

Quality of Non-formal/Informal Education. First Steps to Establish the System in Lithuania

During the adult education week on 19 November 2010 Lithuanian Association of Adult Education organized distant video conference. It was devoted to the issues of learning organization and to quality of non-formal and informal adult education. 120 members of LAAE participated in the conference. They gathered in distant learning classes in Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda, Utena, Pakruojis, Mažeikiai and Naujoji Akmenė.

The question of quality of non-formal and informal teaching and learning constantly appear in the agenda of adult educators and decision-makers on national and international levels. Here we remind only few most important documents:

- A Memorandum of Lifelong Learning. Commission of European Communities (2000)
- Adult learning: It is never too late to learn. Communication from the Commission (2006)
- Harnessing the power and potential of adult learning and education for a viable future. Belém Framework for Action. The Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI) (2009)
- Strategy of Assuring Lifelong Learning in Lithuania (2008)

CONFINTEA VI Belém Framework for Action devotes full chapter for the quality of teaching and learning and stresses: "Quality in learning and education is a holistic, multidimensional concept and practice that demands constant attention and continuous development. Fostering a culture of quality in adult learning requires relevant content and modes of delivery, learnercentred needs assessment, the acquisition of multiple competences and knowledge, the professionalisation of educators, the enrichment of learning environments and the empowerment of individuals and communities".

It might seem that sufficient attention is paid to the quality of non-formal and informal education, but the reality is quite different. So far at least in Lithuania almost nothing has been done in order to realize the idea.

Accreditation system is created in the system of formal education. It makes everyone to evaluate oneself regularly and to receive external evaluation. The quality of non-formal and informal education is left to the evaluation of those who render trainings and who participate in them (market). Unfortunately, market does not solve everything. In public sector, especially speaking about unprofessional non-formal and informal education, laws of market can hardly be applied.

That is why we suggest to establish the system of voluntary self-evaluation and external evaluation of the quality of non-formal and informal education. What for? It would give stimulus for improvement; it would help to identify the spheres in which we must brace ourselves up; it would help to control the quality of non-formal and informal education; it would also help the clients to determine the relation between price and quality.

In order to realize the idea we need: 1) approval by the community; 2) instruments for evaluation and self-evaluation; 3) system of evaluation and self-evaluation; 4) who takes the responsibility to evaluate and to establish the instruments and the system; 5) evaluators; 6) money for preparing the instruments and the system of evaluation and self-evaluation.

Taking such objective one need to create the criteria of measurement of quality which could allow evaluating quality objectively. Several EU projects were targeting that task and tried to create quality measurement criteria and quality evaluation system:

- Project SEQUEL (Sustainable Environment for the Evaluation of Quality in E-Learning)ⁱⁱ.
- Project RECALL (Recognition of Quality in Lifelong Learning)ⁱⁱⁱ.

The draft list of criteria for evaluation of quality of non-formal and informal learning was prepared on the bases of the results of those projects. The list was distributed to the participants of the conference for evaluation of feasibility for Lithuanian context. The forms are under processing currently.

Four papers were presented during the conference:

- *Adult education week as the start to the learning planet.* Arūnas Bėkšta, Lithuanian Association of Adult Education
- *Basic ideas of the 6th International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI).* Prof. Vincentas Dienys, Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre.
- *Development of Quality Culture.* Rūta Karvelytė, Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre.
- *Quality of adult learning- adaptation for change?* Prof. Margarita Teresevičienė, Vytautas Magnus University.

The participants in distant classes had an assignment to discuss and present their opinion on the following questions:

- Do we need to evaluate the quality of non-formal and informal learning?
- Who shall be the evaluator?
- When (one or several times during the year; when the organization applies)?
- For how long will the evaluation be valid?
- Who pays?

Shortly the results of discussions are as follows:

- All groups recognized the need for evaluation and for creation of the system to this purpose.
- Evaluation could be organized by Lithuanian Association of Adult Education that should create a pool of evaluators.
- The application can be submitted at any time, but the time of the evaluation will depend on the organization of the process and number of applicants.
- Evaluation shall be valid for three years.
- Opinions regarding “who pays?” separated. Most of groups suggested that the applicant should pay for the expenses of evaluation. But there were several remarks that in that case the objectivity of evaluation could be doubted. Therefore the process should be financed by the State.

Now it is important starting concrete preparatory works.

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ⁱ Harnessing the power and potential of adult learning and education for a viable future. Belém Framework for Action. CONFINTEA VI. 2009.

http://www.unesco.org/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/INSTITUTES/UII/confintea/pdf/working_documents/Bel%C3%A9m%20Framework_Final.pdf

ⁱⁱ Quality Guide to the Non-formal and Informal Learning Processes. MENON Network EEIG, 2004.

<http://www.menon.org/publications/TQM%20Guide%20for%20informal%20learning.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.europeanqualitymark.org/home/>