

## THE PROFESSIONAL PROFILE OF TEACHERS: ANALYSIS AND DEVELOPMENT OF COMPETENCES AND TEACHING METHODOLOGY

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### **Abstract:**

The development of lifelong and lifewide learning dimensions represents the key element for the promotion of a learning society through the access to new and improved basic skills for all, innovation in teaching and learning, guidance and counselling and the possibility of learning in structures closer to one's home. These elements are essential to promote an active citizenship, to ensure a wider access to education and to promote participation in all spheres of social and economic life. The focus on teacher training and the need to develop appropriate competences are key elements promoting quality in lifelong learning courses. This kind of approach is essential for teachers in order to improve competences throughout one's working life. First of all it's necessary to analyze and to manage self assessment tools and methodologies in order to gauge one's competences and to plan a Personal Development Plan.

The project has been carried out through an action research and through the analysis of teacher's competences' development in lifelong education. This "teachers' competences profile" is defined by the above mentioned analysis as well as monitoring and competences assessment. The tool is planned with the teachers themselves and is based on the European guidelines as well as the Provincial documents in lifelong learning.

*Keywords: assessment, teachers, competences, learning, knowledge.*

## 1. LIFELONG LEARNING AND LIFEWIDE LEARNING : FROM ARC OF A LIFE TO PATH OF LIFE

As the European documents declare, learning throughout one's life covers all ages: «Lifelong learning must cover (all the activities of) learning from the pre-school age to that of post-retirement, including the entire spectrum of formal, non-formal and informal learning.» (Resolution of the Council of the European Union, 2002).

Knowledge, beside a lifelong learning, is characterized by a global learning too, so that informal and not formal learning are valued as well: «the lifelong dimension indicating that the individual learns throughout a life-span. The lifewide dimension recognises formal, non formal and informal learning. Taking this as the starting point, three principal policy sectors or subsystems can be identified in lifelong learning»(Skolverket, 2000, p. 7).

It's a process that keeps on moving and changing, where the individual participates actively to its own construction (Jonassen, Mayes, McAleese, 1993). A process that takes place through specific kinds of collaboration and through social negotiations (Doise, Mugny, 1982) where metacognitive abilities are essential (Albanian, Doudin, Martin, 1999), as well as a self learning approach (Bandura, 1982, 1977; Zimmermann, 2000).

Learning represents a constant challenge in the global and glocal world. In a society of knowledge, the access abilities (Rifkin, 2000) to education and the information are determined by the definition of key competences (European Council, 2006) and are useful to face one's life's path. It's an open process that requires to learn throughout one's life in different contexts: school, work, personal life. Competence itself isn't characterized by something that the individual acquires at a sudden time, but it's a continuous process in development and evolution (Le Boterf, 1990, 1997, 2000).

The focus on lifelong learning and the need to develop appropriate competences' profiles for teachers is, in this context, a key element to promote quality in on-going education courses. This means that it's important for teachers to develop their competences, not only at the beginning of their career but throughout their working life.

Competences are in the learning society, the capital base on which to build the Europe of knowledge (Lisbon Strategy). The identification, analysis and assessment of competences can play a role of guidance in choosing between a variety of educational offerings and can support the construction of a personal profile in the field of education as well as a professional and personal life.

## 2. LIFELONG LARNING IN EUROPEAN DOCUMENTS

The path that characterizes the European framework of Lifelong Learning refers to some important documents, each one defines the main aim to be fulfilled by the definition of learning as a lifelong path for all ages.

The Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (2000) highlights six key messages:

1. New basic skills for all;
2. More investments in human resources;
3. Innovation in teaching and learning;
4. Valuing learning;
5. Rethinking guidance and counseling;
6. Bringing learning closer to home.

In the making of an «European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality» (2001), lifelong learning is defined as an «all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective» (Commission of The European Communities, p.10).

Throughout the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on key competences for lifelong learning «Key competences for lifelong learning» (2006) have been defined as key competences during one's life: communication in one's mother tongue; communication in foreign languages; mathematical competences and basic competences in science and technology; digital competence; learning to learn; social and civic competences; sense of initiative and entrepreneurship; cultural awareness and expression.

The key role played by learning has been featured in 2006 with the European document "Adult learning: It is never too late to learn", where the importance of improving the educational offer for adults has been highlighted by removing obstacles to participation, ensuring accessibility, recognition and validation of learning, considering informal and non-formal learning outcomes. The document underlines the importance ensuring the quality of adult learning programs as well as specific didactics methodologies and providers' quality in the training and the quality of teachers.

In 2007 the Communication on Adult Learning "It's never too late to learn" states that the quality of teachers is a key factor in adults' learning.

To sum up, the quality of teachers and teaching methodologies are key elements in promoting quality training, in considering new social and political emergencies and taking new emergency into consideration too (eg. active aging, conversion work, ...).

### **3. TRAINING AS AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT TO QUALITY TEACHERS**

Today teachers have to face various and complex challenges: considering specific needs (deficit or talents) for each learner, encouraging independent learning, promoting the acquisition and the development of key skills, using a variety of methodologies and technologies in learning, developing critical thinking and opening to different cultures.

Teachers' quality and training are essential factors to promote a knowledge-based society (Lisbon Strategy 2000). Teachers are asked to ensure quality in teaching and to enable the acquisition of knowledge and skills that are useful in the process of personal and professional life. Nevertheless teacher training has lots of contradictions and negative points.

From the European document "Improving the quality of teacher education" (Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, 2007) negative data emerge about teachers' training. Firstly investment in training and continuous improvement are insufficient: in any State, in fact, the minimum training period required is of only five days a year. Equally inadequate is the grade of teachers' participation in continuing education and training opportunities. As a result the lack of investment and participation doesn't ensure a level of quality in teachers' training.

The data TALIS-OECD "Teachers' Professional Development: Europe in international comparison" (2009), shows that teachers need an effective feedback on their work in order to take advantage of training opportunities, as well as the variety of experience training and a better working climate in schools are also important elements for an adequate professional development.

This is how the OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría interpreted the data: "Teachers are the life blood of education, and professional development of teachers is an essential ingredient in maintaining the quality of education systems. The results from TALIS contained in this report show that teachers have an appetite to learn and to seek continuous improvement, but also that the provision of in-service professional development needs to be better targeted to the needs of teachers" (Speech for the launching report "Teachers' Professional Development: Europe in international comparison").

### **4. THE RESEARCH: AIM, TOOLS AND METHODOLOGIES**

The demand for a research comes not only from the national and international need of teachers' lifelong learning and training, but also by the specific need expressed by the on-service teachers' group. The competences and methodologies characterizing the Teacher Continuing Education profile in the province of Bolzano have been analyzed through a research-action project and through the use of a Personal Development Plan (PDP), a tool for analyzing, monitoring and evaluating competences, (written in collaboration with the teachers involved in the research on the basis of EU directives, national and provincial) analyzed and monitored by the development of the profile too.

The PDP works as a valid support to analyze areas of competences (at the beginning), and to design and implement the development paths, to monitor and to evaluate them (at the end of the process). The analyzed and developed profile through research characterizes the register for teachers at a provincial level.

Through the research we understand what it means - in teachers' experiences - it motivates adults to grow and learn, it offers the opportunity to accede to one's competences and helps to understand the learning experience as a transformative experience.

In this sense, the educational experience turns out to be an opportunity to motivate and develop a professional learning community, that constantly evolves and compares itself to one's working practice and professional awareness.

The research developed these aims:

- Analysis and identification of a teacher's competences in a lifelong process;
- Mapping of didactic methodologies for an adult target;
- Construction of a PDP, based on the existing model, with individuated competences;
- Monitoring of competences and their development;
- The profile's definition through the competences and the teacher's methodologies;

A small group modality has been adapted to report it in a larger group after. Those moments are alternated with long distance work where a server is needed: <http://kronos.education.unibz.it/FUBmoodle/course/view.php?id=23>.

During the research a Personal Development Plan (created with the teachers themselves) has been planned, a questionnaire of self audit (at the beginning and the end of the research path) and a questionnaire of half - structured for the final research experience.

Rubrics of competences' assessment of key moments in training: start-up, development, evaluation and revision have been produced as outcomes of the research. Each individuated competence area has been pinpointed to specific indicators and mastery levels.

Report and schemes of teaching methods and of operative aspects have been also produced to summarize didactic and operative material for teachers.

#### **4.1 Phases and activity research**

The research is based on the methodology of action research and has been developed in 6 phases:

##### *Phase 1: Analysis of the state of the art: competences and methods in lifelong learning.*

In this phase, we focused on the term and the concept of competence. European, National and Provincial documents have been analyzed and with teachers' aid, a teacher profile in term of competences and methods, using a bottom up approach, has been built. The analysis of the relevant literature has been conducted by consulting databases, papers and online. There is a bibliographic study on the existing in order to arrive at a mapping scenario and at a stating of the art and skills of both teaching methods in the field of Lifelong Learning.

This method of operation has allowed full participation of stakeholders and has been based on the needs expressed by teachers.

##### *Phase 2: identification of teaching methodologies*

In the second phase it was decided first to collection teaching methods already used by teachers using specific schemes.

Starting from the definition of the four key moments of a training (start-up, development, evaluation and revision) were declined the different teaching methods and operational procedures to: initiate tasks and paths; develop content; close activities and path, to assess and review the processes and content.

##### *Phase 3: realization of "Personal Development Plan" (PDP)*

The competences identified are included in the Personal Development Plan as a working model that already exists. Teachers use a self-assessment questionnaire (self-auditing) of competence before starting to use a PDP in order to analyse the level of competences identified.

##### *Phase 4: Using the PDP in service*

During the 4th phase teachers have used the PDP. While managing PDP teachers are able to reflect on both personal competences and teaching methodology as well.

### Phase 5: Monitoring and coaching

In the 5th phase, coaching and monitoring activities have been realized. Teachers are been supported in the preparation and management of the PDP.

### Phase 6: Profile definition, data analysis and results diffusion

The last phase involves the administration of a semi-structured questionnaire and in-depth interviews to collect data on the experience conducted and to record elements of change and development in the creation of a professional profile. The tabs and categories of evaluation include elements of quality on professional continuing education for teachers in the province of Bolzano. The research data have been made public in a seminar with the active involvement of the various stakeholders that have participated in the research.

## 4.2 Personal Development Plan

PDP is articulated in four steps: (fig. 1):

- 1) self audit: in this phase each person carries out an analysis of starting personal competences using a Swot analysis;
- 2) development plan: development plan: on the basis of the competences analized, a personal learning plan is created considering the opportunities and the obstacles referring to the internal and external context emerged from the SWOT analysis;
- 3) log book and monitoring: each person registers the activities planned in order to improve the skills and competences underlined during the self audit and the definition of the learning plan. The teacher reflects on the competences developed through the activities realized (reflection in action) (Schön, 1983). In this step activities are monitored.
- 4) yearly report: highlighting of the results that have been obtained, the base on which to construct the following year learning. With the annual report it possible to turns out obtained progresses and it is the base for the plan of the following new year (reflection on action) (Schön, ibidem).

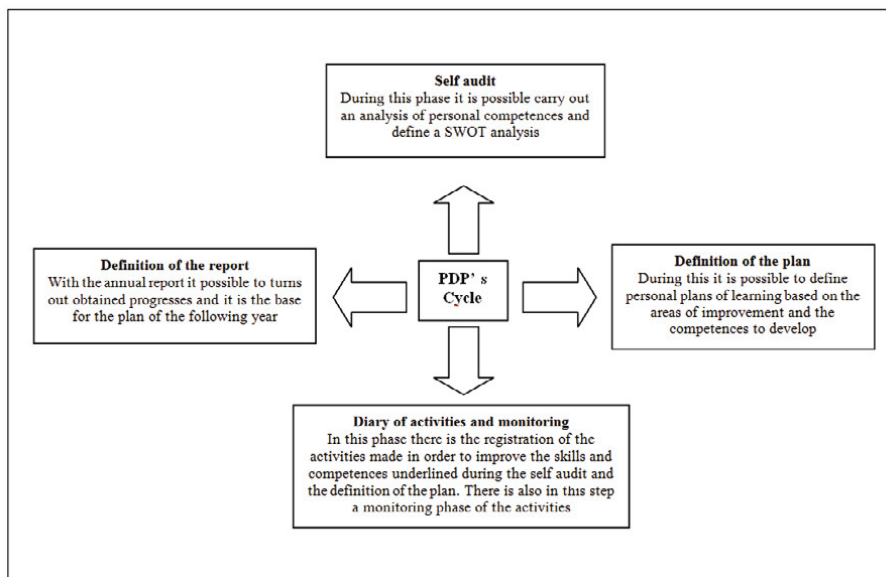


Figure 1: PDP's Cycle.

## 5. RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

The research has defined the profile of the teacher (in Bolzano Province) in terms of didactic, operative and methodological competences supporting the development of individuals able to enhance it's own learning and to make it, through in the PDP, a source of training in itself.

Through PDP I've tried to show combining instances of reflection and evaluation (self-and hetero directional) as well providing space for autobiographical narrative about one's own competences and

experience. Describing experiences, the competences acquired and methodologies used by, the teachers have not only described events and activities, but have revealed a deeper data such as values, expectations, cognitive modes of operation.

The data obtained from the questionnaires and the interviews shows that the PDP has supported a conscious learning, through identification of competences and contexts where learning takes place, in a conscious and an available learning process.

Motivation is a central part of PDP development. It takes time and effort: if the subject isn't supported by a strong intrinsic motivation, the PDP management is ineffective.

This reflection opens important scenarios both in the importance of a mentor / supervisor who can implement with the PDP's user scaffolding activities, as well as a feedback, and in the need to organize training and development paths.

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