

Christina Chaib, Sweden
www.encell.se

Validation – a Swedish perspective

Background

During the years 2004 to 2007, Sweden had an authority for validation. It was called The Delegation for Validation, and the main task was to support and form the development of the problems of validation according to legitimacy, quality and working methods.

In 1996, the ministries of education in the OECD-counties formulated a strategy in order to make the lifelong learning a reality for all. The strategy included, among other things, to create and enhance instruments for validation of knowledge and competencies. The European commission for lifelong learning, expressed in their memorandum from 2000, the need for an overlapping strategy to carry out a plan for lifelong learning has been discussed. Two important aims were to work for active citizenship and increased employment. To stimulate the mobility within Europe, systems and methods that confess education and competencies are needed. These have to be accepted by workplaces and institutions in the European countries.

Lifelong learning should be a reality for all people through their whole lifetime. In a society where the importance of education and knowledge increase, everything must be done to stimulate the lifelong learning. It demands a well developed infrastructure to confess every person's knowledge and competence, every person must be supported when doing important choices, and every person should have access to the learning he or she needs at that certain time, level and direction that are requested.

Validation

The official definition of validation, from the Department of Education, is (Ds 2003:23, s. 19):

Validation is a process that means a structured assessment, estimation, documentation and acceptance of knowledge and competencies that a person has independently of how it has been acquired. (Ds 2003:23, s. 19)

Validation is about assessing the individual's real competence, wherever it has been acquired – in Sweden or abroad, recently or long time ago. This perspective corresponds to how the concepts normally are used by the European context by Cedefop (The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training). Through validation the competencies an individual has attained are surveyed and documented. It comprises both formal and informal learning, on one hand, institutionalized education within official educational systems, and on the other learning outside the official educational system or through informal learning. The latter appears in working life as well as in every day

settings, where learning occurs as a side-effect of different activities. Validation is of vital importance in three different contexts:

- In ongoing studies aiming at describing or identifying the level of knowledge, to adapt the content or shorten the time for the studies
- In connection to supervision aiming to find a relevant education programmer
- To document real competencies and skills before an employment or in connection with the development of the staff at a work place

Due to the validation authority the concept of validation causes confusion because the concept of validation is also used for other types of phenomena that have existed for long time, and imply other meanings than validation (www.valideringsdelegationen.se, 2006-12-15). A discrepancy is done between on the one hand validation, which is about to get knowledge valued and confessed, and on the other hand testing, which is about confession related to a job in the field of the vocational or academic area (ibid., s. 4; SOU 2001:78).

Validation can also be interesting in contexts of rehabilitation. In this sense it is about creating an increased consciousness within a person about his or her possibilities to enhance the self confidence and to identify importance and meaning in life (Andersson & Fejes, 2005).

Competence in validation

The documentation of the validation process has to be legitimized by the labor-market as well as the educational field, to facilitate a close cooperation between representatives from both sides.

The contents of all the validated knowledge and competencies are spread over a vast field both concerning educational aspects and those in the labor market. The competence to validate is not always accessible in the local or regional area, but has to be found at a national level. One occupational group has become especially important for the validation work, namely the group that works with vocational guidance. They have been offered competence development in validation, both on a theoretical and practical level, in order to meet the increasing demands for the "know how" in validation. The former authority of validation has inspired the validation work at the municipalities with the following structure (Bergmo Prvulovic, 2007):

- The first step is to describe the knowledge and competencies without any valuing aspects. The aim is to create the conditions for a deeper study. The documentation is done as a recommendation or a written report. The staff responsible for vocational guidance does this step.
- The second step is to analyze the knowledge and competencies, on a deeper lever, and in a more focused way. The aim is to stipulate the level and status of the validated competencies. In this case the documentation are valued, and delivered either as a certificate or as an opinion. In this step different experts are involved.

Some reflections

Validation is not yet an unequivocal and well-defined activity; there are still some confusing aspects:

It is important that the routines for validation are clear and guiding so the validated persons can estimate how long time for studies they need.

Economical aspects are: Who is going to pay and for what? Who is responsible and which events are motivated to run?

When validating university studies the universities risks to get less compensation than if the students follow the whole study programmer. Does it risk to leads to a decreasing interest by the universities to validate?

Validation is not something that will end in itself, or be experienced as compulsory as soon a person is out of the labor market or education.

There are risks that validation will be associated to people that are marginalized.

References

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