

Grundtvig Programme: an introduction

The project “Supporting Potential Development”

INES TESTONI, MARIA SILVIA GUGLIELMIN

■ Abstract

In the article the authors discuss the various European policies concerning education and training that address the difficult economic situation. They explain the concept of “flexicurity”, which is a combination of the flexibility required by the new economic policies and the security that the welfare state must guarantee its workers. Within this scenario, programs such as *Lifelong Learning Programme* are aimed at increasing the flexibility of workers. Part of the Grundtvig initiative is located within these programs and in particular the project “Supporting Potential Development” is presented. This project was designed by the Italian Association of Morenian Psychodramatists (AIPsiM) and aims to increase self-efficacy and spontaneity of adults involved in a training program implemented using the techniques of psychodrama and playback theatre.

■ **Key words:** *lifelong learning, European policy, unemployment, flexicurity.*

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■ Sommario

Nell’articolo sono presentate le politiche europee riguardanti l’educazione e i training proposti per affrontare la difficile situazione di crisi economica. Viene illustrata la “flexicurity”, ovvero una combinazione tra la flessibilità richiesta dalle nuove politiche economiche e la sicurezza che il welfare state deve garantire ai lavoratori. In questo scenario rientrano i progetti denominati “Lifelong Learning Programme”, che mirano ad incrementare la flessibilità dei lavoratori. Al loro interno si inserisce il Grundtvig e in particolare il “Supporting Potential Development”, qui presentato, ideato dall’Associazione Italiana Psicodrammatisti Moreniani (AIPsiM), che mira ad incrementare l’autoefficacia e la spontaneità degli adulti coinvolti in un percorso di formazione attuato mediante le tecniche dello psicodramma e del playback theatre.

■ **Parole chiave:** *formazione continua, politiche europee, disoccupazione, flexicurity.*

The Council of the European Union (CEU) is interested in enhancing cohesion among all member states through the development of inter-state, inter-group and inter-individual relationships. Through a series of specific initiatives, the goal is to contribute to the successful implementation of inclusive strategies and underline the importance of achieving sustainable and inclusive growth (Watkins, 2007). This originates from the CEU’s belief that education and training play a fundamental role in achieving cooperative objectives as that equips citizens with the skills and competencies needed by society to promote social and trans-national cohesion.

European policy on education and training

In order to improve social and individual competencies for the 21st Century and considering the formative process as a complex reality influenced by cultural, individual and socio-economic factors, the European policy is involved in three different types of intervention (EComm, 2008; ECoun, 2006). The first type of intervention is aimed at scholastic drop out and the necessity of improving access to higher education. Essentially the goal is to create pro-active and compensatory measures to prevent discrimination and inequality (Collins, Kenway, McLeod, 2000; Duru-Bellat, 2004; Ellenbogen, Chamberland, 1997; Ross, 2007). Related to this goal, the second objective involves promoting the mobility of young people in order to give them the possibility of constructing their own life project. In this sense, the *Youth on the Move* initiative is directed towards helping young people achieve their full education and training potential, thereby improving their employment prospects (EComm, 2004a, 2004b; ECou, 2005).

Educational Institutions need to improve the quality and relevance of the courses they offer and to encourage citizens from all walks of life to enroll in formal and non-formal higher education courses (Scheerens, 2007). Given the relationship between education and economic growth (De la Fuente, 2006), the latter objective concerns the recognition that the training available must be relevant to the needs of the workforce and must also facilitate the individuals' access to lifelong learning opportunities and guidance (EComm, 2003, 2006b; Brunello and Checchi, 2007; Hanushek, Kimko, 2000; Kleiner et al. 2005). This means that education and training programs must respond quickly to new trends in order to better meet the skill needs of the labor market and the social and cultural challenges of a globalized world. In order to strengthen the ability to anticipate and match labor market skill needs, the CEU is geared towards improving access to lifelong learning, in particular for disadvantaged groups. The strategies adopted in pursuit of these three objectives means that Member States of the EU must engage in horizontal cooperation and share experience and best practices.

Facing the labor crisis and the solution of “flexicurity”: the role of lifelong learning

The CEU considers chronically high unemployment rates as an unacceptable loss of human capital. In recent years, the labor crisis, which has discouraged workers and lead them to leave productive activities, has required the EU to make significant labor market reforms. The crisis has illustrated how hard it is to implement integrated policies. In fact, on the one hand, the short-term working solutions have not been complemented with enough training opportunities for employees and on the other hand, when incentives for training are offered, an insufficient number of individuals take the opportunity to re-train. In the latest CEU report on this issue, they state that modern social security systems have to be revisited and adapted to the post-crisis context. The welfare state solution that CEU proposes is “flexicurity”. The term “flexicurity”, which derives from the combination of “flexibility” and “security”, is a labor market policy of the welfare state oriented towards a dynamic

economic model. This model is made up of two fundamental concepts: social security and active labor. The European Commission implements flexicurity through the following: comprehensive lifelong learning strategies, reliable and flexible contractual arrangements and modern social security systems that provide adequate income support during employment transitions. In this sense, flexicurity guarantees on the one hand, flexibility and reliability in contractual arrangements, and on the other hand, creates active labor market policies, reduces segmentation in employment and makes transitions worthwhile for both the employee and the economy. Lifelong Learning (LL) is the cornerstone of this model and may indeed provide a solution to the present situation only if the promotion of a post-crisis labor market is related to the creation of a *highly skilled workforce* that is capable of contributing and adjusting to social change through an upgrade of competencies and knowledge.

The European investment in education and training systems is geared towards anticipating skill needs and raising global employment. Specific priorities of flexicurity policies are upgrading skills of workers who are particularly vulnerable to economic restructuring. For example, women, minority groups, the disabled or mentally challenged, low skilled workers that need to transition towards a new kind of job, the unemployed and parents returning to work. These goals are pursued through the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP), instituted by the European Parliament on November 15th, 2006. This programme is similar to other educational concepts like continuing education, but with the addition of providing both formal and informal learning opportunities throughout an individual's life so that there is a continuous development and an improvement of knowledge and skills needed for employment and personal fulfillment. The strategic importance of the LLP is related to the fact that it is not enough to ensure that people remain active and acquire the right skills to get a job; the recovery must be based on creating job growth. In fact, policies that exploit key sources of job creation and promote entrepreneurship and self-employment are also essential to increasing employment rates. So the basis of the success of flexicurity is the promotion and diffusion of LLP strategies.

Specific LLP priorities in Europe include: implementing lifelong learning through partnerships at regional and local levels between public services, education and training providers and employers; identifying training needs, improving the relevance of education and training and facilitating individuals' access to further education and training.

The European Grundtvig Programme and *Lifelong Learning*

Within the LLP, the European Grundtvig Programme (EGP) focuses on problems related to adults and the ageing population, specifically on education and “alternative education streams”. Launched in 2000 and now part of the overarching LLP, the Grundtvig programme provides adults with opportunities to improve their knowledge and skills, keeping them mentally agile and potentially more employable. This cooperative venture also involves supporting the institutions and organizations delivering these services, in addition to teachers and staff. Grundtvig's mission includes the cooperation between associations, information

services, counseling organizations and others involved in LL and adult education at local, regional and national levels, such as NGOs, enterprises, voluntary groups and research centers. The purpose of the Lifelong Learning Programme promoted by the EGP is to enable individuals at all stages of their lives, pursue active learning opportunities. In addition, the program is focused on constructing cooperative opportunities throughout Europe with the goal of integrating various educational and training initiatives. In this sense, the EGP is geared towards creating networks of groups working in the educational field, and with these networks, constructing a forum or a common platform to discuss and exchange information on key issues, policy, training and/or research in the area of adult education.

Both formal and informal organizations can participate in the EGP. For example, primary and secondary schools that provide courses for adults, community centers, libraries and museums, hospitals, prisons and youth detention centers, sports associations, neighborhood organizations, national / regional and local authorities, professional organizations and private sector enterprises whose activities are not limited to vocational training. The EGP/LLP is divided into various sub programs, which include the *Grundtvig Multilateral Projects* that involves institutions/organizations from different countries working together and pooling their knowledge and experience to create pilot projects in strategic areas interested in high quality teaching products.

The *Grundtvig Multilateral Network*, whose goal is to strengthen the link between the various promoters of adult education practices and to improve the European dimension in every activity or issue of common interest in the field of adult learning, in addition to helping make lifelong learning opportunities more available to citizens. Lastly, the *Grundtvig accompanying measures* is a financing program that supports various activities which, although not eligible under the main actions of the Grundtvig Programme, will clearly contribute to achieving its objectives. *Supporting Potential Development* is included in the dimension of the construction of European partnership.

In addition, the CEU underlines the importance of reinforcing the evidence base of socio-educational interventions through a partnership with the education and training sectors in identifying the factors that produced the effects. This requirement means that joint progress reports need to take into account European objectives, whilst acknowledging the distinct added value which those reports offer in providing a deeper insight into the CEU. The adoption of a clear methodology which includes a description of the process and the results of the intervention ensures transparency and an effective operational participation of the relevant stakeholders. The need to ensure that the effects of the interventions can be measured through quantitative and qualitative methods is becoming increasingly important. A scientific methodology requires gathering impartial evidence that provides feedback and advice and promotes through the dissemination of the results, the best model.

During this complex time in history where rapid changes are occurring, there is a need for training opportunities and the development of competencies and resources that can help individuals find and apply new strategies to manage challenges with flexibility and efficiency. In this context, teachers and educators need to have instruments that enable them to offer adequate responses to the needs of those who are in a disadvantaged position. For example, there are those who have lost their jobs and need to be empowered, immigrants

that need to find a new niche and individuals who due to economic reasons, had to interrupt their studies. In all of the aforementioned cases, there is a need to provide training that is based on a methodology that is strong and effective and that can help these individuals develop their potential. Both teachers and educators as well as their students and clients have to become active protagonist of their own personal and professional life.

From the aforementioned, and specifically after the instances of the European Commission (2007), the program *Supporting Potential Development* (SPD) was born, joining organizations from Austria, Finland, Italy, Lithuania and Romania. The idea of the SPD originated from the Italian Association of Morenian Psychodramatists, whose objective is the dissemination of the Morenian action methods, the development of effective tools and the promotion of studies on the theoretical and practical efficacy of the constructs. Starting from this position, the association started to think about incorporating Morenian action methods to empower and train adults in relational skills and to develop their creativity. This method can help professionals build stronger competences and improve their own effectiveness. The choice to focus in particular on teachers and educators is based on the fact that these professionals work with groups. This approach reaches more people and is congruent with the Morenian Action method. In particular, the association is interested in supporting those who work with disadvantaged people. The result of this activity proved that Morenian action methods are useful in developing relational and communicative skills as well as developing the ability to engage in creative problem solving.

Objectives and aims of *Supporting Potential Development*

The main objectives of the SPD are to develop adequate new teaching and educational skills for teachers/ educators who work with disadvantaged people. In order to do this, experts in action methods, psychodrama and playback theatre have been selected by SPD because the methodologies they employ involve active educational techniques. SPD offers teachers and educators the opportunity to work, on the one hand, on specific themes, such as conflict management, vocational orientation, systemic thinking, cultural–gender–race differences; and on the other hand, to use action methods as a tool for developing potential and creativity, thus helping professionals become more flexible and competent on both a personal and professional level.

The aims of SPD are the following ones.

- To create and promote a network of associations that use psychodrama and playback theatre in lifelong learning, foster the exchange of best practices and increase the mobility of trainers and students (which is a common goal of all the aforementioned programs). The EU will set common standards in training.
- To upgrade personal, professional, pedagogical, relational and social competencies. In particular, those of teachers and educators because they reach many individuals and thus multiply the effects of the project.
- To support the development of creativity in individuals and groups; the main objective is to develop the ability to come up with the right answers to new problems or situations

and new answers to old situations, in both personal or professional contexts. This means developing the individual's potential and creativity so that they are able to analyze relational situations and personal feelings under several perspectives.

- To initiate a network of professional trainers and to create training courses for teachers and educators using psychodrama and playback theatre. ■

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