Simona Sava

Needs Analysis and Programme Planning in Adult Education

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Study Guides in Adult Education

edited by
Regina Egetenmeyer

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Contents

Preface

Needs analysis and programme planning are among the central responsibilities of full-time staff working in adult education institutions. In contrast to the school sector, adult education for the most part does not work with long-term fixed curricula. Rather, programmes are being planned and revised on an ongoing basis, and geared towards the needs of different groups. As adult education is – at least in principle – characterised by voluntary participation, it is essential to investigate the interests of potential participants. But adult education is not limited to individual needs and interests. Rather, adult education programmes are positioned in the context of the needs and interests formulated by national and international educational policies, research findings, the institutional mission of adult education providers, and, in some cases, the interests of institutional clients. Besides formulating needs and interests, it is the specific task of needs assessors to identify latent needs in society.

Within this context of different needs, it is obvious that needs analysis struggles with a lot of conflict areas, contradictions, and antinomies. While it is a challenge to identify needs in the first place, it is just as much of a challenge to find ways of addressing these needs. Adult education has to balance educational and economic goals. It has to deal with individual interests and the interests of society. Discrepancies may arise, for example, between the formulated needs of an institutional client and the perceived needs of the participants that institutional clients select for a course. All of these needs are present when adult educators are engaged in programme planning.

There are various ways to do needs analysis and to serve the needs that have been identified. In this volume, Simona Sava provides an introduction to needs analysis and programme planning in adult education. Hence the book is written not only for students but also for practitioners in the field of adult education. Therefore, Simona Sava introduces her readers to the discussion on needs and needs analysis in educational contexts, referring to both the European and the Anglo-Saxon discussion. Practitioners learn how needs

analysis can be done in their daily work in adult education, and how they can use their results for programme planning. Readers of this study guide will notice that Simona Sava's perspective on adult education is informed by both theory and practice. As a professor at the West University of Timisoara, she is scientist. But she is also doing essential developmental work in adult education as director of the Romanian Institute of Adult Education. As a result, she combines theoretical and practical perspectives, serving as an expert not only in Romania but throughout Europe.

Simona Sava is devoted to the topic of needs analysis and programme planning within the European Master in Adult Education. She first taught this course in Germany during her stay at the Faculty of Educational Sciences at the University of Duisburg-Essen as a DAAD-guest professor in spring 2009. Since then, she has returned to Germany each year to teach this course. It is also among the courses she teaches at the West University of Timisoara, enabling her to evaluate her study guide with different groups of international students. A warm thank you goes to Simona Sava for contributing this volume to the *Study Guides in Adult Education* series.

Regina Egetenmeyer

1. Introduction

Needs analysis is an important issue wherever educational programmes are carried out that are designed to attract adults on a purely voluntarily basis, just by matching their interests and needs.

Such continuing education programmes are frequently perceived as unattractive and not sufficiently tailored to learners' needs and interests, which is why participation rates in adult education continue to be rather low. As a consequence, recent policy documents and messages (e.g. European Commission, 2008) stress the need for more systematic and in-depth studies about adults' continuing education needs, as well as the need for predictive studies about the future needs of the labour market, society, and (groups) of adults in order to be able to adapt educational programming to both of these needs.

Unfortunately, in a lot of adult education institutions, needs analysis is done in a non-professional manner, based more on the experience, feeling, and information of the programme planner. Conducting a needs analysis is often considered a costly, time-consuming, and unreliable activity; thus the 'trial and error' principle is still the most common approach when it comes to designing adult education programmes. Analysing needs may indeed be an unreliable activity unless it is performed by observing the requirements for rigorous qualitative analysis that any needs assessor should adhere to, including careful reflections on how the identified needs are to be prioritised and transformed into solution strategies. Moreover, the managers of an educational institution need to ask for such needs analysis; they have to accept and back the changes related to needs, because such decisions – like those related to public relations – are fundamental decisions that also serve to guide strategic management, and hence are the responsibility of the top management.

This book, therefore, is designed as a study guide accompanying the course on 'Needs analysis and programme planning', which has been delivered online and face to face to an international group of students in the European Master in Adult Education programme for several years. It aims to pro-

vide readers with suggestions on how they should act as needs assessors and programme developers. The book was further refined and improved by students' comments and feedback, as well as by discussions with colleagues from other universities and with practitioners. After all, needs analysis and programme planning is a very practical thing, which also has to be informed by research findings, however. This approach was also used for presenting the various issues and examples with regard to European adult education, even though the (rather limited) literature available in English mainly comes from adult education in the United States.

Adult education, as an academic discipline, has to address the issue of programme planning, as the education of adults is very much about organising educational provision in a managerial way – that is, to ensure a tailored, smoothly running programme, able to reach the envisaged learning outcomes, based on well-defined instructional and marketing plans, as well as well-designed delivery. Thus the book is geared towards postgraduate students preparing to become professional adult educators, as well as towards those intending to plan educational programmes for adults, or acting as middle/ top managers charged with such responsibility.

However, the study guide is not intended to provide a detailed review of the existing research on needs analysis; rather, its has been designed in a more didactic way, seeking to provide basic information to ground such a complex topic, with some suggestions for further reading. The focus is more on the relation, more on the link between needs analysis and programme planning, to raise readers' awareness of the multiple conditions that have to be taken into account while sorting and prioritising the data gathered from needs analysis and translating them into programme ideas. Thus the didactic concept behind presenting and discussing the various issues is to foster readers' understanding of the various aspects and types of needs, while progressively adding more information about how, where, from whom, and with which methods needs can be identified. The exercises and tasks are designed to be applied to the same target group. Progressively, from one chapter to the next, other reflections about doing needs analyses and then translating them into programme planning are added.

The book has two parts. Part One (Chapters 2 to 5) covers the various types of adult (learning) needs and provides hints (and methods) on how to identify, analyse, and address these needs. Beginning with the issue of needs analysis in adult education, the first part presents the typical challenges involved in performing such an analysis. It describes the contexts in which these needs can be identified, as well as the specificity of the determined needs, explaining the main methods of identifying them. Moreover, the first

part involves theoretical considerations about the concept and types of needs, the diagnosing of educational needs, and their theoretical understanding.

Part Two (Chapters 6 and 7) focuses on how to develop programmes tailored to the needs identified, illustrating the necessary steps and the factors to be considered, in a practical way. The process of programme planning involves multiple factors, mainly related to institutional aims and capacities, which need to be taken into consideration when designing an educational programme for adults, both in the planning stage and in the stages of implementation and evaluation. Finally, the second part provides theoretical considerations and guidelines for the effective planning of educational programmes for adults.

Chapter 8 offers a number of conclusions, highlighting once more the main issues and controversies about whether or not to perform needs analyses to inform programme planning, pointing out the main ideas presented in the book. For further reflections, clarifications, examples, and points of view, references to important related works are provided in an annotated bibliography.

I would like to offer special thanks to Professor Ekkehard Nuissl at the University of Duisburg-Essen, the coordinator of the European Master in Adult Education programme and chair of the DAAD Programme, for his friendly and constructive feedback while reviewing this book; to Regina Egetenmeyer, the coordinator of the study guide series, for her patience and support while I struggled with dividing my time between other commitments and the finishing of this book; to Carsten Bösel, the copyeditor, for his effort to put my manuscript into 'readable' English; and mainly to my family, for their big understanding and support.

2. The Importance of Needs Analysis and Programme Planning in Adult Education

Needs analysis is both a task and a procedure linked to one of the main characteristics of the field it is set in: freedom of action. The primacy of free action is the premise of the possibility that needs analysis should actually lead to practical results or consequences. That does not necessarily mean that the individual or the organisation having a need must be able to act freely or enable others to act freely on their behalf. The main idea is that needs cannot be standardised or determined a priori by legal or regulative proceedings of any kind.

In capitalist terms, a very close connection is thus created between needs and demand. Demand, to some extent, is a 'manifest', recognisable needs situation already articulated in the market. It is of great importance to anticipate and match labour market and skills needs, and, consequentially, the need for adult and continuing education, in order to enable adults to cope with these needs and challenges.

The unforeseen 2008 financial crisis illustrates the limits of predicting the capacity of individual EU Member States and the European Union itself. The capacity to identify, anticipate, and match future skills and labour market and societal needs is a precondition for education and training systems to generate new skills, to help people re-enter the work force, to enable them to adapt to these needs, and to design suitable programmes in this respect.

Text box 1: 'Improving the Union's capacity for skills assessment, anticipation and matching'

Improving the monitoring and anticipation of labour market and skills requirements is necessary to help people return to the labour market, facilitate the matching with existing vacancies and orientate skill development in order to improve long-term job prospects. A substantial improvement in the Member States' and Union's capacity to forecast, anticipate and match future skills and labour market needs is a precondition for the design of efficient employment, education and training policies and individual career choices.

Source: European Union, 2008, p. 5

In addition, adults' reactions to all of these challenges, their awareness of the need for lifelong learning, and their motivation to engage in (continuing) education require a better understanding of the education and training systems, but also a proactive approach on the part of educational institutions, which have to be able to design efficient and attractive programmes that might stimulate, support, and keep adults learning. That is why, precisely in the field of education, the difference between manifest needs (e.g. of the labour market) and latent needs (e.g. of individuals) is of great importance. These two types of need will be explained in more depth later in this book.

2.1 Decisions of individuals to participate in adult education

Adult education is a voluntary activity; more precisely, participation in organised adult education is, as a matter of principle, based on free will. This is how adult education is different from formal education in all European countries. Participation in the formal education system is mandatory. Non-participation in mandatory educational measures is considered illegal in Europe, and parents who keep their children out of school can be subject to penalties. The basic idea of mandatory schooling resides in the social rule according to which children and young people should be educated until they have reached a certain degree of maturity, allowing them to be able to decide for themselves. Today, this degree of maturity has mostly been set at the age of 18. In most European countries, therefore, adult education is considered to start at this age. In other countries, this particular educational stage is considered to

begin once the individual graduates from the formal school educational system (e.g. Italy, Romania), or once the individual graduates from a vocational school (e.g. Germany).

No matter how the starting point of adult education is defined, the following is always true of adulthood and adult activities: there are no legal obligations to participate in any organised educational measures. The independent and sovereign adult is a key Enlightenment idea, which continues to be embodied in the education system of every democratic European society.

Nevertheless, the aforementioned voluntary character of participating in organised adult education has certain limits once adult individuals set career goals for themselves that can only be achieved by complying with certain legal access rules (or other juridical standards). Admission into certain specialised professions (such as psychotherapist or civil law notary), for example, becomes possible only after having completed a professional degree (which is mostly academic) and only by following measures strictly linked to continuing education. Also, the practice of certain professions (such as medical licensure) is strictly linked to regular participation in specific measures of continuing education. Activities in fields such as health, safety, insurance, and banking are strictly related to and dependent on legally defined obligations to attend training programmes that belong to continuing education. This also applies to commercial activities, such as starting a business in a certain professional field where holding adequate credentials, defined by law and only to be obtained through continuing education, are required in many European countries. A special type of mandatory continuing education is more and more frequently found in the realm of immigration: in a number of European countries, migrants are required – under the threat of expulsion – to attend language-related continuing education classes (Immigration Act, 2004).

Access barriers to organisations (e.g. sports associations, companies) or to certain positions within organisations (e.g. trainer, branch manager) are often stipulated by corporate regulations. Big associations or organisations (such as churches, trade associations, unions, etc.) have their own internal training systems to prepare employees for mastering future or higher-level tasks. Nevertheless, individual or special obligations to engage in adult education may arise beyond what organisations offer in terms of standardised and systemic continuing education. Such cases are to be found in companies that require their employees to attend a certain continuing education measure unless they want to lose their eligibility for promotion or even risk losing their jobs.

The 'voluntary nature' of adult activities, therefore, needs to be considered in a more nuanced light even in adult education. In many ways, adult individuals are more or less ordered, notified, instructed, or asked to engage

in a range of educational activities. Regarding the motivation to participate in adult education – an aspect directly linked to need – there is a heuristically meaningful difference, if only a rough one, between intrinsic and extrinsic motives. The variety of extrinsic requirements to be identified in continuing education, especially in professionally oriented continuing education, does not, however, call into question the principle of voluntary involvement. Adult individuals always comply with these requirements out of their own free will, so as to achieve, to fulfil, to experience, or to be able to do something.

A difference between the intrinsic and extrinsic induction of need may also be found for supra-individual constructs such as associations, organisations, and companies. For example, a company might develop, in and of itself, a need to improve its leadership structure, to create more transparent ways of communication, and to increase production. Then again, that company might have an externally determined development need because of evolving markets, new technologies, and changes in clients' behaviour and demands.

Considering the relation between manifest and latent needs, as well as the one between intrinsic and extrinsic need in adult education, one can draw the conclusion that another difference has to be defined before raising the issue of need from an analytical point of view, namely the difference between 'subjective' and 'objective' need. The individual subject, the individual adult person, has a subjective need that can be induced extrinsically but, nevertheless, emerges from their own free will. This need does not always have to be manifest, it can also exist in its latent form until it becomes manifest in specific situations (e.g. when confronted with certain educational opportunities; cf. Chapter 4, but also Chapter 3, for conceptual clarifications).

This type of need, however, is not identical to the 'objective' need, which is always defined for a larger 'unit' and is oriented towards the requests and requirements of individual subjects. This 'objective' educational need is to be noticed in companies, regions, states, countries, and organisations – each featuring their own goals and standards, which are to be implemented, materialised, and approved by their members, inhabitants, and so forth. From one point of view, need is an individual category, providing information about subjective interests and goals; yet from another point of view, it is also a supra-individual category, determining a communication and tension ratio between the superior units and single individuals by using goal and target definitions (this differentiation is explored in more detail in Chapter 3).

Altogether, one can still determine a structural and control (or verification) frame as far as the existence of needs is concerned. Figure 1 shows the tri-dimensional nature of need and its conditions, depicted as a cube.