

The age of APL

Activating APL in a diversity of perspectives

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Learning throughout life is a continuous process for each human being of adding to and adapting his or her knowledge and skills, and his or judgement and capacities for action. (UNESCO 1996)

Introduction

In modern society it is of primary interest to enhance human learning potential, capacity and flexibility. It makes no difference whether one is working, learning or seeking employment. The emphasis is on the extent to which someone can contribute to society, in his/her (voluntary) work, social activities and private life. In order to be able to deal with people's learning potential, terms such as knowledge, skills and attitude are qualifying and are subsumed under the common denominator 'competences'. However, competences include more than that. They also implicitly refer to the talent to adjust to changing circumstances, flexibility or deployment potential. Therefore, competences not only include professional competences but social and personal competences as well. Competences are in a continuous state of flux. Learning – and thus developing and using competences - begins from birth and continues throughout life. Everyone already learns lifelong, it only needs to be valued and guided. The present society has a major interest in capitalising on this. It already takes place in part, since more formal educational pathways can be followed in the school system during certain periods in life. More non-formal and informal pathways are followed at other times in life. The accreditation of prior learning (APL) is intended as the instrumentation for dealing with the diversity of these pathways.

APL offers a focus on opening up learning opportunities for all and is intended as a process oriented instrumentation for recognizing and valuing what people have learned so far in their lives. The next step in the APL-process is to link these learning experiences to further development steps, or a lifelong learning-strategy. APL is not designed to highlight the lack of competences but precisely the opposite – to take stock of existing competences; in other words, rather than being half empty, APL takes the view that 'someone's glass is already half filled'.

But how to activate APL as an effective instrument for facilitating lifelong learning that appeals to the citizen and other stakeholders? With this question in mind, I intend to offer a model for describing and analyzing the roles and responsibilities of the main stakeholders in achieving their goals in the lifelong learning-arena. In this model APL functions as a matchmaker between the learning needs of the learning individual¹, the learning system² and the labour system³. Crucial in this is acknowledging that it's up to the empowerment of the citizen him-/herself to make use of this potential for the sake of personal development, employability and citizenship. The extent to which APL is effective as a matchmaker in this process, holds the promise of characterising this era as '*the age of APL*'.

The world is changing, and so is learning!

Learning is nowadays more than ever considered important or valuable, people are encouraged to invest in their potential throughout their lives, taking into account their prior learning. This is the so-called learning society as introduced by the UNESCO in 1972: "*if learning involves all of one's life, in the sense of both time-span and diversity, and all of society, including its social and economic as well as its educational resources, then we must go even further than the necessary overhaul of 'educational systems' until we reach the stage of a learning society. For these are the true proportions of the challenge education will be facing in the future.*" (Faure e.a. 1972).

This introduction led to an on-going debate on the challenges this vision poses to us all (Schon 1973; Husén 1974; UNESCO 1996; Edwards 1997; Jarvis 2008). What all these contributions share, is a set of common principles for the *learning society*:

1. there's more to learning than just education,
2. lifelong learning is a necessity since an initial qualification won't be a structural guarantee for a career,

¹ The learning individual is the adult who, after initial education, needs or wishes to keep on investing in learning.

² The learning system consists of initial and adult (vocational and higher) education and training.

³ The labour system is the social and economic structure of society. It comprises labour, labour market and social infrastructure.

3. acquiring competences isn't restricted to formal learning but also entails informal learning and non-formal learning; all these forms have to be considered as valuable learning,
4. society can be seen as a social and economic structure in which learners all have a learning attitude, implicitly and/or explicitly, and in which learners have to take up their responsibility in this too, lifelong.

This is the context in which the empowerment of the citizen as an individual learner can come to full bloom. The empowerment of the citizen changes the nature of learning and challenges the learning system to design lifelong learning-strategies for different societal purposes. In this sense, learning fits well into societal development as one of the so-called instrumental freedoms that contribute, directly or indirectly, to the overall freedom that people have to be able to live the way they would like to live (Sen 1999). Nobelprize-winner (economics) Amyarta Sen formulated that 'social opportunities', as one of the five instrumental freedoms, refer to the arrangements that society makes for education, health care and so on which influence the individual's substantive freedom to live better. These facilities are not only for the sake of conducting private lives but also of great value for more effective participation in economic and political activities. Learning affects people's private as well their public lives. Therefore, it is vital for people to have access – or better instrumental freedom – to all forms and phases of learning in order to shape their own destiny. Crucial in this empowerment of the citizen is the concept of the Valuation of Prior Learning which is regarded as the main organising principle for lifelong learning strategies. It is not designed to highlight the lack of knowledge and skills but precisely the opposite – to take stock of existing knowledge and skills: in other words, rather than being half empty, someone's learning potential is valued as a half-filled glass! (WG EVC 2000). Valuation of prior learning can be defined as: " the process of promoting participation in and outcomes of (formal or non-formal) learning, in order to raise awareness of its intrinsic worth and to reward learning. (www.cedefop.gr: "EU Knowledge system for lifelong learning"). This kind of valuation shows the real human potential (of the person) on the basis of the analysis and valuation of personal competencies; it even adds lifelong learning as a personalised learning strategy to the existing, (almost always) institutionalised learning strategies of organisations, schools and institutes. Valuation of prior learning is focused on empowerment and opening up individual perspective(s) by means of designing personal learning strategies. It can make the (public and private) system more customer-driven with this focus on personal development. Organisations benefit from this since individuals can always be developed within their organisational context, which makes the circle round again and turns personal development into a collective effort with collective gains.

The 3 learning modes

The development of the systematic of the accreditation of prior learning (APL) since the 1980s can be understood as a confirmation of this shift towards empowerment as facilitated by valuation of prior learning and personalised learning strategies. The understanding grows that the role of the learning system changes from an institutionalised learning system with uniform learning paths and little room for personal input, into a learning system characterized by flexible and more personal steered learning (Duvekot & Klarus 2007). In England this is referred to as 'personalized learning' or the tailoring of pedagogy, curriculum and learning support to meet the needs and aspirations of individual learners (Hargreaves 2004-2006). The same goes for the labour system in which the general norms on the functioning of workers are focused more and more on facilitating their further development instead of controlling labour top-down. One could even say that APL is about democratising learning and working.

The starting point of APL is that initial training for a career no longer suffices. It is important to acknowledge that competences (knowledge, skills, attitude, aspirations) are constantly developing. This means recognizing that someone always and everywhere - consciously and unconsciously – learns through:

- *formal learning*, which occurs in an organised and structured context (in a school/training centre or on the job) and is explicitly designated as learning (in terms of objectives, time or learning support). Formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It typically leads to qualification or certification.
- *non-formal learning*, which is learning embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) but with an important learning element. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It typically does not lead to certification.
- *informal learning*, which results from daily work-related, family or leisure activities. It is not organised or structured (in terms of objectives, time or learning support). Informal learning is in most cases unintentional from the learner's perspective. It typically does not lead to certification.

Source: Cedefop 2009

To be able to recognize these forms of learning, two questions are relevant: (1) is the learning intentional and (2) is it programmed as a learning activity? These questions can be captured in the following matrix:

| | | | |
|--|---|-------------------------------------|--|
| Learning is intentional | → | | |
| Activity is planned & programmed as a learning activity | ↓ | Yes: Learning is intentional | No: Learning is not intentional |
| Yes: the activity has one or more learning goals | | <i>Formal Learning</i> | - |
| No: the activity has no learning goals | | <i>Non-formal Learning</i> | <i>Informal Learning</i> |

Source: Werquin 2007

In linking the competences acquired in these three modes of learning, a learner might be able to design a personal development path that fits with one's learning style and is in line with his labour or social context.

APL since the 1980s

In order to be able to support the trend of personal involvement in learning, a number of methods on accreditation of prior learning was introduced since the 1980s in different countries. Most methods were initiated by legislation or based on new pedagogical insights.

France was the first country to introduce legislation with respect to validation when in 1934 a law was introduced to enable individuals to obtain an engineering diploma on the basis of professional experience. Later in the 1980s the concern in France about the need to recognise individuals' skills and competences was growing when the country suffered from high unemployment rates, particularly among young people and those lacking qualifications. Since 1985 it's possible for people in France to get access to all education-levels on the basis of their *Bilan de Compétence*. This 'bilan' or 'balance' is a personal dossier with all the proofs of someone's professional and personal learning experiences so far. These experiences might have been obtained in- and outside the learning system. With a portfolio-assessment someone can get formal accreditation of these experiences for obtaining a specific certificate or even a diploma (Charraud 2007). The importance of the validation of experience and skills has since then been recognised through a number of subsequent policy initiatives and confirmed by legislation, including the 2002 Social Modernisation Act and the 2003 cross-sectoral agreement on lifelong learning, confirmed by law in 2004. Initiatives such as the *Répertoire National de la Certification Professionnelle* (RNCP – national repertory of vocational certificates) have been set in place on a national level, with collaboration from relevant stakeholders, including the social partners, and support for their implementation at a regional level.

In England the development of APL was influenced by David Kolb's approach of experiential learning (1984). He stated that for learning to take place, people should progress from experience, via reflection, to theorisation, thence understanding and application of their new knowledge in another sphere. Reflection is crucial in being able to extricate the learning gained from experience. This learning cycle, based on a concrete experience, reflection on this experience, turning this reflection into a generalisation and applying this generalisation back into new situations where new experiences could in turn be enhanced and accumulated, contributed in England to the development of methodology for the accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL). In this way people provide themselves the basic material for further learning. Later APL came to the front with its focus more on prior certificated or vocational learning and less on experiential or informal learning (Fraser 1995).

At European level, the *White Paper on education and training* of the European Commission in 1995 provided a major contribution to the broadening of access to and use of the adult learning system by stating that "the formal procedures of teaching, training and assessment still describe only a very limited part of the individual competences or learning potential. Competences acquired in non-formal and informal situations are also essential for optimal performance on the labor market or in social functions." (EU1995).

Many European countries followed with initiatives to offer the citizen better and easier access to learning opportunities and to facilitate personal responsibilities for lifelong learning (ECOTEC 2007):

- In Norway the Competence Reform was launched in 1999 to help meet the needs of individuals, society and the workplace in terms of skills and knowledge and to give adults more opportunity to acquire education and training to improve their qualifications. The reform aimed to put non-formal

and informal competences on a more equal footing with formal competences. This ambition was supported by stakeholders in the field of adult education, such as the trade unions and associations favouring liberal adult education.

- In the Netherlands the debate on the importance of validating non-formal and informal learning (EVC) started with the establishment of a Commission on the Recognition of Informally Acquired Skills in 1993, which published in 1994 the report "Kwaliteiten Erkennen" (Recognising Informal Skills). The Dutch government responded positively to this report and decided to provide a set of instruments to assist EVC, including necessary development funding, with the main aim to make education more accessible for adults. An EVC workgroup was set up in 1999 to investigate the future possibilities of EVC. Their 2000 report "The bottle is half full!" emphasises the Dutch vision that EVC should not be used to highlight gaps in knowledge and skills, rather should build further on existing knowledge and skills.
- In Denmark 'Anerkendelse af realkompetence(r)' or 'Recognition of Prior Learning' (RPL) has a long tradition. The Public sector started to work on policies relevant to RPL in 1997 (adult vocational training programmes) and more generally in 2001 (adult education and continuing training) and the key policy "Recognition of Prior Learning within the Education System" was published already in November 2004.

At present, these initiatives are taken further, mainly by means of legislation of regulation of:

- financial facilitation, such as fiscal opportunities and opening up of training funds,
- transparency of qualifications in building up national qualification frameworks to be related to the European Qualification Framework (EU 2008),
- quality-assurance of APL, like the Dutch Quality Code in which national actors, social partners and accreditation bodies signed a covenant to develop a quality code for APL, based on *the European principles for validation of non-formal and informal learning* (EU 2009),
- further legislation on access to the learning system, like the French 2002 legislation on the *Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience* (VAE) which places emphasis on summative validation.

But, regardless of all these favourable circumstances for lifelong learning, it's of little or no importance when people themselves are not encouraged or encourage themselves to focus on their lifelong learning-process. It is as Peter Jarvis stated: "... *many societies have introduced policies and legislation for lifelong learning. But it is not possible to legislate for people's learning, only for their education*" (Jarvis 2008, 28).

The next step in developing and implementing lifelong learning therefore has to focus on activating the learning individual. It is the people themselves who learn and not policy or learning facilities. This perspective of stimulating and facilitating lifelong learning by people themselves – in true bottom-up steered learning processes – should be opened up by APL. Let's examine therefore the divers ways of APL for creating self steered lifelong learning as an added value to the already existing ways to activate lifelong learning. It's especially with this focus on the learning individual that we might understand that 'the age of APL' is here to stay.

The modes of APL

APL features three main actors, organised in the LifeLong Learning triangle, or the '*L3-triangle*': the learning individual, the learning system and the labour system. APL is the matchmaker between these three actors. This interaction (or matchmaking) is based on the recognition, valuation, accreditation and activation/re-activation of an individual's potential, with respect to goals, opportunities, perspectives and contexts in and from the learning system and the labour system. The macro-level of governmental authorities and social partners facilitates the interaction in the '*L3-triangle*' with laws, regulations and seed money.

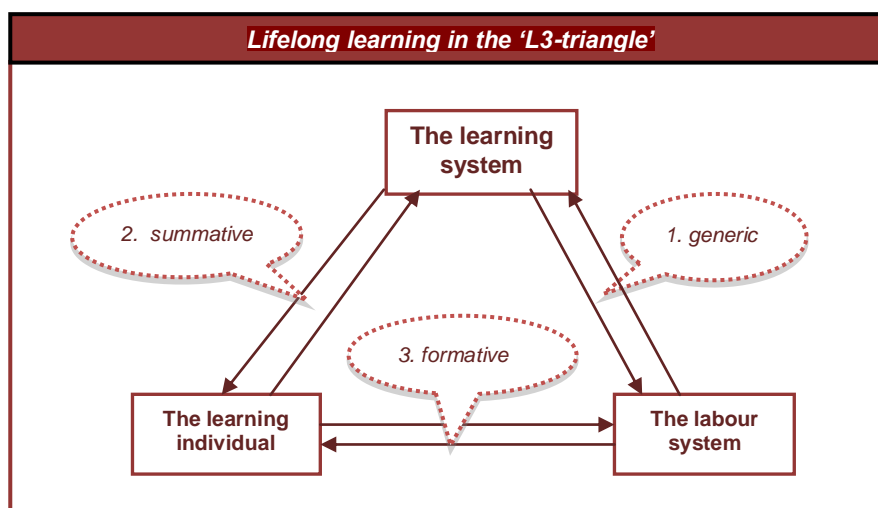
The '*L3-triangle*' highlights learning processes with a summative and/or formative intention. The mutual relationships between the actors determinate the mode of APL. These modes relate to the roles of the actors in decision-making on content and structure of the learning processes, ranging from initial professional training to human resource development in the workplace. Together these processes constitute the overall structure for lifelong learning strategies that might differ in their goals and context but are always sharing APL as a matchmaker. The '*L3-triangle*' in this perspective can be seen as the playing field for lifelong learning strategies. Its constituent parts are the individual, the organisation and the school with their respective responsibilities: self-management of competencies, competence

management and competence-based curricula and guiding tools. The balance of power is flexible, and is dependent on goal and context of learning (Duvekot 2006).

The APL-systematic helps out when it comes to flexibilising and personalising learning and making use of personal contexts for further development or lifelong learning. APL works in three modes:

1. the **generic** mode⁴ focuses on systematically linking competences embedded in national standards with competences embedded in function profiles of human resource management at – profit, not-for-profit or voluntary work - organisation levels. This leads to conversion-tables of the exchangeability of competences in professional (VET and HE-standards) and functional competence profiles (function-descriptors). This mode supports both other modes of APL.
2. the **summative** approach of APL offers a direct and formal procedure for accrediting all learning experiences of an individual to a professional level and a specific standard in a national qualifications structure. It aims at an overview of competences for purposes of recognition and validation. Its focus is on certification or qualification where individuals seek this goal.
3. when APL goes one step further than validation and includes further learning, this is the **formative** mode, aiming at time- and cost-effective personal development within someone's working context. APL links competences from function profiles of organisations with the competences from personal profiles. APL formative is a more informal procedure for accrediting learning experiences of an individual in relation to a specific functional level within a human resources management-system of any organisation active in the labour-system: profit, not-for-profit, civil society or voluntary work. Making *formative* steps entails especially updating, upgrading or side-grading trajectories.

In order to be able to describe and analyse on the one hand the different modes of APL in practice and on the other hand the roles and responsibilities of the three main stakeholders in achieving their goals in the lifelong learning-arena, it is essential to capture the reality of APL in its different modes. For this reason the following research model is presented. In this model APL functions as matchmaker between the learning needs of the learning individual, the learning system and the labour system. Working with the model will provide the material for analysing and explaining the social phenomena that occur when APL is used as a link between the aims and the normative frameworks of these three stakeholders. Questions regarding the support and promotion of effective learning and personal development, instrumented by the APL-modes can be answered and turned into interventions into the ways of working with APL as a matchmaker in one of the modes.



The application of APL in its three modes can be shown in a model for describing and analyzing the roles and responsibilities of the three main stakeholders in the lifelong learning-arena. The arrows in the model indicate

⁴ I define 'generic' in this context as the general framework of national recognized qualifications and human resources management-systems. Qualifications are about professional or vocational profiles; HRM-systems are about functional or occupational profiles. These profiles are all abstract, standardized and unpersonal.

the diversity of negotiations or 'dialogues' between the stakeholders in the '*L3-triangle*'. These dialogues are each facilitated by one of the APL modes.

The model is based on three assumptions. The 1st one being the awareness of the learning individual that he/she already learns lifelong. He/she might even be aware that his/her learning experiences can be collected and documented in a personal profile by means of selfmanagement of competences. This awareness leads to personal empowerment and the articulation of personal learning needs for the sake of personal development, qualification or employability. The personal profile in a way is the reflection of someone's personal normative framework; it should answer questions like 'who am I?', 'what am I up to?', 'how to reach my goals?' and 'which lifelong learning-strategy suits me best?'. The 2nd assumption is that the organisation, active in the labour system, understands that it's vital to be able to articulate its (changing) need for competences in order to reach its goals. This articulation is embedded in the description of competence based function-profiles; these profiles are the organisation's normative framework and reflect the state of the art of competences within the organisation. Lifelong learning-strategies from the organisation are focused on how to update, upgrade or upskill the already available competencies to be able to safeguard the future of the organisation by further developing this stock of competencies. The main perspective of the organisation in this context is the employability of the personnel.

The 3rd assumption is that the learning system understands that it has to be receptive for the learning needs of (adult) learning individuals and their organisations. The learning system should fill in these learning needs in a customer- or demand-steered way by being able to offer flexible and personalised learning or learning-made-to-measure. The main perspective of the learning system is grounded in certificates and qualifications that are embedded in national standards of professional competence-profiles.

The aim of the model is to contribute to:

- the theory on social transitions in general,
- the understanding of the role of the individual learner in the learning society more specifically,
- to integrate top-down facilities on quality-assurance, financing lifelong learning and legislative aspects in bottom-up steered APL practices,
- the best ways to develop and implement the APL modes,

The 1st dialogue between learning system and labour system

The *generic* APL-mode is focused on the matchmaking of competences embedded in qualifications and certificates from the learning system and in function-profiles from the labour system. In this 1st dialogue between two systems APL *generic* compares, values and equals the competences from both systems. Qualifications and certificates are described in terms of professional competence standards; function profiles are described in terms functional competence-standards. APL(-*generic*) is intended as a translation-device of the differently situated competences.

This dialogue results in making learning comparable on the (abstract) level of two systems. It leads to a matrix in which the competences from both 'systems' are compared and mutually accepted in their value for reasons of qualification and certification as well as for reasons of employability.

Learning experiences obtained in informal or non-formal learning settings can show their equivalent in experiences obtained in formal learning settings; and the other way around as well. It is up to personal learning experiences to prove the equivalence is correct.

In this way APL *generic* lays the foundation for designing lifelong learning strategies on the basis of learning outcomes obtained in both 'systems'. Lifelong learning can then either be demand-driven by the learning needs of the organisation or filled in in a supply-driven fashion by 'the school'. This can lead to effective lifelong learning arrangements between organisations and VET-schools/higher education with the aims of updating, upskilling, qualifying, certifying or upgrading the personnel in both learning environments of school and workplace, since:

- the value of non-formal & informal learning at organisation level is accredited by the learning system,
- the value of formal learning is transparent to the organisation. Its learning needs can be linked to formal learning.
- it is made possible to design lifelong learning in a time- and cost efficient manner. There is agreement on which informal and non-formal learning can be accredited which can lead to shortened learning programmes when it comes to a need for a qualification or certificate,
- on the other hand it also becomes possible to learn in short cycles or even only for obtaining specific competences for enhancing better functioning or for upgrading someone's employability.

- Guiding learning at school as well as at the workplace is strengthened, either by guiders from the school or by training workplace-guiders of the enterprise,
- Quality-assurance is organised by mutual recognition of each others competences and valuing the learning environment of both the school as well as of the workplace. This can be done:
 - o on the basis of assessing the workplace by independent valutors and by documenting the different kinds of learning outcomes, obtained at the workplace, that might match with the outcomes from a qualification.
 - o By training and accrediting each others assessors and guiders together in a course. In this way trust between the partners from the learning and the labour system is guaranteed.
 - o By embedding APL in the national standards for which the VET-school or higher education is already accredited in the national qualification system (or framework if that is already operational).

For both stakeholders in this *generic* APL-mode the dialogue works both ways.

Generic APL from the point of view of 'the organisation helps to strengthen employability-goals by:

- valuing learning outcomes from informal and non-formal learning settings and linking them to the outcomes from formal learning settings,
- organising the support from the learning system for articulating learning needs from the organisations within the labour system and for organising the function-profiles into competence-management of the organisation,
- converting the value of competences of the function-profiles into equal values on qualification-levels,
- generating demand-articulation of competences.

The other direction in the 1st dialogue is aiming at the qualification-goals of 'the school' by:

- the formulation of professional qualifications into competences that can be equalled with competences from function-profiles,
- strengthening the flexibility of formal learning in using non-formal learning settings for obtaining competences for acquiring qualifications,
- facilitating the constant process of updating the content of qualifications,
- opening up (parts of or modules from) qualifications for lifelong learning-purposes.

The 2nd dialogue between the learning individual and the labour system

The *formative* APL-mode of this 2nd dialogue emphasises the matchmaking of competences embedded in the function-profiles from the organisation and the competences collected and documented in a personal profile (dossier or portfolio). This implies that the organisation compares function profiles with personal profiles of its staff. In the personal profiles all competences acquired within and outside the organisation are listed in a (digital) dossier or portfolio. This equation is called APL *formative*. The aim is that the individual in consultation with the organisation (or employer) establishes learning goals that add value to the personal profile and the organisation's function-profiles.

Selfmanagement of competences is the basis for personal development and career-planning. It is the crucial element in this dialogue because without this an individual can only partially become a valued, self-responsible and committed partner in '*the L3-triangle*'. In general, selfmanagement of competences aims at personal development or career-planning and creates flexibility and mobility of the individual learner to and on the labour-market. It adds value to lifelong learning-strategies by:

- (re)vitalising individual responsibility,
- providing the basis for dedicated personal development and career-planning,
- stimulating personal development on the basis of prior learning,
- supporting self managed learning and acting,
- stimulating individuals to document continuously their professional- and personal development for setting up new lifelong learning-strategies

In the 2nd dialogue the personal profile is therefore the recurring theme. From the establishment of the need for investment in "human capital" up to the creation of an APL-formative approach, the personal profile is at the fore. The aim of APL *formative* is related to the organisation's context⁵ and leads to subsequent steps in the APL-process: the personal profile is first filled with all personal learning

5 The organisation's context is described in terms of its human resource management: all functions described in competence-based profiles and together comprising the competence-management.

experiences; than these experiences are related to the objectives of the organisation; the personal profile as such is evaluated and recommendations are made; via custom work, the personal profile is augmented, and finally, taken as a starting point for new learning issues from an APL *formative*, embedded situation within the organisation. The APL process, then, begins and ends with the personal profile.

For both stakeholders in this *formative* APL-mode the dialogue works both ways.

APL from the point of view of 'the organisation' helps to strengthen employability-goals by:

- strengthening the organisation's competence management by filling in function profiles in terms of competences,
- activating dynamic employability-goals for the personnel, linked to the goals of the organisation,
- creating close insight in the human learning potential of the personnel by facilitating their selfmanagement of competences,
- linking the personnel's learning potential to the necessary competence-development within the organisation,
- organising demand-steered learning programmes and time and cost-effective learning-on-the-job.

APL from the point of view of the learning individual helps to strengthen personal development-goals by:

- showing the learning opportunities on the basis of the validation of someone's prior learning,
- strengthening selfmanagement of competences and personal development goals to employability and/or qualification targets,
- herewith someone's self-esteem will be strengthened and might have further positive impact on someone's citizenship and private life.
- all in all, helping to position the learning individual in a respected and responsible position of co-makership in the lifelong learning arena.

The 3rd dialogue between the learning individual and the learning system

The *summative* APL-mode of this 3rd dialogue focuses on the matchmaking of competences embedded in personal profiles and in qualifications and certificates from the learning system. The *summative* APL-process in which individuals can get accredited for their prior learning by the learning system, opens up a faster, dedicated and more personalised road to a qualification. This is possible by matching personal profiles with the national standards of a qualification framework. The aim is learning for a qualification or for certificates. *Summative* APL can be used for purposes of formalising learning programmes that aim at updating, upgrading or upskilling someone's competences.

Summative APL is considered to be already rather well developed and implemented in the European lifelong learning arena. The European Inventories on the validation of non-formal and informal learning in 2004, 2005 and 2007 are good sources for finding documented good practices. Also the EU- Lifelong learning programmes and the previous programmes of the last decade are demonstrating the success of the application of the *summative* APL-mode in a diversity of contexts. The European Union recently published their Guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning (EU 2009) to sum up and embed the benefits of *summative* APL. Nevertheless, also *summative* APL still needs building up practices in different contexts in order to prove its added value to more stakeholders that just 'the believers' in the learning system and the already empowered individuals. Linking the benefits of *summative* APL into the other dialogue of *formative* APL can also strengthen the case of *summative* APL itself.

For both stakeholders in this *summative* APL-mode the dialogue works both ways.

For the learning individual this APL-mode helps filling in personal development-schemes by:

- valuing personal profiles in relation to coherent, transparent and trusted qualifications and certificates,
- connecting personal learning experiences to new ones,
- empowering an individual's desire to be a trusted and valued 'customer' of (the services of) the learning system,
- helping to formulate 'missing links' in someone's personal profile,
- helping to get insight in someone's learning style and getting an idea what, why, how and where to learn best,

- pointing out different aims for learning: learning for qualifications for employability and/or personal development and enrichment of someone's personal profile.

Summative APL from the point of view of the learning system helps to strengthen qualification-goals in lifelong learning strategies by:

- opening up the learning system for lifelong learning purposes overall,
- improving access to qualifications by translating the content of formal learning to non-formal and informal learning outcomes,
- learning to refer national standards to personal profiles for the sake of personalising (lifelong) learning,
- learning to organise customer-steered programmes,
- making learning attractive for target groups with difficulties in getting access to formal learning,
- embedding non-formal and informal learning outcomes in qualification frameworks,
- broadening the scope of qualifications to all in society.

In conclusion

The central question of this article was 'how to activate APL as an effective instrument for facilitating lifelong learning that appeals to the citizen, strengthens their empowerment and also is beneficial to the other stakeholders in society?'. With this question in mind, I formulated a research model for describing and analyzing the roles and responsibilities of the main stakeholders in the lifelong learning-arena. In this model APL is used in three different modes in order to be the matchmaker in the so-called '*L3-triangle*' of the learning individual, the learning system and the labour system.

The aim of the model is to show – by means of evidence-based case study-research - the potential of APL as a matchmaker between the main stakeholders. In this way the critical success factors for developing and implementing APL in a diversity of contexts become more clear. It also shows the interlinkage of the actions of the different stakeholders in using APL-systematic. This will help in demonstrating how and where to set up interventions for strengthening APL as a matchmaker for the sake of creating time- and money-effective and - above all – efficient lifelong learning-strategies on a win-win-win-basis for 'me', 'my organisation' and 'my learning provider'. Crucial in this however remains acknowledging the self-managing role of the 'empowered' learning individual in making lifelong learning work!

The active participation of individuals in decisions about form and content of lifelong learning and the implementation of lifelong learning strategies thus becomes a clearer perspective and paves the way for supporting personalized (lifelong) learning, including a plan for comprehensive cooperation in 'the L3-triangle'. The desired effects of APL in this sense focus strongly on:

- 1 improving opportunities for empowerment and deployment: improved empowerment and deployment of individual talent is the most important motivation underlying APL. It increases the opportunities for the individual on the labour market by highlighting the competences he or she already has and how these competences can be deployed and strengthened. This can apply both to those already in employment and to job-seekers. For employers, the emphasis lies on improving the employability-policy for deployability of employees within the organisation.
- 2 To create a demand-led labour market: improving the match between the learning system and the labour system is essential for the organisation of APL. In order to improve deployability, labour market functions must be expressed in terms of competences. These competences must in turn be linked to a demand for learning. The learning system must be receptive, transparent, flexible and demand-led in order to be able to provide the customised approach required.
- 3 To make learning more flexible: the recognition of informally and non-formally acquired competences will boost people's desire to keep on learning, i.e. will promote lifelong learning, since the accreditation of competences can lead directly to an award of or exemptions for qualifications. The recognition approach can also make visible or recognisable existing competences and qualifications within or outside the labour process. This promotes the transparency of the many opportunities for learning. The learning individual will not only want to learn in a customer-oriented fashion but will also know better than now how, what and when to learn, and why he is learning.
- 4 To optimise other forms of learning: other learning environments and forms of learning must be formulated and/or utilised more effectively, since APL also shows which learning environment and/or form of learning is best for a particular individual. This could include (combinations of) on the

job training, mentoring/tutoring, independent learning, distance learning, and so on. The recognition of competences and qualifications will inevitably lead to an adjustment of the existing qualification structure in professional education. The existing description of exit qualifications in the current qualification structure for professional education does not always tie in with the competences required on the labour market.

So, there's a lot to gain with APL. Let's find out into more detail how APL works in practice. The research model can be used for this purpose when describing and analysing practical case studies in a diversity of contexts: across sectors, types of organisations and learning environments; with different target groups, personal approaches and goals; in the diversity of dialogues between the learning individual, the learning system and the labour system. In this way we might understand that 'the age of APL' is here to stay.

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