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Leonardo da Vinci

REFLECTIVE EVALUATION

Reflective Quality Development for Teachers and Trainers in CVT

Summative Evaluation Report
Project Outcomes

Content

Introduction

Summary of the project's background

The Leonardo da Vinci project „Reflective Quality Development for Teachers and Trainers in CVT" (abbreviation: „Reflective Evaluation") focuses on the quality development and improvement of Continuing Vocational Training (CVT) courses through teachers and trainers within the CVT sector.

The overall project aims at the designing of a flexible and interactive web based self-evaluation tool, which teachers and trainers like to employ within their respective institutions. In the focus of quality development are CVT courses of independent CVT providers but with the expected high flexibility of the self-evaluation instrument it is also intended to reach public institutions, company based retraining courses and social partners and chambers.

The web based instrument for self-evaluation originally built on the results of the previously developed instrument "Quality through Self-evaluation and Development". However, during the course of the project it was felt that the tool had to be modified considerably, overcoming a cognitive approach based on questions and answers and now integrating multi-media in order to trigger teachers' and trainers' self-reflection processes.

Evaluation of the Project's Work Processes

Project Time Schedule

After the project first was falling slightly behind the time schedule due to partner changes and the tool becoming more sophisticated than originally planned, the project seemed back into the time schedule at the end of work phase III (see the evaluation report phase I-II). These expectations had not been met fully and the project had to be extended. In terms of content, the main reasons here has been the growing complexity of the tool, mainly the selection and preparation of multi-media material. Thus, it was necessary to ask for an extension of the project.

Exactly the integration of more multi media and other stimulus material – one of the main findings of the test phase – called for the *project meetings* maintaining their character of being real workshops rather than presenting results. Both the meetings in Wales as the additional one in Belgium had as a core the process of jointly optimising the tool. As after the discussions during the first three phases of the project, the partners had developed a 'feeling' for the process of Europeanisation and recontextualisation of the content, the partners saw these workshops as extremely productive.

Internal Communication

Internal communication was seen as working well by the partners in the second half of the project, although it was not more intensive as in other projects. This was due to the nature of the main work tasks of the phases IV to VI and the way contextualisation of the tool's content was organised.

Valorisation at the later stage of the project was carried out by the partners, following the project's overall valorisation strategy (see below). Because of working in their countries around their existing networks as well as reaching a broader audience, for this phase intensive collaboration was not an important point. Even though, the partners mentioned that the co-ordinator's role was quite helpful in discussing different aspects of the valorisation strategy and suggesting improvements. The resulting effect that communication amongst the partners was not extensive was not seen as a hindrance but simply adequate to the nature of these work tasks.

Changing the self-evaluation tool's design, adding materials and contextualising it according to different countries conditions was carried out by electing materials and deciding the general approach during the project meetings. Then, the partners did the work separately. Again, all partners agreed that the co-ordinator was extremely helpful in case of problems.

So, the relatively low level of communication and – more notably the communication flow being more one between different partners and the co-ordinator – a fact the partners mentioned for the first stages of the project (see evaluation report phases I-III) did not change substantially. However, in the later phases of the project, the partners did not see this as a major problem anymore – if even a problem. This is due to the fact that after the first year of the project, the partners had reached a common understanding of the tool's envisaged character and the tests had shown them how to contextualise it for their own countries of necessary.

Project Products

In terms of products, the second phase of the project was determined by the final development of the project's main product, the self-evaluation tool. First, I will concentrate on evaluating the *development process* during the project phases IV-VI and then the product itself.

The partners saw the process of collaboratively designing stimulus material for a self-evaluation tool as quite challenging but interesting. The iterative design process allowed the partners to develop a deeper understanding of the feature of such a self-evaluation tool. This holds for the tool's overall conception as well as for the interdependence between its character and its design – to develop materials that can be integrated into the tool but are in line with the theoretical approaches behind it (see the Final Report on the tool).

According to the partners, the overall approach of designing not only the general outlines of the tool, but developing exemplary and sometimes even substantial parts of its content during the project meetings proved a good way of carrying out the development task. Though, the iterative design process meant that it took some time for the partnership to reach common ground in terms of concept, underlying ideas, design specifics and principles of contextualisation. Consequently, only in the later stages of the project the partners were able to fully enter the design process.

The *self-evaluation tool* itself in its final stage is described in all detail by the co-ordinator in the final report on the tool. There, even conclusions are drawn regarding the tool's implementation into national and European practice (p.78f.). The main issues of further development and change as a consequence of feedback during the test phase have been addressed in the 'evaluation of test results'. Thus, the following part analyses the tool's final version in the light of the findings of the test and valorisation phases.

The main redesign of the tool considered the introduction of more general stimulus material including multi media and the development of pathways guiding users through the tool. Adding multi media was not so much an issue of responding to the need of more diversity in the questions. It is much more an example of a general trend in the tool's design: the integration of cognitive, constructivist and pragmatic learning theories into the instrument (see also p.21 of the final report on the tool). Here, the expectations of the test users have been fully addressed and even driven further. The combination of different types of stimulus material is not only innovative – by integrating them into a common approach that starts with self-reflection but aims at further levels up to quality development in the institution as a whole, the tool is quite outstanding amongst other products the evaluator knows. Normally, self-reflection is just used as an additional means in evaluation processes, the focus being on sketching an institution, project or team as a whole. The self-evaluation tool the project 'Reflective Evaluation' developed has self-reflection at the very core of a process that can have effects on a complete institution and the quality it is providing. The individual trainer or teacher, his or her values and roles, the work they are carrying out and how they are carrying it out, is one main focus of the tool, their relation to the institution and the bigger society are designed from the viewpoint of these trainers and teachers. The huge potential of this approach for institutions is exactly this focus on the persons acting as trainers and teachers.

It is already established research that quality assurance and quality development in institutions providing initial or further education is depending to a large degree on establishing a 'culture' of quality. The most sophisticated quality assurance system provides sub-optimal results, if the institution is not able to make good use of the 'review phase' as CQAF describes it. Detecting problems early and reacting appropriate depends to a high degree on the teachers and trainers working in these institutions. Thus, an instrument that takes the teachers' and trainers' individual self-reflection as a starting point is a potentially ideal means of securing quality.

This potential, though, can only be actualised under some preconditions. For teachers' and trainers' self-reflection being of use for the institution, the institution must be open for the results of this self-reflection. This means that the institution must welcome critical ideas and suggestions for improvement. This, again, relies on the precondition of the institution's interest in quality even if this implies additional costs (in terms of money, time and other resources) in the short run. This is not automatically the case, as the project's valorisation showed (see below). In a context of a low professionalisation of teachers and trainers, insecure and badly paid work and institutions that look for short-term revenues, it is questionable whether the tool's potentials can be fully used by an institution as a whole. Under such circumstances, though, one may argue that teachers' and trainers' self-reflection has some value per se and may at least lead to better individual performance in teaching.

On the other hand, one should not over-estimate the tool's potential either. As important as self-reflection can be, the teachers and trainers still have to 'translate' their findings into practice. This depends on institutional structures and individual skills that are beyond the scope of this instrument.

Project Valorisation

For a detailed description of the various valorisation activities that the partners undertook, see the different valorisation reports as well as table D4 of the final report. Here, I will focus on the general pattern of activities and their results as synthesised from these documents and interviews with the partners.

In general, the partners managed to approach the target group, introducing the tool in some institutions as well as amongst individual teachers and trainers and disseminated it via fairs, conferences, leaflets and other means into the wider target group as well as into the scientific community.

For evaluation purposes, we distinguish two different aspects of valorisation that in effect were often carried out simultaneously. First, there was the dissemination and valorisation into a relatively clear defined target group – institutions and teachers were asked to test and make further use of the product. Secondly, dissemination activities were carried out with the aim to communicate the tool and its features into a wider audience and to even generally raise awareness of quality and self-reflection in the target group.

For the first dimension of valorisation, valorisation activities were carried out slightly differently according to the different partners' networks and the target sector's size and structure in the different countries. Sometimes the partners worked intensively with already existing networks of various size and additionally carried out broader valorisation activities (e.g. Germany, Wales, Portugal), while other partners relied more on their general standing in the sector and concentrating on promotional fairs (e.g. Romania).

In this dimension, valorisation activities concentrated not only on institutions of the target sector. After approaching the target group via the institutions they work in, the tool's potential benefit for the *individual* teacher and trainer was one main starting point of valorisation. All partners used the test phase and the discussions with users on the advantages and disadvantages of different versions of the tool to fine-tune it to the needs of teachers and trainers. At the end of the project, there are teachers and trainers in all partner countries using the tool. This should enable a small but sustainable base for the tool's further dissemination after the project's lifetime.

As mentioned in the evaluation of test results, the individual use of the tool depends to some degree of the target group forming a community of practice. In countries where this base is quite small, sustainable use is quite vulnerable. The possibility to further adapt the tool to individual or institutional needs via developing own material and pathways is a way to cope with this problem. This way, users can communicate their different perceptions of important features of their profession. Although it would be exaggerated to see the tool as a focus of an emerging community of practice, it may play its role for those teachers and trainers that are interested in further professionalisation of their work.

For the second dimension of valorisation, some partners had a far more difficult task than others. As mentioned in the evaluation report on phases I-III as well as in the evaluation of the test results, in some partner countries the very concept of self-evaluation is not widespread in the target sector. In Germany, for example, valorisation has been quite successful. Satellite partners tested the tool and welcome it as a useful instrument for teachers' personal development as well as a means of quality assurance. As it is not clear, to what degree the satellite partners or other institutions in countries like Greece, Romania or Portugal will continue to use the self-evaluation tool, in other countries the sustainability of valorisation is more critical. Because of the target sector's structure in these countries, this is something beyond the partners' possibilities. The fact that the partners notably in these countries managed to introduce the tool into the vocational education of trainers and teachers in the target sector is a means of overcoming this challenge in the long term.

Conclusions:

Summary of Main Findings

The project had to extend the envisaged time schedule due to adding new and different materials to the tool. This is quite in line with the development of the project's first three phases. The decision to make use of web technology in order to design a tool comprising a variety of stimulus material for self-reflection caused a first delay because of the unforeseen technical problems related to this decision. After these were overcome by the end of the first project year, the project partners faced the challenge to develop, Europeanise and (re-)contextualise material that is making use of the tool's possibilities. This again turned out to take more time than originally envisaged.

The internal communication was functioning properly, although not exceptionally well and too often between individual partners and the co-ordinator. That this pattern did not change during the project's second year was mainly due to the partners not feeling a real need for better communication. This in turn was because the partners all held that they sufficiently understood the project's overall course as well as the concrete work tasks to undertake.

Overall, valorisation activities have been sound. Valorisation, though, has been better in some countries than others. The main reason here may be the structure of the target group. A self-evaluation tool has the precondition of a professional interest in personal development and quality. In case the majority of intended users lack this professionalisation (as a result of the professions overall organisation), valorisation becomes difficult.

Suggestions for Similar Projects

For the phases IV-VI as well as for the first three phases, it holds that the way this project made use of the project meetings has turned out to be very effective. The co-ordinator organised the project meetings in a way that substantial work could be done. The approach of not only discussing general guidelines of the tool but exemplarily developing content as well was highly welcomed by the partners. The evaluator sees this as a good way for projects developing products that have a European as well as a national side.

The problems some partners faced with valorisation activities were partly due to differences in development of the target sector. The extent of such differences is difficult to anticipate during the phase of writing a project application. Still, the partners have to address such problems at quite early stages of the project to be able to find solutions as soon as possible.

The general valorisation approach carried out in this project is interesting in some respects. As the project's product, the self-evaluation tool, is not intended for commercial purposes, sustainable use is crucial. To just 'advertise' the tool in the target group has the considerable risk of achieving good dissemination results during the project's lifespan at the expense of later valorisation. Thus, the dual approach of introducing the tool at selected institutions while at the same time carrying out 'normal' dissemination seems viable. Particular mention deserves the valorisation strategy of introducing the tool into the target group's training. This may be a general recommendation for products in this sector.