

The
of Adult **E**valuation
Education Staff

EDUEVAL Handbook

Extended Version

edited by
EDUEVAL Consortium





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behaviour, but also *respect* for the points of view and styles of work of colleagues on the staff, *inclusion* and acceptance even of those who have a “different point of view” (including the users, in a perspective of shared evaluation), multicultural validity and being respectful of gender differences of the proposed action.

These are only some of the possible “filters” that allow orienting the evaluation of the educational work of AE staff, but other criteria can without any doubt be thought of which reveal the quality of the educational action. It is a question of translating the criteria of evaluation – general concepts – into concrete indicators which allow measuring their presence or absence in real contexts. It will be seen in the following sections how to make the aforementioned evaluation operative.

3.4 Methods of evaluation: how to evaluate?

*by Loredana Perla and Viviana Vinci*¹⁸

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The complexity of the evaluation of the work of adult education staff entails, as has been made clear in the previous sections, the importance of using a *triangulated* approach, capable of understanding a reality characterized by multiple dimensions – as is educational work – through different perspectives of analysis and points of view. Superseding *a single model* of evaluation of educational work, in favour of the *triangulation* of different and complementary theoretical perspectives, is also reflected on the methodological level.

How should the educational works of adult education staff

18 Loredana Perla is the author of sub-section 3.4, Viviana Vinci of the sub-sections 3.4.1, 3.4.2, 3.4.2.1, 3.4.2.2 and 3.4.2.3.

be evaluated? Through which methods, levels, criteria and tools of evaluation?

Echoing the theoretical structure based on triangulation, a structure built up either on the qualitative or on the quantitative method should be suspended from a methodological point of view as well, in favour of the perspective of *mixed methods evaluation* (Bamberger, 2012; Bledsoe & Graham 2005; Greene, Benjamin & Goodyear 2001; Mertens, 2010), based on the mixed use of qualitative and quantitative data and methods of evaluation. With this perspective, greater value can be given to the diversity of points of view, the participation of different social players (evaluator and evaluatee, but also the stakeholders) and the evaluation research can take on greater social utility, validity, credibility and completeness (Bryman, 2006). The use of a perspective with a *mixed methods design* (Hesse-Biber & Johnson 2015; Tashakkori & Teddie, 2003; Creswell 2003; Creswell & Plano Clark 2011) implies the possibility of drawing from different techniques, tools and sources, in order to give greater validity to the results obtained and not to use reductive or limiting evaluation perspectives, especially in complex social contexts.

“A mixed methods approach by definition includes facets or components drawn from different evaluative traditions and methodologies. A mixed methods approach, therefore, offers important opportunities for meaningful engaging with difference in the service of better understanding and learning. Like a walk along the jet way, learning from mixed methods evaluation can be about the methodological differences. More important, because each methodology is directed toward understanding something about an evaluand, like an educational program, it is enhanced learning about the evaluand that is the most important contribution of a mixed methods approach to evaluation” (Greene, in Ryan, Cousin, 2009, p. 324).

Talking about *mixed methods* in evaluation means, for example, being able to flexibly and rigorously integrate methods of qualitative research – such as those used in an ethnographic study or in action research (observations, case studies, phenomenological research, interviews, conversations, focus groups) – with questionnaires, grids and matrixes that offer the evaluator a quantitative and numerical element as well as the ability to analyse, through computational analysis software, qualitative text data.

However, it also means being able to integrate different methods and levels of evaluation, conceived in a synergic and complementary way. This is what has been done in the EDUEVAL model of evaluation, based on the triangulation of the *subjective*, *objective* and *intersubjective* dimension of evaluation which is methodologically translated into the levels of *self-evaluation*, *external evaluation* and *evaluation of the context*. Let's have a look at these specifically.

3.4.1 Levels

The EDUEVAL model of evaluation has been built up, as stated, from the triangulation of *self-evaluation*, *external evaluation* and *evaluation of the context*, with three forms of evaluation having precise and different meanings, which we can summarize as follows.

External evaluation means a level of evaluation designed and implemented by an evaluator or team of expert evaluators, not belonging to the organization responsible for the action or service evaluated. This level usually completes the process of self-evaluation, which the institution already implements, and can be of support in guaranteeing the validity and impartiality of the results, precisely thanks to an *external view*. It is of great help to the organization in establishing the merit,

the value, the efficacy, the impact and the conformity (with respect to pre-established standards, objectives declared by the organization, procedures laid down by rules and regulations inside and outside the service) of a programme/action/procedure.

Through external evaluation, on the one hand, greater impartiality, independence of judgement and credibility can be attributed, reducing the self-referentialism of the organization. On the other hand, however, some risks should be stemmed: these relate both to the overlapping of the evaluated subject with the client of the evaluation (who has an interest in keeping the service credible and who implicitly opposes resistance to the evaluation process, which requires an inclination for change) and to the lack of familiarity that the external evaluator has with the context and with the internal dynamics of the organization, which cause mediated and indirect access of the evaluator to the sources of information.

The process of external evaluation differs from certification and accreditation, although they share substantial analogies. Certification “bases the attestation of following the standards of the process, whilst evaluation seeks to extend the panorama of its judgement with reference also to objectives (of policy/programme/action) and to subjective needs/necessities of the addressees. Accreditation is also an attestation of conformity (of structural, technological and organizational) requisites but issued by a national body (e.g. the Regional Council, the National Health Service) which authorizes the structures to exercise in the area. A role is also played in certification by the *conformity* of the services (or parts of them) to pre-established standards. “The certification can be issued even if it attests one or more non-conformities of the service with respect to the requisites” (Bezzi, 2012, p. 26).

The main tool through which external evaluation takes place is the Audit (see further details below).

Self-evaluation is understood as the evaluation which aims to identify the strengths and the areas for improvement, in an organization, through self-analysis of the work, by those working in the context. Defined as “a comprehensive, systematic and regular review of an organization’s activities and results referenced against a model/framework, carried out by the organization itself” (ESS Quality Glossary 2010, Unit B1 “Quality; Classifications”, EUROSTAT, 2011), self-evaluation is a systematic process of self-reflection based on data. It supports the improvement of the organizational performance, such as that of implementing the indications in external evaluation and in the audit process, and is particularly appropriate with the introduction of a new policy or procedure, or when the results reached by an organization are not sufficiently documented or when a problem has to be tackled, such as that of implementing the indications in external evaluations and in the audit process.

The main function of self-evaluation is of the formative type, i.e. to help produce knowledge, reflection and awareness in the operators, who act in the first person in the design and management of the formative actions and can, thanks to the self-analysis of their work, transform the knowledge acquired into changes and strategies for improvement. This particular formative function makes self-evaluation a particularly useful in the evaluation of AE staff, almost a *starting point* on which to subsequently graft the external evaluation and/or the evaluation of the context. For this reason, it will be discussed in further depth later, in relation to some tools (for example the portfolio and e-portfolio) on which the EDUEVAL model can be compared with previous European projects and experiences, such as Validpack for example (see relevant section).

Another function of self-evaluation, in addition to the educational one, is that of *rendering account*, as it allows making known externally the outputs achieved and the value of a project/action that has been enacted.

Self-evaluation often precedes the external evaluation, with which it is in continuity and circularity: self-evaluation supports the documentation of the working processes and the process of the main players of the action as they become aware, therefore it is also functional for the improvement and communication of the “internal” processes to the stakeholders. External evaluation, which often follows on after the process of self-evaluation, helps stem – thanks to a rigorous methodology of evaluative research – the risk of self-referentialism of the results produced.

Evaluation of the context is understood as the level of the evaluation which has as its purpose the interpretation of an educational context, in its complexity, from the intersubjective analysis of the processes, of the environment, of the activities and of even the most intangible factors that are hard to quantify, such as emotions, cultures, structural, symbolic and qualitative dimensions that characterize it. Defined as a set of “procedures of attribution of judgement referred to abstract entities, objects that are not single individuals, but rather complex educational phenomena located at different systemic levels and interacting with one another” (Bondioli & Ferrari, 2000), evaluation of the educational context is a professional skill that has to be built up, taking into account both the educational purposes of the context and the nature of the act of appreciation, of its models and its practices, its tools and its particular techniques, characterized by basic orientations which have to be made explicit.

This is an intersubjective analysis, which takes into account the perceptions of the players who belong to the context, and which allows fostering the professionalism of all the figures that operate in adult education services, triggering off processes of growth inside the service. It involves the internal users in processes of self-analysis, comparison with other social players and designing an improvement plan to be system-

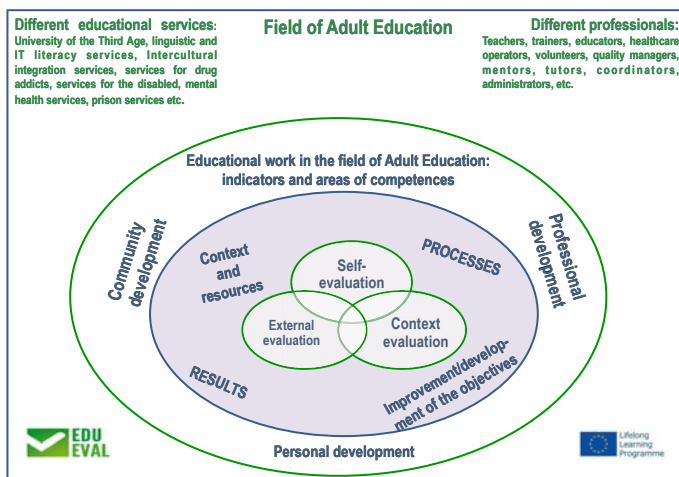
atically reviewed. Through the evaluation of the context, it is possible to identify not only outcomes and products of the activities of an educational service, but also to describe and understand the contexts in which these experiences take place and how these processes are structured, in the awareness of the ecological variables at stake – man and the environment cannot be conceived of as separate (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) –. The educational context includes a heterogeneous set of elements, i.e. all those material, human and symbolic resources which an organization implements for the purpose of producing a formative outcome for the addressees of the educational action: the physical, inter-personal, social environment, the actions, the interventions, the educational strategies, how the work is organized for the operators, the relations with the families of the users, the professional activities of the operators, the relations with other educational agencies and the relationship with the local area. Which indicators of the educational context could be described and evaluated?

The context, in the first place, is evaluated in the extent to which it determines and/or conditions the action of the adult educator and must be described in the first place paying attention to some aspects which relate to the type of service (a brief history of the local and social context in which it operates, the main services provided), the main partnerships established and the main (internal and external) stakeholders of reference, the organization chart, the mission (policies and institutional mandate), the vision (the strategic objectives of the service/context), the strategies and resources of the context (both as a structure and as professionalism).

There is more: the context can also be evaluated by looking at the skills (of the operators) implemented in a context, the educational processes and the interactions that take place in the educational context between educator-learner, between equals (learners, users of the service) and between col-

leagues, the environment, the physical and symbolic space of the action – which includes the furnishings, the materials, the times –, the educational activities, the actions, the routines, the professional gestures and the implicit beliefs (Perla, 2010).

EduEval Evaluation Model



These three levels of evaluation, according to the EDUEVAL model, cannot be conceived of hierarchically or in a clearly separate way, but intersect, are intertwined and at times overlap.

It is sufficient to think of how they are intertwined in an adult education service, where, for example, an external evaluator may check the compliance to the procedures through an audit visit (external evaluation) or each educator (or the staff) evaluates their own work through a portfolio (self-evaluation) or the coordinator – or an operator which is nevertheless part of the context – has to evaluate their own context. This is an intersubjective evaluation, which takes into account several variables and the perceptions of all those who operate in the context (evaluation of the context).

None of these three forms of evaluation, on their own, is sufficient to guarantee an evaluation process that is really of use for improving a service and the organizational culture in an Adult Education context. As can be seen from the cases given as examples and the diagram, external evaluation, self-evaluation and evaluation of the context are part of the same process, conceived of with continuity and flexibility. External evaluation for example, can be based on materials from a process of self-evaluation. In the same way, the tools must not be associated univocally with a form of evaluation but can be used differently, depending on the aims of the evaluation. For example, the portfolio is a tool that can be used both in the process of self-evaluation but also as a tool of evaluation of the context or as an audit portfolio which includes the documentation selected by the institution for the audit visit. The rubric can be used as a tool of self-evaluation or external evaluation of the context.

In conclusion, the levels of evaluation of the EDUEVAL triangular model should be conceived in a flexible and circular way, with the tools and methodologies adapted to the special conditions and the uniqueness of the different educational contexts in which the evaluator (or, better, the team of evaluators) will be operating.

3.4.2 *Tools*

There are multiple tools for evaluating the work of adult education staff: precisely due to the triangular approach based on mixed methods, a wide selection of tools deriving from the observational and narrative methods, also used more in general in social research (Corbetta, 1999) can be considered, such as observation grids, log books and other forms of professional writing, interviews and focus groups, the analysis of the documentation of the service, portfolios, rubrics, questionnaires, the audit etc.

Well aware that the tools used to evaluate educational work have to be selected, each time, according to the requirements of the evaluation (of the target, of the nature of the service, of the number of users, of the problematic issues that have emerged, of previous experiences of self-evaluation of the staff), thanks to the expertise of the evaluator, the choice has been to focus in particular on three tools. They do not represent the *only tools possible* to evaluate educational work, but are considered the most representative of the EDUEVAL model, based on the evaluation of the context, self-evaluation and external evaluation: they are the rubric, the portfolio and the audit.

3.4.2.1 The evaluation rubric

The rubric is a tool used to evaluate the quality of products and performances (McTighe & Ferrara, 1996), especially in the scholastic context, where it is common for evaluating the competence of pupils through a definition of the dimensions that make it up, of the expected levels of mastery and the “evidence” referred to real situations (Castoldi, 2012). It consists of a scale of pre-established scores and a list of criteria that describes the characteristics of each score on the scale (Castoldi, 2006) and appears as a table with two columns. It “is built up by breaking up a complex task into essential elements, identifying for each one of them a series of descriptors of the actions required, with ordinal or numerical values with which to translate the judgement into a raw score or a mark” (Baldassarre, 2015, p. 232; Arter, 1994). The criteria of evaluation of a complex performance, a competence or a product, are expressed in levels of quality that are clearly defined and can be expressed through observable, measurable and concrete behaviour (not through general concepts). The performance that is the object of evaluation is analysed through some

fundamental features, which make up the components of a rubric:

- the *dimensions*, specific characteristics that distinguish the performance (they answer the question: *which aspects do I consider in evaluating a certain performance?*);
- the *criteria*, the educational aims, the conditions that each performance or competence has to meet to be adequate and successful (they answer the question: *according to what can I appreciate the performance?*);
- the *indicators*, which provide concrete feedback on the achievement of the target and the satisfaction of the criterion, identifying what to look at to judge (they answer the question: *which observable evidence allows me to measure the degree of presence of the pre-chosen criterion of judgement?*);
- the *anchors*: concrete examples of performance that can guide translating a criterion or indicator (they answer the question: *in relation to the indicator identified, what is a concrete example of performance in which the presence of the criterion considered can be recognized?*);
- the *levels*, in the last place, specify the degrees reached by the criteria, considered on the basis of an ordinal scale arranged from the highest level to the lowest one.

3.4.2.2 The audit

The *audit* is a documented, systematic and independent inspection visit, aimed at highlighting the non-conformities, with respect to pre-established criteria, of products, processes, systems and programmes in an organization (Storti, 2006). It takes place through collecting objective *evidence*, i.e. information that can be verified and traced back to concrete situations, and for this reason it is also useful for providing significant data to the highest levels of the organization, for

future decision-making. The information that can be verified through an inspection visit in loco can be collected using different methods, including interviews with the personnel, observation of activities and the work context, the analysis and re-view of the documentation of the organization, the statistics, and information from subjects external to the organization. The phases for conducting an audit process are somewhat standardized and include:

- a phase of planning the audit, in which its objectives, the field and the criteria are defined;
- a phase of reviewing the documentation of the service to be evaluated;
- a phase of preparing the work documents and forms to record information/data;
- a phase of planning the programme of the audit;
- an opening meeting, in which to present the method of conducting the audit and the criteria;
- a phase of audit in the field, in which to collect the evidence;
- a phase of preparing the audit report, which includes the non-conformities and the recommendations for improvement;
- a closing meeting, where the audit report is presented (*ibid.*, p. 23).

Used as the tool of choice of the Quality Management System in conformity with the requirements of the UNI EN ISO 9001: 2000 standard and as a form of external evaluation for the purpose of an accreditation system – with the definition and verification that an organization requesting the attestation of accreditation, for example required so that an institution can provide training courses accredited by the local authorities, is in possession of the minimum requirements –, an audit allows not only highlighting non-conformities, in-

efficiencies and discrepancies, it also allows describing some recommendations to improve the organization and to record conformities and good practices.

3.4.2.3 The portfolio

The *portfolio* is understood as the annotated documentation of a training or professional path, curated by the individual or by a work group. It is built up by selecting a series of materials considered significant (photographs, documents, products, films, essays, texts, articles, case studies, course materials, evaluation tools, tests, certificates of membership or participation in groups, notes, performance evaluations), but is not limited to the mere “collection” of documenting material. In order to be able to talk about a portfolio, these materials have to be critically analysed through the identification of merits and limits and situated in the educational experience, interpreting the overall meaning of the experience.

Borrowed from the scholastic and training context, it is also considered a valid tool for evaluating educational action (Paulson & Meyer, 1991) as, in addition to being a final product and inventory of documents, it also represents *documentation of a process*, a narrative practice aimed at reflection and self-evaluation of one’s professional, formative and personal experience. The portfolio allows tracing back the knowledge matured through experience and acquiring awareness of the competences gained, it fosters a growth of awareness by the subject and a more mature construction of identity, it allows the subject to become aware of their learning, their limits and their potential (Castoldi, 2012). The portfolio thus represents self-evaluation through the characteristics of significance, authenticity, processuality, responsibility, promotionalism, recursivity, dynamicity, globality and metacognition.

This tool will be considered in greater depth below, in the

section 3.6.1.3, where a possible exemplification of portfolio for the self-evaluation of the educational work of AE staff will be described.

3.5 Indicators in an evaluation process

*by Pilar Escuder-Mollon, Roger Esteller-Curto,
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3.5.1 Introduction

Defining indicators in an evaluation process helps staff and managers to define the details of what is important for the institution or for the success of the educational activities of the institution. Once indicators have been defined, we then know what data needs to be collected, what is important, and the effectiveness of our activities. Indicators are necessary to be included in the evaluation process, better if they are defined formally. We should not forget other indicators, not formally established, created from the experience and expertise of the practitioners.

When creating indicators for evaluation, it is necessary firstly to understand their purpose and justify the need for them (*Figure 1*), and later how the indicators and the results obtained will be used. Secondly, the indicators should be integrated into the evaluation process, therefore they will be linked to a methodology and in the end, used for assessing, therefore, the indicators themselves should fulfil some characteristics (*Figure 2*).