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## **Competence Pass for Adult Educators – a new Approach**

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# Competence Pass for Adult Educators – a new Approach

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## Contents

1. Introduction .....	3
2. What is the objective of the competence pass for adult educators and which aims are pursued?.....	4
3. Who benefits from a competence pass? .....	5
4. Method and development .....	5
5. Example .....	9
6. Summary .....	12
References:.....	13

## 1. Introduction

We come across competences in multiple ways: naturally, we speak of competences and competent actions. Competences are not restrained to a certain age or certain professions. On this note, one could assume that competences possess an egalitarian aspect. It is expected that children acquire competences already in pre-school or primary school age. Recently, I came across the headline "Competent Infant". Likewise, it is expected that tasks and challenges in the work place are "competently" accomplished.

While the existence of competences is regarded as certain, their description is very arguable. Multiple attempts of descriptions underline this. Competences are neither present per se nor are they an inalterable entity. Competences are not only distributed inter-individually differently; competent acting, i.e. the performance of the competence, can also vary at different times for the same task.

Competences must be acquired; however, it remains largely obscure when exactly which competence has been acquired. Therefore, in our project, we pursue the method to measure competences where they become apparent, namely during the performance of a certain task, independently from how and where they have been acquired.

Adult educators face high demands. They need to possess a high degree of expert knowledge, be trained in didactics and methods, be able to answer questions of participants, interested people or other instances satisfyingly and competently and much more.

The high demands of the occupation and the very heterogeneous access to the vocational field of adult education only hint at the various difficulties the scientific work has to deal with.

The idea for the development of an instrument for the identification of adult educators' competences is closely connected to the need of practitioners to make their competences in the vocational field of adult education apparent and thus transparent. This is mainly caused by the fact that not all practitioners in the field possess a formal academic education but still hold the necessary competences. Making these non-formally acquired competences apparent is the main goal of the project.

The need to make non-formally acquired competences apparent underlines a general trend towards making "additional qualifications, competences, knowledge, skills and proficiencies" apparent that "have not (exclusively) been acquired in the scope of a formal (initial) training" (Sellin 2001 p 295).

Burkhart Sellin names the following factors for this:

- the quickened renewal of knowledge,
- the connected technological and specialist renewal of requirement profiles,
- changes in the work organization and work distribution including work place hierarchies.

“As a result, new and additional ways of competence identification, validation and accreditation become necessary, which are already developing, if initially seemingly uncontrolled” (Sellin 2001 p 295).

The necessity of a valid and practical identification of adult educators’ competences is also displayed in various national and international efforts to develop competence evaluation methods. This conference is a good example.

A study of the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research has counted more than 50 competence passes on the German market although the standard of these varies strongly in terms of content as well as method (comp. BMBF 2004). Furthermore, previous efforts have not been explicitly directed towards the identification of adult educators’ competences. To fill this gap, a research team of the Technical University of Dresden is currently working on an instrument that renders valid but also practical identification of non-formally acquired competences possible.

## **2. What is the objective of the competence pass for adult educators and which aims are pursued?**

- development of adequate instruments/ methods to comprise competences of the people employed in adult education
- documentation and systematization of competences of adult educators to render a comparison of required and existing competences possible and to enable institutes of adult education to reliably comprise their employees’ competences
- compilation of a manual regarding the utilization of the competence pass

### 3. Who benefits from a competence pass?

- **people employed in adult education:** The competence pass gives adult educators the opportunity to identify their professional competences. It becomes obvious in which diverse work situations adult educators are employed and how diverse the requirements for this occupation are. The preoccupation with one's own work furthers self-reflecting processes and thus strengthens the professional self-esteem. Personal development needs can also be identified with the detected levels of specific adult educational competences. This enables the adult educator to choose and attend adequate further or continuing trainings and thus to increase the level of the respective competence.
- **institutes of adult education:** With the help of the competence pass, institutes of adult education can control and further personnel decisions such as hiring or the selective assignment of professionals. Also, internal trainings can be directed more purposefully. The pass can furthermore be used as manual for personnel talks.
- **Certifiers and public authorities:** Here, the compass can function as the basis for their evaluation, e.g. for personnel certification. The pass can also enhance existing quality management systems.
- **people interested in continuing education:** People interested in continuing education profit from the increased quality of training effected by the use of the competence pass.

### 4. Method and development

#### First step:

We defined an understanding of the term competence which is decidedly targeted at the requirements of adult educational acting. For this, common competence understandings have been critically evaluated and reviewed for their usefulness for the competence pass.

#### **Our definition of Competence:**

- Competence becomes evident in dispositions of acting.
- Competence becomes apparent in the **actions** of a person in **typical work situations**.
- A competence can be existent in **different degrees**.
- Competences can be **obtained in different ways**.

In the course of our work, five adult educational competences have emerged:

**Professional and societal competence** refers to the professional control of content and topics of a training program including substantiated scientific background knowledge as well as to a broad general knowledge on the part of the adult educator, especially to an understanding of current societal, political and educationally relevant topics.

**Pedagogical-didactical competence/ media competence** refers to the didactics and methods of teaching. It comprises the ability to professionally plan, hold and evaluate lessons/ seminars and to ensure training success and supervision. Media competence describes the ability to work professionally with available technical means. This is supposed to ensure an ideal preparation and presentation of learning topics.

**Personal/ social/ reflexive competence** describes abilities like empathy, perseverance, concentration, motivation, social-communicative and other personal dispositions that are of great importance in the scope of adult education. Reflexive competence refers to the self-reflexion of the adult educator as well as to the ability to recognize and evaluate general contexts and other function contexts in organization and institutions.

**Organization and management competence** comprises commercial and strategic thinking and acting in regard to businesses and organizations. This includes comprehensive abilities in financial planning, business and personnel development, project planning, execution and evaluation, controlling, training planning, cooperation forms and other possibilities of strategic cooperation.

**Counselling competence/ mentoring competence** refers to the areas of career and education counselling and the assistance for clients, furthermore to the counselling of persons in adult education and to guidance for actual and potential clients as well as organizations such as public authorities, societies, chambers and ministries.

### Second step:

- Following a research phase in institutes of adult education, a typology of relevant adult educational competences was created, based on typical work situations of adult educators.

Systematization of work situations:

- Due to preliminary works in the scope of a habilitation empirical results regarding typical work situations of adult educators could be used.
- To engross and specify these results we executed our own research, which included the examination of ten adult educators in different terms of employment and with different key activities.

The following eleven work situations have been determined:

- I. Preparation of Lessons
- II. Holding Lessons
- III. Follow-up of Lessons
- IV. Educational Counseling
- V. Testing and Developing of Teaching Materials
- VI. Concept Development
- VII. Project Management
- VIII. Personnel Development
- IX. Networking
- X. Educational Controlling
- XI. Public Relations

Currently, we are in the testing phase of the pass. It is possible that the number of work situations need to be changed.

### Third step:

- To identify the level of each competence, competence indicators have been compiled.

To determine the level of a competence, indicators have been developed that refer to the completion of adult educational tasks in different work situations. These serve the determination of the competence level with the use of certain standards. We act on the assumption that a competence does not follow the all-or-none principle but can be developed in varying degrees. This fact establishes the opportunity to strengthen and thus to increase a marginally developed competence through targeted measures.

Fourth step:

- The feasibility and acceptance of the pass is tested and evaluated in selected Saxon institutes of adult education.

The feasibility and acceptance of the pass are currently tested and evaluated in selected Saxon institutes of adult education:

- an adult education center (*Volkshochschule*)
- an institution of confessionnal adult education
- an institution of rural adult education as well as
- an institution of vocational further education.

By choosing different institutions of adult education we hope to achieve a broad coverage of all work situations.



## 5. Example

The work situation of “Educational Counseling” is supposed to illustrate the approach:

### **Work Situation “Educational Counseling” including its ascribed competences and indicators**

**Description:** Pedagogical counseling of persons and institutions regarding their desire of and need for further education; the stress is on information and counseling, special addressing of target groups and institutions.

This work situation requires two competences: Counselling and mentoring competence as well as personal/ social/ reflexive competence. The presented indicators are not complete due to reasons of clarity.

Generally, the adult educator only evaluates these indicators that apply to him/her. Other indicators are omitted and do not influence the final evaluation. A free line enables the adult educator to add an individually important indicator.

We use an evaluation in four categories:

- 1 fully applies
- 2 partly applies
- 3 somewhat applies
- 4 does not apply

The following two images show examples for indicators for the counselling and mentoring competence as well as for the personal/ social/ reflective competence.

Competences	Competence Indicators	1	2	3	4
<b>counselling competence/ mentoring competence</b>	I. I know the object of counseling, i.e. the educational offerings of my institution or my region, the entrance requirements of the courses, the financial promotion for participants etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	II. I am especially trained for educational counseling.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	III. I am familiar with educational theoretical counseling approaches (e.g. according to Rogers, phase model, informative/ situative/ biography-oriented counseling)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	IV. I regard educational counseling as an offering for orientation and as support for decision-making, but not as giving instructions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	V. I can balance the needs of everyone involved in the counseling process.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	VI. I distinguish counseling from advice and information as well as from therapy.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	VII. I discuss the matters of the counseling with the person seeking advice in advance and set clear aims.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>personal/ social/ reflective competence</b>	I. I establish a trustful relationship with the person seeking advice by demonstrating empathy and acceptance.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	II. I can empathize with the person seeking advice but I can also differentiate myself to be able to judge situations objectively.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	III. I use my communication skills, e.g. my ability to listen or to observe.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	IV. I analyze and reflect the counseling conversations and my behavior as a counselor.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	V. I demonstrate intercultural and social sensitivity in dealing with different target groups, e.g. with migrants, the elderly or people from a non-academic background.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	VI.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<b>Level</b>	$\Sigma =$			

The project ends in October 2009. Until then, the next steps are to finalize the competence pass and to compose a manual for its use. Currently, we are planning a follow-up project that includes the implementation of the pass.

## **6. Summary**

Identification and acceptance of competences are an opportunity to increase professionalism in the field of adult education. Additionally, adult educational competences become more transparent for different users. Aim of the project “Competence Pass for Adult Educators” is the development of an instrument that serves objective competence identification and documentation in adult education and the creation of competence profiles. Furthermore, it serves the compilation of adult educators’ competences to enable a comparison of required and present competences and thus to allow educational institutes to safely identify their employees’ competences. The identification of adult educational competences is the prerequisite for their recognition and certification.

Translation: Sandra Mattick

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