The Evaluation of Adult Education Staff

of Adult Education Staff

EDUEVAL Handbook

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3

Table of Contents

3.
The evaluation of adult education staff

In order to contextualize the EDUEVAL model of evaluation of adult education staff, the plurality of theoretical approaches underpinning the *evaluation object*, conceptualized as a powerful regulator of the functioning of systems, should be understood first of all. It is based on the collection and scientific interpretation of data and oriented at improving the processes and products of a system.

To be extremely concise, the international debate on evaluation will be referred to, starting from a tripartite pattern (Stame, 2001) which groups together evaluation studies in three main approaches, describing, for each approach, both the main meanings and models of evaluation that emerge and how the evaluation of adult staff is (or is not) considered. The intention, taking this tripartite model as reference, is to understand and refer to those models of evaluation, the characteristics of which appear more coherent with the requirements of the evaluation of AE staff.

3.1 The theoretical framework : theories and models of evaluation

by Loredana Perla, Viviana Vinci[9]

University of Bari Aldo Moro, Italy

 The meanings and functions of the act of evaluation are multiple and fundamentally vary between two poles, *measurement* and *evaluation*, from which different approaches stem with different considerations of evaluation, as "measurement", "estimate", "appreciation", "comprehension", and which refer, with a different importance, to criteria such as determining the results obtained and the efficacy, efficiency and the performance of the object being evaluated. The three main approaches of evaluation, focused differently on one or more dimensions of those described, are summarized below in graphic form (in a table and a figure).

Table The approaches to evaluation (Stame, 2001)

	Positivist-experimental	Pragmatist-quality	Constructivist
Benchmark	The objectives	The standards	What the *stakeholders* define "success"
Authors	Hyman, Suchman, Campbell, Rossi and Freeman, Chen	Scriven, Wholey, Donabedian, NPM (New Public Management) tradition	Stake, Stufflebeam, Guba and Lincoln, Cronbach, Patton, Fetterman, Hirshman, Tendler
Questions	Do the results correspond to the objectives?	Do the results correspond to the criterion of quality?	What happened? Is what happened good?
Direction of the investigation	*Top down*	*Top down*	*Bottom up*
Attitude towards values	Relativism: the values are those of the programme	The evaluator judges with respect to the values (his own or of the existing concept of quality)	The values are those of the *stakeholders*: at times they agree, at other times they are conflicting
Theory	With good planning all the effects can be foreseen	There is a concept of quality to aspire to in every situation	Reality is richer than can be foreseen; the importance of unexpected events
Main method of investigation	Experiments and quasi-experiments	Scriven's "logic of evaluation"; multicriteria analysis	Comparative analysis; exploration; participated analysis

9   Loredana Perla is the author of sub-sections 3.1 and 3.1.1; Viviana Vinci is the author of sub-sections 3.1.2, 3.1.3 and 3.1.4.

Techniques	Survey	Analysis of user satisfaction; opinions of the experts	Case studies; interviews, focus groups, observations
When and where it is normally applied	In programmes; in European Structural Funds; wherever there are objectives with respect to which it is possible to identify means and results (social and work policies etc.)	In training and education institutions for adults; in cultural and literacy centres; in services (health, education etc.); in university evaluation; in charters of services (standards of quality); in programmes of public sector reform	In innovative situations; in pilot projects etc.
Area of use	Instrumental for political decision	Instrumental for the management and functioning of the administration	Fact-finding; *empowerment*
Theoretical problems	The black box: why should there be this result?	What is quality? How are values formed?	Where to start?
Problems of empirical research	The objectives are not clear: there is no data	How are standards of quality fixed?	Where to look?
Answers-Solutions	Analysis of evaluability; taxonomic evaluation, conceptual maps, evaluation based on theory: Weiss, Toulemonde	If there are no standards of quality, use those from a comparison with other situations or with one's own past. Involve the users in defining quality	One thing leads to another; the reflective practice of the evaluator
Advantages	It helps to plan better	It helps for good management	There is something to learn for all the stakeholders

3.1.1 The *positivist-experimental* approach

In the *positivist-experimental* approach, evaluation is under-stood as the analysis and verification of the attainment of pre-established objectives. Alongside methodological rigour and therefore validity and reliability, the coherence, pertinence and neutrality of the evaluator are important in the models with this approach. Particular emphasis is given to *measure-ment*, the *quantitative* dimension[10]. The conditions necessary for an evaluation understood as "measurement" are very care-ful planning of the objectives – including classified taxonom-

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10 In practice, this approach coincides with the logic of examinations and tests.

ically in terms of observable behaviour – and reliable tools to analyse the expected results. The resulting evaluation model is of a *rationalist* type (Galliani, 2014, p. 28), in which evaluation is associated with the ability to foresee – owing to clear planning of objectives – not only the outcomes of the training process but also of the possible changes/improvements. This approach is affected by a certain methodological rigidity and is not always able to reconcile *grey area* variables.

This approach includes *measurement* models and *goal-oriented* models, which have been applied almost exclusively in scholastic contexts. Some procedures and tools (questionnaire) have also been borrowed from the pragmatist-quality approach and then applied to the evaluation of educational actions.

3.1.2 The *pragmatist of quality* approach

The *pragmatist of quality* approach, on the other hand, stresses the dimension of the comparison and definition of standards and criteria, conceiving of educational evaluation "as *management of the organizational procedures* to guarantee attaining the training standards defined inside or outside the system" (Galliani, 2014, p. 31). The implied evaluation model is of a *functionalist* type, in which evaluation takes on a supporting role for the *decision-makers* and meets the external requests of the *stakeholders*.

In the models that can be ascribed to this approach, particular significance is given to the opinion (and therefore to the "voice" of the different players involved in the evaluation process). The risk of these models is that of self-referentialism and being anchored to indicators established only in the system where the evaluation takes place.

This approach includes various models, such as *Company-Wide Quality Control*, *Goal-free evaluation*, the CAF model and the Servqual model.

3.1.3 The *constructivist* approach

The *constructivist* approach values the subjectivity of the players involved in the evaluation process and aims at interpreting and understanding, by *hermeneutic evaluation* (Perla, 2004), more than *measuring* the phenomena and the actions, which are the object of evaluation. At the centre of the models included in this approach, there is attention to the qualitative dimension of evaluation, the pluralism of values held by the various stakeholders, which requires a process of negotiation, phenomenological understanding of the meanings, languages and cultures emerging from the community in which they are inserted (Galliani, 2014). The model of educational evaluation underlying the constructivist approach is of a procedural type. It sees evaluation almost as an *act of communication*, which can be interpreted and negotiated, characterized by continuity, recursivity, creativity, unforeseeability, progressiveness, collaboration, cognitive and metacognitive regulation of the quality of individual learning and organizational systems (*ibid*, p. 35; Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

This is an approach that is closer to the possibility of understanding the implicit elements of processes that are not grasped by the methodologies of traditional evaluation. However, it is not always possible to guarantee generalization and the use of the knowledge and results obtained. In this case too, there are multiple models: the CIPP model (Strufflebeam, 1967, 1983, 2003); the Responsive Evaluation model (Stake, 1975, 1988); the Multi method model (Patton, 1990, 1997); the Model of reflection in the course of action (Schön, 1983, 1987); Model of formative evaluation (Calonghi, 1992; Hadji, 1995).

3.1.4 *Certification and evaluation of competences in adult education*

After having identified the three main approaches of evaluation, reference should be made to the one which, although it does not represent a real scientific "model" of evaluation, includes a set of procedures – many of which are being experimented in the field – which are verifying the possibility of validating and certifying the informal and non-formal competences of European workers in AE. As is generally known, the goal of the Europe 2020 strategy is to reach intelligent, sustainable and inclusive growth. It is in this direction that the Proposal for a Recommendation of the European Council on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (Brussels 05.09.2012) should be read, which repeated the invitation to all the Member-States to establish as soon as possible a homogeneous system of certification and evaluation of competences, to allow recognizing competences matured during adults' professional lives. The White Paper of the Bauer Committee already pointed out, as early as 1997, the need to establish a better system of recognizing and defining non-formal competences (cf. Cedefop Glossary). At European level, the Recommendation of the Council of the European Union on the validation of non-formal and informal learning was published on 20/12/2012, with which the Member-States were urged to set up national systems for the validation of non-formal and informal learning by 2018. The urgency was felt at the same time to promote the development of methodologies for evaluating competences acquired outside the standard contexts of education and training, i.e. in non-formal and informal learning contexts. The recognition of these categories of competences would make mobility and re-employment of workers on the job market easier. This is also a necessary action in view of the growing need for new professional profiles in some sectors such as services to the person (known as *white jobs*).