



Case Study- Germany

Support of a young unemployed man to find an adequate apprenticeship through assessment

by Ina Grieb

1. Who is offering the assessment?

The 'ländliche Erwachsenenbildung' (LEB) is an adult education institution all over Germany. It focuses its work on rural areas. They offer more and more professional training besides their traditional, general, cultural, political courses in adult education. In Germany, there is a long tradition of this kind of adult education institutions which offer a big variety of topics for their participants.

In the last years, the LEB in the area of Oldenburg had a lot of different EU projects in very different areas and with different target groups. One of the target groups is a group which is growing increasingly in Germany. This is the group of migrants. The LEB developed an assessment training specifically directed at migrants. This first method of assessment was a result of an EU project as well. A project between an NGO in Germany and a university of applied sciences in The Netherlands.

The LEB Bad Zwischenahn started the assessment, also in the context of a European project on integration of migrants. Looking at the experiences mentioned above, they have now been offering this assessment for many years and are addressing not only migrants, but the young unemployed; people who want to change their profession, women going back to work etc.

2. The assessment process

The assessment is a diagnostic process and enables the participant to recognise personal strengths and weaknesses. This is of enormous importance when deciding on a future profession.

For the individual, the assessment offers a differentiated system of support in choosing a suitable profession, an increase in personal motivation and an attempt to match the individual competences with the labour market and further possibilities of education.

The assessment trainers define the goals and the content of the assessment with consideration of the participant's needs. The assessment training can last up to ten days, wherein courses have groups with a maximum of 12 participants. All participants have to fulfil specially designed work assignments, which cover four different areas of practice. These are: manual competences (fine- / gross motor skills), social competences (team work), logical competences (understanding and capability of logical thinking) and language and communication competences (tasks of cooperation, interview).

The realisation of these work assignments in the different areas is documented by at least two trainers. The trainers' observations and the participants' self-evaluation result in the basis for an individual report. The observing trainers look at accuracy and carefulness, the ability to plan and to

be systematic, motivation, willingness to work, capacity of learning, ability to work in a team, capacity of conflict management and being autonomous, ability to work under pressure and frustration, innovation, own responsibility and communication. All these skills are also included in the discussion of qualification frameworks and learning outcome definitions.

3. The case

An assessment course was ordered by the social welfare office in Hannover, Germany, for young school graduates, who have not yet found an apprenticeship or any kind of training or job.

Murat, was a 17 year old young man, who had accomplished 'Hauptschule' with a very moderate result. He was of Turkish background and had tried to find an apprenticeship as a car mechanic without success. For more than a year, he did not really do anything to achieve his goal. The problem was, how could he be supported in being successful?

The key question was in asking for his strengths and not necessarily looking at what kind of apprenticeship he wanted to do. The assessment process has an open result, which means that the focus is on his personal competences, irrespective of his goal to become a mechanic. Murat was very sure that he only wanted to get an apprenticeship as a mechanic. He never considered anything else.

When the social welfare office offered him the assessment course, he was not immediately interested. It took quite a while and a lot of convincing for him to try the training.

He did the 4 day training programme and finished two work assignments in each of the four areas. His group consisted of six participants. In the beginning, he felt insecure, but very soon he forgot the observing trainers and was fully engaged in fulfilling the tasks (together with his group). When he got his feedback, he had the possibility to reject it, and then this observation would not be included in the final report. On the other hand, he gave his self-evaluation as an equal part of the final report. Murat had no problem with the reports given to his activities in the group. On the contrary, the biggest added-value was the excellent judgement for his communication and contact skills. He had never been aware of that. Furthermore, he was also assured of his technical competences, which he had not been sure of before.

For Murat, the assessment was a great success. He was confirmed in the competences he had realised before and he gained more self-esteem and self-confidence. He even registered that he had more skills than he was aware of. These additional strengths meant that he could widen his perspective on his future profession. He could now try to find an apprenticeship where his technical and good communication skills would be needed. He then decided to look for an apprenticeship as a salesman in the automobile industry.

At the end of the training there was an intense counselling of his performance in the assessment training. The only categories used were those agreed beforehand by all the observing trainers, and by Murat as well. This report was documented in a kind of certificate, which could be shown to future potential employers. At the same time, Murat was allocated a contact person (in this case somebody from the social welfare office). This contact person accompanied him further and supported him because otherwise, the newly gained optimism and self-assurance might vanish quickly.

Murat was successful in getting an apprenticeship as a salesman in the automobile industry, showing the employer his school report and the assessment certificate. As he was not successful before the training, he was sure that the certificate, which clearly showed his competences, helped him in getting a job. The contact person could support him in explaining to the employer, the seriousness and reliability of the assessment.

The assessment process in this context is not used to a large extent yet. Employers might know it from the more traditional area of human resources, where it is used for example in personal development of staff. To use this changed assessment, referring more to the needs of young unemployed people, is still developing. But, it has now become a new way of helping some young people like Murat.

4. Final remark

The validation of competences which are not reflected in school reports has no tradition in our education system up to now. The support from outside through observers on the one hand and the possibility of self-judgement on the other hand, had never been an option for Murat.

All four areas of competences show qualifications which have not necessarily been learned at school in a way that the students can profit from. But, these competences are an important part of the whole personality and include the results of informal learning as well.

To have a validation of competences like this one is an additional chance, especially for migrants, because for many reasons, their school reports are often not as good as they could be. Ways of validation like this give them a chance to show more of their, sometimes hidden, competences.