Employability and transition to the labour market for adult educators: Understanding the labour market

1. Context: The value of storytelling for building employability

Stories are a very important aspect of personal identity. Through stories we create ourselves. Stories serve as the basis of what each person will become. For this reason, it is important to understand how we build our personality through stories and to be aware of the trajectories through which it is possible to orient the self.

A vast literature indicates the importance of stories, from philosophical texts (Wittgenstein) to Bruner and literary texts (Saint Augustine).

Human beings have always used storytelling for multiple purposes, such as the transfer of knowledge through stories or songs in ancient times. However, the essential aspect of storytelling has to do with their ability to create our identity. From this point of view, storytelling is not directed towards an external event but towards our own life, reconstructed through an autobiographical journey that owes much to the stories to which it was exposed (Bruner, 1990).

2. Steps for analysing a professional story

The INTALL project proposes professional life stories of professionals in the adult education sector to enable participants to find inspiration for reflecting on the most suitable job placement paths for them and their contextual situation.

To get the most out of these stories, INTALL has developed a step-by-step analytical guide, summarised below.

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 find a job,
   - learning while working.

   These goals define a continuum along which the knowledge and the skills acquired, the activities and experiences collected, and the strategies used take on a different value in relation to different audiences and to different storytelling formats.

2. **Identify the potential audience**

   Even if a story's main value is for the self, a professional story can be addressed to different audiences:
   - peers and colleagues,

- potential employers,
- students and different kinds of job seekers,
- teachers and/or mentors.

Concerning the audience, INTALL online stories present professional stories developed to inspire students and help them to reflect on who they are and what they want to be as professionals (goal setting).

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 content.

- Letters, blogs/diaries are usually sound formats for building an autonomous self-narrative.
- Interviews and self-reports are mainly used in the research process 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.

The INTALL professional stories use interviews to let the narratives emerge and to let students benefit from different kinds of information.
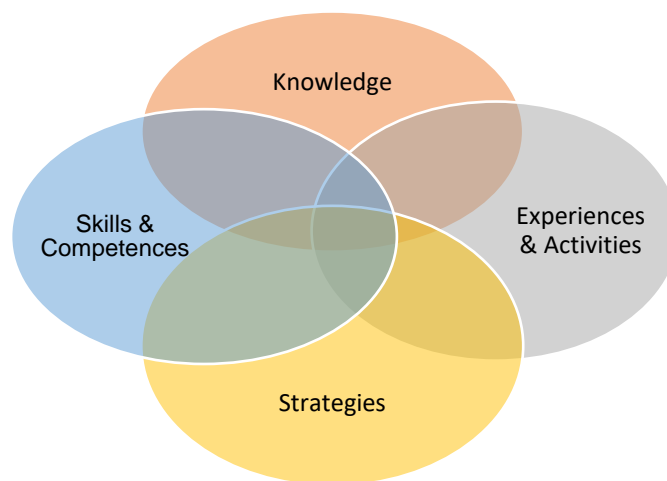
4. **Read through the story**

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

- who they are and where they come from
- what they do as professionals and where they work,
- how many jobs they had before entering their current position,
- which achievements brought them there,
- which skills helped them progress,
- what others can do to enter the field.

Different examples of professional achievements

5. Start the analytical process

a. Gather information from the story.

b. Identify relevant elements of the story.

c. Reflect on how these elements create a progression path.

d. Connect with yourself.

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

a. Gather information from the story.

Find a quiet place and get the best from professional stories by reading through them.

b. Identify relevant elements of the story.

Focus on:

1. the interviewee's objectives, motivations, expectations, and desires,

2. the situations in which he/she makes significant professional choices (as a student, as a graduate, in early career, etc.),

3. the internal or external resources that he/she used to direct his/her career (include knowledge, experiences and activities, skills and competences, and strategies).

c. Reflect on how these elements create a progression path.

Reflect on the kind of path that can be derived starting from these elements. Research suggests that graduates can find a job in the field through

1. insertion following the reconstruction of a broken/different study path,

2. insertion starting from the internship experience,

3. job placement through entrepreneurship,

4. integration into work by study-work continuity,

5. insertion through synthesis of previous diversified professional experiences (Torlone, 2010).

d. Connect with yourself.

According to Bruner (1990), reading through a story is an act of meaning-making, in which we spontaneously fill information gaps using stories that we already know, first of all our own story. This process of merging our personal experience with the experience of others is therefore a search for authenticity and self-listening.

Faced with the story of a professional who talks about his/her journey, which allows us to see how his/her motivations and achievements have brought him/her there, the most important thing is to ask ourselves who we are. What are our achievements in terms of motivations, knowledge, experiences, skills, and strategies? And who would we like to be? Comparing that to the expectations, competences, and progression of different professionals, we should start a reflexive dialogue leading us from comparison to deeper self-assessment for professional goal-setting.

3. Professional families of adult education

The job search is the result of the complex articulation of two main moments: the one of reflection on ourselves and the one of the active reflection on the context in which we are. The first moment encompasses all the reflexive practices that allow us to:

- learn to make learning achievements visible to ourselves by collecting evidence and organizing that evidence into an effective narrative,
- identify our values, our expectations, and our career goals,
- take actions to achieve them, starting the second stage of the process.

Once we have reached a certain level of self-awareness, it is easier to identify the professional sector of our interest, the one that valorises our talents because it corresponds to the concept of life that sets us apart.

In the field of adult education and lifelong learning, the most widespread professional roles are:

- COORDINATOR OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING SERVICES
- EDUCATOR AND TRAINER
- INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNER
- CAREER MANAGER/COUNSELLOR

For this reason, here are detailed descriptions of each role in terms of responsibilities, required entry qualifications, skills, and frequent employers.

COORDINATOR OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING SERVICES

General description

- As coordinator of educational and training services, you will be in charge of designing, planning, developing, and assessing education and training programmes.
- You will handle teamwork activities among other professionals working in education and training programmes and coordinate their work.
- Jobs may be advertised under different titles such as: programme/project manager, adult education manager, education and training manager.

Tasks/responsibilities

As coordinator of educational services, you will need to:

- perform needs analyses and talent development diagnoses,
- design educational and training programmes based on organisational and adult learners' needs,
- plan education and training programmes according to needs analyses and the aims of programmes established,
- monitor education and training programme development,
- evaluate education and training programmes,
- assess adults' learning,
- devise individual adult learners' education and training plans,
- produce education and training materials,
- prepare education and training programme budgets and keep within budget.

Qualifications

Adult educators need to work with other professionals. This area of work is open to a wide range of graduates (according to the European Qualification Framework levels 6, 7 or 8), but the following subjects are particularly relevant:

- educational sciences,
- adult education,
- pedagogy/andragogy,
- economics/management,
- cultural studies.

Skills

You need to be skilled in:

- creative and critical thinking,
- adapting to a wide variety of circumstances,
- teamwork,
- team management and coordination,
- project organisation, planning, and implementation,
- communication,
- leadership,
- negotiating,
- learning to learn.

Employers

There are opportunities for coordinators of education and training services in the private and public employment sectors. These include:

- private firms,
- central and local government,
- NGOs,
- education and training institutions,
- health services.

EDUCATOR AND TRAINER

As educator/trainer, you will be in charge of planning and delivering education sessions and training programmes. In addition to your education and training skills, you'll need to be an expert in one of two areas: technical/professional skills and general skills.

As educator/trainer, you must keep up to date with developments in your subject area, new resources, and pedagogical methods.

Tasks/responsibilities

As educator/trainer, you need to:

- prepare and deliver lessons,
- give feedback on adult learners' progress and development,

- research new topic areas, maintain up-to-date subject knowledge, and prepare new materials,
- select and use different learning resources and equipment,
- support adult learners on an individual basis through academic or personal difficulties,
- assess adult learners' knowledge and skills,
- select and implement formal and non-formal activities,
- maintain records of adult learners' development.

Qualifications

Adult educators need to work with other professionals. This area of work is open to a wide range of graduates (according to the European Qualification Framework levels 6, 7, or 8), but the following subjects are particularly relevant:

- educational sciences,
- adult education,
- pedagogy/andragogy,
- teacher education,
- cultural studies.

Skills

You need to be skilled in:

- communication,
- listening,
- learning to learn,
- inspiring and motivating adult learners,
- understanding the needs and feelings of adult learners,
- teamwork,
- working independently,
- creativity,
- interpersonal interactions and facilitation.

Employers

There are opportunities for educators/trainers in education and training services in the private and public employment sectors. These include:

- private firms,
- central and local government,
- NGOs,
- formal and non-formal education and training institutions,
- health services.

INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNER

As an instructional designer, you are in charge of producing learning and assessment materials to be used online.

Instructional designers do not have direct contact with learners. They design, develop, and assess courses and curricula by creating education and training materials and adult learner guides.

Tasks/responsibilities

As an instructional designer, you need to:

- create learning activities and course content to be used online,
- work with subject-matter experts and identify adult learners' education and training needs,
- state goals and related content,
- provide exercises and activities that enhance the learning process,
- create supporting material/media (audio, video, simulations, role plays, games, etc.),
- develop learning assessment instruments,
- create adult learners' guides and education and training manuals.

Skills

As an instructional designer, you need to be skilled in:

- written communication,
- IT,
- course development software and learning management systems,
- leaning to learn,
- creativity,
- visualising,
- storyboarding,
- writing instructional texts, audio and video scripts.

Qualifications

Instructional designers need to work with other professionals. This area of work is open to a wide range of graduates (according to the European Qualification Framework levels 6, 7, or 8), but the following subjects are particularly relevant:

- educational sciences,
- adult education,
- pedagogy/andragogy,
- instructional design,
- IT and education,
- cultural studies.

Employers

There are opportunities for instructional designers in education and training services in the private and public employment sectors. These include:

- private firms,
- central and local government,

- education and training institutions,
- IT organisations.

CAREER MANAGER/COUNSELLOR

As career manager/counsellor, you provide information, advice, and guidance to help adults make education and training choices. You also help people exploring learning from experience.

The help and advice you give will include identifying options for suitable careers, advising on how to write a good CV and covering letter, assisting with the application process, and helping to locate relevant education and training courses.

Tasks/responsibilities

As career manager/counsellor, you need to:

- interview people one-on-one or in small groups to discuss career or education and training options,
- plan career development and support organisations to meet people's needs,
- advise people on how to source relevant education and training courses or qualifications and what funding might be available,
- provide advice on CV, applications, job hunting, and interview techniques,
- run small group sessions or larger presentations on all aspects of careers, work, and topics related to personal development,
- help people to gain a more adequate understanding of the current job market and education and training opportunities,
- negotiate with other organisations on your advisees' behalf,
- keep up to date with labour market information, legislation, and professional and academic developments.

Skills

As career manager/counsellor, you need to be skilled in:

- communication, observation, and listening,
- motivating and establishing trustful relationship with adult learners,
- pursuing an empathetic, non-judgmental, and ethical approach,
- teamwork,
- working independently,
- organisation,
- problem-solving,
- research.

Qualifications

As a career manager/counsellor, you need to work with other professionals. This area of work is open to a wide range of graduates (according to the European Qualification Framework levels 6, 7, or 8), but the following subjects are particularly relevant:

- educational sciences,

- adult education,
- human resources management,
- psychology,
- sociology,
- cultural studies.

Employers

There are opportunities for career managers/counsellors in education and training services in the private and public employment sectors. These include:

- private firms,
- central and local government,
- education and training institutions.

Exercises

To test your learning progress on the topic "Understanding the labour market and professional profiles for adult educators", we have prepared an exercise for you.

Exercise 1, available at OpenWueCampus, allows you to analyse professional stories and asks you to identify some key elements of those stories.

References

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