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**UNIVERSITÄT
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GUIDE

FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF PROFESSIONAL STORIES

within the joint module
“International and Comparative Studies for Students and Practitioners
in Adult Education and Lifelong Learning”

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STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP INTALL

INTERNATIONAL AND COMPARATIVE STUDIES IN ADULT AND PRACTITIONERS IN ADULT EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING

The ERASMUS+ Strategic Partnership **INTALL** is a partnership between eight European universities and two practice institutions in the field of adult education and lifelong learning. It builds a bridge between academic learning and the field of practice in adult and continuing education.

Master's and doctoral students as well as **practitioners** in the field of adult education and lifelong learning are invited to join an **Adult Education Academy** in Würzburg. The programme is structured in two weeks. In the first week, participants learn about international and European policies in adult education and lifelong learning. In the second week, participants jointly conduct their own international comparative study. INTALL builds on the results of the ERASMUS+ Strategic Partnership COMPALL (2015-2018).

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1. WHAT IS A PROFESSIONAL STORY?

"Stories are an important aspect of a person's identity [...]; they are ways in which we talk about ourselves as human being, [...]. The patrimony of stories that the person has when he/she is an adult does not only constitute the source of personal stability, or personal transformations, but becomes, at the same time, a working tool, a compass through which is possible to orient the self" (Smorti, 1996, p. 71).

A story is a first-person account through which salient parts of our biography are recalled to memory, recovered in their emotional aspects and reconstructed in the light of the value they have for our present and our future.

Storytelling is therefore an activity through which humans try to make themselves intelligible to themselves and to a possible listener.

Desired outcome of a story: Stories encourage us to rewrite our present through different point of view and ultimately to give us a new form and find new orientations in life (Boffo 2005).

How can a story be used?

- Stories support internal narrative processes, leading to greater self-awareness.
- Stories stimulate communication processes essential to learning, based on organizing thoughts and emotions in sound narratives.
- Stories bridge the gap between knowledge and action, fostering goal setting and strategic thinking.

2. STEPS FOR DEVELOPING A PROFESSIONAL STORY

2.1 DETERMINE THE PRIMARY GOAL OF THE STORY

There are three primary goals that define stories linked to professional development:

- Learning to learn
- Learning to innovate your job
- Learning from sharing your experience



These goals define a *continuum* along which the knowledge and the skills acquired, the activities and experiences you collected and the strategies you used take on a different value in relation to different types of audience and to different formats used to convey the story.

2.2 IDENTIFY THE POTENTIAL AUDIENCE

Even if a story has its main value for the self, a professional story can be addressed to different kind of audiences:

- Pairs and colleagues
- Potential employers
- Students and different kinds of job seekers
- Teachers and/or mentors.

Concerning the audience, INTALL online stories intend to inspire students and help practitioners to reflect on who they are as professionals and what are the elements of their story that can still help them to progress in the adult education field (as goal setting).

2.3 REFLECT ON THE TOOL FOR BUILDING THE STORY

A number of tools exist for building your story. Storytellers show their autonomy in choosing (1) the format, and (2) the contents.

- Letters, blogs and diaries are usually sound formats for building an autonomous self- narrative.
- Interviews and self-reports are mainly used in research processes for gathering and interpreting information.
- CVs, motivation letters and (e)Portfolios are mainly used for professional development, even if they are less used and rarely understood as tools for constructing life stories.

Concerning INTALL professional stories, we invite you to an interview and to participate at the Employability day in Würzburg at the beginning of the second week of the Winter School in order to let your narratives emerge and benefit the students with different kinds of information.

2.4 GET PREPARED FOR THE STORYTELLING

Specific element of a professional story can be found in the INTALL professionals' narratives. INTALL professionals should tell us:

- Who they are and where they come from
- What do they do as professionals and in which institution(s)
- How many and what kind of jobs they had before acquiring their current position;
- Which achievements have brought them there;
- Which skills help them to progress in their professional life;
- What others can do to enter in the field of adult education.



Concerning the terms achievements, in this context we refer to internal and external aspects of professional life as highlighted in Figure 1.

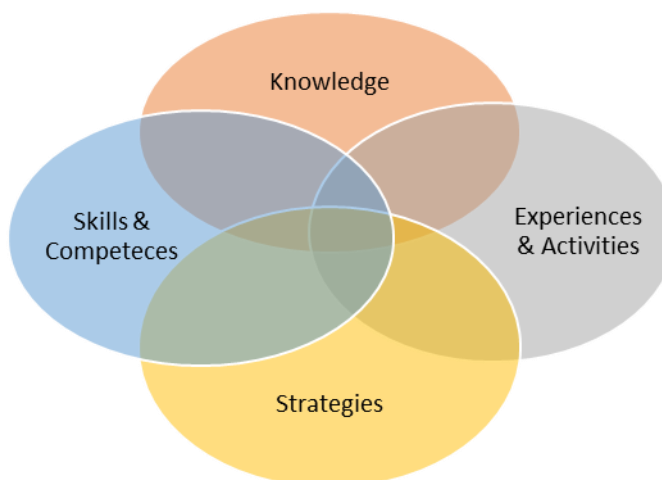


Fig. 1—Different examples of professional achievements

2.5 START A REFLECTIVE CONVERSATION WITH YOURSELF

For starting a reflective path on yourself, you should

- a) **Get information** from your story
- b) **Identify** relevant elements of your story
- c) **Reflect** on how these elements create a progression path
- d) **Share** your story with your audience

We will now discuss each of these four parts in more detail.

- a) **Get information from your story**
Recall to the memory the early steps of your professional story. Focus on the motivations, the expectations and also the knowledge and competences you used to have.
- b) **Identify relevant elements of your story**
Focus on:
 1. The situations in which you made significant professional choices (as a student, as a graduate, as a post-graduate etc.)
 2. The internal or external resources that you used to direct your career (include people, knowledge, experience & activities, skills & competences and strategies).

c) **Reflect on how these elements create a progression path**

Think on the kind of path you had delineated starting from these elements. Research suggests that graduates can find a job in the field through:

- Insertion following the reconstruction of a broken/different study path;
- Insertion starting from the internship experience;
- Job placement through entrepreneurship;
- Integration into work through study-work continuity;
- Insertion through synthesis of previous diversified professional experience (Torlone, 2010).

d) **Share your story with your audience**

Take advantage of an interview or one of the moments of sharing offered by the INTALL project to put into words your journey. Get closer to the emotions you have experienced, to the expectations you have satisfied, changed or abandoned. Tell future professionals which activities, experiences and skills have most contributed to making you grow as a practitioner.



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3. REDESIGN YOUR EXPERIENCE

According to Bruner (1990), storytelling is an act of meaning in which our past informs our present and makes sense of our future. This process of sense making is therefore a foundational step authenticity and self-listening.

When faced with our own professional story, we recall our personal journey as a whole. We glimpse which motivations and achievements have brought us here. We ask ourselves who we are according to what are our achievements. We compare our motivations, knowledge, experiences, skills and strategies to who we were used to be.

We take the chance to assess our expectations, to open up ourselves to new motivations, to set new goals and to focus on the competences we need to get them, coming to a deeper self-awareness.

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