

European Conference

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“ Accreditation of Prior Experience and Learning (APEL) ”

How does APEL fits into our educational system?

Let's remember that the French Ministry of Education includes primary and secondary education together with the technical and vocational training. It also rules further training and apprenticeship for adults.

The first law concerning APEL was established in 1992 by the Ministry of Education and signed by the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Sports and Youth.

This law represents the achievement of a former strong political project written in 1792 by Condorcet during the French Revolution : he said that no human being could be considered as a free citizen able to act on his own without being educated and trained.

It was the bases of our public education aiming to train freely all the children as well as adults to ensure two of our republican principles “Liberté” et “Egalité” designed by Jules Ferry one hundred years later.

Then in 1971 a law created the adult training system whose consequences were another softer revolution in 1968 : school was no longer ending at 16 or 18 but every adult got the opportunity to enter continuous training while working or being unemployed. The APEL law established that experience creates knowledge and competencies and is worth for validation with the same dignity as formal training .

So APEL fits into the aims of our educational system.

What about methodology ?

Our technical and vocational curricula are designed in partnership with the professional bodies and branches. They result from the consensus between branches represented by employers and employees, teachers and inspectors. They are built according to a very simple but demanding methodology which consists in describing the main activities of the jobs that can be performed by the people after a certification.

We first describe activities, then the level of exigencies to acquire the diploma, and of course eventually the knowledge and competencies to be developed while training.

The APEL system is based on the same principle : we ask the applicant to describe his or her activities to get the corresponding diploma.

First of all, it can be said that in 1992, APEL was considered as a cultural revolution for the different bodies acting in the Vet System.

The teachers said : “How can an adult apply for a diploma without academic training : it is not possible !”

The people from the professional bodies and branches said : “You are selling the diplomas : it is not possible.”

The inspectors said : “Be aware that the diplomas will have no value if you offer them : it is not possible !”

For the first time in history, the Minister decided to experience the methodology in the region in a bottom up system asking us whether we could try to find good samples in companies to test the validity of the law.

In Alsace we experienced the process in a brewery where people were trained for producing beer according to industrial processes.

The human resources manager and the training manager were quite interested in the idea, and gave us a free access to explain the idea to the salaries and to show them the possibility to be given a diploma thanks to their experience.

The reactions :

First the Trade-Unions Representatives said : “It is not possible because we got recently a 600 hours grant to be trained and prepare the diploma, we disagree to lose our newly acquired rights”.

Then the workers said : “It is not possible because we have never been trained since we left school thirty years ago, we are not able to cope with such a process, we are not able to write down what we do, as Alsations we cannot even speak good French.

We don't know anything about mathematics and percentages and fractions.

We never have any opportunity to get academic training etc .

We chose the longer path asking them to organise an individual visit of the brewery for us !

We noticed that each of them leaving from the meeting point (Human resources manager office) was taking the right way for the visit, from the entrée “Matières”(ingredients) such as bark or hops ending on the platform of the station to see the wagons full of beer cans or bottles leave. Thus we were explained the making of the beer : process and technical aspects, recipes and secrets, asking to their supervisor when they happen to forget the name of the rock used for filtration: “Kisselgur”.

After the visit it was clear that they all knew very well all the aspects of their job, they also knew the level of requirements they had to perform to be considered as “Master”(Maître - Brasseur).

But they were still resisting because they didn't know how to use computers for text writing, they were using only the functions of the computer to supervise temperature, fermentation, water-pressure and vanes.

So the company offered some typing training to them so that they could be able to write the dossier.

To those who said they knew nothing in mathematics or sciences, we asked them what they were used to do apart from the job : one was ruling an important local association, the other one a small football club, so they discovered that through other activities they had a lot of experience and knowledge.

Thus finally they were all convinced that they were able to apply for accreditation of prior experiential learning, and they all went through the dossier tutored by one of our mentor who knew quite well the brewing industry.

They all got their diploma and we stabilised the dossier together with the other colleagues who had been working in other regions on other activities.

Since 2002, a new law following the national inter-professional agreement (ANI) gave more visibility to APEL. It is one of the main aspect of the new life long learning policy, aiming to put emphasis on the value of experience as the fourth way of acquiring a diploma or certification.

This law creates the national depository for professional certification.

Accreditation of prior experiential learning : a success story?

Some elements to ensure success could be pointed out :

- Political impulse at all level
- Strong piloting
- Personal involvement of the public services (bodies)
- Free information for anyone, anywhere and at anytime
- Explanation of the process given to all the stakeholders
- Conviction shared by all the actors
- Compulsory training for all the mentors and assessors both from the academic bodies as well as the professional ones
- Evaluate the results
- Analyse the individual changes for the applicant in terms of salaries, position employment, self confidence to get arguments to convince the next ones
- Ensure the quality of the process
- Publish in the professional media
- Go to the critic mass to prevent going forwards

So a very good job has been done, but it should never be forgotten that access to long life learning process is not yet equally ruled in the world !

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