



Self evaluation - theory and practice

This handbook provides a summary of the results of a European funded Leonardo Da Vinci project 'Transnational Methods and Models for Self-Evaluation of Non-Formal Personal Competencies'. The handbook summarises the work carried out under the project and the accompanying CD ROM provides the curricula and tools produced by the partners.

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- Context / background to the project
- Cornerstones and mutual learning
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- Curricula models and tools
- How to use the project findings

Context/background of the project

Introduction

Throughout our life we gain new skills and competencies. Some of these are learnt in formal situations - in school, in vocational training courses, in college or university. Others we learn through our work. Many of our skills come from less formal settings - from home, from our hobbies or from social groups to which we belong.

For some of our skills and knowledge we have certificates to proof what we have learnt. References from previous employers may also provide evidence of our experience. But many of our skills and the knowledge we possess are not recorded by formal certificates.

This becomes a problem when we wish to change our jobs or if we become unemployed. It is also a barrier to entering new courses which require previous experience.

Moreover, we are not always aware of just what skills we do possess. We are not always aware that skills we have learnt in informal settings may provide a basis for new careers, for starting a new course or for using our experience in the community.

The Self Evaluation project aimed to help people to become aware of their personal competencies by the use of new methods for self-evaluation of non-formal competencies. Self-evaluation means to support people in evaluating their own possible competencies. The aim was to enable people to discover their own competencies, to make them 'visible' and to make use of them for new employment opportunities, including finding opportunities for self-employment.

In doing this we were aware that many programmes and courses, especially for unemployed people, start from the needs of the labour market. In other words, they look at what skills people might have to meet the needs of particular job opportunities. We wanted to start from the opposite end, to look at all the skills and knowledge that individuals possess, including those recognised in the form of certificates and those skills and knowledge not formally recognised. We feel that starting from this viewpoint may open up new possibilities and opportunities for people which they might never have previously considered.



About this guide

This guide has been produced primarily for practitioners – teachers, trainers and guidance counsellors – interested in self evaluation. It may also be of interest to researchers, managers and to policy makers and planners in education and training.

The guide provides a short introduction to the work of the self evaluation project. It explains the background to our ideas and thinking and provides examples of the curricula and tools which the project partners have developed.

Each of the tools is accompanied by a short evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the particular approach, developed by the partners themselves to help guide potential users.

The accompanying CD ROM provides access to the detailed curricula and tools as well as to many of the papers and documents produced through the project. In many cases the tools and documentation is available both in the p

The project partners

Coordinators – BIAT, University of Flensburg, Germany

Project partners:

IHK Flensburg, Germany

University of London, UK

Danish Institute for Educational Training of Vocational teachers, Denmark

Academus Consultadoria, Portugal

University of Patras, Greece

Greek Dances Theatre, Greece

National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education, Czech Republic

Institute for Educational Sciences, Romania

partners' native language as well as in English.

Further products and documentation can be downloaded from the project web site –

<http://www.self-evaluation.org>.

Project activities

The Self evaluation project was funded through the European Commission Leonardo Da Vinci programme and ran from 2001 – 2005.

In the first phase of the project, the partners examined different processes and ways of recognising skills and knowledge in different countries. This was both to increase our knowledge of best practices and because we recognised that any new curricula and tools would have to be integrated within existing courses and programmes if the project was to be successful.

In the following phase of the project the partners developed and piloted new tools, courses and curricula for self evaluation.

We developed a framework for evaluating the curricula and tools, including interviews with participants and stakeholders, a SWOT analysis and benchmarks. This was seen as important not only to judge the quality and impact of our work but also to enable us to provide guidance on how the new curricula and tools might be best used.



Cornerstones for curriculum and pedagogic development

The partners in the Self-evaluation project came together because of a shared understanding both of the needs of learners and the potential for meeting those needs. That does not mean, however, that a common course, module or even pedagogic approach can be developed and implemented in the different partner countries in Europe. Education and training is heavily influenced by historical, social and cultural development. Whilst the different countries of the European Union may share common principles and aspirations the systems of education and training remain surprisingly diverse. Put quite simply, curricular programmes cannot be transferred from one country to another.

Background and introduction

What is possible is to learn from each other through processes of mutual learning and to launch new initiatives or reforms based on an understanding of the dynamics of development in other countries. What is also possible is to pursue developments based on common principles and understandings. That was one of the key aims of the Self Evaluation project. Whilst recognising that each country has a different system and that learners will interface with the system in different ways, the project seeks to develop and test curriculum modules based on a set of common principles and understandings. This section of the guide sets out those common ideas. Its aim is not to provide a template for curriculum and pedagogic development but rather to provide a common basis and starting point for that development. Whilst partners were free to base their curriculum modules and pedagogic approach on the traditions, cultures and systems of their own country, those modules and approaches should reflect the principles and understandings expressed within the cornerstones.

Cornerstone 1 – Principles and aims

The self evaluation project and the curricular models and pedagogical approaches aim to develop individual's social self reliance. The curricular modules are designed to prepare and guide people through a process of self reflection in order to evaluate their own skills and knowledge. The starting point of such a process is not the needs of the labour market but the ideas and aspirations of the participants. The self evaluation programme may be a stand alone module or may be embedded within a wider programme of learning. That programme may have as its aim labour market integration. However, one of the objectives of the self evaluation programme is to encourage individuals to explore as wide as possible the different opportunities and options for future actions. This might be progression to continuing learning, it might be to look at possibilities for self employment or voluntary work or it might be more geared towards social networking and community activities.

Therefore the curricular and pedagogic design needs to focus on the ideas and aspirations of the learners and to encourage self reflection and confidence in exploring those ideas and aspirations. It also needs to encourage participants to explore the different opportunities and resources of their communities, be they communities based on geographical proximity or communities based on practice.



Cornerstone 2 – personal, social, learning and methodological competencies

The self evaluation project builds on the ideas developed through the earlier Leonardo da Vinci Tacit-key project. The following chart outlines the underpinning competencies to be developed through the self evaluation curricular modules.

Dimensions of key competencies	Explanation
<i>methodological</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ability to deal with different modes of communication, different people, different aims, etc.) - analysis of situations and decision making - problem-solving - self-organisation - ability to draw on experience in new situations (learning from the past) - ability to interpret situations and respond to them appropriately, including micropolitical awareness - time-management
<i>social competencies</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ability to work with others (interpersonal) - ability to co-operate - self-projection (positive image of yourself) - managing conflicts - negotiation skills
<i>learning competencies</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'learning to learn', self learning ability - understanding controversial issues - critical and reflective abilities
<i>competencies related to attitudes and values</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - acceptance of self-responsibility - demonstrate commitment - positive attitude towards change - ability to foster confidence and trust - micro-political awareness

Cornerstone 3 – Content and subject related competencies

As we said in the first cornerstone, the self-evaluation programme is not based on labour market needs, nor is it merely aiming at labour market integration. Having said this, obviously work based competences are important, especially as part of a process of self-reflection and self evaluation.

Firstly the self-evaluation module will encourage participants to reflect on the skills and knowledge they have acquired through formal education and training, not merely from the viewpoint of what they are occupationally qualified to do but from the view of what key qualifications and transferable skills they have acquired. Many participants may be aiming at a new career direction, either because of personal aspirations or because of changing opportunities for employment. Secondly the self evaluation module will look at previous



work practice and the possible skills and competences gained which are not formally documented and acknowledged.

The module will also encourage participants to consider ways in which they can develop their future content and subject related competencies. Once more, this may be through formal education and training but may be through work based activities. Thus future work, voluntary activity, self employment or community activities are to be seen as a learning opportunity for content based competencies.

Cornerstone 4 – Flexibility

The self evaluation modules are designed to focus on the needs of individual learners and to develop self reliance. This demands a flexible approach to pedagogy. A traditional systemic or didactic approach is inappropriate for such an aim.

It is important that providers are flexible in their approach.

Flexibility takes a number of forms. The timing of learning provision should be flexible to meet the needs of the participants, for instance recognising childcare responsibilities.

Secondly flexibility should allow learners to pursue the programme at their own pace. Whilst some participants will require only a brief period of time to complete the self evaluation process others will require far more time to develop the confidence and skills necessary to undertake that process.

The project is not prescriptive in terms of pedagogy. Some partners have developed computer based learning materials. Others have seen the best provision as being though one to one coaching. Group work and peer group interaction may be seen as a potential learning method. It may be that some learners will wish to undertake a period of work experience as part of the self evaluation process. The self evaluation project is itself a developmental action and one aim is to evaluate the efficacy and results of different approaches. However the pedagogic approaches must take into account the needs of the learners and should encourage the development of self learning competences.

In the first cornerstone we stressed the aim was to encourage learners to consider the many different opportunities and potentials for further activities following their participation in the self evaluation module. It is important that they are supported and encouraged on this process, rather than the module being seen as a traditional course with a start and end date.

Cornerstone 5 – The role of the teacher and trainer

It should be clear from the previous cornerstones that this is not a traditional course that we have developed. Furthermore, it is also clear that there is a major role in facilitating self evaluation and in supporting participants through that process. This may be a challenge for teachers and trainers who are used to more traditional didactic and systemic course provision. It is particularly demanding in the need for flexibility.

It is hoped that continuing professional development programmes and activities will be organised for teachers and trainers based on this guide for practitioners. It is also suggested that as part of this process teachers and trainers should themselves participate in the self evaluation exercise.



Using the curricula and tools

As we said in the section on the project cornerstones, curricula, concepts and materials designed in one country or context cannot simply be transferred to another system or context. What is possible, we said, is to learn from each other through processes of mutual learning and to launch new initiatives or reforms based on an understanding of the dynamics of development in other countries. It is also possible to pursue developments based on common principles and understandings. Whilst recognising that each country has a different systems and that learners will interface with the system in different ways, the project sought to develop and test curriculum modules based on a set of common principles and understandings

The summaries in this guidebook provide examples of the different approaches the Self evaluation project partners initiated and developed through the project. The CD Rom, which accompanies the guidebook, provides access to the different curricula elements and tools developed and tested through the project. Whilst the materials will need adaptation for use in different contexts, we believe they provide a rich resource for those seeking to introduce self evaluation activities for socially disadvantaged people, be they in the context of labour office programmes for the unemployed or for further education and training programmes of the socially disadvantaged.

The curricula and tools are provided in partners' national languages and in English. The index file on the CD ROM provides navigation links to the different language versions.

The curricula and tools have been extensively piloted and evaluated in practice. Evaluation methods included interviews with practitioners – teachers, trainers and labour office employees – and with participants. Based on the outcomes of this work, each partner produced a SWOT analysis of their curricula and tools, detailing the strengths and weaknesses and opportunities and threats. The project also developed the series of benchmarks, reproduced elsewhere in this guidebook. The full SWOT analysis and benchmarks for each product are included on the CD ROM. They are intended to help readers decide which products might be most suitable for adoption and integration in their own curricula and activities.

During the final dissemination conference, held in Bucharest in May 2005, a workshop session was organised to explore the issues arising from self evaluation activities. The issues outlined below are based on the results of that workshop and are intended as further assistance to practitioners wishing to develop self evaluation activities based on this guidebook within their own curricula and activities.

Self evaluation – a tool for empowerment and self discovery

Self evaluation is most powerful as a method for individual empowerment and self discovery. As such the commitment to the individual participant is critical to the success of the methodology. Such commitment can only be realized by voluntary participation.

In many countries in Europe there is growing pressures to ensure that all unemployed people – including members of socially disadvantaged groups – are actively seeking employment. In some countries this is now a condition for payment of social welfare benefits. When self evaluation activities are included as part of Labour Office programmes for the unemployed there may be explicit or implicit pressure for compulsory participation in the activities. This may greatly reduce the effectiveness of self evaluation as a methodology. There is a grave



danger that participants will either participate in a perfunctory manner or will provide the replies seen as required rather than truthful and reflective self evaluation.

Supporting participants

Some of the partners in the self evaluation project trialled the use of computer based tools. With the increasingly pervasive use of computers, there is little doubt that such approaches will become more common in the future. Whilst the use of Information and Communication Technology tools can increase access to activities for self evaluation, and provide enhanced flexibility, they cannot replace the role of teachers and trainers in providing skilled counselling and guidance and support to socially disadvantaged people. We would advise that, wherever possible, there is face-to-face support for participants in the use of ICT based tools.

The training of teachers, trainers and counsellors

In our original Cornerstones we said that Self evaluation may be a challenge for teachers and trainers who are used to more traditional didactic and systemic course provision. We recommended programmes of professional development prior to implementation of the activities and that teachers and trainers themselves follow the self evaluation programme. However, thus recommendation proved problematic in practice. It was not always possible to gain agreements to free staff for professional development activities. Nevertheless, we remain of the opinion that professional development for teachers and trainers is critical for the successful implementation of self evaluation activities. One answer may lay in the production of more publications like this guidebook. Another idea is to organise peer group activities for teachers and trainers, to ensure they gain sufficient support in the development and implementation of new curricula activities.

Raising expectations

When we originally launched the Self evaluation project, we were at some pains to stress that self evaluation activities were designed for personal self development and to explore options for further education and training and for voluntary and community activities as alternatives to progression into employment or self employment.

However, it is not so simple in practice. It was always intended that the self evaluation activities would either be delivered as a stand alone module within an existing course or programme or be embedded within an external programme. This meant negotiating with external agencies and providers to develop collaborative arrangements for the delivery of the self evaluation activities.

In reality, many of the programmes run by these organisations have as their major aim the return of participants to employment. The lack of a wider developmental perspective is a particular problem in countries and regions with persistently high unemployment rates. In such contexts the self evaluation activities may raise expectations and hopes with little opportunity of fulfilling such expectations. We would advise that teachers, trainers and counsellors are careful not to unreasonably raise expectations of the results of participation in self evaluation activities.



Flexibility and time

We also recommended that flexible opportunities were provided for participation in self evaluation activities, especially for those, such as single parents, with significant family commitments. Furthermore, we recognised that different participants would need different time to complete the various activities provided in the programmes.

Once more, in practice this appeared somewhat utopian. Not only is existing course provision usually quite rigid in structure and organisation, but many of these activities are funded by labour market and government organisations with limited funding dictating the extent and duration of provision for participants.

Pedagogic approaches

Self evaluation, with an emphasis on reflection and empowerment, is based on a student centred pedagogic approach. Not only may this be challenging for teachers and trainers, but may also represent a new experience for learners. Learners may need support in developing and expressing ideas and opinions.

To be most effective, the self evaluation activities should be embedded in courses and programmes which share this approach to teaching and learning.

Learning from others

As you may have gathered from this section, implementation of self evaluation activities within existing curricula is not a straightforward task. It is almost inevitable that there will be the need for compromises in implementing the activities. Even so, we do believe that the approach can prove successful and that many of the activities detailed in the accompanying CD ROM may be adapted and used for a wide range of different contexts and target groups. If you would like more information about any of the activities please contact the project partners responsible for the particular activity.