect during 2007. Some of these cases are also mentioned.

It should also be noted that the additional material (reports etc.) is not specifically referred to in the results, even if some material has been published separately.

PERSPECTIVES ON VALIDATION

In this section we introduce some concepts that provide a perspective on validation as a phenomenon and that also constitute the basis for our analysis of validation policies in the Nordic countries. The concepts we highlight are 1) convergent and divergent, 2) summative and formative, and 3) formal, non-formal and informal. These concepts have been used in prior analyses and comparisons of validation (see e.g. Andersson, 2006; Colardyn & Bjørnåvold, 2004) and are useful as they represent three central dimensions within which validation initiatives and policies can vary.

Convergent – divergent

Validation, as well as other forms of assessing knowledge and competence, might be designed in a convergent and/or divergent way. Convergent validation implies an assessment of *whether* and *to what extent* the knowledge corresponds to certain demands determined beforehand – goals, criteria etc. However, divergent validation aims at determining *what* an individual knows, from a more unbiased point of view. Any method of validation can be placed somewhere on the continuum convergent-divergent. In other words, the assessment of knowledge is rarely absolutely convergent or divergent. The British and French approaches mentioned above illustrate more convergent and divergent models respectively. Another option is a model whereby one proceeds from a divergent to a convergent approach during the process of validation.

Summative – formative

Summative validation is primarily retrospective and its main purpose is to sum up prior learning, to document and value/assess what a person already knows. Formative validation, on the other hand, is primarily looking ahead

with the purpose of providing a basis for designing the subsequent learning process. Validation can be given both summative and formative functions but this is not necessarily easy to combine since these purposes put different demands on the method. The objective of summative assessment is to give a reliable picture of what a person already knows, whereas formative assessment is primarily concerned with making learning as effective and meaningful as possible.

Formal – non-formal – informal

We use the concepts 'formal', 'non-formal' and 'informal' to characterize different kinds of educational and learning processes but also different assessment and validation processes. Formal education is used to describe education in the official education system – essentially schools, adult education, and universities. Formal learning therefore becomes learning connected to formal contents and the curriculum. Non-formal education implies organised learning outside the formal education system, e.g. in popular adult education, further training, and other organised competence development in working life. Informal learning is learning that takes place in everyday life, volunteer organisations, working life, etc., and which is not organised with the primary aim to learn.

Concerning the assessment/validation of knowledge and competence, formal assessment leads to a documented result based on an officially established standard e.g. a certificate, a professional qualification, or a license. Formal assessment may also lead to non-formal documentation. For example, a person who does not satisfy the requirements for obtaining a certificate or a license may still get a written certification of his or her actual competence. Non-formal assessment/validation is carried out in an organised way but the result is not formalised. This may be the case when divergent mapping results in an individual CV not based on any official patterns, or when a participant receives a certificate without an official status. An informal as-

sessment, however, is not organised as a special activity but is an informal part of another activity. This may be the case when an informal, formative assessment is made as part of a learning process – something that a teacher may do unnoticed and which affects the subsequent teaching and learning process.

COMPARISON

The presentation of the results of the comparison starts with a brief overview of the concepts and definitions of validation used in the Nordic countries. Further, we give a general picture of 'Nordic validation' and a comparison for each sector included in the study. (For a more extensive presentation of the results of the study, see Hult & Andersson, 2008.)

Concepts and definitions

In the five countries different concepts are used for what we describe as 'validation'. This is not only due to the fact that the countries have different languages but also to the fact that in each country the focus is somewhat different.

In Swedish the term '*validering*' is used, a translation of the French concept '*validation des acquis de l'expérience*'. '*Validering*' puts the focus on the process of validation. In Swedish policy validation has been defined as

> a process that includes a structured assessment, valuation, documentation, and recognition of the knowledge and competences that a person possesses regardless of how they have been acquired (Utbildningsdepartementet, 2003).

In addition, validation is defined as an exploratory (as opposed to a controlling) process aiming to assess and recognise existing knowledge.

Denmark, Norway, and Iceland mostly use the concept 'real [actual] competence' – in Danish '*realkompetence*', in Norwegian '*realkompetanse*' and in Icelandic '*raunferni*' – which means that, within this concept, the focus is on the object of validation, the competence that might be the target of

evaluation. Every competence is included, regardless of where it has been gained. In Denmark there is no comprehensive expression that corresponds to 'validation'. Real competence can be recognised in relation to education with the help of different kinds of competence assessment. The basis for assessment may be a competence clarification, an individual competence assessment, and/or a documentation in a competence folder (portfolio). In Norway, validation is called the 'documentation and valuing of real competence'. 'Documentation' implies a certified document showing the real competence that a person possesses. 'Valuation of real competence' in turn implies a process in which competences are valued and recognised in relation to certain types of usage in e.g. working life, civic life, or the public education system. In Iceland, the term '*raunfærnimat*' is used, also meaning real competence evaluation. It encompasses a validation process in five steps: information, mapping, analysing interviews, verification, and documentation.

In Finland validation is described as 'valuing what has been learnt', which includes both the validation process and the competence. The Finnish expression '*aiemmin opitun tunnistaminen ja tunnustaminen*' can also be translated as recognition and validation of prior learning, but the Finnish word '*validaatio*' is also used. This includes the identification, recognition, and validation of prior learning.

The general pattern

All the countries have methods for valuing or validating competence, even if the terms are different. In all five countries, validation is most developed and used in the education sector, and it is mainly carried out in relation to the criteria of the education system. All the countries have more or less individually adapted education systems that to some extent are based on the individual's competence independently of how it has been acquired. Most often this individualisation is not completely implemented, but still there is some kind of adjustment to individual needs. In all

the countries, validation is least developed in the third sector.

Common to all the Nordic countries, the labour market actors have been involved in the development of guidelines for validation and the Ministries of Education are responsible for or have participated in the validation work. Another common aspect is that validation is still being developed and modified. For example, in Finland where a permanent system of validation (cf. Colardyn & Bjørnåvold, 2004) has existed since 1994, changes are even today being made regarding how competence should be assessed and recognised. Concerning the stages of development mentioned above (ibid.), we can also see how Denmark, like Norway, can now be considered to be at the stage of an emerging national system. Iceland (not included in the European inventory) is at the stage of experimentation and uncertainties, and so is Sweden, despite many developmental efforts.

The education sector

In all the Nordic countries validation is primarily carried out in the (adult) education sector. The policy dealt with here is mainly related to the upper secondary level, even if the formats and the terms vary between the countries. In all the countries concerned, validation in this sector is in some respects a right, even if there is variation as to what this right includes. Despite a certain variation regarding school systems, the methods used in the validation field are very similar. In all the countries apart from Sweden, validation has a convergent orientation, according to which the formal, non-formal, and informal competences should relate to educational criteria. In Sweden it is considered that course objectives are too narrow and that all competence cannot be made visible in this way. For this reason a more divergent policy has been expressed, which means that validation may be more open and not only directed towards the kind of documentation that is the result of formal education.

The advantages of validation are considered in a similar way in all the countries: increased understanding of one's own competence, self-confidence, and motivation for further studies. Shortened study time saves both money and time for the individual and, furthermore, the individual can receive supplementary education and learn more.

In all the Nordic countries, validation can be both formative and summative. It may have different aims and consequently there may be different approaches to the process of validation. Those admitted to an education programme who, as a starting-point for future studies, validate what they already know, are subject to a formative validation. But the same validation may also be summative. The aim does not necessarily have to be further studies. Instead the person in question may want a certification of what he/she knows in order to apply for a job. Likewise, validation becomes summative if it turns out that the individual meets all the requirements of the education programme in question and for this reason does not need any supplementary education.

EDUCATION VERSUS VALIDATION AND INDIVIDUALISATION

Validation is often used as a basis for further studies and it offers a way of reducing the study time. Formal qualifications in the education system are regarded as important, which often means that the supplementary education is the goal of validation. Even if the Swedish policy is somewhat different, the general idea is that validation might lead to admission to studies and a reduction in the time to achieve formal qualifications by making it possible for individuals to get credit for their existing knowledge. In order to achieve a formal qualification in a short period of time, validation and education programmes which are adapted to the individual and prepared to fill the 'gaps' in an individual's background are the optimal alternative both from the individual and the socio-economic perspective.

However, validation and individualisation have inherent problems. Central

problems concern financing and organisation. For the education institutions, validation and shorter, individualised education programmes may not be the most profitable and easiest alternatives. For example, education institutions in Finland and Denmark receive less funding if education takes less time. There is simply a lack of financial incentives to shorten participants' study periods in adult education. Further, the cost of validation is higher than that of ordinary education because validation is individually tailored whereas an education programme is prepared for a whole group of students. The question is whether the benefits of a reduced study period can compensate for the probably higher implementation costs.

The labour market

A person who has worked for a long time may have acquired competences that are different from those taught in school – through work experience, in-service training etc. Validation in the labour market concerns mostly competences acquired in working life and assessments is carried out in relation to labour market demands, for example accepted vocational certificates or international standards. Thus the starting point for validation in the labour market is the vocation or the vocational area, as distinguished from requirements in formal curricula/course objectives.

In practice the differences between the education sector and the labour market sector are not so distinct. The sectors may very well overlap and different countries define them somewhat differently. For example, Finland has totally integrated both sectors and does not differentiate between the labour market sector and the education sector regarding validation, while Iceland on the other hand makes a special division between labour market validation and validation in formal education.

Denmark and Norway are the only countries that have produced special national documentation tools for this sector. Sweden and Finland have no national documentation tools but they have different kinds of methods at the national level, whereas Iceland is devel-

oping both documentation tools and methods. It is not completely clear whether each country has a convergent and/or a divergent orientation in validation in the labour market sector. The vocational recognition of competence in Denmark, Iceland, and Norway can be regarded as convergent but the documentation form used is more divergent. Sweden has, like in the education sector, a policy in which the starting point is divergent but convergent approaches are sometimes used in specific vocational fields. Finland, however, uses more clearly convergent methods.

THE ROLE OF THE BRANCHES OF INDUSTRY IN VALIDATION

So far the branches of industry in the Nordic countries have not chosen to develop special validation and assessment methods based on vocational, instead of educational, criteria at the national level. However, working life/the branches contribute to designing the requirements of vocational training. Among the Nordic countries, Sweden has been developing most divergent (and in some cases convergent) mapping and self-evaluation methods. In Sweden the goal has been to start from the vocation/vocational field rather than educational criteria and course plans. However, convergent validation methods intended to be based on vocational requirements still have ended up using (existing) educational criteria to a great extent. The fact that validation is connected to the education system is probably due to the need for legitimacy.

The third sector

The third sector is where the least has been done concerning validation and documentation in all Nordic countries. The 'third sector' does not consist of any uniform activity, but is made up of different non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The sector includes popular adult education (e.g. folk high schools, study associations), non-profit organisations, sports associations, associations for voluntary social work etc. Courses offered in the third sector – studies of developing countries, lan-

guage courses, ICT courses, creative courses etc. – are mostly regarded as non-formal. In addition, much informal learning takes place in the activities of different non-profit associations and the competence developed there does not always become visible even though it may have great value.

The most evident difference between the countries is whether there is a national documentation tool for real competence in the third sector or not. Such tools exist in Norway and Denmark whereas Sweden, Finland and Iceland are still at the stage of experimentation and uncertainty. The fact that competences acquired in the third sector vary and that they are acquired in a variety of activities means that the needs for documentation vary. Consequently, the tools that are developed are also rather divergent.

There is also hesitation towards the idea that persons should be assessed in this sector. Of course this does not apply to everyone in the third sector, but resistance is still encountered in most Nordic countries. Individuals become active in the third sector for example because they want to study democratic values, personal development, and views and values, rather than to be assessed. Consequently, validation and assessment in a broad sense might be regarded as contradictory to the purpose of third sector activities. Nevertheless, opinions vary and some think that it would be interesting to have the competencs acquired in the sector valued and recognised. For example, some emphasise the unique competences that popular adult education can create and that by validation could be made visible and valued.

Another aspect is that to a large extent in the Nordic countries, there is trust in the documentation of experiences from the third sector. Therefore, these experiences do not necessarily have to be translated into formal competence in order to be valued. In addition, many people have a relatively extensive formal education, and experiences from the third sector as 'additional qualifications' possess a value that does not need to be formalised.

Table 1. The main orientation in different sectors in the Nordic countries

	Education	Labour market	The third sector
Denmark	Convergent	Divergent	Divergent
Norway	Convergent	Divergent	Divergent
Finland	Convergent*)		Divergent
Iceland	Convergent	Convergent	Divergent
Sweden	Divergent	Divergent	Divergent

*) The Finnish competence-based qualifications system is common to the education and labour market sectors and is partly used in relation to the third sector, too.

CONCLUSIONS

This final section begins with a comparative analysis and a discussion about the results as a whole. We also discuss the orientation of validation, its functions, and the relation between formal competence and competence that is requested by the labour market. Finally, some future challenges are discussed concerning validation in the Nordic countries.

Different orientations: Convergent – Divergent

Firstly we will sum up and discuss which orientation the validation policy takes in the different countries regarding the convergent - divergent dimension (see Table 1). The main features are that the view on validation to the greatest extent is convergent in the education sector and mainly divergent in the third sector.

The description in Table 1 refers to the validation policy at the national level. In Sweden the starting point is divergent in all three sectors. In practice there is convergent validation in Sweden too, even if it is not the starting point. Contrary to this situation, Finland has a convergent starting point in the national competence-based qualifications system. Only criteria included in a vocational qualification can be validated in Finland. The system for vocational qualifications includes the education sector and the labour market and, partly, the third sector.

Norway and Denmark have also developed national divergent documentation tools for competence in the third sector. At the national level there are few projects going on in the third sector in the other three countries. Validation is mostly divergent in the third sector even in these countries, as far as there is any validation at all.

It seems that the suitability and potential of the policies and initiatives depends on the context. The freedom of the third sector requires more divergent approaches, while the formal education sector to a large extent represents a convergent approach with learning outcomes, criteria, grades etc. In the labour market the context varies more between and within countries, depending both on its relation to the education system and the varying approaches in different branches.

Formative and summative functions

The formative and summative functions are difficult to separate in the existing models. The models vary, and one and the same model may have double functions. For example competence may be assessed and documented in a summative way in relation to a certain module or course but at the same time this assessment may work formatively in relation to the supplementary courses that will follow. Still, we provide some examples of what these different functions might mean in different sectors (see Table 2).

In education, formative diagnoses and summative examinations and documentation are clear examples. In the labour market, validation may happen

Table 2. Examples of formative and summative functions in validation

	Education	The labour market	The third sector
Formative	Diagnosis	Mapping	Diagnosis
Summative	Examination, documentation	Certification, documentation	Documentation

through a formative mapping of competences resulting in a continued and systematic competence development, while a summative approach might involve certification of vocational competence. Diagnoses, probably rather informal, could be a natural part of non-formal education in the third sector, while a divergent documentation of competence can have a summative function.

Formal versus requested competence

Another difference concerns the emphasis put on formal competence in the labour market. Two models with emphasis either on formal educational qualifications or on 'useful documents' can be distinguished in the Nordic countries. Finland and Sweden serve as examples.

Formal qualifications are by far the most important thing in Finland and validation is in principle only carried out to determine formal qualifications. As only formal competence is counted, 'all' competences that are needed in the labour market are converted into formal vocational qualifications that can be validated. The Swedish policy, unlike the Finnish one, is based on the principle that it is not necessary to convert everything into formal competence in terms of education certificates etc. Other documentation, too, must have a value and be usable. Some competences acquired in working life do not correspond with education goals but may represent a different kind, or level, of competence than what can be included in formal education. The most important thing with this approach is that validation results in a document of competence which is a 'useful document' for the person in question.

Whether the system focuses on 'formal educational qualifications' or 'useful documents' is really a matter of what is in demand in the labour market. Here too we see how the context to a high degree influences what is possible and suitable. Do the employers demand formal qualifications or are other forms of documents also accepted? Formal qualifications, like grades, have legitimacy in the whole society. This is probably the reason for the fact that validation to a great extent is related to the education system. When a practicable national system with grades already exists, it is not certain that there is any substantial need for another system of assessment and documentation, especially if separate branches already have their own standards and certificates. The question is whether education programmes completely cover the needs of the labour market or whether it would be profitable to develop new assessment methods in order to value competences from working life and other sectors of society that cannot be related to criteria from formal education.

Future challenges for the Nordic countries

There are similarities as well as differences between the Nordic countries regarding the development of the field of validation. The existing variation also means that the countries face somewhat different challenges concerning the future development. Finland's principal challenge will probably concern validation of knowledge that is not acknowledged by the existent system of vocational qualifications or diplomas. In Sweden the challenge is to continue developing validation from the basis created by the National Commission on Validation, a development that will depend on the role validation is given in the education policy that is undergoing major changes. Denmark and Nor-

way have proceeded relatively far and the most important challenges seem to be related to the implementation and dissemination of policy and methods to different sectors of society. Iceland is the Nordic country where the development of validation has started most recently, and it is primarily concerned with establishing possibilities and rights to validation on the basis of experiences from different pilot projects.

A general challenge is how the different sectors (education, labour market, third sector) relate to each other. What transparency and mobility between the sectors exists and how is it stimulated by different policies and attitudes to validation? In the first place this concerns the relation between the third sector and the other sectors. In the third sector there is interest, but also hesitancy, to relate to and interact with the education and labour market systems. Competences developed in different non-profit activities and in non-formal education are seen as valuable and as something that consequently should be recognised by the formal education system and by the labour market while at the same time maintaining the freedom of the sector.

Secondly, the relationship between education and the labour market is interesting. Is it possible to find a balance, like in the Finnish system that integrates education and labour market requirements, or should one of the sectors get priority? If the labour market is given priority, the requirements of working life dictate the competences that should be valued. This provides a clear connection to the context where the competence is expected to be used, but at the same time the state must give up its influence over the competence requirements and control over policy. In consequence, competence requirements may become dependent on business cycles, changing with the variation of supply and demand of labour rather than depending on the actual demands of competence in the workplace. Or, they may become regional without national or international equivalence. Further, criteria may be formulated by commercial branches that are sometimes more interested in restricting ac-

cess to a vocation where the demand of labour is low than including individuals who have the necessary competence, and so on.

Thirdly, it is also important to pay attention to those sectors that are not included in this study – above all higher education. One of the questions in higher education is how to value experiences, competences, and qualifications from schools and municipal adult education, working life and the third sector regarding fulfilling the demands for admission and accreditation.

Finally, there are challenges about how the countries relate to each other. How can interest in the different ways of validation be used to facilitate and perhaps even to stimulate transparency (with regard to how competences are documented and valued) and mobility in the Nordic countries as well as in other countries? Continued cooperation and exchange of information will be necessary to promote such development. It is probably possible to further develop common principles at Nordic and/or European levels, but the degree of convergence has to be considered in order to avoid the development of systems that exclude and keep invisible certain competences, groups, and learning activities.

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Studying and comparing the policy and practice of recognition of non-formal learning in Nordic and Baltic countries

Leena Saloheimo

Joint Action for Validation of Learning (JaVaL) was a Nordic-Baltic project that addressed the issues of recognition of non-formal learning outcomes achieved through studies and other activities in the third sector. The partnership was formed by adult education specialists from Estonia, Finland, Denmark, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, and Sweden.

The issues of valuing learning in the perspective of lifelong learning have been strongly emphasized in national and EU strategies and worldwide for a decade. The recognition of all forms of learning, especially non-formal and informal learning, are seen as an important prerequisite for the creation of favourable conditions for developing lifelong learning. Different networks, such as *Transfine* (http://www.transfine.net), *Refine* (http://www.eucen.org/refine) and *Tuning* (http://tuning.unideusto.org/tuningeu/), have explored the field of valuing formal, non-formal and informal learning, and exchange of best practice between the three. Common European principles for validating non-formal and informal learning have been discussed and formulated (Commission of the European Communities, 2004).

The idea of valuing non-formal learning has attracted non-formal adult education institutions and organizations in Europe, but especially in the Nordic countries. Adult education organizations have been involved in many relevant projects, but usually as minor partners. It has been the rule that non-formal learning providers should accept existing systems, or adapt themselves to the needs of other adult education providers. It is strongly felt in the field that the institutions of

non-formal adult learning need to identify their own needs and starting points vis-a-vis valuing learning. This should be done in cooperation with all stakeholders involved in the recognition of learning.

JAVAL PROJECT

Joint Action for Validation of Learning (JaVaL) was a Nordic-Baltic project funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2005–2007. The project addressed the issues of validation of non-formal learning outcomes gained in the third sector. The partnership was formed by adult education specialists from seven countries: Estonia, Finland, Denmark, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, and Sweden. The project was co-ordinated by the Finnish Adult Education Association (*Vapaan sivistystyön yhteisjärjestö*, VSY) and conducted in close cooperation with the Nordic Network for Adult Learning (*Nordiskt Nätverk för Vuxnas Lärande*, NVL) and the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA).

There were one or two representatives from all of the partner organisations in the project coordination group. In order to facilitate the implementation of the recognition process in all education sectors, each participating country also formed a national reference group representing different stakeholders in the field of adult learning. In

the cases of Finland and Norway, the national reference group was identical to the NVL national network of recognition.

The coordination group planned and carried out the project. The project activities were centred around five two-day meetings and some tasks were carried out by the partners nationally. Project activities included collating best practice data into a database, carrying out a survey of recognition policies and practices, presenting and comparing data from partner countries, formulating policy suggestions, and organising dissemination conferences in Lillehammer in 2005 (with NVL and EAEA) and Copenhagen in 2007 (with NVL and the *Dansk Folkeoplysnings Samråd*, DFS).

PROJECT GOALS AND EXPECTATIONS

At the time of starting the JaVaL project in 2005, the Nordic countries were already strongly involved in the process of developing validation, whereas Baltic countries were only taking first steps in the field, with Estonia being ahead. The expectations of the project partners were discussed at the start of the project. The participants wanted to learn from each others' experiences and to strengthen their own third sector initiatives. The Latvian and Lithuanian partners were also looking for concrete models or examples of im-

plementing the recognition of learning at the national level. The goals of the project were to

- collect examples of good practice in implementing recognition in the field of lifelong learning in all the Nordic and Baltic countries;
- work out a set of criteria for recognition of non-formal learning, by taking into account the values and philosophy of non-formal adult education, and further develop and test the set of criteria in cooperation with the national Ministries of Education.

The goals were restructured during the project and the main changes are described later in this article. The results were to be disseminated through an online searchable cross-referenced database and in national seminars and two international conferences for Nordic, Baltic, and European participants.

PROJECT FRAMEWORK AND KEY CONCEPTS

The partners started the project work by defining the project focus and key concepts. The multicultural group communicated in English (not the mother tongue of any of the participants) and needed quite a lot of discussion before coming to an agreement regarding the project focus. The partners decided to focus on the recognition of the outcomes of non-formal learning situated in the third sector, for example in folk high schools, study circles, courses provided by non-formal adult education or cultural associations, sports associations, and activities such as voluntary work, union activism, creative activities, and so on. The recognition of learning in working life and all formal education was excluded although it had to be referred to at many points of the process.

As the project partners were familiar with the European Union lifelong learning strategies and documents, it was decided that the project would use

the European Commission classification of different types of learning:

(a) formal learning: typically provided by education or training institutions, structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and leading to certification. Formal learning is intentional from the learner's perspective;
(b) non-formal learning: not provided by an education or training institution and typically it does not lead to certification. However, it is structured, in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view;
(c) informal learning: results from daily life activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time and/or learning support). Typically, it does not lead to certification. Informal learning may be intentional but in most cases, it is non-intentional (or incidental/random). (Commission of the European Communities, 2001)

However, since a lot of non-formal learning in the Nordic countries takes place in non-formal adult education institutions, it was decided that non-formal learning provided by adult education and training institutions would be included in the definition.

Within the JaVal project, validation is understood as referring to the process of identification, assessment and recognition of learning outcomes, which can also be described as competences. The Nordic concept of 'validation' is used in the same meaning as the 'recognition of learning' in the European context. The participants also decided that the process of recognition of learning would be considered from the adult learner's point of view. This perspective was emphasized especially in the final recommendations. For partners whose activities and perspectives

traditionally tend to be institution and curriculum centred it was a challenge to differentiate the outcomes of learning from study programmes, and the individual learners' needs from institutional interests.

COLLECTING CASE DESCRIPTIONS OF RECOGNITION PROCESSES

In the first phase of the project, examples of best practices of recognition of non-formal or informal learning in the participating countries were collected. Initially, not many cases were found so the definition of cases was widened to include examples or even experiments of the implementation of recognition in adult learning, the third sector, vocational training, and working life. The cases chosen had to be relevant to the development of the recognition of learning in the third sector. The case descriptions were entered into the NVL online searchable database (http://www.nordvux.net/page/179/bestpractises.htm). In a dissemination conference in November 2005, cases of recognition from different countries were presented and discussed, along with the criteria and methods of recognition.

Characteristics of non-formal learning in the third sector

While collecting data on recognition implementation it was realised that it was necessary to clarify the key values of non-formal learning and to look at the specific competences that can be acquired through non-formal and informal learning in the third sector. In January 2006 the partners came up with the following list of characteristics of non-formal learning:

- flexible
- voluntary
- encourages further learning
- student oriented
- student directed
- builds self-confidence
- socially interactive

Table 1. Recognition steps and the responsible bodies

Steps of recognition	Responsible body
Information/recruitment	(Third) sector
Articulation: describing the competences	(Third) sector or non-formal education institution: facilitative counselling/guidance
Evidence-gathering	Individual
Assessment • predefined/towards standards (job functions) • open-ended/situational judgement	Independent assessor
Recognition	Receiving sector/institution

- dialogic
- collective
- exceptional topics / a mosaic of topics
- open and creative
- requires personal responsibility

It was also agreed that competences developed through studies and other activities in the third sector typically include social and communication skills as well as different types of general skills.

Process of recognition

During the project it was repeatedly pointed out that the recognition of prior learning covers more aspects than a system of certification of skills. After thorough consideration, the project group agreed on the definition of the steps towards recognition and on bodies responsible for each step (see Table 1).

It was envisaged that third sector institutions could provide information to individuals about the possibility of recognition of prior learning, and recruit them to the process of recognition. These institutions could also provide conceptual and technical help and support for describing competences gained through prior learning. This function would require special training for relevant members of staff.

After the articulation of competences, the candidate gathers the documents verifying his or her competences. The tools considered useable for describing competences and for evidence-gathering include, for instance, interview, dialogue, ICT tools (competence analysis in groups, in dialogue or individually), tests (identifying the competence level), and career plans. An independent assessor or a body of assessors then conducts an assessment based on the documents or other evidence provided by the candidate. The assessment tools depend on the nature of the assessment. Predefined assessment could require using certificates, diplomas and course descriptions etc. Open-ended assessment could be carried out with the help of a portfolio, CV, or self-evaluation, and so on. Finally, the result of recognition can involve, for instance, exemption from courses or certification. The educational institution can grant a diploma, or the employer can give the employee a higher status or a more demanding post and a pay rise.

NATIONAL POLICIES AND PRACTICES OF RECOGNITION OF NON-FORMAL LEARNING

The project group realised that there was no point in developing a common set of criteria for recognition early on because it was impossible to do so without knowing more about the national policies and systems as well as the concepts and procedures of recognition used in the participating countries. Instead, it was decided to explore the policies and practices of recognition of non-formal learning, to make comparisons between the participating countries, and to make general recommendations of recognition for national decision-makers.

A questionnaire covering the system of adult education as well as recognition policy and practice in each country was set up. The questionnaire was filled in by project partners and other national specialists of recognition in the early autumn of 2006. The data was arranged into a table of country descriptions (see http://www.vsy.fi/doc/javal.pdf).

Practice and policy of recognition

All the participating countries have some policy and practices concerning the recognition of prior learning. Recognition is practiced in the formal adult education sector and in working life in all of the countries, and, apart from Finland and Sweden, also in the third sector. Recognition policies have legal or formal basis in legislation or national initiatives. The validated competences are ones gained through non-formal learning, including learning situated in the third sector or working life. In Lithuania, only competences gained in the third sector are validated, and in Sweden only those gained in the working life.

The processes of recognition vary across the Baltic and Nordic countries. The most complete processes include providing information and raising awareness of the possibilities of recognition, documentation or demonstration of competences, assessment and recognition, as well as necessary counselling in the different phases of the

process (Denmark) or most of the elements mentioned (Estonia, Finland, Norway, Sweden). The recognition process in the third sector may also include the clarification of skills and competences, and documentation (Denmark, Norway). In Latvia, the process is connected with schools' and universities' midterm tests. The students participate in the analysis of the results, knowledge and processes related to the tests. In Lithuania, the formal educational system connects recognition with the accreditation of the course curriculum, and the certification of non-formal learning is based on the curriculum description and the assessment of learning outcomes.

Recognition policy in the third sector

Competences gained in the third sector activities and/or working life are validated in all of the project countries, and they have national initiatives for developing recognition of learning in the third sector. Recognition is most often carried out by formal adult education institutions or employers. In Estonia, an independent recognition authority is in charge of the process. The competences valued are classified as social or personal/general. In Lithuania, skills have to be gained through a training programme. Any competence relevant to the subject of study can be validated in Norway. In Sweden, recognition is used especially for experiential learning in the health care sector and in nursing.

Developing models for the recognition of competences gained in the third sector

The process of designing models and tools for the recognition of non-formal learning has been decentralized in all project countries and it has started from individual initiatives. National educational authorities have been active to varying degrees and social partners have participated in the discussion

as members of different working groups or steering committees. In Finland and Sweden, social partners have not shown special interest in developing the recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

The third sector itself has actively participated in different working groups and steering committees, and/or started pilot programmes at local, regional or national levels. Although the Swedish third sector was reported as having no influence in the development work, it has started a national pilot programme.

By the time the questionnaire was circulated, the development work had resulted in official implementation in some of the countries. In Estonia, an initiative concerning the evaluation system for folk high schools and study centres was included in the national lifelong learning strategy. In Latvia, a three-party convention formed by the Latvian Adult Education Association, Ministry of Education and regional governments has been formally recognised as a validator. In Norway, validation centres, recognition systems for higher education and recognition tools for the third sector have been set up.

Apart from Latvia, all project countries have some national funding available for the development of a system of recognition for learning in the third sector. Funding from the EU and/or Nordic sources has also been utilised in every country. For example, the Swedish National Commission for Validation has special funds for development work.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Once the survey had been carried out and the country descriptions were ready, the project group started formulating its final recommendations to political decision-makers as well as to non-formal adult education institutions and to organizations themselves. (See the insert for the list of recommendations.)

The results of the JaVaL project were presented at the final conference in Copenhagen in March 2007. Other conference presentations covered the wider European and global framework: Professor Michel Feutrie from the University of Lille considered the possibilities and challenges of the recognition of non-formal and informal learning in

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JaVal recommendations for decision-makers:

- The recognition of prior learning is a right of an individual.
- Recognition is a means of motivating adults for lifelong learning.
- All education sectors should cooperate in the creation of recognition policies.
- Guidance and counselling – need to ensure the competence of counsellors of recognition.
- Independent assessment bodies need to be established.
- Research and development resources are required.

Recommendations for the providers of non-formal adult learning:

- Special competences gained in non-formal learning need to be clarified.
- The voices of the third sector need to be made heard at all levels of the development work.

See http://www.vsy.fi/doc/javal.pdf for further details about the recommendations.

the European context; and Patrick Werquin introduced and reflected on OECD's objectives and activities in promoting the recognition of non-formal and informal learning worldwide. These reflections convinced the JaVaL partners of the importance of their own initiatives in the field.

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The recognition of individual experience in a lifelong learning perspective.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning in France

In January 2002, with the introduction of the social modernisation law, France passed an important milestone in introducing the concept '*validation des acquis de l'expérience*' (VAE) and in implementing a comprehensive framework for social and professional recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

Michel Feutrie

The social modernisation law (Ministère de l'emploi et de la solidarité, 2002a) establishes a new right for individuals wishing to receive a qualification on the basis of their experience: all they have learnt in their professional and personal life can be assessed for a qualification. Further, all learning and training institutions offering qualifications and registered in the national list of vocational qualifications (*Répertoire National des Certifications Professionnelles*, RNCP; see the insert for more information) are obliged to set up a procedure for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning for candidates applying for one of the qualifications they award. Together with five decrees, this law forms an extensive framework for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in France.

A STEP-BY-STEP CONSTRUCTION

The recognition of non-formal and informal learning is not quite new in the French educational context. In 1934 a law (Ministère de l'éducation nationale, 1934) allowed Engineer Schools to award diplomas on the basis of at least five years' working experience as an engineer in a company. Around a hundred candidates are still qualified this way each year. However, the process of recognition of non-formal and informal learning is generally considered to have really started in 1985 when the Ministry of Education, in accordance with the 1984 University Reform, published a decree (Ministère de l'éducation nationale, 1985) enabling *access* to all levels of university education without the traditionally required qualifications. Access was made possible on the basis of personal and professional experience of at least two years for candidates with a qualification from initial education, or three years for candidates without one. In addition, this decree makes possible *exemption* from modules or units. This decree is now well

The Répertoire National des Certifications Professionnelles (RNCP) is a list of all the qualifications accredited by the State Commission for Vocational Qualifications (*Commission Nationale de la Certification Professionnelle*, CNCP) after a procedure placed either on the responsibility of different ministries (Education, Employment, Agriculture, Social Affairs, Health, Youth and sports) for State qualifications, or on the responsibility of the CNCP for other qualifications. Currently around 15,000 qualifications are likely to be registered in the RNCP. The descriptions of these qualifications are available on the CNCP website, http://www.cncp.gouv.fr.

established and all universities apply it. In 2006, 16,220 application forms were examined by the validation commissions (*Commissions de Validation*) in the universities. Seventy-two per cent of them received a positive answer. It is worth noting that this procedure was established around the same time as the APEL (accreditation of prior [experiential] learning) procedure in the United Kingdom.

Then, in the 1990s, a law and 4 decrees made it possible to *award a part of a qualification* (at the maximum all the modules or units in an educational programme minus one) on the basis of professional experience. This law applied to vocational qualifications awarded by the Ministries of Education, Higher Education, Agriculture and Youth and Sports. This law was abrogated and replaced by the 2002 law.

The social modernisation law of 2002, together with two decrees, a general decree (Ministère de l'emploi et de la solidarité, 2002b) and a specific one for higher education (Ministère de

l'éducation nationale & Ministère de l'emploi et de la solidarité, 2002), made it possible to *award full official qualifications* on the basis of personal and professional experience if the candidate has been involved in paid, unpaid or voluntary employment or activity for at least three years. This legal framework extended the procedure to all educational institutions awarding qualifications registered in the RNCP.

A PROFOUND CHANGE IN 2002

The 2002 law can be seen as the result of a learning process that helped decision-makers, stakeholders, social partners and educators experiment and finally come to a consensus about an alternative route to certification. This new route is based on four major changes.

First and main change: learning and training institutions are allowed to award a complete qualification (degree, diploma, certificate, etc.) on the basis of personal and professional experience. This means that the law opened a new road towards qualification in addi-

Officially recognised qualifications in France
Three types of qualifications are officially recognised in France:
• qualifications awarded in the name of the State under the responsibility of a ministry (around 13,000 qualifications, of which around 11,000 for Higher Education);
• qualifications awarded by public or private institutions or organisations registered in the RNCP after a specific procedure involving ministries and social partners (around 1,500 qualifications);
• certificates awarded by professional bodies accredited after a procedure based on an agreement between social partners in a specific sector (around 450 qualifications).

tion to schooling, apprenticeship, or further education. It is no longer necessary to participate in learning or training programmes to obtain a qualification. There is now a complete dissociation between the learning process and the assessment process for a qualification.

Second change: the whole experience of an individual can be taken into account: work experience of course, but also personal experience acquired at home, in volunteering, or in leisure activities.

Third change: all qualifications registered in the RNCP are open to validation: state diplomas, qualifications awarded by accredited learning and training organisations, and certificates awarded by professional and sectoral organisations.

Fourth change: the duration of experience required has been reduced from five (in the 1992 law) to a minimum of three years.

The implementation of a comprehensive framework

Three other decrees complement the 2002 law: a decree that created a new leave for employees (Ministère de l'emploi et de la solidarité, 2002c); a decree that allows companies to include their employees' validation expenses in the compulsory continuing education expenditure of the company (Ministère des affaires sociales, du travail et de la solidarité, 2002a); and a decree making validation a required part of the annual activity report that learning and training institutions have to submit to the government (Ministère des affaires sociales, du travail et de la solidarité, 2002b). However, the most interesting developments are not the regulations but the commitment of the stakeholders. Since 2002, we have been witnessing an important mobilisation of stakeholders in the development of this process: from policy-makers, ministries and Regions to learning and training

institutions, companies and social partners. VAE, surprisingly, is seen as an important element of educational policy and favourably considered by all. Policy-makers' critique mainly focuses on the speed of implementation and on the fact that not enough many people benefit from validation.

A three-level VAE system has been built and it is now progressively becoming an essential element of the educational policy in France. For instance, the annual State Budget includes a chapter on VAE under the Vocational Education Annex. On the first level, we find information and orientation services which since 2006 are the responsibility of the Regions. All Regions have implemented a network of information and counselling offices (*Points Relais Conseil*) where individuals can find information and counsel on the VAE process, qualifications, and procedures developed by learning and training institutions. The Regions have also set up a commission organising the dialogue between the state, the Regions, and social partners about the implementation of VAE at the local level. The Regions are gradually investing in VAE. They are developing policies to meet the needs of specific groups such as low-skilled and illiterate people, to help SMEs implement the procedure and to facilitate dialogue between learning and training institutions as well as including VAE in their continuing education policy, developing surveys, and so on.

On the second level, we find procedures developed by learning and training institutions. In the case of institutions awarding state qualifications, the procedures are defined by ministries. These ministries have developed a validation action plan that introduces validation regulations, assessment procedures and application forms and tools, procedures for the identification and training of professionals, and so on. The procedures of other institutions are

their own responsibility, but they are controlled by the CNCP. The social partners came to an agreement in 2003 regarding continuing education for employees. The agreement aims to place continuing education in a lifelong learning perspective and to contribute to positive professional pathways for employees. VAE is one of the tools at their disposal.

On the third level, we find quality control procedures that have mainly been developed at the state level on the basis of annual reports provided by learning and training organisations and thematic reports produced by inspection bodies or experts.

The specific situation of Higher Education[1]

Because of the relative autonomy of Higher Education institutions and their substantial experience in the field of validation, the Department in charge of Higher Education in the Ministry of Education argued for a separate decree for Higher Education. This decree only concerns universities, schools of engineers, and business schools awarding qualifications accredited by the State. If they award other qualifications they have to apply the general decree. The Higher Education decree is largely in line with the general decree (which concerns all other institutions).

In this process candidates are invited to apply to the institution awarding the qualification, in accordance with the conditions defined by the institution. Each institution may define its own conditions in conformity with the law, such as how many years' of experience is required, the content of eligible activities, and so on. Candidates can only apply for one qualification each year, or a maximum of three different qualifications. Most frequently they have to prepare a dossier, or a portfolio, and provide evidence (such as documents and certificates) in support of their application. It is up to the institution to

define the type and content of evidence required.

In higher education, a jury must interview the candidates. It can award a full qualification or a part of it. In the latter case the jury formulates recommendations to the candidates about further requirements that need to be fulfilled in order to obtain the full qualification. The way in which the qualification has been obtained is not indicated on the certificate. It is therefore identical to a certificate awarded after traditional assessment.

Within Higher Education, due to institutional autonomy, the composition and role of the jury is the responsibility of the president of the university or the director of the higher education institution. They nominate the president and members of the jury, taking into account their competences. Academics must be in majority and at least one of the jury members must represent companies, trade unions, or external organisations.

State of play

When launching the new framework, it was not evident that it would be successful. The actors who were at the heart of the process were afraid of possible resistance from learning and training institutions and from teachers or trainers. However, the first results were encouraging and the number of candidates increased rapidly. We have no statistics from private institutions, but on the basis of information provided by public institutions we can estimate that the number of applicants was around 100,000 in 2006. Within Higher Education, only statistics from universities are available. In 2006 all universities (apart from one) examined at least one application form. In total, 3,935 dossiers were compiled and 3,705 candidates received a qualification. Forty-six per cent of the candidates applied for a masters' degree. Two thirds of them were between 30

and 45 years old, 22 per cent over the age of 46, and 48 per cent were employed in an executive position (Ministère de l'Education, 2006, 6).

It was no more evident that learning and training institutions would easily start awarding full qualifications on the basis of individual experience. Realistic expectations relied on around 5 per cent of the applicants receiving qualification on the basis of experience. The first results exceeded the most optimistic expectations. In 2006, on the whole, the percentage of full qualifications awarded was around 25 per cent of applications. Surprisingly, it is higher in universities with around 50 per cent each year.

One of the most interesting results of the implementation of validation is the emergence of a five step procedure which is more or less common to all institutions. The first step involves the reception of people seeking information about validation opportunities, procedures, and orientation towards institutions likely to offer qualifications that match their experience. These services are provided either by institutions awarding qualifications or institutions in charge of advice, guidance and counselling, companies, jobcentres, and so on. Currently it is the Regions that are responsible for granting the institutions the permission to provide these services.

The second step involves the formal verification of the validity of the (validation) claim. If the claim is found valid, the suitable qualification is chosen, and the relevant procedure and requirements explained to the candidate. This step is the responsibility of the learning and training institutions.

The third step consists of the preparation of the dossier, or collection of evidence, or tests. During this phase candidates receive the support of an advisor (*accompagnateur*) who provides them guidance during the process of compiling the dossier which can be

long. The process involves frequent exchanges between the candidates and advisors. This phase is crucial and it is now widely recognised as the most important part of the procedure.

In the fourth step the dossier is examined by a jury, and candidates are observed at work or during practical tests in accredited centres. Candidates may be interviewed (in Higher Education the interview is compulsory) in order to supplement the dossier or to clarify dimensions of experience that the members of the jury wish to explore.

The fifth step involves the decision and communication of results to the candidates and follow-up in case of partial validation. In some universities steps four and five are combined. After the jury's deliberation, candidates are invited to discuss the decision with the jury. The objective is not for the jury to justify its decision but to relate it to the candidate's personal and professional pathway and to provide recommendations for the future, or articulate needs for supplementary evidence in case of partial validation.

A NEW APPROACH AT WORK

The 2002 law on VAE has introduced a shift from a learning approach to an approach based on evaluation as well as an inversion of the logic of assessment. Validation of non-formal and informal learning obliges us to review our conception of assessment. In traditional assessment, the logic is programme or content driven and the direction of communication is from somebody who knows to someone who (in principle) does not know. The assessors are the "masters of the game", verifying that the candidates are able to fulfil the necessary requirements. Assessment of non-formal and informal learning on the other hand is mainly based on what is not expected because non-formal and informal learning does not follow programmes, disciplines, or

structured learning processes. The candidates are the "masters of the game" because they are the only ones who can provide the elements and the information that will be used in assessment. Assessment depends at the same time on the compatibility of learning outcomes and the requirements of the qualification, and on the candidates' understanding of the assessors' expectations and their capacity to mobilise and present their experience in an appropriate way. We come from a one-way assessment, or a sanction-assessment, to an assessment based on dialogue and on mutual trust. This new approach is now producing appreciable results, the following four or which are particularly relevant to higher education institutions.

VAE places the individual at the centre of the process

Validation requires an individual centred approach because the candidates' experiences are unique even if they live or work in identical environments. What they have learnt from different situations is quite specific as it is a result of an individual cognitive process of integration and assimilation (whether conscious or not) of all the resources these situations provide. Individuals structure, articulate, continuously organise and re-organise these experiences according to previous learning, interests, willingness, the environment, and according to positive or negative returns between action and reflection. Consequently, the assessment procedure has to help candidates become conscious of unplanned learning that is hidden in activities, and understand it has a value. The procedure also needs to make learning outcomes visible and understandable to the candidates and to others, help the candidates organise learning outcomes in a way that suits the standards of the relevant qualification, and prepare the candidates to meet the jury under the best conditions.

This in itself is a learning process, and must follow the rhythm of each individual. It is a new and so far unusual practise, and it must be guided by advisors able to adopt a new kind of attitude.

VAE obliges juries to adopt new attitudes

The experience of an individual is comprehensive and cannot be seen through the prism of disciplines or traditional programmes. Learning outcomes from professional and personal activities are not immediately available for assessment. In addition, experience is contextualised, and contexts do not provide equal opportunities, which is particularly difficult for academic juries. It is for this reason that the law made provision for the nomination of validation juries that include members who have experience of this kind of approach. Two main approaches are currently orienting the juries' work in the French system: one is based on what we could call a "weighing principle", whereby the individual's experience is weighed up against standards and references of the qualification; whilst the other is based on a "developmental principle" which takes into account experience as a whole. The first focuses on formal results and is more or less related to programmes while the second tries to make candidates aware of what they have learnt and the milestones they have passed, to situate them on a route, and to develop a holistic approach. We know that candidates apply for validation at a certain moment in their personal and professional pathways and it appears particularly important for the jury to understand the dynamics of this pathway.

Validation is not simply about reporting on the results of an assessment. Rather, it involves the evaluation of a learning process; evolving competences; and of an individual progression that demonstrates, at the appropriate level,

increasing capacities to solve problems. The objective is not to identify knowledge or skills, but to verify if candidates can demonstrate that their schemes of thinking, the models they use, their methodologies, their "private theory" are relevant. In this perspective, the jury situates its decision in relation to the individual personal and/or professional project and to what is happening in the sector or occupation in which the individual works or is active. The objective is not only to award a qualification but to steer candidates' personal and professional progress, to provide them with tools and methodologies for understanding what they are continuously learning, to help them move from passive learning to a proactive attitude, and to provide them with a theoretical basis that will enable them to operate in their evolving environments.

Such an approach simultaneously involves decontextualisation and formalisation, and conceptualisation of knowledge and competences gained in concrete activities in order to organise, prioritise, confront, criticise and make them transferable to other situations (other contexts or other levels of complexity). This is how validation of non-formal and informal learning can become an integral and essential part of the lifelong learning perspective.

Progressively, this second approach is gaining ground. The percentage of total validation cases shows that in a large number of universities, the juries in charge of VAE have adopted a positive approach regarding experience and have progressively learnt to read and evaluate it.

VAE obliges us to revise university programmes

The traditional programme descriptions in use in most French universities are not appropriate from the perspective of validation. Validation starts from what is demonstrated in concrete

activities which is always a combination of knowledge, methodologies, and skills mobilised to solve a concrete (repetitive, new, crucial) problem. The task is to establish a connection between competences verified as effective in a specific context and the type of behaviour and capacities that are expected from those who are awarded a qualification in the traditional way. What are students able to do at the end of their learning process and what is their level of expertise and responsibility?

This suggests a need for our colleagues to develop their programmes and pedagogies in a way that allows students to operate in the job market. It is worth noting that a large part of the educational programmes are rather well built and rather efficient regarding the job market, but teachers are not quite in tune with it. We can observe that they become more aware of the link with the job market when they are confronted with the validation process, concrete application forms or portfolios, and real workers.

More generally, the discussion provoked by the introduction of learning outcomes (focusing on what an individual knows, understands and is able to do at the end of a learning process rather than inputs and duration) into university programmes in the Bologna process will probably accelerate this evolution of validation and help in the future validation procedures.

VAE implies a holistic process from reception and admission to decision

The starting point of validation is the overall experience of an individual. It is a result of a continuous process which universities have to analyse in relation to standards or references in order for the juries to come to a decision about qualification or possible follow-up. What we have learnt since 2002 is the key role played by guidance. Most French universities have established validation centres which call on 'pro-

fessionals' to help the candidates to analyse their experience, to present it in a 'legible' way to a jury and to link the outcomes of their experiential learning with the requirements of the qualification.

From the organisational and administrative perspective, developing validation of non-formal and informal learning upsets the traditional calendar of the university. Candidates can enrol at any time of the year and juries do not necessarily convene at the end of a semester or an academic year (in some universities juries convene when the candidate is ready). In case of partial validation, the jury identifies the additional evidence that is expected from the candidate and the way the candidate will have to fulfil the requirements. The jury may recommend attending courses, reading books, or preparing a report on a specific issue, and so on. This process obliges universities to provide flexible and more adapted arrangements, and will certainly help them to progressively become lifelong learning institutions.

QUESTIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

At this stage of implementation, some problems are not yet completely solved and some new questions appear.

A new culture needs to be adopted

The separation of formal learning and certification that the 2002 regulation wished to introduce is not yet a reality. The 2002 regulation provides for a deep change, but the practises developed by numerous learning and training institutions (sometimes guided by the recommendations of ministries) are still influenced by earlier regulation. Some have seen the 2002 law just as an extension of the 1992 law. The new culture embedded in the 2002 regulation is not yet understood by all. Although the process of assessment sometimes gives priority to the identification and extraction of elements of knowl-

edge and skills which are comparable to those gained through formal learning, experience is not always considered as a whole. In this case we are more in a process of validation of experiential learning than in a process of validation of experience. Some institutions are reluctant to implement VAE because of the reactions of alumni who are not happy that candidates, even if they possess solid and valuable experience, obtain a degree without having been selected and taking part in the training programme. So, for some actors wishing to protect their "prestigious degrees", the creation of qualifications specifically dedicated to the validation of experience is not out of the question.

Voluntary vs. professional activities

VAE explicitly allows the recognition of knowledge, skills and competences gained in volunteering and unpaid activities. Progress has been made thanks to the reflections and experiments initiated by the Ministry of Youth and Sports, but a lot is yet to be done. In most learning and training institutions practicing VAE, voluntary activities are not considered and appreciated in the same way as professional activities. Especially in universities these activities are seen as something additional to everything else that is being examined. Only in a few cases do assessors consider voluntary activities as likely to build capacities in the same way as professional activities, or as alternative to professional activities. We need to work on specific instruments and models for identifying, analysing and assessing voluntary activities, just as we have done in the past with professional activities[2].

The provision of guidance

We have seen that guidance is essential to the French VAE system. In general, candidates polled in surveys or interviewed by journalists declare that they

are satisfied with information. However, satisfaction is not so high concerning guidance. The level of satisfaction is strongly linked to the final result of the assessment. Our analysis (Bejjani & Feutrie, 2006) introduces new questions regarding the arrangements implemented by learning and training institutions. Do we need to accept that people work harder in the production of a dossier (which requires a huge amount of work) if the advisors estimate that candidates have a small chance to obtain a significant positive answer at the end? As VAE is a right for individuals, it is impossible to stop candidates from trying it out. In most cases the results are far from what the candidates expected, which creates frustration and sometimes reinforces school failure. Of course we cannot leave the candidates alone, especially if they are low-skilled and have difficulties especially in the articulation of their experience, but how far do we help the candidates? How to articulate the contribution of different sources of support (family, colleagues, friends, human resources managers, superiors, etc.) in the process of producing the dossier?

The challenge of managing individual pathways

Since 2002, VAE has principally reached a section of the population that is highly experienced and in some way had been waiting for an opportunity to achieve social recognition for the work they have been doing for years. The question is: what will happen when a significant part of those who could be interested have gone through validation? Several answers to this question have been envisaged during the last two or three years. Efforts have been made by several ministries to attract experienced people who lack qualifications, especially in the field of social work. Some, mainly big, companies have started integrating VAE in

their human resources management. But we might have to envisage VAE differently in the future. Our vision is that VAE has to be the structuring element that is at the core of personal and professional pathways, introducing continuity in discontinuity, and organising transitions in life. VAE contributes to the organisation and formalisation of individual learning outcomes and ensures continuity and progression. The future developments of a much more knowledge-based economy that requires actualisation of knowledge and skills beyond simple adaptation impose the idea that individual trajectories will need more frequent returns from work and training. So, the challenge is the organisation and management of individual pathways in this perspective of lifelong learning.

Validation at the European level

Finally, validation of non-formal and informal learning is now a key issue at the European level. It is an integrated part of the lifelong learning strategy that Europe wants to promote. Increasingly, countries set up arrangements for the identification, validation and certification of non-formal and informal learning. However, the level of implementation and ideas at work are different from one country to another. After the European Council adopted a set of Common principles in 2004 (European Council, 2004) designed to strengthen the comparability, compatibility and transparency of validation approaches and methods across national boundaries, the European Commission has been working on a set of guidelines that will provide member states with an instrument for improving practises in the field of validation of non-formal and informal learning. In France, the validation of non-formal and informal learning is part of the existing formal education and training system, providing an alternative route to qualification. In other European countries, due

to the resistance of learning and training institutions and even NGOs, validation of non-formal and informal learning is developed in parallel with the formal system. This is sometimes seen as a positive situation, providing an opportunity for the implementation of validation procedures and the recognition of the diversity of what is learnt by European citizens. But, are we not creating "second class" qualifications and making the system opaque for users? The results obtained by the French system offer interesting perspectives that can contribute positively to the European discussion on this important issue.

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ENDNOTES

1 The Association of Directors of Continuing Education Services in Universities has just published a book presenting recent developments on VAE in Higher Education. See Ben Moussi-Le Gall, 2008.

2 At the European level, the MOVE project has produced very interesting work on this issue. See in particular the final report of the conference on *Mutual recognition skills and competences gained through volunteering: towards a European debate*, Brussels 23-24 May 2007. The report is available online at http://www.eaea.org/doc/projects/MOVE_conference_report.pdf.

Documentation and validation of non-formal and informal learning in Norway.

Policy, initiatives and experiences

In recent years, validation of non-formal and informal learning has become a key aspect of lifelong learning policies. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s it has been generally acknowledged that learning occurs in different arenas and can be advanced in formal, non-formal and informal ways. This means that the concept of lifelong learning has been broadened to include learning in a vast variety of settings and contexts. The challenge is to link all this together.

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As long as learning, skills and competences acquired outside formal education and training remain invisible and are not taken into account, the ambition of lifelong learning for all cannot be achieved (Colardyn & Bjornavold, 2004).

European countries are at different stages of policy formulation and implementation of systems for validating and recognising prior learning, with some only at the beginning of the process. Finland and the United Kingdom, on the other hand, are among the leaders, having integrated validation into the qualification system and developing national qualification frameworks. Norway is somewhere in between but has made great strides towards a national comprehensive validation system (Bjørnåvold, 2008) in which documen-

tation from formal education, workplace training, voluntary work and non-formal education can be linked together. Currently, the schemes are still at the implementation stage and the ambition to have a comprehensive national validation system has not been fully satisfied. This article will present the policy and practice prior to the Competence Reform at the end of the 1990s, examine the initiatives which have been taken in the wake of the reform, and discuss what has been achieved so far.

PRIOR EFFORTS TO IMPLEMENT ASSESSMENT OF PRIOR LEARNING

The contemporary Norwegian schemes for assessing prior learning have a long history and have been developed on the basis of previous efforts in the adult education system, working life and higher education.

Adult education

The principle of formal recognition of prior learning is publicly mentioned in the first parliamentary bill on adult education in 1965. This introduced a broad vision of adult education as a joint effort on the part of the state, working life, civil society and the school system to provide for skills training, general education and personal development. Moreover, the bill stated that everyone should have the opportunity to document one's knowledge and skills at all levels and areas within the public education system, independently of how and where they had been acquired (Parliamentary bill no. 92, 1964–65). This principle was also established in the 1976 Act relating to adult education, where the intention was to provide supplementary instructions for its implementation. But in the

beginning of the 1980s the Ministry came to the conclusion that these matters had to be examined further by a public committee.

In its report (NOU 1985:26), the committee argued for greater fairness between persons with formal education and those with working life experience and recommended a number of schemes. The recommendations from the committee did not, however, lead to any immediate results. As indicated by the secretary of the committee ten years later, two different views on knowledge collided; one perceiving learning as something acquired through studies, the other as something acquired through doing, i.e. through the practical exercise of vocational work at the workplace (Dalin, 1996).

Working life

Since 1952, the Vocational Training Act has allowed individuals to take a craft certificate examination provided they had 25 per cent more working experience than the normal apprenticeship (usually three years). This meant that an employee could have his or her main training and practice at the workplace and take the theoretical exam required for the craft certificate whenever he or she wanted. In the following years, many believed that the educational institutions would be able to cope with the new challenges regarding skills training and technological and industrial development. Accordingly, it was thought that the old apprenticeship programmes would be phased out. This assumption proved wrong. In 1981, a new Act relating to craft training in working life made the apprenticeship schemes more attractive and stated that the craft certificate should be the primary aim of all vocational training whether it occurred in schools or in working life (Hagen & Skule, 2007). The same year a report to Parliament, *Education and Work* (no. 45, 1980–81), proclaimed the workplace as the most im-

portant learning arena. A large number of apprentices continued to choose this practical way to achieve the craft certificate, and from approximately one-third to one-half of the candidates for the craft certificate examinations each year took this route (Ure, 2007, 38).

In the 1990s, this practical opportunity was questioned by the initiators of the new upper secondary education reform (Reform 94). They placed more emphasis on general knowledge rather than the specific vocational and practical subjects and argued principally that the apprentice candidates should be tested in the same general subjects as the school participants. However, these new requirements were strongly resisted by both trade unions and employer associations (Skule et al., 2002). Moreover, the employers and the candidates themselves have been very satisfied with this way of acquiring a craft certificate and it has been retained (Reichborn et al., 1998).

Higher education

In the 1970s, Norway introduced a number of models for access to higher education, with three alternative entrance requirements: I) Access through accepted formal education, in practice completed upper secondary education; II) access through accepted formal education, but with additional criteria; and III) access through the individual route, based on the institution's assessment of the individual applicant's real competence (Grepperud, 2005, 126). This third entrance scheme recruited many students in particular to the recently founded regional colleges in the 1970s. These were based on the philosophy of giving new groups of adults better access to higher education, assisting in the provision of adult education and complying with the regional need for professionals. To begin with, the colleges also complied with this philosophy as a large proportion of those admitted to the institutions were part-time stu-

dents, a third were over 30 years of age and a fifth had not completed upper secondary education. These features changed, however, as the regional colleges strived to be accepted as university colleges rather than providers of adult education (Tøsse, 2005, 166).

NEW INITIATIVES

The impetus for the new initiatives in the 1990s is linked to several trends. One is the vocational trend in adult education provision, practice and research, including a revitalized interest in informal learning, the social dimension of competences and the tacit dimension of knowledge. The second is the general shift of focus from education to learning which coincides with a change in focus from provision to demand and from input to output. Thirdly, the changes in the political climate and economic development revived human capital thinking and put more emphasis on quality, efficiency and resource exploitation. This meant that forging partnerships in education, as well as the joint efforts combining formal and informal learning at all levels and in different arenas, became increasingly urgent. In short, a larger vision of the learning society emerged in the 1990s (Coffield, 2000, 4).

THE COMPETENCE REFORM

In Norway, the unions and the Labour Party took the leading role in making lifelong learning a reality for all. In 1995, the Norwegian Federation of Trade Unions (LO) passed a Plan of Action for Continuing Education and Training, with the following main priorities: paid education, a leave of absence for education and the recognition of prior learning CTeige, 2007, 109). These requirements led to the appointment of a governmental committee to further outline an action plan, and its findings were presented in *New Competence* (NOU 1997:25). This time the recommendations were immediately

followed up by a report to Parliament (no. 42, 1997–98). In the beginning of 1999, the Norwegian Parliament subscribed to the main ideas of what was entitled *The Competence Reform*. One of its aims was to develop a system for validating prior learning in a way that would equalize work experience with formal education.

Both economic and political reasoning were behind this initiative. The initiators from the political left argued that the widening skills gap put the low-skilled and low-educated at risk and feared that this development would broaden the class divide based on competences and access to education. The political left traditionally emphasize the value of practice and work experience. In the 1990s they incorporated the documentation of prior learning into a social democratic policy of equality. As human capital has become the main force of production, workers have in fact managed to become empowered as the owners of their own competences, the Labour spokesmen explained. Hence, education and formalising experiential knowledge were in tune with the traditional class struggle towards a more just and equal society (Tøsse, 2005, 252–254). From a state perspective, documentation of prior learning could be an economic benefit for the public as well as the individual. The employers' association (NHO) agreed with the general emphasis on the importance of competence development. The ensuing discussions and negotiations with the societal partners, applauded by the Government, therefore agreed on the importance of developing a system of documentation of prior learning to increase the mobility of the workforce and to place the adult learner into the right level of education. The social partners assumed that such a system could be a bridge builder and integrator between the two major learning systems, working life and formal education (Skule, 2000, 2).

These perspectives also coincided with the needs and experiences of the workers. In a representative survey, 65 per cent of 1,000 employees reported that their most important knowledge and competence had been acquired at the workplace. Only 16 per cent felt that formal education was more important. Even among the university educated, only 50 per cent considered their formal education to be the most important source of skills and knowledge (Larsen et al., 1997; Reichborn et al., 1998). It was also documented in another study that more than 40 per cent of employees in both the private and the public sector felt that their competence acquired through workplace learning should be formally documented (Skule, 2000, 2).

THE NATIONAL VALIDATION PROJECT

In 1999, based on a broad agreement, the Parliament asked the Government

> to establish a system that gives adults the right to document their real competence without having to undergo traditional forms of testing (Parliamentary Proceedings, 1998–99, 7b, 1545).

This system was to have legitimacy in the workplace and in the educational system. To accomplish this resolution, the National Validation Project was formed in 1999, and was run by the Norwegian Institute for Adult Learning (Vox) for its three years of existence.

Although in use for some time, the term 'real competence' was not a well-defined or unambiguous concept. In the preliminary work on the Competence Reform, it was defined widely as the total sum of competences achieved through formal education and organized learning, as well as the knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired in non-formal and informal ways through self-education, work, family life and social participation (NOU 1997:25, 124). In a more narrow way, it was to include all the competence which a person has built up through paid or unpaid work, continuing education, leisure activities etc. which supplements the competence this person has documented through basic education (Report to Parliament, no. 42, 1997–98, 4).

Real competence, thus defined, is something a person has achieved outside the formal education system but has not been documented into a diploma or a written statement. Accrediting these achievements were also where the problem lay and the Ministry of Education as well as the universities and colleges have mainly used this narrow definition (Søkerhåndboka, 2006, 93).

The National Validation Project also used this narrow definition when testing different validation models in working life, upper secondary and higher education, and in the civil society. In working life, 150 enterprises from different business sectors took part in the test involving 6,000 employees. One of the largest projects, tested in 24 enterprises, was the development of a computer-based scheme of documentation which was to provide an overview of the competence a worker had acquired through education, work and voluntary activities. The scheme had two components, one filled in by the individual worker and the other by the enterprise, describing the areas the employee had worked in. It has been valued as a flexible instrument mainly to be used in the workplace, but the employee can also use it to apply for a new job, for access to education or to shorten an apprenticeship programme. The evaluation report also observed that it contributed to making employees more aware of their factual competence and it stimulated training and competence development in the enterprises (Skule & Andersen, 2001). However, the scheme has not been adopted by all working life, neither has it been followed up by new national initiatives (Folkenborg, 2003, 41).

In the education area, the testing of different models was related to the overriding aim of the Competence Reform to raise the general level of education among adults by stimulating them to complete upper secondary education and also to continue with higher education. At the upper secondary level the purpose of recognising prior learning was to 1) match learning with a formal qualification and shorten the study period, 2) give possibilities for more streamlined and tailor-made study programmes for each individual, and 3) provide the individual with an accredited certificate or diploma (Mohn, 2007, 26). During the project period, 17,000 adults had their prior learning validated. All county administrations participated, and 600 persons were trained to undertake the process of validation (Vox, 2002, 67–80). The test period also included various models for access to higher education based on the documentation of real competence.

The need for the recognition of non-documented learning has been felt especially by the folk high schools/experiential schools and study associations. Norwegian folk high schools are principally – for ideological reasons – non-examination and non-syllabus institutions. In the 1990s, different and alternative ways of assessment were tested. In 1996, Parliament complied with the schools' request for some kind of accreditation for giving their students special credits when applying for admission to further and higher education. This was not the same as documentation of real competence but a normative judgement based on the folk high schools' self-concept as providers of general education, personal development and basic life competences, supposed to be provided through work methods and a good learning environment, social education activities, subject studies and dialogue based on guidance and evaluation. A prerequisite for this public valuation is that the schools provide documentation showing what the students have worked on and a minimum of 90 per cent attendance (NOU 2001:16, 26).

The study associations are faced with much the same challenges of how to document the learning and wider benefits the participants may have achieved through non-examination courses. During the project period, the Norwegian Association for Adult Education (VOFO), in cooperation with six study associations, tested some validation instruments (Vox, 2002, 59). Based on their findings, VOFO developed a scheme which can be used as a personal competence document of accumulated information from working life, education, and leisure activities. This document is intended to help provide an overview of what is needed for competence development on the job or for further education and training, and it may be useful in preparing job interviews, job applications or applications for access to educational institutions (see http://www.vofo.no).

EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

A total of 24,000 persons participated in validation during the project period. The Ministry concluded that the results provide a foundation for establishing a national system for the documentation and validation of individual competence. Evaluation reports (Vox, 2002; Sundt Magelsen & Sørås, 2002; Agenda, 2003) showed that the main elements of the system had been developed and established. However, there was a need for further organisational development, especially more co-operation and communication between the actors and the education providers. An information strategy was also needed, along with better opportunities for individuals to obtain counselling, support and help. As studies have demonstrated, many adults do not know about their rights, the practical schemes, or who to consult (Engesbak et al., 2003; Engesbak & Stubbe, 2005).

Upper secondary education

At the upper secondary education level the validation of prior learning is the responsibility of the county councils. Since adults have a statutory right to upper secondary education, this validation is free of charge. It is carried out by qualified personnel and occurs through a communication process with professionals. The process is linked to two main issues: (i) the reduction in the length of the study period; and (ii) the provision of "tailor-made" education adapted to individual needs in terms of time, place, length and progression, and with due consideration for the individual's learning disabilities, especially in reading and writing. Most recommended in the validation process is the use of a dialogue-based methodology combined with portfolio assessment, self-assessment and vocational testing (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2007). However, in a majority (82 per cent) of cases evaluation is based on written materials, while interviews are used with a third of the applicants (Engesbak & Stubbe, 2004, 27). In principle, approved prior learning should be regarded as equal to an examination certificate and it can be summarized in a competence certificate, a school report, or a course diploma which might eventually be included in a craft certificate. From 2000 to 2005, approximately 60,000 persons underwent a formal validation procedure for the upper secondary level. Eighty per cent of this validation related to vocational subjects, primarily the health and care sector (Mohn, 2007, 32).

Working life

In accordance with the present collective wage agreement between the social partners (LO and NHO), enterprises are required to provide a system of documentation for employees' experiences, training courses and practice that might be relevant to a worker's employment relationship. In a 2006

questionnaire, 44 per cent of employers reported that they surveyed workers' competences. However, it is not clear what this means exactly as these surveys were widely defined and included appraisal interviews and informal chats (Vox-barometeret, 2006). Vox has developed two computer-based programmes for the documentation of real competence from work practice that may be used both by employees and employers (see http://www.vox.no). Moreover, a pilot project on voluntary documentation in agriculture, supported by the State Agricultural Administration, has been carried out. The intention is to provide the farmers with a Competence Passport describing their total competence in a way that may be useful for their further development as farmers (Mohn, 2007, 40).

Higher education

Due to changes in regulations and laws in the late 1980s and in 1995, the various schemes relating to the third individual route to higher education (where access is based on real competence) were standardized in such a way that admission based on non-formal and informal learning was in fact suspended (Grepperud, 2005, 129). The Competence Reform corrected this situation with the result that the University Act now gives applicants aged 25 (or older) admission to higher education, provided they can document the necessary qualifications for the particular study. They can also be granted exemptions from examinations if they have equal real competence. The act gives, however, no instruction as to how to implement these schemes, nor does it define exactly what is meant by real competence. It is left to each institution to work out its own instructions and rules, and due to this, the intention of the act is practised differently. This is especially confusing when it comes to requirements for exemptions from examinations, and in fact very few have tried to apply for such an exemption

(Brandt, 2005; Engesbak & Finbak, 2008).

Studies show that the reform and schemes allowing access to higher education on the basis of recognition of prior learning comply with the needs of a large proportion of the adult population (NOU 1999:17). In the first year after the implementation of the reform (2001), 5.4 per cent of all new students in higher education had passed an assessment of their real competence (Helland, 2005, 11). In the period from 2003 to 2006, almost 13,000 candidates had applied for validation for admission purposes, and approximately three quarters of them were admitted to study programmes (Vox, 2008). Around 80 per cent of these candidates apply to university colleges, where health care and education science are particularly popular studies (Helland, 2005; Samordna Opptak, 2006).

However, doubts and concerns have been expressed regarding the ability of this group to succeed in higher education. Several Norwegian studies show that 'real competence' students attending professional studies at university colleges do as well as 'ordinary' students, both in terms of grades and retention (Abelsen et al., 2004; Helland, 2005; Helland & Opheim, 2004; Samordna opptak, 2006). Studies also suggest that they acquire appropriate learning strategies and manage to cope with the implicit requirements for high quality learning. In conclusion, they appear to do well, succeed in adjusting to the requirements and express positive mastery expectations despite their imperfect formal educational background (Rønning, 2008a; 2008b).

CONCLUSIONS

The complex issue of validating informal and non-formal learning has been on the agenda for a long time in Norway and was tackled by the Competence Reform. In 2000, a coherent national strategy was adopted with the aim of making informal and non-for-

mal learning equivalent to formal learning, even if it is not identical when it comes to curricula requirements and centrally administered examinations. Although Norway is one of the European countries at the forefront of adopting such a strategy, so far it has not managed to integrate validation of prior learning into the qualification system.

During a short period from 1999 to 2002, different methods and tools were tested in enterprises, educational institutions and the voluntary sector. The OECD country report from 2007 concluded that there were 'both high achievements and reasons for some concern after five years of experience with a recognition system'. However, there was still 'a main challenge for the national recognition system to maintain, evaluate and develop its legitimacy within the educational and workplace sectors', and 'a new mode of information is needed to access the performance level of the Norwegian model of recognition of non-formal and informal learning' (OECD, 2007, 65–66).

In working life, the tools which have been tested have not been developed further. Distribution throughout working life has been limited, partly because after some years LO began to lose interest. There is also evidence that some employers consider the validation of prior learning to be an extra cost, and question the value from strictly a business point of view (Payne, 2006). Another reason might be that there are contrasting interests between the employers and employees concerning mobility and advancement in the labour market, and the basic criteria for the evaluation of job positions. Educational institutions, enterprises and public authorities deal differently with these questions (Skule, 2000). There are also different attitudes among stakeholders towards what Ellström (1999) dichotomizes as the world of work and the world of education, each linked to different cultures of knowledge and logic.

Studies show that teachers and educational professionals are very sceptical when it comes to accepting real competences as a foundation for shortening the length of studies (Røstad & Storli, 2006, 49). Students in higher education have, for instance, been refused exemption from practical training if their previous working life practice has not been supervised and systematically converted into a more acceptable competence (Engesbak & Finbak, 2008, 41).

Usually individuals must provide the documentation of prior learning, but it appears that the schemes for such documentation are not well-known and, accordingly, not used to a high degree (Basis, 2006). In a report on higher education, Brandt (2005) therefore suggests that the provision of information and counselling to applicants on the real competence schemes should be a normal procedure at every institution. The need for guidance and information is also supported by Røstad and Storli (2006) who point to the need for developing a better understanding of the purpose of validation and adapted learning. Moreover, another challenge is to create more organized and visible structures which provide predictability in adult learning. Finally, more work needs to be done to arrive at a more structured documentation of the competence achieved in working life and the third sector.

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Validation of adult educators' competences

Adult educators, and trainers in particular, perform a broad range of tasks and activities. Due to the variety of adult educators' competency profiles and qualifications, validation of competences and prior learning becomes necessary. The VINEPAC[1] project responds to this need by developing an instrument that can be used across Europe.

Anne Strauch

According to Communications by the European Commission (2001; 2004), the recognition of informal and non-formal learning outcomes is one of the lifelong learning strategies. Many validation efforts exist in different countries and contexts because relevant competences are often acquired in such learning contexts, for example in working life, and are not covered by traditional qualifications.

The validation of competences is not restricted to specific occupations. Informal and non-formal learning is increasingly relevant to nearly all occupations, including the field of adult education. Many adult educators do not hold qualifications for the activities they carry out as part of their work. Their competences frequently go unrecognised as they are acquired at work, by informal exchange of experience, by reading etc. and not in formal learning settings that lead to a qualification.

In the framework of the Copenhagen process (http://ec.europa.eu/ education/policies/2010/vocational_ en.html) and the Education and Training 2010 Work Programmes (http://ec. europa.eu/education/policies/2010/et_ 2010_en.html), professional development and improving the quality of adult education staff have been recognised as priorities at the European level.

Currently a lot of research is dealing with questions of professionalization in the field of adult education. A European research group on competences in the field of adult and continuing education set up by the German Institute for Adult Education (*Deutsches Insttut für Erwachsenenbildung*, DIE) defined seven areas of activity that are relevant to professional development in the adult education sector in autumn 2005. A European conference in Bad Honnef (*Qualifying the Actors in the field of Adult and Continuing Education. Trends and Perspectives*) dealt with the topic of how actors in adult and continuing education can be qualified in May 2007 (Nuissl & Lattke, 2008). Different studies are being carried out concerning adult learning professions in Europe (for example, the final report

of European Commission funded research on Adult Learning Professions in Europe is expected to be published soon on http://ec.europa.eu/education/ more-information/ moreinformation139_en.htm).

These studies and initiatives indicate the need for professional development in the field of adult education. Adult educators, and trainers in particular, perform a broad range of tasks and activities. Due to the variety adult educators' competence profiles and qualifications, validation of competences and prior learning becomes necessary, regardless of the contexts in which they have been acquired.

THE VINEPAC PROJECT

The VINEPAC (Validation of informal and non-formal psycho-pedagogical competences of adult educators) project responds to these needs by developing a specific validation instrument for the registration, assessment, and documentation of adult educators' competences. The project aims to provide tools for appreciating prior experimental learning (APEL) in the field of adult education. The project is an important attempt towards professionalization in adult education as it provides the opportunity to validate and prove specific adult education competences which can lead to higher standards and towards increased quality.

The distinctive feature of the VINEPAC validation instrument is that it takes into account the internationalisation of the adult education sector within the last years. VINEPAC responds to European needs by initiating and developing an instrument that can be used in all European countries and that is addressed to adult educators at the European level.

In this article I will describe the project, its background, aim, and outcomes as an example of a study in the field of validation of non-formal and informal learning. The article will give an overview of how validation of competences can be realized in the adult education profession. I will describe the validation process, including the development of an adult education competency profile for validation purposes, the set of standards and indicators, the

concrete validation instrument as well as the different validation steps.

OBJECTIVES AND AIMS OF VINEPAC

VINEPAC is funded by the European Union Leonardo da Vinci programme. The project started in October 2006 and it will finish in September 2008. The project team consists of several partner institutions from different European countries. The Romanian Institute for Adult Education (IREA) is the project coordinator. Other project partners are the Centre for Research in Theories and Practices for Overcoming Inequalities (CREA) in Spain, the National Adult Training Board (CNFPA) in Romania, the German Institute for Adult Education (DIE) in Germany, the National School of Higher Agronomy Studies (EDUTER Institute) in France, the General Worker's Union (GWU) in Malta, and the University of Bucharest (UB, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences) in Romania.

The overall aim of the project is to develop a validation instrument that
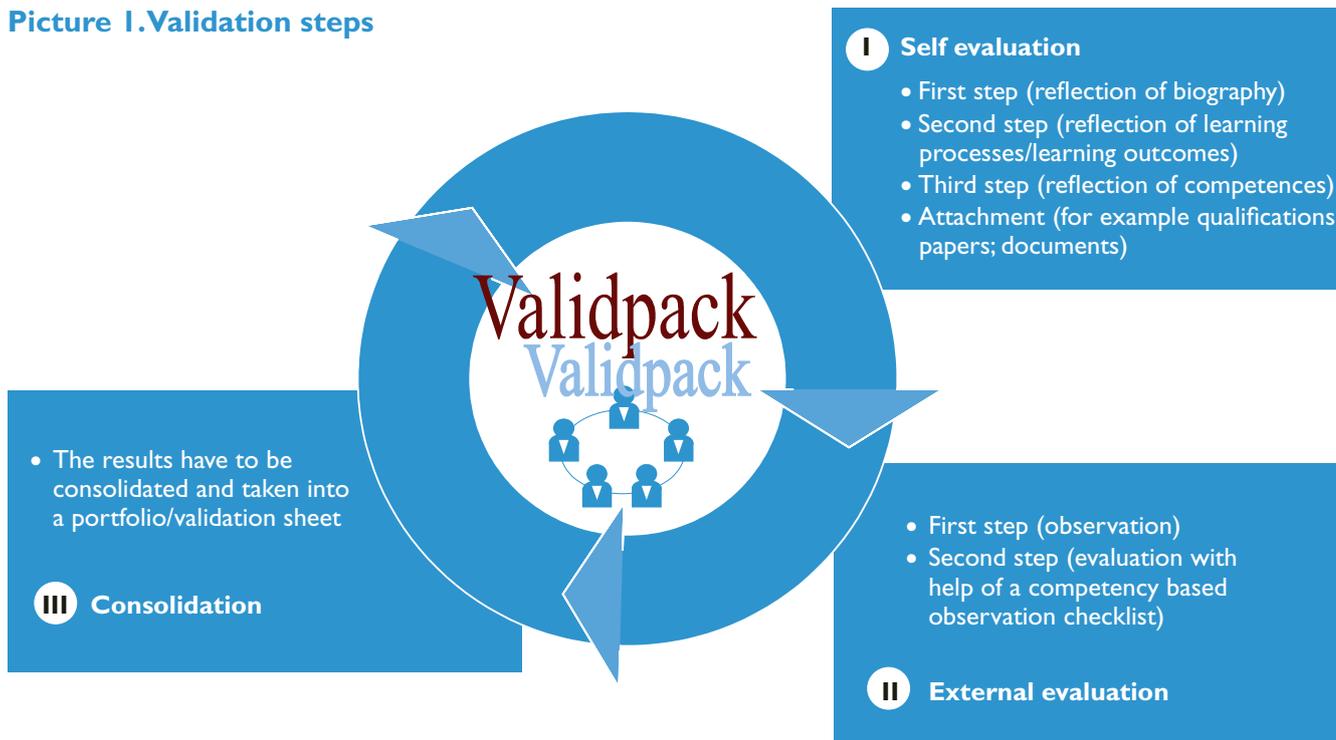- assesses important adult educators' competences,
- facilitates the documentation of experiences,
- builds a basis for certification based on the validation results,
- is broad enough to be established at the European level,
- documents a minimum standard of competences of adult educators,
- facilitates adult educators' mobility in Europe, and
- is applicable in different contexts.

The project aims to create a concrete validation instrument package that will provide the opportunity to evaluate and document adult educators' competences, whether acquired in formal, non-formal or informal learning contexts. This involves the development of an adult educators' competency framework with standards and indicators for evaluation. The final product is a user-friendly validation instrument.

VALIDATION INSTRUMENT: VALIDPACK

Validpack is a concrete tool for the documentation and recognition of adult educators' competences. It is a detailed process that includes a hand-

Picture 1. Validation steps

I Self evaluation
- First step (reflection of biography)
- Second step (reflection of learning processes/learning outcomes)
- Third step (reflection of competences)
- Attachment (for example qualifications papers; documents)

Validpack
Validpack

- The results have to be consolidated and taken into a portfolio/validation sheet

III Consolidation

- First step (observation)
- Second step (evaluation with help of a competency based observation checklist)

II External evaluation

book guiding adult educators through the validation process. The VINEPAC project team focused on trainers' competency profile as this is the main and most frequent role performed by adult educators. A trainer is a person with teaching activities.

Validpack can be used by all adult educators who have more than one year, or 150 hours, of trainer experience with adults. To start the whole process, an adult educator wishing to achieve validation has to go to an authorized validating institution to receive the handbook and other relevant materials, and to arrange a date for external evaluation. The institution will also provide support and recommend an external evaluator.

Validation steps

The validation process is divided into three steps: self-evaluation, external evaluation and the consolidation of evaluation results. The steps are described in more detail in the *Validpack* handbook. The validation process is based on a concrete competency framework which is described below.

Adult educators have to provide evidence of the prescribed adult educators' competences. This can either happen through self-evaluation or external

evaluation. Some of the most important adult education competences are not directly observable but can be evidenced through self-evaluation. Likewise, some competences cannot easily be self-assessed but can be observed by an external evaluator. Both steps are anticipated to take place in the validation process, with the additional consolidation step to increase objectiveness.

The first step in the validation process is *self-evaluation (or self-assessment)*. This step offers adult educators the opportunity to reflect upon competences that have been achieved outside formal learning settings. The *Validpack* handbook includes a chapter on relevant documents (such as certificates, qualification papers, competency profiles, proof of relevant related activities) that can be included as evidence of specific competences or qualifications.

In the absence of a specific professional development pathway for trainers in the majority of European countries, trainers have to manage their own professional and personal development which generally is the result of learning in non-formal and informal settings. The purpose of the self-evaluation step is to encourage adult educators to build a clear picture of the ex-

tent and range of their competences and their performance. This will help adult educators for example when enrolling in a study programme or applying for a new job. The self-evaluation step includes:

- reflecting on biography, including learning contexts and learning outcomes;
- reflecting on competences;
- drawing a personal mind-map; and
- including relevant documents (for example qualifications and certificates).

The second validation step, *external evaluation (or external assessment),* increases the objectivity of the validation results. The external evaluation involves an external expert who observes two one-and-half hour training sessions and assesses the adult educator's competences with the help of a *Validpack* observation checklist and interview grid.

The third and last step in the validation process is *consolidation*, which involves consolidating the results from self-evaluation and external evaluation into a single validation outcome. This step is undertaken by authorized validating institutions.

The validation process is complete once the adult educator has completed

all three steps. If the adult educator fulfils the minimum standard in the required competences, he or she will receive the *Validpack* validation sheet which proves his or her adult educator's competences to external authorities, for example employers or adult education institutions. The process builds a basis for certification based on the validation results. For certification that would be acknowledged by employers for example, the validated competences would need to be compared to competency standards at the European level (for example the European Qualification Framework, EQF). Further, the *Validpack* validation sheet would need to be accepted at national levels as a valid basis for certification. Therefore, the *Validpack* tool needs to be disseminated across Europe and institutions need to be encouraged to apply for permission to use the instrument for validation and as a basis for certification. Authorized validation institutions can currently be found in Romania (the Romanian Institute for Adult Education, IREA, and the National Training Board, NATB), and institutions in other countries are expected to follow.

Competency framework

The definition of relevant competences is an important step towards validation. Without a concrete understanding about the competences that are relevant for adult educators it would be impossible to decide whether or not an adult educator is competent to carry out training tasks.

The definition of the term 'competence' is not easy, particularly in an international context. A common international understanding of the term follows the definition promoted by the OECD in the DeSeCo (Definition and Selection of Competencies: Theoretical and Conceptual Foundation) project. The project defines competence as

the ability to successfully meet complex demands in a particular context. Competent performance or effective action implies the mobilization of knowledge, cognitive and practical skills, as well as social behaviour components such as attitudes, emotions, and values and motivations (OECD, 2003, 2).

There are a variety of approaches dealing with competency profiles for adult educators. The VINEPAC competency framework builds on the European Commission approach (1995), according to which competences relevant to the pedagogical field consist of:

- Diagnostic competences,
- competences relating to carrying out training tasks,
- integration competences,
- methodological and didactical competences,
- group management competences combined with group dynamics,
- team work competences,
- counselling competences,
- competences for managing organizational and political conditions: scheduling, development, evaluation, marketing, work context etc.

The VINEPAC adult education competency framework was developed in reflection with national reports on adult educators' tasks and competences required from them in different countries. The framework creates a psycho-pedagogical competency profile of the adult educator as a trainer. It takes into consideration the importance of reflecting on the role and the characteristics of the training context and training tasks. Table 1 shows the way adult education competences are divided into competence clusters and standards.

Standards and indicators

In order to evaluate competences, the competence list has been complemented with standards and indicators for each competence. An indicator provides evidence that a certain condition exists or certain results have or have not been achieved (Brizius & Campbell, 1991, 15). The competence descriptions and performance indicators enable the adult educator and the evaluator to assess specific competences on a scale from 'very well', 'well', 'well enough' to 'not well enough'.

The list of competences will be pub-

Table 1. Competence clusters

Competence group	Competence cluster	Competence standard
Knowledge	Initial knowledge of adult learners' psycho-social profile	Is able to use adult learners' characteristics in the management of the educational programme.
		Is aware of and sensitive to adults' responsibilities as workers, family members, citizens and community members.
		Applies knowledge of teacher-directed and learner-centred instruction.
	Knowledge of group characteristics	Creates a physical and interpersonal climate that is conducive to learning by drawing on adult learning theory, knowledge of learners' cultures, and interpersonal dynamics.
		Is sensitive to and accommodates diverse learning styles, abilities, cultures, and experiences, including learners who have disabilities and other special needs.
	Knowledge of the subject area	

Competence group	Competence cluster	Competence standard
Educational Management	*Preparation of the educational programme*	Identifies and responds to learners' individual and group needs, interests, and goals when developing instructional plans.
		Plans instruction that is consistent with the programme mission and goals.
		Is consistent with the management of the programme.
	Design of the educational programme	Employs individual, group and team learning.
		Models communication, negotiation, decision-making and problem-solving skills for learners.
		Sequences and paces lessons appropriately.
		Provides frequent and varied opportunities for students to apply their learning.
		Monitors and adjusts teaching strategies based upon student needs and performance.
	Use of technology and resources (time, material, space, people)	Effectively integrates current and appropriate media and technology as tools for instruction.
		Selects and uses a variety of resources for the learning environment (print, human, and technological).
		Acquires, accesses, and uses technology for effective adult learning.
Assessment and valorisation of learning	*Identification of individual needs*	Works with learners to identify their needs, strengths and goals, and advises or refers them to appropriate programmes and levels of instruction.
	Use of results of assessment data	Uses results of (diagnostic and needs) assessment data on a regular basis to plan lessons, develop curricula, monitor progress towards objectives and goals, and to verify learning.
	Monitoring learning	Monitors learning beyond simple recall of information using a variety of assessment strategies.
	Evaluation and feedback	Structures and facilitates ways for learners and peers to evaluate and give feedback on their learning and performance, through reflection and self-assessment.
	Learner guidance	Guides learners in the development and ongoing review of their educational plans.
	Valorisation of learners' progress	Uses qualitative methods to valorise learners' progress.
Motivation and counselling	*Sharing information*	Shares information with learners and colleagues about additional learning resources, educational opportunities, and options for accessing support services.
	Referral to appropriate resources	Makes referrals to appropriate resources when guidance and counselling needs are beyond own expertise.
Personal and professional development	*Analysis of professional development needs*	Analyses professional development needs and opportunties.
	Self-development	Demonstrates interest for self-development.

Table 2. Standards and indicators – an example

Clusters of competence	Competences	Standards	Indicators
Knowledge	*Initial knowledge of adult learners' psycho-social profile*	Is able to use adult learners' characteristics in the management of the educational programme.	– Plans and delivers learning activities which suit adult learning characteristics: problem-based activities etc. – Justifies his/her didactic choices by evoking characteristics of the adult learner.
		Is aware of and sensitive to adults' responsibilities as workers, family members, citizens and community members.	– Develops a flexible learning framework in terms of time, place, content etc. – Gives reasonable / negotiated deadlines for study tasks and assessment. – Recognises the prior experience of learners and accords appropriate exemption from (a part or the whole) programme – Connects learning situations to learners' every day duties / responsibilities / tasks and different roles. – Invites learners to present experiences linked to the subject area.
		Applies knowledge of teacher-directed and learner-centred instruction.	Justifies his/her didactic choices by elements of theory.

lished in the Validpack handbook in September 2008. Table 2 shows an example of the way each cluster of competences is broken down to single competences, standards and performance indicators for each competence.

SUMMARY

Although the validation of competences and the development of different validation instruments is already a very popular field of adult education research, there is a need to establish instruments with wide acceptance across Europe to allow European mobility and to increase quality in the field of adult education across Europe.

VINEPAC took up the task to set up an international approach for the validation of adult educators' competences. It responds to a European need by offering an instrument that can be used by all adult educators working as trainers in all European countries.

After setting up the instrument it is important to disseminate it and to distribute materials to European adult educators. Currently there are some institutions in Romania which are in the process of being authorized as assessment centres for trainers' competences. The next step will be to implement the instrument in other countries as well. The existence of a legal framework for the validation of competences that have been acquired in non-formal and informal learning settings could make it easier to authorize institutions to use the validation instruments such as *Validpack* and to increase the acceptance of the procedure.

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INTERNET RESOURCES

http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/vocational_en.html

http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/et_2010_en.html

http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/moreinformation139_en.htm

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ENDNOTE

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Valuing learning in the Netherlands.

Landmarks on the road to accreditation of prior learning

Visions on the introduction of a comprehensive national system for the accreditation of prior learning (APL) in the Netherlands were voiced in the mid-1990s but they were not fully implemented. However, the ambition to implement a high quality, transparent and easily accessible APL procedure for all individuals has been given new input in recent years.

Martine Maes

The accreditation of prior learning (APL) is one of the instruments for valuing learning in the Netherlands. The aim of this instrument is to value and accredit competences irrespective of how, where and when they were acquired. This aim is based on the idea that learning and competences should be viewed in a positive way: through mapping competences, people are motivated to further develop them. This way of thinking is in line with lifelong learning strategies which are being implemented in many countries. But how can we implement a fully embedded, high-quality system of accreditation of prior learning in the Netherlands? How far have we come on this road, and which challenges still lie ahead? With these question in mind, I will take a closer look at the principles, procedures and developments of APL in the Netherlands including some European reflections. I will consider current challenges, with special attention to the APL quality code which was drawn up by all actors involved in APL in the Netherlands in 2006.

MAKING TALENTS VISIBLE: THE GLASS IS HALF FULL

The accreditation of prior learning enables individuals to present their experience, knowledge and skills in an integrated way. With APL, all competences can be recognised, valued and accredited to pave the way for further development. However, accreditation of prior learning is not merely an instrument, but a principle. It is a way of thinking that involves a positive appraisal of competences that have been acquired, instead of looking at what is still missing. Further, skills are assessed regardless of where or how they were acquired. APL covers all forms of learning: formal, non-formal and informal.

Accreditation of prior learning is not a new phenomenon. Implementation has been under way for some 15 years

Table 1. APL steps

Intake, explanation, goal	The candidate formulates his or her personal goal (career development, upgrading qualifications, etc.). In general, an APL procedure is appropriate if the candidate has a minimum of 3 years relevant work experience.
Portfolio	Listing all relevant competences for the selected job/function. Collating proof of these competences.
Assessment	An independent assessor (or assessors) from an educational or certifying institution assesses the competences in relation to recognised (occupational, branch or educational) standards. Certification is given when competences meet the standard.
Further development	Depending on the goal, the candidate formulates (in co-operation with the company or re-integration institution) a plan for further development. Sometimes more training is needed to improve competences in certain fields. Tailor-made training programmes combining learning and working can be offered.

in some European countries (France, Nordic countries), and well as in non-European countries such as Australia. The identification and accreditation of competences has become a key element in national strategies for lifelong learning. In the European Union Member States, the objectives at political level include an emphasis on individual learning needs and on economic issues. Accreditation of prior learning is part of a policy to strengthen competitiveness, raise individual employability and work security, and to improve economic performance.

There is no single APL procedure, but a wide array of practices that have emerged in the Netherlands since the 1990s. They have been analysed and developed into a basic guideline for APL procedures, and documented in the APL quality code (more on the quality code later in this article).

Basically, three actors are needed for an APL procedure: a candidate, a company (or employment agency), and an educational or certifying institution. The candidate is central to the procedure. The company guides him or her in the portfolio process and supports

the formulation of a personal development plan. The educational or certifying institution has the expertise in learning and assessing competences and has the right to issue certificates or diplomas. The basic APL procedure involves four steps which are presented in Table 1.

APL is not a goal in itself, but always seen in the context of a broader aim. We can distinguish five contexts and aims in which APL is particularly used:

1. individual career development
2. shortening the duration of training programmes
3. competence management in companies
4. reorganization of companies
5. looking for a job

In these situations, the most important outcome is the increased employability gained by accrediting acquired competences and the focus on further development. In some contexts (2, 4-5), the certification or diploma is an important aim. In other contexts (1, 3, 5), an overview and assessment of the competences might be enough to attain the goal.

THEORETICAL REFLECTION ON COMPETENCES

Over the years, visions have changed and terms shifted from qualifications to competences. 'Qualifications' now only refer to formal certification (e.g. diploma). This shift of terminology was in line with the shift towards an individual perspective on learning where competences (acquired anywhere, anyhow or at any time) are compiled throughout an individual's life in his or her personal portfolio. The individual perspective on learning, with the learner and the learning process at its centre, has (slowly) found its way to the formal educational settings in the Netherlands as well as in other countries. Competence-based learning is being introduced in senior secondary vocational education as well as in higher professional education in the Netherlands (see http://www.cinop.eu for more information). Other countries including Ireland, Finland, Norway, the United Kingdom and Portugal are adopting a competence-based approach to learning as well, with provisions for APL (Colardyn & Bjørnåvold, 2005).

A theoretical reflection on competences is needed because the concept has been used in so many meanings and contexts. Competence refers to the ability to perform a certain task in a specific context. Competences are coloured by the person who acquires them as well as by the context in which they are acquired or used (Klarus, 2006). This holistic approach was illustrated by an assessor who once stressed that in APL procedures, the assessor and learner are in constant dialogue: Why are you doing this, how are you doing this and what knowledge is hidden behind these skills? In assessing competences, the assessor looks for the learners' abilities to combine all the aspects of their knowledge, skills and attitudes and how they reflect on their personal character and values.

Table 2. Definition of competences according to Roe (2002)

Competence	An ability, which has been learned, to perform a task or role adequately. Competences are shown by what someone can do.
Partial competence	The ability to perform parts of a task or role in an adequate way. Partial competences can add up to competences.
Knowledge	What someone has learned on facts, relations, techniques and procedures within a certain field of practice.
Skills	What someone has learned by practice and consequently is able to perform.
Attitude	The way someone acts in relation to persons or objects in the combination of cognitive (knowing), action (doing) and affective (liking) aspects.
Capacities	Naturally given intellectual capacities, with which people are able to have insight in problems and solve them and learn new facts and relations.
Personality	Naturally given characteristics of personal behaviour (small changes in a variety of settings).
Other characteristics	Other characteristics include: values, interests, aims, motives, style of behaviour, or biological or biographical characteristics.

Figure 1. Roe's architectural model of competences
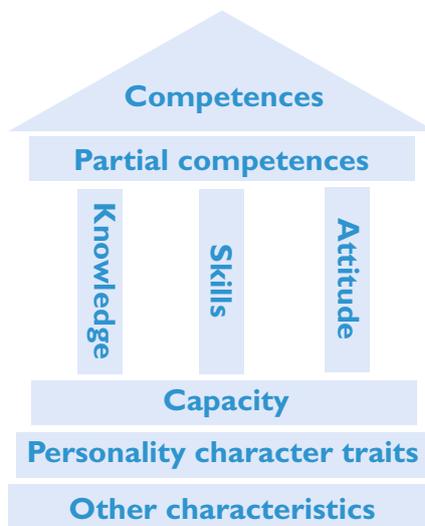
A clear illustration of this vision on competences is Roe's (2002) 'architectural model of competences' (see Figure 1 and Table 2), which is a widely accepted definition of competences in the Netherlands.

In Roe's model, competences are based on partial competences and in a next step on knowledge, skills and attitudes. Competences are developed in learning processes in actual (or simulated) work situations. Knowledge, skills and attitudes are developed in learning processes, partly on the job, partly at school or in daily life. What has been learned is based on the foundations of intellectual capacity, personality and other characteristics.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In the Netherlands, the first experiments with the accreditation of prior learning (APL) date from the 1990s. In March 1994, the government set up a working group to advise on a system of accreditation of qualifications acquired via informal learning (Wijnen, 1994). An important precondition for such a system was met in 1996 with the new qualification structure for vocational education which included the aim of accrediting qualifications acquired 'elsewhere and earlier'. In higher professional education, the implementation was more difficult since there was no such national structure and the competences were more complex. In general, the working group recommended the implementation of the accreditation of prior learning in pilot projects, guided by a national steering group. Unlike other countries such as France and Norway who included APL in the legal framework to provide citizens with the right to have their competences accredited once every few years, the Dutch government decided not to include APL in the legal framework but to stimulate it with various supporting measures, financial schemes and structural conditions (such as the qualification structure).

After experiments in the health and welfare sector, the instrument quickly spread to the technical and agricultural sectors. Later, experiments in volunteer organisations and in many educational establishments followed, mostly with the help of (European) subsidy schemes. However, all actors used their own instruments and assessment methods. This phase was characterised by a pragmatic bottom-up approach. With the action plan 'A life long learning' (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, 1998), the national government put the issue on the national agenda again, with a central place for APL in the context of accrediting competences acquired in the working place or elsewhere outside the formal educational system. This action plan paved the way for the publication of *De fles is halfvol* ('the glas is half-full') which provided a clear vision of a system of APL to be used in education and companies alike (Werkgroep EVC, 2000). To support the implementation of this vision the working group recommended the creation of a Knowledge Centre for the Accreditation of Prior Learning which was to make full use of all existing practices and experiences and to bring the use of APL forward in the contexts of education, branches and companies. Created in 2001, the centre is managed by the Centre for Innovation of Education and Training (CINOP) and employs APL experts from various backgrounds and organisations. This centre is unique in Europe in the sense that it not only collects knowledge and shares good practices, but it is also a partner in developing new practices nationally and internationally, raising the quality of APL and advising companies, regions and other institutions on how to implement APL. The Knowledge Centre APL is included in the new governmental policy *Strengthening Learning and Working* (Projectdirectie Leren en Werken, 2005).

With this policy, national government invested nearly 40 million Euros in APL (over the years 2005–2007) and will, in the coming years, continue to invest in APL and learning and working at senior secondary vocational education level, higher professional education level, in developing a regional infrastructure and in promoting the accessibility of APL. The Ministries of Education, Culture and Science; Social Affairs and Employment; Agriculture and Nature Management; Economic Affairs; Integration; and Finances are all involved.

The number of candidates having completed an APL procedure was approximately 5,000 in 2006, and the numbers are rising. More and more companies (including Philips, Heineken, Friesland Foods, but also smaller companies) are exploring the possibilities of APL. New providers enter the market, including private training institutions and higher education institutions. These developments mark a new phase in the implementation of APL in the Netherlands.

CHALLENGES

The intentions laid out in the national, sectoral and regional policy documents to implement a comprehensive system of APL have not yet been realised. Although rising impressively in recent years, the estimated number of APL procedures is by far lower than was expected some ten years ago. The context in which APL would be taken up is also different than envisaged. Instead of companies and the labour market, it is more the educational institutions who are occupied with providing APL procedures nowadays. The focus of these institutions on certification, or on enrolling students for (part of) educational programmes was only a part of the intentions.

Lifelong learning is getting more and more tangible, but the most important (conditional) challenge is the paradigm shift which still needs to take place in many institutions and in many minds. It takes time to change deeper values and conditions in society. The early adaptors have been innovating since the early days and show results in independent thinking and learner-centred orientation. To make lifelong learning work requires a culture shift in our whole society. We need to move from:
– thinking in terms of one education and training programme for all to individually tailor-made training programmes;
– an institutional perspective to an individual perspective on learning throughout life;
– focusing on the content of learning programmes, to focusing on professional performance and competences;

– thinking in terms of examination in formal settings to valuing learning in different contexts (Dungen, 2007).

A truly embedded, comprehensive system of accreditation of prior learning in all contexts and for all individuals would require tackling further preconditions. Firstly, the demand for valuing learning and experience should be made more visible. Especially in labour organisations it is difficult to focus on long term policy including personnel development. Regional networks of stakeholders (employers' organisations, educational institutions, centres for work and income, intermediary organisations) have taken up the challenge to express demand and match it with local education providers.

Secondly, if demand is voiced, the providers of APL (public and private educational institutions) should be ready to provide the requested services. The national investment programme has stimulated the majority of educational institutions to set up APL procedures in senior secondary vocational and higher professional education. The Knowledge Centre APL publishes a list of recognised providers of APL and training programmes for which APL is available. This list has grown dramatically since its introduction. The challenge is to provide the full range of training programmes in all regions and at the different educational levels. Time will tell whether APL will, at a strategic level in these institutions, be a catalyst to competence-based learning and examination, to a better cooperation between labour market and education, and make the organisation of learning more flexible and learner oriented. The cultural shift from the institutional perspective to an individual perspective on learning throughout life still remains a vision. Ideally, this involves tailoring training programmes to individual learners' needs. The high costs of this type of learning still prevent its realisa-

tion. The most important thing is to maintain the quality of providers and APL procedures.

RAISING THE QUALITY: THE APL QUALITY CODE

The same conditions apply to APL as to regular examinations in formal education. Competences are related to the same standards and lead to officially recognised diplomas. All stakeholders in education and labour market have to be able to rely on the quality of the procedure in order to attach the same value to the outcomes of APL procedures as to the outcomes of formal learning. The absence of regulations on quality assurance and the diverse practices throughout the Netherlands led to formulating minimum standards for the quality of APL. In 2005, the Dutch cabinet and government, employers and trade unions therefore agreed as follows:

The Cabinet will promote the APL Knowledge Center's development of a quality framework for the APL procedure with broad support from all relevant parties and resulting in a covenant between the government and the parties on the use of this framework (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2005).

The framework is among others inspired by the *Common European Principles for the Validation of Non-formal and Informal learning* (European Commission, 2004) and can be used to assess procedures, create more transparency and set a minimum standard for APL procedures. Although interest in quality issues is high in other European countries, the framework is unique in Europe. Most attention is paid to the quality of assessment, which includes the assessors' methods and competences. In France, for example, the quality of the jury validating the experiences remains an issue. The quality of the jury members as well as the combination of the backgrounds of the jury mem-

bers (from practice and from education) are a concern. In the United Kingdom, several projects have been implemented on quality and assessor training.

In November 2006, a covenant (Kenniscentrum EVC, 2006) was signed by the stakeholders (including the biggest trade union federations and employers' associations; associations of private educational institutions, municipalities and vocational education and training centres; all government funded universities of applied sciences; and The Open University) who agreed on the following:

– The use of the code is voluntary, but the signing parties dedicate themselves to promoting APL. Making its use mandatory would detract from the motivation to abide to the APL code.
– Rather than a standard process, APL is customised to individual needs.
– APL procedures result in an APL report which documents the individual's competences.
– Accredited APL providers are listed in a directory.
– The competences of individuals supervising these procedures and performing the assessments are documented. Only professionals can be supervisors or assessors.
– The quality of APL procedures is always being improved, both at the level of quality assurance of the APL procedures and at the level of the APL code itself.

The quality code for APL[1] aims to achieve more transparency and comparability and make APL more accessible. It contains the following items:

– The goal of APL is to define, evaluate and accredit individual competences
– APL primarily answers to the need of the individual. Entitlements and arrangements are clearly defined and guaranteed.

– Procedures and instruments are reliable and based on solid standards.

– Assessors and supervisors are competent, impartial and independent.

– The quality of the APL procedure is guaranteed and is being improved on an ongoing basis.

The full English version of the quality code can be downloaded from the website http://www.kenniscentrumevc.nl

TRANSPARENCY AND COMPARABILITY

An APL procedure results in an APL report, which gives an overall comparison of the individual's competences against the standard levels of those competences. These standards can be a job standard, educational standard or professional (branch) standard. The APL report has an independent value to the individual and can result in improvement of his or her position in the labour market, exemptions for parts of public or private training programmes, or a diploma accredited by the national government or a relevant sector. A uniform format for this report was added to the APL quality code in 2007.

A study in the child care sector (FCB, 2007) shows that not all APL providers come to the same results at the end of an APL procedure, even if they use the same APL methodology. Sixty per cent of the participants in the study attained a nationally recognised child care diploma without further training. However, the success rate varied between APL providers from those who awarded 90 per cent of the candidares a diploma without further training to those who awarded none. Therefore, the use of the same methodology does not guarantee the same conclusions.

The APL quality code and the uniform format for the APL report are a start, but more is needed to make APL more transparent and comparable. The aim is to have the APL reports accepted in every educational institution in the Netherlands, without further assessments or testing. This requires trust among the institutions that the APL procedure is of high quality and takes into account the same principles, qualification profiles and comparable assessment codes. Questions are still raised on the comparability of the assessments of informally acquired competences (APL) and assessments in formal contexts (examination). The question is even more complex because APL procedures are realised in various contexts using various standards (national standards, occupational profiles, sectoral standards) and with various aims (attaining a nationally recognised diploma or individual career planning) (Dungen, 2007).

ASSESSORS AND CRITERIA

The work of the supervisor and assessors is crucial in the light of comparability. In the quality code and in practice, a lot of attention is paid to the competences of the independent supervisors and assessors, training and certification programmes for assessors, and internal, regional or even sectoral standards for assessment procedures. A competence profile for supervisors and assessors is included in the APL quality code.

Two highly experienced APL experts and assessor trainers from the APL centre of the Hogeschool van Amsterdam reflected on the above mentioned research (FCB, 2007) and the role of the assessors (Berkel & te Lintelo, 2007). When assessing competences, assessors start from the most typical tasks and critical situations in professional practice. A set of criteria supports them in the definition of competent behaviour in these situations. They call these criteria the assessment standard. This standard is the same for all candidates. The difficult part is the evidence provided by the candidate, who is responsible for providing relevant, actual and recent evidence for these typical tasks and critical situations. The assessor is responsible for assessing the evidence in relation to the set criteria. This step is crucial to the outcome of the APL procedure. Assessors should have a minimum set of competences themselves to perform this task. Most importantly, they should have up-to-date and in-depth knowledge of the professional practice in order to relate the competences to real-life situations and behaviour. Furthermore, they should be experienced in assessing competences and have knowledge of training programmes. In practice, the best combination is an assessment by two assessors: an external assessor coming from professional practice, and a second one from a training institution. Together they cover the whole set of requirements.

In the process of assessment, several aspects turn out to be crucial (Berkel & te Lintelo, 2007). The set of assessment criteria should be specific enough, but not too strict because otherwise the uniqueness and diversity of every candidate and situation cannot be taken into account. According to Berkel and te Lintelo, more experienced assessors can handle this 'grey' area on the basis of their expertise, whereas junior assessors can be insecure about the criteria in this step. Training assessors is important, but their experience is the key. To reduce subjectivity, the APL quality code strongly recommends the use of at least two assessors. Communication between assessors from various institutions or sectors (such as child care) on a regular basis is necessary for creating a solid and common base for interpreting the set of criteria. Interaction is a key aspect in APL procedures. The higher the level of competences, the more important it is that candidates reflect on their knowledge, skills and attitudes, can reason and relate them to (internal) values. Simulations or portfolios do not capture this aspect, so an interview is always part of the assess-

ment. The quality of the assessment is raised when the right mix of assessment methods is used, the aims and characteristics of the target group and the competences to be assessed taken into account. Usually, a mix of methods is used in APL procedures because every situation and individual is different.

EVALUATION OF THE QUALITY CODE

A year after the signing of the covenant on the APL quality code, an evaluation was undertaken by the Knowledge Centre APL under the auspices of an independent researcher (Sikkel, 2007). Although this was maybe too early, some issues were highlighted. The implementation of the quality code triggered APL providers to start new procedures, evaluate existing procedures, train and certify assessors and supervisors, and promote the use of APL among a bigger audience than before. Up to now, the quality code has not attributed greatly to the comparability, transparency and accessibility of APL procedures in the Netherlands. To achieve these aims, the exchange and communication between APL providers needs to be enhanced, and examination committees' acceptance of APL reports from other APL providers needs to grow considerably. The APL report and the comparability of assessment procedures is seen as a key in this acceptance. The quality code defines the reference framework to which all providers should connect. It sets the standard for some elements of the APL procedure such as products, methodologies and professional competences. However, the differences between organisations regarding the quality of the whole process still need to be addressed.

The effort of the covenant to create more unity in the quality of APL has also resulted in finance mechanisms and subsidy schemes. The national government has implemented a tax scheme to support APL procedures that are provided by accredited APL providers. In some sectors employers who offer APL to their employees can be refunded for the cost, and in collective labour agreements, paragraphs on personal development sometimes include APL as one of the possible instruments to be used and refunded.

OUTCOMES OF APL AND CONCLUSION

Apart from the quoted study in the child care sector, structural research on the outcomes of APL has not been carried out yet. On the other hand, a lot of information on the outcomes and results has been published in various publications, articles and good practices. These sources indicate outcomes on different levels: the individual, the company and society as a whole. The outcomes are mostly defined in 'soft terms' such as improved employability, status, self-confidence and motivation. More tangible outcomes include financial benefits and cost and time efficient training, but fewer facts and figures exist on these subjects.

Experiences show that APL has often a huge impact on individuals' lives, especially during transition phases. For example, the transition of a job seeker to paid employment by means of APL and career guidance makes a big difference for both the individual and the society in terms of inclusion in the labour market and reduced social benefit costs. Another example of a transition is an employee with low level (or no) formal qualification but several years of working experience. Gaining recognition for his or her experience with APL and following a short tailor made training programme can upgrade a person's qualification, improve employability and open the way to work at a higher level. Experiences of APL projects in companies show that after finishing an APL procedure, employees are more self-confident, feel rewarded for the recognition of their skills, have their experience assessed and sometimes certified at a higher level and are much more motivated to use and develop their talents. Return on investment studies are being carried out to define the material and non-material results of the companies' investments.

All these outcomes contribute to aims at the societal level, such as upgrading the skills of the working population, making use of talent, inclusion of the unemployed in the labour market, and improving the match between demand and supply on the labour market. Society as a whole benefits from these efforts, but more research should be done to capitalise on these outcomes.

In conclusion, big steps have been made in the past few years in the Netherlands to promote APL. The challenges include raising the quality, visibility and accessibility of APL, as well as the match between the demand and supply of APL services. Most importantly, paradigm and cultural changes are a precondition for making it all work. It will take some more time to incorporate these desired cultural changes in strategic policies, at workplaces and in the minds of those working in education, guidance and human resources. We can see positive results in environments where experiences of lifelong learning, personal development policy, employability and flexible programmes of (accrediting) learning and working have been gained over the past years. The challenge is to embed these results in the whole society and to pave the way for every individual to work on his or her personal development and employability.

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ENDNOTE
1 The full English version of the quality code can be downloaded from the website www.kenniscentrumevc.nl

The National System of Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences in Portugal

The last decade of the twentieth century was a turning point for lifelong learning. It was no longer just a slogan promoted by intergovernmental organizations, but increasingly became an instrument of reform and modernization within national systems of education and training.

Raquel Oliveira

Portugal was no exception and some changes were introduced in the adult education system at the start of the new century, namely the establishment of a National System of Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences.

NATIONAL SYSTEM OF RECOGNITION, VALIDATION AND CERTIFICATION OF COMPETENCES: THE WHAT AND THE WHY

The Portuguese National System of Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences consists of a national network of New Opportunities Centres (formerly called Centres of Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences), where adults, aged eighteen and over, can be oriented through a process of recognition, validation and certification of competences acquired in different contexts, whether formal, non-formal or informal. The system was created to deal with the low levels of certification and qualifications of the Portuguese population.

At this stage it is important to point out some past developments that clearly influence the present situation and actions in Portugal. First of all, one needs to stress that it is somewhat difficult to talk about education and training of adults in Portugal before 1974. Until that time a conservative educational system provided by a repressive and dogmatic political regime did not allow the development of an adult education system. Education was undoubtedly an instrument for social integration and enforcing conformity.

After the revolution on 25 April, 1974, in the new democratic dawn, 'the fearless plunge into popular education activities' (Silva, 1990, 18) led to the emergence of adult education as a specific field of social action. Although the road to adults' participation in educational processes seemed open, it proved a difficult one to follow.

During the second half of the 1990s, a national survey on literacy in Portugal (Benavente et al., 1996) was carried out and its results led to a public realization of a serious problem: not only were the levels of school attendance and qualification low, but they were also insufficient in providing people with capacities to function in the society.

As a result of this study together with the Portuguese participation in the 5th International Conference on Adult Education held by UNESCO (in Hamburg, July 1997), a Task Force for the Development of Adult Education was formed. Aiming to revitalize adult education in Portugal, in its report the Task Force acknowledged that it was

necessary and urgent not only to prepare the future but also, and simultaneously, to correct the past. [And that would] require the promotion of adult education as a real political priority for the Government of the Nation. (Melo et al., 1998, 13)

In order to develop a strategy, a specific programme, *Know+: Programme to the Development and Expansion of Adult Education and Training*, was put forward (Melo et al., 2001). As a consequence of the programme, an independent structure for adult education and training was for the first time created in Portugal in 1999. Under favourable circumstances provided mainly by the European Union funding, this public institute, The National Agency for Adult Education and Training (ANEFA), was controlled by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour and Solidarity. After outlining its theoretical foundations, organisation and the guidelines to key-competences, ANEFA launched the National System of Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences in November 2000, coinciding with the opening of the first six centres of recognition, validation and certification of competences in the country.

NATIONAL SYSTEM OF RECOGNITION, VALIDATION AND CERTIFICATION OF COMPETENCES: THE WHO

After some periods of turmoil that endangered the National System of Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences, it is presently administered by the National Agency for Qualification (*Agência Nacional para a Qualificação,* ANQ).

The establishment of ANEFA had led to the rise of new hopes regarding the growth of adult education and training activities, even though some doubts remained about the real political involvement in the development and widening of adult education and training in Portugal. After only a short existence, ANEFA was abolished in 2002 due to the change of government which brought a right wing coalition (the right wing Social-Democratic Party and the ultra right Popular Party) into power. Closing down ANEFA demonstrated the lack of concern of some parts of the society over the low levels of qualification and certification of the adult population in Portugal, and its consequences on the development of the country.

The question of the low levels of certification and qualification were brought back into the spotlight only when the centre-left Socialist Party won the election in 2005. At the beginning of 2006, the government launched the New Opportunities Initiative which aimed to raise the minimum level of qualifications for youngsters and adults to secondary school level, mainly by offering more technological and vocational courses, and to qualify a million adults by 2010.

The ANQ was established within this political framework in 2007. This public institute has administrative, financial (including the right to inherit), scientific and pedagogical autonomy and it is controlled by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour

and Social Solidarity. ANQ's mission goes beyond the management and development of the National System of Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences as it also coordinates the implementation of policies concerning the vocational education and training of youngsters and adults. The slogan 'an opportunity new for the youngsters and a new opportunity for adults' claims a strong impulse is being given to the qualification of the Portuguese population, in order to overcome the low levels presented by the country in international statistics. The notorious discourse shift into the qualification theme is clearly linked to a globalized paradigm of lifelong learning and to the continuous need for people to have competences for dealing with the challenges of modern life, in particular those concerning technological issues.

The National Agency coordinates and supervises the System, but the actions are implemented by other organizations which can be public or private, as long as they are solidly rooted in the area of their activities. In this sense, these organisations are quite diverse, and include business associations, enterprises, local development associations, municipal associations, voluntary associations, vocational training centres, schools (there is a growing number of New Opportunities Centres within schools, mainly in the secondary and third levels of basic education) and so on. These organisations have to be accredited by the National Organisation Accreditation System, which determines who is best able to provide the service and fulfill the needs of the local public.

This diversity of local organisers is in contrast with the lack of funding sources; the majority of the New Opportunities Centres depend on European Union funding. Therefore, these centres are created in accordance with specific EU criteria, namely, demo-

graphic density and geographic dispersion. Other criteria include the ratio of population with a low level of education and qualifications, accessibility conditions and the diversity of the public. At the present time the network of New Opportunities Centres consists of a total of 425 centres in mainland Portugal and Madeira (besides its continental territory, Portugal has two autonomous regions: the Madeira Island and Azores Islands).

NATIONAL SYSTEM OF RECOGNITION, VALIDATION AND CERTIFICATION OF COMPETENCES: THE HOW

The New Opportunities Centres seek to welcome and guide adults aged 18 or over who have not completed four, six, nine, or twelve years of school education or are seeking a professional qualification.

The first step for someone interested in the services offered by the Centres is to sign in at a Centre. Their details will be entered into SIGO *(Sistema Integrado de Informação e Gestão da Oferta Educativa e Formativa)*, an integrated management system that connects the network of Centres and the NAQ. From that moment onward it is possible, at any moment, to see the records of actions and paths taken by the individual within the System.

The second step is the diagnosis of the situation and orientation to the best path. With the help of curriculum analyses, individual interviews and group sessions, a specialised technician helps adults to describe their situation, clarify their aims and identify their options. Once the most suitable path for the adult has been identified, a Personal Plan for Qualification is drawn.

The personal plan can involve education or training activities, such as evening classes, education and training courses, double certification training courses that combine school level certification and a professional qualifica-

tion, short-term modular education or training among other existing programmes. Alternatively, the plan can lead to the process of recognition, validation and certification of competences.

The process of recognition, validation and certification of competences has been developed at the New Opportunities Centres. The process of recognition involves the personal identification of previously acquired competences. The process allows individuals to reflect and evaluate their life experiences and to document them in a Reflexive Portfolio of Learning. Between recognition and validation, the New Opportunities Centres can provide some (a maximum of 50 hours per adult) complementary training in key competences areas.

Validation involves the evaluation of competences acquired by individuals in the course of their lives, based upon the defined key competences areas (see insert for more information) for each of the certification levels. Validation comprises self-evaluation of the Reflexive Portfolio of Learning, as well as evaluation by a professional of recognition, validation and certification of competences and trainers of the relevant key competences areas. One of the most significant aims of this process is to help the adult to construct significant personal and professional projects.

Certification is the official confirmation of competences by a jury that consists of the professional of recognition, validation and certification of competences, trainers of the key competences areas, and an external examiner. The certified competences, acquired through experience and/or training, are entered in a personal record of competences. The individual receives a Diploma of Qualification when s/he reaches a certain level of schooling or qualification.

Key competences in Portugal

When the National System of Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences was first established there was only a set of guidelines to key-competences equivalent to the basic level of education. Those guidelines are still the basis for the process of recognition, validation and certification of competences on the basic level (equivalent to four, six or nine years of schooling) and comprise four areas: Language and Communication; Mathematics for Everyday Life; Information and Communication Technologies; and, Citizenship and Employability.

In 2006, the process of Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences was launched on the secondary level (equivalent to twelve years of schooling) comprising three key competences areas: Citizenship and Professionability; Society, Technology and Science; and, Culture, Language, Communication.

Since 2006, it has also been possible to undertake a process of recognition, validation and certification of competences in order to achieve a professional qualification. In this case the process it is carried out with reference to the National Catalogue of Qualifications, which currently lists thirteen different qualifications.

SOME CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The creation of an institution devoted to adult education and training at the start of the twenty-first century arose from the hope that finally it would be possible to overcome the low level of schooling and professional qualification in Portugal. The priorities proposed by ANEFA were completely new and showed the need to develop quite an opposite approach to that emphasising formal education and "second chance" education. The innovative and effective alternatives proposed to raise adults' participation in learning processes. Hence, they were based on the recognition of prior learning and required fewer hours of attendance than evening classes and in some cases even combined school certification and professional qualification. Therefore, the recognition, validation and certification of competences revealed to be more attractive for adults as they may build an education and training path that best suits their needs.

Moreover, the involvement of other institutions besides schools in these processes is appropriate for people who in many cases have had unpleasant experiences as students and may resist a traditional approach to education. These institutions are able to supply a more suitable education and training for adults. Therefore, adults' participation is widened and their motivation for learning is increased.

Furthermore, educational programmes involving recognition and validation processes focus on adults, giving them a central role. These programmes provide training tailored to adults' needs. They represent an effort to raise adults' self-esteem and to involve them in the drawing of their own educational paths. They also foster the participation of those who were excluded from formal education they did not relate to.

However, there are some doubts regarding these initiatives as a specific and urgent measure to overcome low levels of qualification in Portugal. For example, they clearly favour a market-oriented approach, whereby participation in educational programmes has its own price. This creates inequalities and consequently harms active participation in the development of a democratic citizenship. The fragile Portuguese social structure is not yet prepared to deal with the ferocity of the free market rules.

Also, the terms of funding of the majority of the New Opportunities Centres strongly constrain the professionals working there, impelling them to act not in the adults' best interests but in a way that best and quickest achieves quantitative goals. Funding of the Centres is dependent of the number of certified adults, which means that if the quantitative goals are not achieved the Centre will suffer financial penalties. Essentially, a process based on the recognition of prior learning, by definition, has to be centred on the individual and it has to respect his or her pace and wishes. Even though one can recognise the richness that involvement in a group can bring to the process, the massification and over-standardisation of the process may undermine the inclusive dimension that should be inherent to it.

Finally, what will the future bring us? Will we still have a National System of Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences after 2013? Will it be state funded or self-financed by the local organisations? Will it be free of charge for participants? Presently we are living a boom period in widening the System, with a spectacular number (more than a hundred!) of Centres opening this year, which is very much related to the start of a new European Union funding period. The past eight years have already showed us some good examples and practices. There is a place for the National System, which should exist side by side with other education and training options and programmes, as long as we as practitioners and policymakers are as reflective as we ask of the participating adults.

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Promoting teacher effectiveness through teacher motivation

As the most significant resource in schools, teachers are central to school improvement efforts. Improving the efficiency and equity of schooling largely depends on ensuring that teachers are highly skilled, well resourced, and motivated to perform at their best.

Paulo Santiago

There has been substantial research and policy development on teacher education and skills development, and resourcing in schools. Much less attention has been paid to teacher motivation, in particular the role of policy in meeting the aspirations and enhancing the motivation of teachers as a vehicle for promoting teacher effectiveness. This is a key priority for policy-makers given the evidence that indicates that raising teaching performance is perhaps the policy direction most likely to lead to substantial gains in student learning (OECD, 2005). A motivated teacher is not only one who feels satisfied in school but is also one who is determined to strive for excellence and professional growth.

Given the research results on effective teachers and the changing demands on teachers, many educational systems are concerned about the quality, motivation and characteristics of some of those attracted into teacher education. Information from several countries suggests that, in the past the teaching profession has often been chosen, at least partly, on the basis of the continuity, the comparative job security and the stability it potentially provides, whereas the teaching profession calls for the very opposite, i.e. a sense of mission, an entrepreneurial spirit and the willingness to take risks. There is evidence that enrolment in initial teacher education programmes is often a second or third choice, or a fall-back option in case the graduate labour market deteriorates (OECD, 2006). In addition, completion rates are strikingly low in some teacher education programmes and the proportion of graduates starting a career in teaching is often below expectations. The fact that in many countries access to teacher education is open, in comparison to the limited access into professions such as medicine

and law, might contribute to the relatively lower status of the teaching profession in the perception of the public. Therefore, attracting motivated individuals into teaching, meeting their aspirations and keeping them motivated while in the profession are key policy goals as a means to reach student learning objectives. They are also likely to raise the attractiveness of the profession.

The research and experiences available provide useful insights about how teachers may become more motivated to excel in schools, develop skills, seek new challenges, and assist in school reforms. This article draws attention to a number of responses which have received less policy emphasis in OECD countries but which appear promising as means of enhancing teacher motivation (thus improving teaching performance) and promoting the status of the teaching profession (thus attracting better candidates to teaching). These particular responses are: transforming teaching into a knowledge-rich profession; supporting and guiding teachers' work; evaluating and rewarding effective teaching; fostering a sense of group identity among teachers; and making proper use of rewards. The findings summarised in this article build mainly on the conclusions from the OECD project Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers, in which 25 countries took part (OECD, 2005).

EVIDENCE ON TEACHERS' MOTIVATION

A strong conclusion from studies is that teachers are highly motivated by the intrinsic benefits of teaching – intellectual fulfilment, working with children and young people, helping them to develop, and making a contribution to society – and that educational systems and schools as workplaces need to ensure that teachers are able to focus

on these tasks (OECD, 2005). There is evidence that teachers enter teaching to help young people learn, that their most gratifying reward is accomplishing this goal, and that work-related factors most important to teachers are those that allow them to practise their profession successfully (Frase, 1992). Teachers who leave the profession often report that the factors which attracted them to teaching – working with students and colleagues, professional autonomy, and opportunities for personal and intellectual growth – were increasingly difficult to achieve in the day-to-day realities of the job. This is in agreement with some studies that suggest that the for-profit or not-for-profit character of the institution is correlated with the degree of intrinsic motivation of its employees. Segal et al. (1994) found that employees and managers of non-profit firms are more intrinsically motivated than those in profit-oriented firms.

Studies also indicate that extrinsic factors become more important once the teacher has started in a teaching position. Extrinsic motivation, in contrast to intrinsic motivation, requires a connection between the activity and some separable consequences, so that satisfaction comes not from the activity itself but rather from the consequences to which the activity leads, such as praise, status, job security, vacation time or money (Gagné & Deci, 2005). Compared to those at the beginning of their careers, experienced teachers put greater weight on their personal circumstances, and identify factors that hinder job satisfaction such as a lack of recognition, inadequate working conditions, and few career prospects. However, the importance of extrinsic factors is likely to appear understated in teacher surveys as a result of the tendency to provide "socially desirable" answers and because the surveys focus generally

on job satisfaction and not on job performance, for which extrinsic factors are possibly more influential.

The review by Johnson et al. (2005) supports the view that teachers' decisions to remain in their schools and in teaching are influenced by a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic rewards that they receive in their work. However, the review brings to light the importance of the interaction between the two. For example, pay can take on increased importance when other working conditions make it difficult to perform well. This profile of teachers' motivation suggests that policies for meeting the aspirations and enhancing the motivation of teachers to perform at their best need to capitalise on intrinsic factors, make appropriate use of extrinsic motivators, and ensure that teachers have good working conditions so that their motivation is maintained (OECD, 2006). Next, a selection of five policies to enhance teacher motivation and promote the teaching profession is highlighted.

TRANSFORMING TEACHING INTO A KNOWLEDGE-RICH PROFESSION

In today's knowledge-based societies, teaching remains largely unchanged while other forms of work have been dramatically transformed. Many other professionals commence their working lives with a sense that they are entering a role that has been shaped by past research and that will be transformed during their working lives by future research. In most countries, teaching is yet to offer such excitement. There are indications that resources allocated to teachers' professional development amount to only a very small proportion of the total expenditure on schools (OECD, 2005). Teaching is increasingly seen as a professional activity requiring a careful analysis of each situation,

choice of objectives, development and monitoring of suitable learning opportunities, evaluation of their impact on students' achievement, responsiveness to students' learning needs and a personal or collective reflection on the whole process.

It is essential to provide opportunities for teachers to maintain a research role alongside their teaching role; with teachers engaging more actively with new knowledge; and with professional development focused on research results for improved practice. A good example is action research, a systematic inquiry by practitioners to improve teaching and learning. The products of the inquiry are made public, adding to the knowledge base of teaching and learning, and open to peer critique. Teachers as researchers study their own methods of instruction and assessment, examine the cognitive processes of learning, or participate in the process of curriculum research and development. Peer reflective groups and coaching encourage teachers to challenge existing theories and their own preconceived views of teaching, and offer ways for teachers to share their expertise and experience more systematically. This is likely to raise the intellectual excitement teaching can generate and therefore both increase the intrinsic motivation of teachers and improve the attractiveness of the profession.

Consequently, initial teacher education not only needs to provide sound basic training in subject-matter knowledge, pedagogy related to subjects, and general pedagogical knowledge, but also needs to develop the skills for reflective practice and research on-the-job. Traditionally, teacher preparation has focussed on teachers' role in the classroom only. Increasingly, however, teachers are seen to have much broader roles, taking into account the individual development of children and young

people, the management of learning processes in the classroom, the development of the entire school as a "house of learning" and connections with the local community and the wider world.

Developing a full range of necessary professional expertise requires periods of professional growth, a key element for sustaining intrinsic motivation throughout the career. This implies that much more attention needs to be focused on supporting teachers in the early stages of their career, and in providing the incentives and resources for professional development. Effective professional development is ongoing, includes training, practice and feedback, and is given adequate time and support. Successful programmes involve teachers in learning activities that are similar to those they will use with their students, and encourage the development of teachers' learning communities. Professional growth can also be promoted throughout the career by providing opportunities for gaining experience outside schools through sabbatical leave, extended leave without pay, and job exchanges with industry. Increasing the mobility of teachers between schools, and between teaching and other occupations, broadens the spread of new ideas and approaches, and results in more opportunities for diverse career experiences.

SUPPORTING AND GUIDING TEACHERS' WORK

Research literature supports the proposition that having one's views acknowledged, and opportunities for self-initiative, being offered choice and relevant information in a non-controlling way, and understanding the reasons why certain tasks need to be undertaken, promotes motivation and leads to positive work outcomes (Deci et al., 1989; Gagné et al., 2000). The field experiment by Deci et al. (1989) revealed that

training managers to maximise employees' opportunities to take initiative and acknowledge their perspectives increased their trust in the organisation, and more positive work-related attitudes. For the teaching profession, a study by Blase and Blase (1994) shows that when principals effectively used shared governance strategies and participatory management, teachers felt motivated and their sense of ownership and empowerment increased. A study by the National Center for Education Statistics (1997) based on a comprehensive database of over 40,000 teachers in the United States found that workplace conditions constitute a distinguishing factor between the most satisfied and the least satisfied teachers: 'The most satisfied teachers worked in a more supportive, safe, autonomous environment than the least satisfied teachers.'

School principals and other leaders are the key in providing support to teachers. They can help foster a stimulating and supportive school culture, as well as help buffer teachers against mounting and sometimes contradictory external pressures (Mulford, 2003). Skilled leaders can help foster a sense of ownership and purpose in the way teachers approach their job, provide professional autonomy to teachers, and help teachers achieve job satisfaction and continue to develop professionally. School leadership is therefore a priority, and requires improved training, selection and evaluation processes for school leaders, upgraded support services, and the provision of more attractive compensation packages (OECD, 2008). A key requirement is that principals and other school leaders are trained and supported when conducting teacher evaluations and linking this to professional development planning. Training of school leaders should emphasise shared leadership strategies,

participatory management, openness to teachers' initiatives and the ability to acknowledge teachers' views. Given the range of responsibilities that principals have, it is important that there is a leadership team in each school that shares the load and ensures effective delivery (OECD, 2008). This would enable the principal to focus on educational leadership for improving learning and teaching of students and staff, rather than concentrating mainly on administrative tasks.

Consequently, teachers should, in order to exercise greater responsibilities and opportunities for decision-making and leadership, develop competencies in areas such as team building, organisational diagnosis and development, dealing with change processes, finding and using resources, managing projects, and building skills and confidence in others.

EVALUATING AND RECOGNISING EFFECTIVE TEACHING

A number of studies have also highlighted the importance of feedback on performance to enhance motivation (Deci et al., 1989). In a survey of San Diego School District teachers in the United States, Frase and Sorenson (1992) found feedback to be the factor most strongly related to job satisfaction. Similarly, Frase (1992) identifies recognition and feedback as important motivators for teachers and calls for the use of evaluation as a vehicle for teachers' professional growth and improvement.

When teachers receive little or no feedback it can send an implicit message that their work is not important. Regular appraisal should be an integrated, routine part of professional life. In many instances, there needs to be a stronger emphasis on teacher evaluation for improvement purposes (i.e. formative evaluation). This can be low-

key and low-cost, and include self-evaluation, informal peer evaluation, classroom observation, and structured conversations and regular feedback by the principal and experienced peers. Designed mainly to enhance classroom practice, such appraisals would provide regular opportunities for teachers' work to be recognised and celebrated, and help both teachers and schools to identify professional development priorities.

It is important for individual teacher appraisals to occur within a framework provided by profession-wide agreements of teachers' responsibilities and standards of professional performance. Principals and other senior colleagues need to be trained in evaluation processes, and schools need to have the resources to meet teachers' professional development needs. Evaluation frameworks and tools would assist principals and other senior staff, and also help teachers to better prepare for assessment – and to benefit from it.

FOSTERING A SENSE OF GROUP IDENTITY AMONG TEACHERS

There is also evidence that identification with a group is key to taking on values and regulations as it fosters feelings of relatedness. This is the basis for a recent theory of work motivation proposed by Ellemers et al. (2004), suggesting that strong identification with a group facilitates individuals' motivation in accordance with the group's goals and in turn facilitates the group's performance. This has led some authors to suggest that structuring work to allow interdependence among employees and identification with work groups, as well as being respectful and concerned about each employee, may have a positive effect on motivation and work outcomes.

Giving schools more responsibility for personnel management (teacher selection, working conditions and development) is critical for building a school

identity. School leaders could actively seek out the teachers that fit the particular needs of their schools with teacher selection organised in more direct interaction between schools and candidates through personal interviews and visits to schools. This would be likely to improve the match between applicants and school needs and help shape a school identity with which teachers identify.

School leaders can also foster group identity by introducing shared leadership and encouraging collegiality. Opportunities for team work, facilities which encourage teachers' presence in schools, and a culture of sharing and peer reviews would also contribute to developing teachers' sense of belongingness. In some countries, there has been a visible paradigm shift from learning separately to learning together, in which practicing teachers are jointly responsible for their work in classrooms. This means that interdisciplinary teacher teams work collaboratively to develop and revise curriculum, plan schedules, discuss student learning and share successful practices. Staff members hold each other accountable through peer coaching, peer evaluation and teacher portfolio presentations. This change has important implications for how schools are organised as places for teachers to learn as well as to teach.

In addition, the creation of institutions such as Teaching Councils would help strengthen the professional identity of teachers, raise the status of the profession and complement the role of the unions in bringing teachers together. Teaching Councils provide teachers and other stakeholders both a forum for policy development and, critically, a mechanism for profession-led standard setting and quality assurance in teacher education, teacher induction, teacher performance and career development. Such organisations seek to obtain for

teaching the combination of professional autonomy and public accountability that has long characterised other professions such as medicine, engineering and law.

MAKING PROPER USE OF REWARDS

Extrinsic rewards appear to be potentially effective for raising motivation for unexciting and routine tasks and, if introduced in the appropriate context, can also raise motivation for inherently interesting activities (Komaki, 1982; McGraw, 1978). However, extrinsic rewards can, under certain conditions, undermine intrinsic motivation and can thus be detrimental for job performance and satisfaction (Deci et al., 1999). The challenge for policy is therefore to carefully introduce extrinsic rewards that raise motivation for certain tasks in a way that does not undermine intrinsic motivation. Options for achieving this objective include the diversification of rewards, their closer linkage to acknowledged performance, and the equitable treatment of individual teachers.

Research shows that extrinsic motivators can be successfully introduced in many circumstances. Several studies have provided evidence that incentives can promote effort and performance in teaching (see Harvey-Beavis, 2003; Santiago, 2004). Given the dominance of intrinsic factors in motivating teachers, one promising strategy is granting rewards in areas likely to foster the intrinsic motivation of teachers. Teachers' extrinsic rewards are generally limited to salaries, allowances, leave benefits and future pension benefits. Rewards could be diversified to include time allowances, sabbatical periods, fee support for post-graduate courses, or opportunities for ongoing professional development activities as ways of recognising the work of teachers. These rewards create extra possibilities for

professional growth, with potential benefits for intrinsic motivation. In addition, the level of teachers' compensation is typically associated only with qualifications, school sector and years of experience. It could prove useful to relate incentive structures more closely to the responsibilities teachers take on in schools (e.g. middle management, department head), which would provide a more transparent means to acknowledge their contribution.

According to Frey (1997), extrinsic rewards undermine intrinsic motivation when the external intervention is perceived to be controlling by individuals. By contrast, when the intervention is understood to provide positive feedback, intrinsic work motivation is unaffected or may even rise. When the reward is contingent on performance, extra risk exists that intrinsic motivation is undermined by rewards. For instance, Deckop and Cirka (2000) found that the introduction of merit-pay programmes in a non-profit organisation led to decreased feelings of autonomy and intrinsic motivation. However, the effect depends on the context and the way rewards are applied. For example, the interpersonal climate in which rewards are administered has a significant influence on their effects. Ryan et al. (1983) found that participants who received performance-contingent rewards in a supportive climate showed higher intrinsic motivation than a control group that received no rewards and no feedback, while those who received performance-contingent rewards in a controlling climate showed lower intrinsic motivation than the same control group. Hence, linking rewards to performance needs to be introduced in a supportive climate so that it is perceived to provide positive feedback.

There is also evidence that rewards must be perceived as equitable in order

not to be detrimental to motivation. An example is the extent of differentiation between individuals. As described by Frey (1997), the more uniform the provision of external rewards, the more negatively affected are those individuals who have above-average work morale. They feel that their contribution is not recognised by supervisors and therefore might adjust their intrinsic motivation downwards.

In most countries teachers with similar qualifications and experience who are working at a given level of schooling are paid according to a single salary scale regardless of their working conditions or additional responsibilities. This raises concerns about the potentially inequitable treatment of teachers. Moving to a different concept of equity of teachers' compensation, there could be benefits to introducing differential compensation to account for the specific conditions teachers face, and the additional tasks for which they are responsible.

Systems in which teachers' rewards are related to reviewed performance need to ensure that such schemes are perceived as fair by teachers and are endorsed by the teaching profession. Priority should be given to the development of fair and reliable indicators, clear assessment criteria, and training programmes for evaluators, while ensuring that assessment measures take into account the contexts in which teachers work.

CONCLUSION

Education policymakers, school leaders and the teaching profession face the challenge of motivating teachers to high levels of performance. This article proposes greater policy emphasis on five main responses to this challenge: (i) transforming teaching into a knowledge-rich profession; (ii) supporting and guiding teachers' work; (iii) evaluating and rewarding effective teaching; (iv) fostering a sense of group identity among teachers; and (v) making proper use of rewards. These imply bringing greater challenge and variety to teaching, ensuring opportunities for professional growth, meeting the need for teachers to feel valued and supported in their work, involving teachers in decision making and helping build a strong sense of professional identification and worth. The analysis stresses that motivation underpins both the success of teachers' work, and the introduction of any renewal in schools.

Although attractive compensation packages are important for improving the appeal of the profession, teacher policy needs to address a lot more than pay. Analyses of what teachers value about their work provide insights about what needs to be emphasised: the social relevance of teaching, the quality of the relations with students and colleagues, the support by school leaders, the need for feedback and recognition, good working conditions, and opportunities for professional growth. OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS, http://www.oecd.org/edu/talis), a large scale survey which examines the learning environment and the working conditions of teachers in schools across 24 countries and whose first results will be published in 2009, will make available detailed views of teachers and school principals and will suggest how these can inform teacher policy development.

A key part of any general strategy must also involve reminding teachers that they are highly skilled professionals doing important work. General campaigns can enhance the image of the profession by highlighting its importance for the nation as well as its sophistication and complexity, and the intellectual excitement it can generate.

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The network of teaching practice schools.

A partnership for teachers' professional development and lifelong learning

The University of Helsinki network of teaching practice schools has become an important part of teacher education aiming at focused and strategic school-university partnership. One of the applications of this collaboration is the research practicum in primary teacher education.

Erja Syrjäläinen and Riitta Jyrhämä

The network of teaching practice schools has been, since 2004, a project supported by the Finnish Ministry of Education and coordinated by the Faculty of Behavioural Sciences at the University of Helsinki. The network has become an important part of teacher education for both educational and societal reasons. It guarantees the diversity of teaching practice experiences and therefore prepares students for extended professionalism. The fact that some municipal schools offer teaching practice is a prime example of how universities, in addition to serving as research and teaching facilities, also influence society.

The network of teaching practice schools has an impact on the development of both teacher education and the cooperating schools. As a result of this collaboration, everyday school reality can be considered as one basis of teacher development. Teacher students are prepared to confront reality and at the same time the up-to-date pedagogical and academic knowledge flows to the schools and refreshes teachers' pedagogical practices. Our example – the case of the research practicum in primary teacher education – connects research to this context. Student teachers collect their Master's thesis data during their practice. Cooperation of this kind seems to open many possibilities both from the university's and the school's point of view. For the student it is a functional example of the teacher as a researcher and thus encourages him/her to take an investigative approach in his/her future work. At the same time, research carried out in the schools stimulates teachers working in them.

TEACHING PRACTICE IN FINNISH TEACHER EDUCATION

In Finnish teacher education programmes, teaching practice periods are advanced studies in both the Bachelor's and Master's degree studies (cf. Jakku-Sihvonen & Niemi, 2006; Niemi, 2008). On an organizational level, the cooperative partners involved in teaching practice include the universities and the designated teacher training schools. The individuals in charge of supervising the process include general didactics and subject didactics lecturers from the university faculty as well as the teachers of the university teacher training schools and municipal teaching practice schools (see Jyrhämä, 2006). At the University of Helsinki, teaching practice is organized so that student teachers gain experience of both university teacher training schools and municipal teaching practice schools. Two university training schools receive a steady influx of student teachers (several hundred per year) and cooperation between universities and these schools has become the norm. Therefore teachers of these schools have a good conception of the needs of student teachers, and the quality of supervision is considered particularly high.

Teaching practice schools in the local area receive student teachers for teaching practice periods once or twice a year. Not all teachers in these schools become mentors, so only a few teachers, approximately 3–5 per school, receive student teachers and are involved in the teaching practice. Therefore, the number of student teachers in teaching practice schools is relatively low, which means that teaching practice does not disturb the school's normal routine and teacher students get an authentic view of everyday school life. This has been one of the principles in organizing the network. The practice and the context of university training schools compared to teaching practice schools is meant to be different in character and in that sense they complement each other.

The length of practical studies, or practicums, and their scheduling in relation to the rest of the studies vary significantly within teacher education programmes in different countries. In the Finnish system, student teachers have traditionally had several teaching practice periods of various lengths at different stages of their studies. This practice differs from those systems that use longer practicums; in the US, for instance, teacher students have the opportunity to acquire proficiency in their profession by spending a full academic year in a placement (Sandholz, 2002) and by teaching in a paid internship position (Freese, 1999).

Since 2004, special efforts have been aimed at developing cooperation between the University of Helsinki and municipal teaching practice schools. There has been teaching practice in local schools before, but since 2004 the intention has been to organize it in a way that promotes interaction that has pedagogical value for both sides. The network of teaching practice schools can be considered a model of school-university partnership cooperation. In systematizing this collaboration, schools were invited to apply to become networking schools. At the same time, teachers were asked to apply to a supervision course. During 2004–2007, 680 teachers from 204 schools or educational institutions submitted applications to join the network. When the current supervision course ends at the beginning of 2009, about 500 teachers will have attended supervision courses during these years.

The network of teaching practice schools (also called field schools or partnership schools) at the University of Helsinki serves several teacher education programmes: primary school teacher education (TE), subject TE, kindergarten TE, special TE and adult TE. This means that the network must encompass schools and educational institutions from day-care centres to polytechnics. Teachers are mostly needed for primary, secondary and upper secondary level education. In one academic year in all teacher education programmes, 46 different teaching practice

periods are arranged and over 2,000 students need placements for teaching practice. About 64 per cent of these placements are arranged in local teaching practice schools and the remaining 36 per cent in the two university teacher training schools.

In systematizing the collaboration, school mentors have become very important partners in teacher education: it is they, part-time university teachers, who implement the curriculum of teacher education. They receive a salary for this task, and are also expected to take part in network meetings and conferences.

The terms 'supervision' and 'mentoring' often define mentors as teachers who supervise student teachers in schools. Figure 1 illustrates the positions of student teachers, school mentors and university supervisors.

Student teachers and mentor teachers encounter each other in teaching practice where academic knowing and professional knowing meet. The university lecturer acts as a supervisor in this relationship, and also guides the student teacher in his/her practice. The mentor's task is twofold: as a representative of the school, the mentor teacher acts as an expert in school pedagogy; but at the same time he/she must be aware of the objects and tasks of teaching practice. In this respect, the mentor serves in a university pedagogical role (cf. Jyrhämä, 2006).

The practical studies in teacher education play a key role in how future teachers will view their profession and everyday work as teachers. According to Zeichner (1990), the quality of teaching practice defines the quality of teacher education. This view supports the fact that practical studies are essential to the process and should, therefore, be given the attention they deserve.

SCHOOL-UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP – PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICAL ACTIVITIES

The awareness of the ethical, practical and complex character of teachers' work has brought about the collaboration between schools and universities to research teaching, learning and education. On an international level, the need to integrate teachers' practical expertise into teacher education has been acknowledged (Sutherland et al., 2005; Hodkinson et al., 1999). Three main objectives can be recognized in school-university partnership: preparing prospective teachers, enhancing the professional growth of practicing teachers, and encouraging research related to educational practice (Sandholz, 2002; Winitzky et al., 1992; Stevens, 1999).

The idea behind the collaborative infrastructure between schools and universities is the creation of a new learning community. This has been one of the guiding principles when systematizing the network of teaching practice schools. The consistent and goal-oriented education of mentors and the officially ratified contractual agreement between the University of Helsinki and the schools in the Helsinki metropolitan area are the first steps in bridging the gap between academic and professional knowing. The contractual agreement and the procedures connected to developing the cooperation has helped the University of Helsinki TE programme handle problems very often connected to student teacher placements in municipal schools: the mentors' inability to identify with the student teacher's situation as a novice, difficulties in connecting theory to practice, lack of information about the teacher education curriculum, the inconsistent quality of supervision, and so on. (Christie et al., 2004; Wilson, 2006).

Sandholz (2002), whose study concentrated on professional development, summarized the most profound experiences that influenced teachers' teaching: subject-specific conferences, teaching and collegial interaction, and mentoring student teachers. Based on Sandholz's findings, it is not insignificant what kind of activities are maintained in the cooperation.

In addition, as Bienzle and Jütte (2008, 8) note, trust is a prerequisite to network success and therefore it is necessary to create a network culture in which trust can grow and is eventually rewarded (see also Zetlin et al., 1992; Rodgers & Keil, 2007; Rice, 2002; Teitel, 2001). At the University of Helsin-

Figure 1. Teaching practice at the intersection of academic and professional knowing
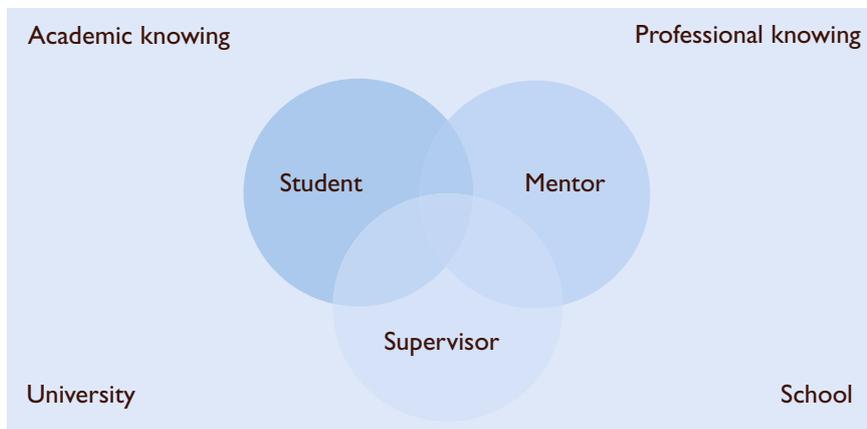
ki, the execution and planning of the network of teaching practice schools has taken place both in broadly-based planning groups and in smaller 'put-into-action' working groups. The network coordinator has played a key role in this work (Syrjäläinen & Meri, 2007). The most important activities have been the supervision courses, teaching practice symposiums, cooperation seminars and meetings arranged for school principals. Also, different kinds of online support materials have been created, the most important of which is the Practicum Handbook (Syrjäläinen, Jyrhämä & Haverinen, 2004).

The supervision courses have been considered the most important form of cooperation, guaranteeing the quality of the practicums. At the University of Helsinki, the education of mentors has a longer tradition (Jyrhämä & Kronlund, 2003), but since 2004 the supervision course has been a larger entity (8 credit points), taking one year to complete. Essential working methods in the supervision course have included home groups and a peer group, in which different kinds of conversations and collegial discussions about, for example, teacher's growth and supervision experiences, take place. The discussion themes integrate teachers' experiences with given assignments and sessions arranged at the university and the university teacher training schools. Discussions take place both face-to-face and online.

The purpose of the teaching practice symposium, which is arranged once or twice a year, is to bring together teacher educators from networking schools, different TE programmes, university teacher training schools, and also from different faculties connected to subject teacher education. The symposium programme consists of a keynote lecture and subject-specific group meetings. The lecture deals with the latest findings and experiences concerning mentoring, and in the group meetings the participants discuss teaching practice, mentoring and other current issues. Besides the teaching practice symposium, different cooperation seminars are arranged, usually bringing teachers together for some special programme or subject. The purpose of these meetings is to strengthen the network culture within each discipline. In addition to the meetings, symposia and seminars, mentors are supported by different materials, websites and connections.

The purpose of these practical activities is, firstly, to assure the coherence and quality of the student teachers' experiences. All the mentors and supervisors should acquire the same kinds of views about supervision purposes and procedures. Secondly, the wider objective is to gain collaborative experiences on which the development of the teacher education curriculum and cooperation between different partners can be based.

The most commonly experienced advantage in school-university partnerships is connected to the professional development of schools and teachers (Callahan & Marlin, 2007; Borthwick et al., 2003). Participants in a cooperative project interviewed by Borthwick et al. (2003) listed professional development, increased resources, support from collegiate interaction, and the benefits acquired by students as the main achievements of this type of cooperation. When teachers and schools submitted their applications to the supervision courses and to the network of teaching practice schools, we were naturally interested in their reasons, especially the teachers', for becoming mentors (Syrjäläinen & Jyrhämä, 2005; 2008). For example, there was an open-ended question on the application form: 'Why do you want to participate in a supervision course? Summarise your reasons. I'm interested in working as a mentor in teaching practice, because…' Of 460 teachers only four failed to answer this question. Each ap-plicant gave from one to eleven different reasons. Altogether 1,644 answers formed the data which were the target of a content analysis. The descriptions of the applicants' reasons were divided into twelve categories. A total of 58.8 per cent of the descriptions focused on issues of professional development, sharing teaching experiences and interaction as the motivating factors for becoming a mentor.

Teachers applying to the network spoke of "grains of gold" that can be identified through shared thoughts, ideas and stimuli. As mentors, teachers are exposed to new views and fresh perspectives concerning their teaching and their pupils. In addition, while mentoring others, they must justify and question their own work and ways of acting. This expands their awareness, thus motivating them to refresh and update their knowledge (Syrjäläinen & Jyrhämä, 2008).

A STEP TOWARDS A COLLABORATIVE LEARNING COMMUNITY: THE RESEARCH PRACTICUM

In primary school teacher education we undertook an interesting experiment concerning inquiry-oriented teaching. This experiment – the research practicum – took place during the academic year 2007–2008, when the research practicum course option was offered to students as an alternative to traditional separate courses. The Finnish research-based teacher education programme can be viewed as culminating in two courses of study: the Master's practicum (the final teaching practice period) and the Master's thesis. A two-fold ideology is implemented in these studies, meaning that both courses of study focus on practicing: the former on practicing teaching and the latter on practicing researching. In the research practicum the idea is to integrate knowledge, not separate it. Within the research aspect, it is possible to concentrate on specific subjects in a school

context. One of the authors, Riitta Jyrhämä, works as a university lecturer and has been the initiator of this experiment as well as the person responsible for it.

The aims of the research practicum experimentation were to 1) integrate researching and teaching (the student's point of view) and 2) connect academic studies with work (the university's and schools' points of view). The teacher students who took part in the experimentation combined their practicum period and their Master's thesis research.

Jyrhämä et al. (2008) found that students in teacher education appreciate the research-based approach. Teachers should be able to conceptualize practice and implement theory. Students who have worked as teachers have often found ideas for research topics from practice. The integration of theory and practice has been the aim of the research practicum. By theory-practice integration, teachers may adopt an inquiring attitude as well as develop their own meta-level thinking. Both academic as well as professional skills, interlocked with each other, are practiced.

Cases

As part of the research practicum the students took part in a seminar to discuss general matters dealing with research as well as the students' own researching processes. The research topics were very practical, mostly types of action research. The length of the practicum together with the data gathering varied from five weeks to four months. If the practicum took longer than five weeks, the purpose was to concentrate on data gathering and thus reveal possible changes in the evidence. Investigations were made in all age groups of primary level education, also including one special needs group. The research practicum did not solely involve the research theme and data gathering; teacher students also had to teach other subjects. The experimentation proved successful. The Master's theses, as well as the practicum periods, were successfully completed on time. All the ideas for research topics came from the students who were helped with the planning of the research and the practicum. The topics and methods of the MA theses research and the realization of the practicum in the pilot seminar group included the following:

• *Developing the school community. A case study of how one school community works*

• *Developing the mathematical skills of special needs children*

• *The development of the conception of maps*

• *January: One month of intense reading*

• *Improving the social atmosphere of the classroom*

• *First and second graders' relationships to nature*

• *Getting to know each other through drama. Experiences about the progress of interaction in a new class*

• *The charm of dance: A folk dance project with fourth and fifth graders*

As in all Master's thesis research, the prerequisites for the final paper included the theoretical frame of reference arising from the topic, the setting of the research problem, description of data gathering, analysis and discussion.

Findings and opportunities

The students' experiences of researching their own practice seemed to be successful. Also, the practicums, the research practicum in particular, had a refreshing and inspiring effect on the schools. It is very important that students are motivated to research topics that deal with teaching concretely. This often speeds up graduation. The students' attitude towards researching teaching has been positive, and their desire and capability to undertake re-search may have increased. The combination of MA thesis research and practicing seems to be a successful way of integrating theory and practice, and opportunities for these kinds of studies should be provided. This method seems to be especially suitable when conducting the practicum in the student's own classroom. This is the case in our multimode teacher education, which has offered the possibility to study and work at the same time (see Kynäslahti et al., 2006; Krokfors et al., 2006; Maaranen et al., 2008). Further, plenty of topics or ideas for research can be found in university practicing schools as well as in field schools (partnership schools). Research topics may concentrate on general educational issues or on multidisciplinary themes. It is interesting to note that some of the teacher students' mentors also became interested in doctoral studies.

FROM A TEACHING PRACTICE NETWORK TO A COLLABORATION IN LIFELONG TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

The network of teaching practice schools has, along with the university training schools, an important role in educating teacher trainees. In this network the contacts that different kinds of schools and teachers can offer are especially valuable. For example, when the university is looking for research cooperation, an appropriate partner can always be found. In the practice schools cooperation with the university students and teachers is experienced positively and for the pupils the presence of the teacher students is a refreshing change.

Teaching practice is an evident part of the school-university partnership. It works as a bridge between a student's academic studies and his/her future work as a teacher. Teaching practice creates implicit and practical knowledge about teaching that cannot be attained any other way. Tynjälä (2004;

2007) points out that expert knowledge, in addition to consisting of theoretical (conceptual) and practical (experiential) knowledge, also consists of knowledge concerning self-regulation. This third form of knowledge becomes apparent in mentoring situations between expert and novice. The expert's informal knowledge about theory and practice in different kinds of problem-solving situations generates knowledge about self-regulation. Tynjälä (2007) argues for a connective educational model in which educational institutions and working life could together create learning environments in order to improve and develop working life in itself. This kind of model executes integrative pedagogy where research and development is fundamentally linked to everyday working life and cooperation in general. Accordingly, teaching practice cooperation can grow more systematically to include continuing and long-term development and research activities. At the same time, new infrastructure for teachers' in-service education is created.

Figure 2 shows an organizational model where pre- and in-service teacher education together with research-based teacher education build an appropriate continuum for teachers' professional development and lifelong learning. The genuine interaction (interplay) based on research-based teacher education opens up new insights concerning both pre- and in-service teacher education.

One of the objectives of this article, besides describing the activities of organizing the network of teaching practice schools, was to illuminate the principles and visions connected to this kind of partnership collaboration. This provides the opportunity to establish cooperation especially in research and in the in-service education of teachers. In all these areas – the practice of student teachers, the research on teaching and learning as well as teachers' in-service education – the focus is on 'the practice of teaching', above all the development of it. And behind this is the target group of all education: learners of all kinds – and their lifelong learning.

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Figure 2. School-university partnership as interplay moving towards the teacher's lifelong professional development
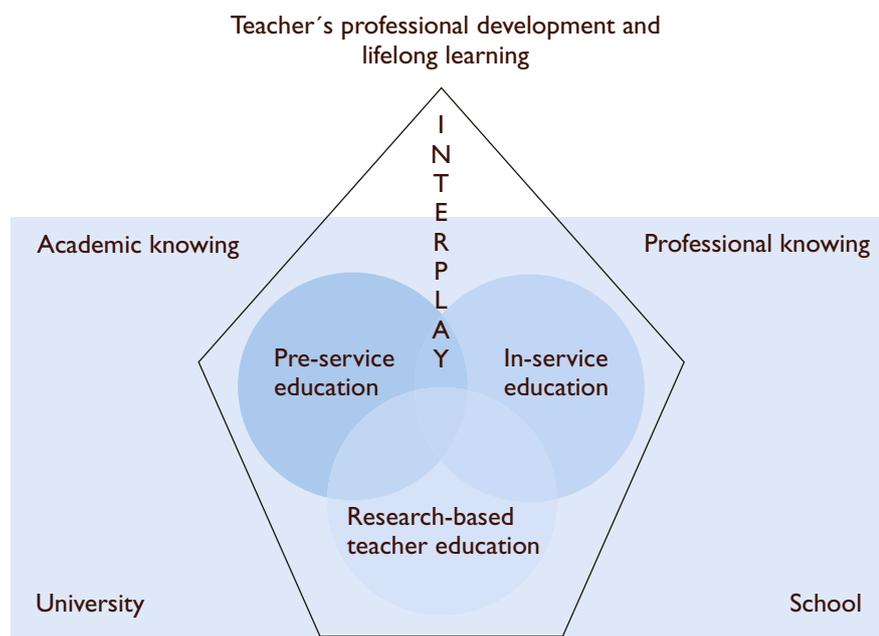
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The practice of learning from experience

DEATH BY BULLET POINTS – EXECUTION BY EXAMPLE?

Davies' model of experiential learning is intended for 'people who, in managing their lives, want to make the best use of their experiences'. At the outset, he points out that his model, contrary to being specific to any particular discipline, is general in nature. He does not aim at a universal, final model, but describes his version as 'more comprehensive than models of learning already published'.

Davies begins by introducing the elements of his model of experiential learning, which include expectations, emotions, opportunity, learning orientation and memory. He goes on to analyse our observations of experience, compares them to formal knowledge, and describes the processes of reflection and insight as well as credibility checking. Davies writes in a text-book manner and offers clear diagrams in support of the structure of his book. What may alienate some readers, however, is the seemingly endless array of illustrative examples, some straight out banal. Davies derives them from his own experience, as well as his research material which consists of interviews on people's experiences of exceptional events.

EXPERIENTIAL, INFORMAL AND FORMAL LEARNING?

Davies' model is based on Kolb's (1984) model of experiential learning and Jarvis' learning cycle (1994). It focuses on *experiential* learning, although the title of his book is *informal* learning. What remains unclear is the relationship between these two. It seems that according to Davies, experiential learning encompasses formal learning since formal knowledge is an element of his model. But how this stands in relation to the title of the book he does not explain.

Neither does Davies account for the role of experiential learning within formal education. Instead, he makes a stark contrast between the two. According to him, formal learning usually confirms expectations, whereas learning from experience brings about a shift in expectations (p. 36). He defines formal knowledge rather widely, including what we see on TV, posters and even graffiti, hear on the radio, from friends and colleagues, and overhear in public places (p. 107). This deviates somewhat from how formal knowledge is usually defined and becomes problematic when – presumably – experiential learning is equated with informal learning. Davies states that as formal knowledge tends to merge (in time) with our own experience, and people find it difficult to differentiate between the two, it is preferable that they are treated together in the model.

THEORY AND PRACTICE?

Davies promises a new, comprehensive model for making sense of experience, but does he deliver that promise? He points out that academic disciplines have their own philosophies, bodies of knowledge and research methods, and practitioners are often reluctant to move outside them and embrace the work of others. Davies' work, in contrast, is not rooted in any particular branch of study, and draws on a number of disciplines (p. 9), which leads to another kind of problem. The model draws on a variety of literature, ranging from established writers to more controversial theories of intelligence, as well as practical guides. In being comprehensive, the model is highly ambitious, and encompasses such a wide set of elements related to learning and human cognition that all readers may not subscribe to its theoretical implications.

The merits of the book, however, lie in its practical use. Davies offers a list of possible uses for the model, including, briefly, mentoring and counselling. He also provides the reader with useful points for exploration at the end of each chapter, stressing the importance of writing and sharing of experiences, i.e. articulating and thus processing further one's reflections. The book makes for refreshing reading for those interested in developing their skills for learning from experience. It provides a welcome example of the popularization of theoretical knowledge which beckons readers from different backgrounds, as long as one isn't too picky about the theories.

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