

Parameters to map background learning of adult learners

Improving Guidance and Counselling in Adult Learning was a two-year project of Erasmus+ KA204 - Strategic Partnerships for adult education, funded by European Union, which increased the quality of adult education by innovating effective ways of lifelong guidance and counselling. The aim was to develop a pedagogical tool to map background learning parameters of adult learners¹, to expand and develop the skills of counsellors² who support these adult learners and, therefore, break new ground of lifelong guidance and counselling. The good practices gathered by the consortium served as a basis for the pedagogical tool.

The project was a cooperation between four adult education institutions:

- ✦ AFEdeMy, Academy on age-friendly environments in Europe B.V. (The Netherlands)
- ✦ Caritas Coimbra (Portugal)
- ✦ Ljudska univerza Celje (Slovenia)
- ✦ Työväen Akatemia (Finland), which was the project's coordinator.

All partners work with different types of adult learners. The partnership covers a wide range of adult education age-wise, geographically, and from basic to tertiary level.

Guidance and counselling may be considered as a map; though the aim is in the future, the starting point is the present of the person being advised; this, in turn, is affected by their past. The consortium aimed to develop a framework for the guidance and counselling in adult learning to map the following background learning parameters:

- Recognition of prior learning
- Self-awareness as a learner
- Factors of self-awareness
 - Ability to make independent choices and evaluations

¹ Some of the definitions of adult learners put emphasis upon the age, whereas other focus upon breaks in schooling or responsibilities and functions that adults are required to carry out in their lives. In this handbook the adult learners are the participants in adult learning opportunities. They form a heterogeneous group of individuals with different educational biographies and diversified educational needs.

² In this handbook, it will be used the word "counsellors" when referring to tutors/trainers/trainers/educators/social work technicians, psychologists, among others, because depending on the context, all these professionals may be involved in the guidance and counselling in adult learning.

- Adult learners' self-esteem, self-respect, and self-efficacy
 - Metacognitive skills
 - Motivation
 - Cultural and social economic background

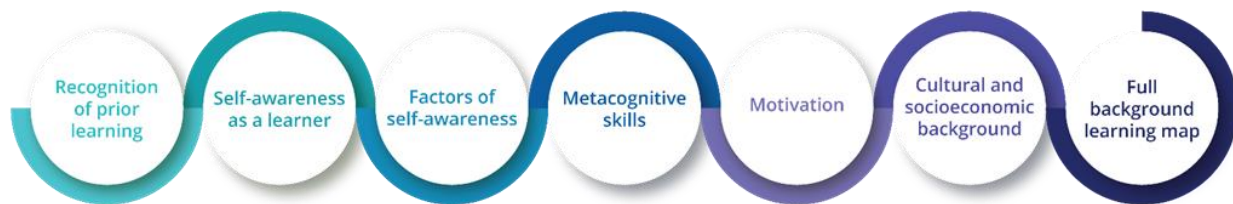


Figure 1: Parameters to map background learning

Recognition of prior learning is even more important to adult learners than to other learners because of prior education and life lived. The adult learner has gained both formal and non-formal education. Connecting new to prior knowledge makes learning more affective. Self-awareness as a learner has been formed through all other learning experiences. Through reflection, it is possible to acquire new perspectives to gain a more complete understanding of changing events. The counsellor has a very important role in undoing the negative circles developed from bad learning experiences. Recognition of the barriers to adult learning improves learning results. It is often expected that the adult learners have sufficient self-guidance skills to take responsibility for their own learning. This is not however always the case. In Finnish and Slovenian reality, it is possible to divide the responsibility, for example by the counsellor setting timelines for study tasks. Also, extending self-mirroring to the learning process permits motivation and planning of adult learners' studies.

Sufficient self-esteem can overcome the fears of learning, and there is no need for special strategies to face failures. Sufficient self-respect makes it possible for the adult learner to try out new things and to see challenges positively. Depending on the context, it is possible to ease adult learners' possible problems in cognitive skills by helping with study strategies and offering exam and essay clinics, for example. Effective learning demands that an adult learner can be active and

finds both the activity and the subject under study of interest. Motivation for learning can be divided into internal and external. Balancing family, work and study might be hard.

More than supporting the choice of a specific qualification path and/or professional path, guidance and counselling activities are expected to prepare citizens of different ages and in different situations to be able to face the challenges of the labour market, anticipating and managing the various transitions they are going to make. For example, in the Qualifica Centres's lifelong guidance and counselling³, in Portugal, the activities developed are expected to enable citizens to effectively manage their careers and to build life projects, facilitating various transitions: between school and the labour market, the return to the education or training system, the transition between employment and unemployment, between different jobs and between employment and retirement. It is a paradigm shift, shifting the focus from the orientation of an intervention merely to support decision-making on an area of study or professional training, contextualized in the time and in the organism in which it is made available (educational context, public employment service or other), for an intervention throughout the life cycle, focused on supporting these transitions.

The handbook that was built in the earlier mentioned Erasmus+ project presents the best guidance and counselling practices in adult learning, to map background-learning parameters, collected by the consortium, and developed further/reshaped after the testing of different practices with the adult learners. Both counsellors and adult learners were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of the tool in mapping background learning parameters as well as perceived ease of responding among adult learners.

- ✦ Each partner gathered information about their own organisation's existing guidance and counselling practices and tools separately, as well as information on each country's national education system (formal, non-formal and informal education):
 - Desk research, structured interviews, and/or questionnaires to gather existing examples of counselling and guidance practices, tools, successes, and challenges (in

³ ANQEP - AGÊNCIA NACIONAL PARA A QUALIFICAÇÃO E O ENSINO PROFISSIONAL (2017). *Lifelong Guidance at the Qualifica Centres: Methodological Guide*. [Online] Available from: https://anqep.gov.pt/np4/file/339/Ori_Longo_Vida_GM.pdf. [Accessed: 15th January 2020]

the case of written documents, the most important and useful ones, as well as the analysis, were translated into English, the official project language.)

- The descriptions of the instruments and methodologies used by each partner organisation are described in each parameter to map background learning, divided into suitable practices for individual and group guidance and counselling. There is also the case of practices suitable that can be used in individual and group guidance and counselling processes.

The Handbook of the Best Practices to Map Background-Learning Parameters with national perspective will be published in the summer 2021 on the web pages of each partner, as well as in their chosen social media. We live for the future – we learn from the past!