

IMPROVING WELLBEING IN ADULT EDUCATION

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***Abstract:** For the last two years, a project partnership consortium comprising seven partners from six different European countries addressed the priority of Grundtvig Multilateral projects “Quality assurance of Adult Learning, including the professional development of staff” in the frame of the project *WELNESS-Skills for True well-being, 527797-LLP-1-2012-1-RO-GRUNDTVIG*. The main aims were to improve the content and delivery of adult education through providing adult education organizations with tools that enhance the well-being of educators/Professionals/Tutors and adult learners. Well-being has been identified as a foundation for effective teaching and learning. Educators/Professionals/Tutors in adult education are especially vulnerable to burn out syndrome. The research which was performed showed that the main areas in which adult educators and learners need support were: stress and health, communication and relationships and effective teaching methods/self-esteem In the present paper the final outputs of the project are presented: they are three workshops and three seminars for the stakeholders of our project addressing specifically the problematic issues and providing tools to be used both by educators and learners to enhance wellbeing and lower stress.*

***Keywords:** Wellbeing; Adult Education; Adult Education Professionals; Adult Learners; Guidebook.*

JEL Classification: I250

Chapter I

1.1. Project Approach

A project partnership consortium comprising seven partners from six different European countries: Romania (Coordinator), Poland, Slovenia, Italy (Promimpresa and FormAzione Co&So Network), Cyprus and UK were put together to address the priority of Grundtvig Multilateral projects “Quality assurance of Adult Learning, including the professional development of staff” (*Skills for True well-being, 527797-LLP-1-2012-1-RO-GRUNDTVIG*). The proposal of the project also corresponds to the European Pact for Mental Health and well-being launched at a Conference on Mental Health and Well-being on 13 June 2008. It was stated that “The level of mental health and well-being in the population is a key resource for the success of the EU as a knowledge-based society and economy.” The project started on the first of January 2013 and ended on 31.12.2014.

1.2. Conceptual and methodological framework

There are sound practical reasons for prioritizing and promoting well-being. The evidence from large National and cross-National research shows that individuals with higher well-being as indicated by measures of happiness or life satisfaction, tend to be more

productive, have higher incomes, more stable marriages, and better health and life expectancy (Diener, 2000; Judge et al, 2001).

These cross-sectional associations are supported by longitudinal evidence. For instance, a meta-analysis by Chida et al,(2008) showed that positive feelings or attitudes at one point in the life course were associated with increased health and longevity later in life. A range of experimental research further confirms that higher levels of well-being or positive emotions produce a range of beneficial outcomes including a broader focus of attention and more creative thinking (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005), more tolerance and generosity towards others (Forgas, Williams, 2002), a healthier physiological response to stress (Fredrickson et al, 2001). Taken together, the evidence shows that well-being or positive emotions lead to positive behaviors, increased cognitive capability and health and that positive behaviors, capabilities and health in turn fuel well-being and positive emotions. Well-being therefore matters as an outcome in its own right, as well as in light of its benefits for Adult Learners and society.

Adult learners Subjective well-being (SWB) has usually been conceptualized in terms of people's emotional responses (good or bad feelings) and their cognitive or evaluative responses e.g. 'satisfaction' (Kahneman et al, 1999; Diener, 1984. However, as noted in our (*Skills for True well-being, 527797-LLP-1-2012-1-RO-GRUNDTVIG*) project, this conceptualization regards well-being as a state rather than a process (Rogers, 1961). It focuses on having positive feelings or evaluations, as opposed to doing certain things that lead to lasting pleasure or fulfillment (Vitterso, 2004). This distinction was fundamental to the development of our partnership project. It parallels two distinct philosophical approaches to well-being – the hedonic approach which emphasizes positive feelings (Kahneman et al, 1999) versus the eudaimonic approach which emphasizes positive functioning (Keyes, 2002; Ryan & Deci, 2001). The eudaimonic approach has been operationalized in various ways, and typically includes concepts such as autonomy or self-determination, interest and engagement, positive relationships, and a sense of meaning, direction or purpose in life (Ryff & Singer, 1998; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Diener et al, 2010; Seligman, 2002).

Items designed to capture the range of eudaimonic concepts were included in our (*Skills for True well-being, 527797-LLP-1-2012-1-RO-GRUNDTVIG*) project. However, in terms of theory underpinning the different conceptualizations of functioning or eudaimonic well-being, each participating partner of our project (*Skills for True well-being, 527797-LLP-1-2012-1-RO-GRUNDTVIG*) drew on different traditions regarding implementation of the well-being pilot course. The six well-being dimensions proposed by Ryff & Singer (1998)(autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life, self acceptance) derived from developmental psychology and psycho-dynamic theory. The three concepts described by Deci & Ryan(2000) (autonomy, competence, relatedness) came from the humanistic approach and the perspective of psychological 'needs'. Seligman's (2002) core concepts (pleasure, engagement, meaning) combined hedonic well-being with key aspects of Aristotle's theory and Csikszentmihalyi's work on 'flow' (1988), while Diener's (2010) conceptualization was influenced by all these earlier approaches plus the evidence that optimism is important for successful functioning and well-being (Scheier & Carver, 2003) and the work of Putnam (2000) and Helliwell et al (2009) showing that 'social capital' is basic to the well-being of societies.

Indeed, the evidence on the importance of social connections to well-being (Helliwell and Putnam, 2005; Diener and Seligman, 2002) partly led us to ensure that our project (*Skills for True well-being, 527797-LLP-1-2012-1-RO-GRUNDTVIG*) included detailed measures of social as well as personal well-being. While there is substantial overlap between these different conceptualizations, they are essentially idiosyncratic.

Chapter II

2.1. Project aims

In the present paper we will focus on two of the main aims of the project:

Aim 1: improve the content and delivery of adult education through providing adult education organisations with tools that enhance the well-being of Educators/Professionals/Tutors.

Aim 2: improve the content and delivery of adult education through providing adult education organisations with tools that enhance the well-being of adult Learners.

Well-being has been identified as a foundation for effective teaching and learning. Educators/Professionals/Tutors in adult education are especially vulnerable to burn out syndrome. They spend most of time interacting with students and co-workers and need to update their knowledge and skills continually and sometimes they need to attend to the challenging task of evaluating Adult Learners or subordinates as well as being evaluated. Without practical tools for monitoring their inner state and tools for self-management they are likely to suffer from decreased motivation and work engagement, drop in their creativity and work performance as well as poor health and hence frequent absenteeism. In order to work fruitfully the educators need practical skills enabling them to find and maintain their optimum teaching state. Satisfying levels of well-being in the field of education certainly plays an essential role. The success of education relies heavily on the quality of interaction between a teacher/trainer and students. Research shows that well-being is a core inner resource that allows a person to use his or her potential fully, work productively, deal with stress and life challenges, contribute to the community and create meaningful life aligned with one's values. Well-being is the foundation for physical, emotional, mental and social health. Although, well-being is of growing significance in policy circles and public debate, the education system does not strongly focus on providing people with skills that directly help to enhance and sustain their well-being.

2.2. Project unfolding and results

In an attempt to identify and develop self-management skills to create satisfying levels of sustainable well-being, the consortium of the European partnership project WELLNESS (*Skills for True well-being, 527797-LLP-1-2012-1-RO-GRUNDTVIG*), engaged in a Transnational well-being Analysis to examine a baseline well-being level in Adult Learners and Adult Educators on National and European levels as well as define key needs related to promoting well-being.

Both target groups, adult learners and adult educators, were involved in the project from its initial phases as they participated in the transnational needs analysis. A multi-national needs analysis has been carried out by all partners of the consortium serving as the foundation for next phases of the project. Each of the 7 partner organisations examined 50 adult learners and 20 educators. So, the transnational wellbeing analysis was conducted among 140 adult education professionals and 350 adult learners. The research tools were: questionnaires for educators, questionnaires for adult learners – both developed by the project partners, focus groups for educators and focus groups for learners. The aim of the needs analysis was to examine the baseline level of wellbeing in the target groups as well as identify the main factors that have impact on the level of wellbeing and skills that educators and learners need to develop further in order to enjoy greater and sustainable level of wellness. After having conducted the needs analysis in their countries, all partners produced country reports that were carefully examined and synthesised in a final report which has served as a foundation for the design of seminars for educators and workshops for learners in the following project stages.

The needs analysis allowed us to identify the main obstacles to wellbeing such as high stress level, ineffective communication, disturbing thoughts and emotions, problems with motivation and organizational factors. Also main skills to be developed have been identified such as coping with stress, dealing with difficult thoughts and emotions, communication skills, self-esteem, effective teaching methods.

It is worth mentioning that the needs analysis helped us not only to examine problems and needs of the target groups but also what gives them greatest satisfaction, joy and meaning of life (both professionally and personally) hence while designing the courses we were able to take those factors into consideration and design the courses in order to strengthen them and build on them. Thanks to the needs analysis we have identified factors that are universal as they were found in all participating countries.

The findings of the Transnational well-being Analysis, served as the basis for developing pilot courses, workshops and seminars for Adult Learners and Adult Educators. Based on the findings of the needs analysis 3 alternative seminars for adult education professionals and 3 alternative workshops for adult learners have been developed. The guiding principle while developing the courses was to ensure that they respond to the main needs identified across the countries of the partnership, and that they offer understandings and tools that have a potential to bring about sustainable and deep change. Trainers, educators and researchers from all partner organizations have contributed to the development of the courses. Handbooks for the trainers as well as for the course participants have been also created and have served as useful tool during the pilot courses as well as a resource to which the participants can come back after the course to refresh their knowledge.

Adult learners and educators took part in the pilot courses and have been encouraged to use resources developed in the project.

Each partner has piloted 2 seminars for the educators and 2 workshops for the learners, out of the 3 designed for each target group. Seminars for adult education professionals have been designed consisting in: seminar objectives, methodology, training program, preparation and follow up, as well as training manuals. The chosen topics were: 1) stress & health 2) communication & relationships 3) effective teaching methods. The seminars have been tested in the piloting phase in order to produce highly relevant and useful resource for educators. Workshops for adult learners have been designed (workshop objectives, methodology, training program, preparation and follow up), as well as training manuals. The topics were: 1) stress & health 2) communication & relationships 3) self-esteem and self-presentation. The workshops have been tested in the piloting phase in order to produce highly relevant and useful resource for learners. The seminars and workshops have been evaluated with tools such as: pre and post questionnaires and a semi-structured interview conducted 1 month after the training.

It is worth mentioning that the courses have been very well received and have shown to have substantial positive impact on the participants. The participants of the pilot courses have reported significant shifts in perception; have found the new skills and understandings eye-opening and helpful in daily professional and personal life.

The conceptual framework of implementation of the pilot courses allowed us to find the most effective and attractive ways to promote well-being through adult education. After having analyzed the reports, the partners developed the final version of the in-service training for educators and the final versions of the workshops for learners. We promote these workshops and seminars at European level, making them available to wide audience beyond the existing networks of the partners.

A guidebook with the findings of the project as well as practical tools for enhancing wellbeing has been produced, translated in all partners' languages, published and disseminated.

A project website has been launched: www.wellnessllp.eu. This contains all materials, workshops and seminars, together with their manuals, questionnaires to be applied.

Conclusions

The partnership approach of the course was based on developing sets of easily applicable wellness training program namely: Stress and Health, Self-Esteem and Self-Presentation/ Effective teaching methods and Communication and Relationships. The courses delivered skills that help individuals and organizations to increase their level of Well-being. A great deal was given to raising awareness of the importance of wellbeing and promoting easily accessible free materials for learners and educators. Moreover, the implementation of the courses employed holistic and practical approaches to enhance and sustain Well-being for all those involved in adult education.

Taking the partnership methodological approach into account, the results reported demonstrate the importance of all considered indicators of the partnership courses undertaken. They also allow for a ranking of their relative importance on the level of the total sample, where participants' pre and post knowledge of all the courses proved to be the most important predictors of Well-being. Offering Well-being training courses designed to directly address the needs of adult learners and educators equips them with sets of diverse abilities, thus enabling them to expand their existing paradigm of education and in turn inspiring and motivating themselves and others towards greater and more fulfilling achievements.

The results of the implementation of the pilot courses are unanimous about the strength of evidence that Well-being programs can make a significant difference to Adult Learners and Educators. The evidence similarly suggests - why Wellness courses must address individual, social and environmental influences. The impact of the training courses for all participants led to implementing new practices, new courses, new ways of attracting Adult Learners and Educators and new ways of solving problems. This suggests that the courses of Well-being have influenced a shift in organizational culture that occurred during the pilot training with substantial changes. This implementation phase of the project is built on the paradigm of prophylaxis and focuses on enhancing quality of life through building strong inner resources that help individuals bring more fulfillment to their lives and make them more resilient in hard times. By promoting positive flourishing throughout life, this helps to prevent or limit mental disorders. The implementation of the pilot courses identified specific needs of Adult Educators and Learners regarding their Wellbeing and offered practical tools for managing their inner state so they are able to use their potential fully in the educational setting. It is worth mentioning that without sufficient levels of Wellbeing, individuals are not able to engage satisfactorily in a meaningful and compassionate way that enhances their Wellbeing. It is expected that in the long-term, the project will lead to enhanced level of sustainable well-being in both learners and educators and hence prevent the negative consequences of stress and enhance teaching and learning ability leading to higher satisfaction and engagement in the teaching and learning process. It is also expected that the awareness of the importance of well-being will enable the beneficiaries to creatively engage in finding new ways of sustaining high levels of wellness and have better access to their inner resources such as creativity, insight, motivation etc.

The project results, courses and workshops, will be integrated and systematically used in the partner institutions and disseminated in their local environment. This is already achieved through exploitation activities, namely implementing seminars for learners and professionals in partner's regular programmes.

Specific objectives of the Grundtvig programme were also addressed:

- *Providing adults with pathways to improving their knowledge and competences*

The project has offered workshops as well as online materials for adult learners and educators. It is worth mentioning that adult learners and educators have been involved (by needs analysis and dialogue) in the process of designing the courses from early stages and continued to be involved in the process during the piloting phase.

- *Quality assurance of adult learning, including the professional development of staff*
The seminars and online resources for adult education staff that are the final product of the project have resulted from a multi-country needs analysis, competences of professionals from different countries and complementary backgrounds and thorough piloting hence we believe that they will offer unique value and attractiveness.

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