



## **Case study on the cooperation between Universities and Trade Unions**

**Topic: the Accreditation of prior and experiential learning (AP(E)L) of TU activists**

**CGT and the University of Versailles St Quentin-en-Yvelines(UVSQ), France**

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Date : May-June 2009

### **General context:**

Among the existing relationships between TUs and universities in the fields of research and education in France, our contribution concerns more specifically the Accreditation of prior and experiential learning. This global validation process in France, existing in no other country, represents a fundamental control lever for lifelong learning. Our common work for the TULIP Project relates to the validation of competence acquired by TU officials during their activities and its translation into a university degree.

The Accreditation of Prior and Experiential Learning (APEL) in France is an individual right registered in the law of social modernization of January 17, 2002 and resumed in the national interprofessional agreement ( ANI) of September 20, 2003 on the access of employees to lifelong learning, which has been signed by all social partners. This validation allows an individual to obtain, totally or partially, a degree or a professional certificate listed in the National Register of Qualifications (Répertoire National des Certifications Professionnelles, RNCP).

The Continuing Education Departments are responsible for the implementation of the AP(E)L at universities.

We can count about 10,000 advisers to industrial tribunals, 12000 managers in Social Security centres and 400,000 staff representatives, members of work's councils. The permanent officials are very few and many of them have only some hours of delegation depending on the size of the company, and their mandates are conditioned by the results of elections.

Our contribution is based on four types of experience:

1. the first one relates to a method implemented in a Labour Institute,
2. the second one describes a regional development,
3. the third one represent some examples of individual cases/independent pathways,
4. and finally we present a device developed in our university in order to take into account the citizen experience.

## **I. The work in a Regional Labour Institute**

### **I.1 The goals**

The work undertaken at the Labour Institute of Midi-Pyrénées region in January 2007 (see bibliography - Yannick Le Quentrec: « the Validation of experience of TU activists: a recognition of TU activism » ) will enable clarification of the fields of competence of the TU experience, the compatible university domains and the development of a coaching-advising system. This training – action has the following objectives:

- To identify and describe the fields of competence covered by the variety and plurality of TU experience
- To elaborate a general referential of TU competence
- To list in the curricula the degrees which could be in line with the TU experience
- To work with university staff responsible for the selected degrees
- To inform and make aware to the Trade Unionists the AP(E)L opportunities

This method was achieved with 13 TU activists representing the variety of situations, with participation of academic staff, AP(E)L practitioners, as well as a team of teachers and researchers.

### **I.2 The TU activist competence**

There are four main roles of the TU activist: spokesperson, facilitator, analyst and administrator.

From the work of the Centre of Studies and Research on Qualifications ( CEREQ), we can define the following typology:

- The transverse competence: to listen and to express, to organize and to decide, to inform, to set up files, to create and to participate in a democratic proceeding.
- The competence related to the internal environment: to develop, to manage, to coach and to teach, to inform, to inquire, to manage conflicts, to represent his/her organisation internally.

- The competence related to the external environment: to build alliances at national and international level, to inform about the positions and the actions of his/her organisation, to claim and to bargain, to represent his/her organisation externally.

### **I.3 The associated degrees**

The listed competences enable definition of possible university domains of validation:

human resources management, coaching, advice, communication, teaching, employment /labour law, vocational integration, environment monitoring, accounting and finance management.

The TU members consider that this list translates only partially their acquired skills. They often cannot separate what 'they do' from what 'they are'. The TU activist finds it difficult to use "I " instead of "We", to define his/her individual role in the common work. So, the main qualities related to this particularity could not be listed among the competences.

The TU members insist on competence related to social knowledge, which is not validated enough in the courses framework.

Nobody is considering the TU activity as a job.

### **I.4 The conclusions**

The competence of TU experience cannot be separated from the condition of being a TU activist. A lot of competences must be externalized.

The transferability of TU experience remains a complex problem.

The ideas, the values, the convictions at the origin of TU commitment are, though fundamental, but translated and taken into account in the courses frameworks with difficulty.

The coaching-advising system seems generally to be fundamental in the AP(E)L method, and more necessary in the case of the TU activists.

## **II Regional development of the AP(E)L in Rhône – Alpes**

### **II.1. The context**

An agreement between the State, the Rhône-Alpes region and the social partners defines the conditions of application of regional policy in favour of AP(E)L development, which opens new perspectives for this validation in comparison with the Validation of vocational abilities (VAP).

The TUs who signed this agreement wished to try a device dedicated to their TU activists, in order to take into account the experience acquired during their TU activities through AP(E)L.

## II.2 The objective

To allow TU activists to identify their experience, in order to value them within the AP(E)L method.

## II.3 The methodology

It is using the method of competence assessment (analysis of competence, tools and concepts). This method takes into account the results of the experimentation on information and consulting within AP(E)L, which has been implemented since 2002 by the regional CIBC (Inter institutional Centre for Competence Assessment).

Within the experimentation, different sessions of individual work are planned (in total, 8 sessions of 2 hours) in the CIBC centre, allocated between interviews with 2 advisers in competence assessment and individual autonomous work (realization of tests, production of different works...). The duration of this experimentation is 4 half-days for 6 months.

## II.4 The contents

The personalized advice has as its objective to coach the TU activist for starting the AP(E)L method.

The program of following actions was proposed to the beneficiaries:

1. ***The analysis of the method and the pathway of a candidate***, with a check on eligibility of his/her experience with a view to AP(E)L.
2. ***The portfolio of competence***
  - main vocational experience, which could be taken into account by the AP(E)L,
  - draft of a **competence sheet**,
  - list of the degree(s) related to this competence.
3. ***The professional project analysis***, with an approach to the “transferability of competence” aspects.
4. ***Draft and editing of the AP(E)L project (strategy, action plan and contact to the validation body)***.

## II.5 Profile of participants

**The motivations** of TU activists form integral parts of their TU commitment. To think about their professional evolution, a reclassification, or a change of this commitment calls to their feeling of identity and of membership and, for this reason, can develop in several of them resistance regarding implementation of AP(E)L.

### **The specificity of the question of competence at TU activist:**

As the activists attempt to remain « a part of a collective », they may have difficulty in recognizing their personal real share in the achieved work and to measure the capital of competence.

### **Two types of positions :**

1. *General administrators*, corresponding to logistic management (secretary, treasurer, agent for development). *The general administrators* work in the inter-professional field; they often have not very deepened, but general-purpose competence, without developing particular vocational skills.
2. *Specialists/experts*, having specific competence in their domain ( e.g. regional person responsible for the training of TU activists, adviser to the industrial tribunal...).

## **II.6 TU competence**

Considering the profiles of the activists participating in this action, the TU competence was listed in 4 big domains, covering various fields of knowledge:

### **1. Defense of the employee**

- a. staff representative and TU representative,
- b. adviser to the industrial tribunal

### **2. Involvement and consulting in company**

- a. Economic and social,
- b. Employment,
- c. Safety prevention

### **3. Training-research**

- a. Responsible for study,
- b. Learning Design,
- c. Teacher/trainer

### **4. Management**

- a. Administrative organization,
- b. Staff management, management of competence,
- c. Organization of events

The typical positions connected to different fields of knowledge have been identified; each position has been analyzed in terms of domains of activity, related knowledge and required vocational and personal abilities.

## **II.7 Constraints regarding AP(E)L**

From the TU activists:

- constraint in finding the availability needed to undertake and achieve the AP(E)L method,
- constraints related to individual motivation and cognitive aspects (identity reorganization, possible conflict of loyalty or change resistance when confronted with the passage to another socio professional category...).

From the TU organizations:

- difficulty in ensuring the human resources needed to support the AP(E)L step of a TU activist, without incidence in the functioning of the union,
  - AP(E)L can increase the mobility of TU activists and conversely reduce their TU engagement.

From the assessors (academic staff):

- possible cultural even ideological resistances toward the AP(E)L philosophy
- constraint to assess prior skills and abilities acquired outside the university.

## **II.8 Conclusions**

From 16 beneficiaries within the framework of this experimentation,

- 1/3 have validated a postgraduate university degree with preliminary resumption of studies,
- 1/3 entered continuing education,
- 1/3 are still at the stage of reflection.

At personal level:

A number of participants think they will continue their TU activity, with an evolution towards more important responsibilities. Others are directed outside.

## II.9 Observations and comments

- We consider the reserve of certain academics to the idea of granting a degree without having studied at the university, i.e. only from the experience. At the same time, as the result of the experimentation, 2 beneficiaries, one of which had only a CAP (Vocational Training Qualification) and the other who had no diploma at all, could obtain a Masters degree through this validation.
- The university degrees were validated within the framework of the VAP (Validation of vocational abilities) and not through AP(E)L. The method of the Validation of vocational abilities implemented at the universities is confronted with a « whole or nothing » approach: the validation of registration at Masters level does not imply the validation of Bachelor or any other previous degree.
- Even if the results of the experimentation are mitigated (see the constraints above), the beneficiaries consider that the method was profitable for them through the possibility of becoming aware that their activities generated competence which may be valued.
- The TUs remain interested in this experimentation, because it asks basic questions about the renewal of the generations of TU activists, about the sense of the current TU engagement, and about the social utility of competences generated by trade unionism.

The Inter institutional Centre for Assessments of Competence ( CIBC) will continue working with the participants following their demand and advising them during their careers.

## III Individual experience

### A) Candidate 1

#### III.A.1 The profile:

1. **Staff representative for 15 years**, the candidate was a **TU representative** and a member of the Committee for Safety prevention and Work Conditions ( C.H.S.C.T) for **8 years**.

Competence related to these responsibilities (as described by the candidate):

- To be always aware of the legal and case law evolution,
- A strong attention to and supervision of the strict application of law,
- A permanent negotiation (wages, advantages, 35 hours etc.),
- Drafting of very specific legal letters (to the Employer or Administrations),
- Defense of the employees in any event.

2. **Permanent legal adviser in Labour Law within the TU** for approximately **5 years**.

Competence related to these responsibilities (as described by the candidate):

- Coordination between the different stakeholders (Lawyer, TUs, Jurists, etc.),

- Drafting/editing of articles for the media,
- A good elocution to be able to bargain and meet the audio-visual media,
- Drafting of mails for submission to the President of the European Parliament and its deputies.

### 3. TU defender for 4 years

Competence related to these responsibilities (as described by the candidate):

- Preparation and drafting of many legal documents (Reports, Pleadings),
- Pleading in court in front of lawyers (Conciliation boards, industrial tribunals).

4. The candidate is currently **an employee advisor in the Departmental Labour Direction**, with double approval: the one from the Ministry of Labour and employment and the other from the Prefect.

Competence related to these responsibilities (as described by the candidate):

- Bargaining and mediation between employers and employees
- Preparation of detailed and pointed legal reports for the stakeholders (Employees Courts),
- **Work** in cooperation with certain company doctors.

### III.A.2 The AP(E)L step :

Holder of a Bachelor's degree in private law obtained as a learner-employee and after having followed the Master course and having prepared a report on " moral harassing ", the candidate wishes to obtain the complete validation of Master « Employment relationships, negotiation and organization » at the University of Metz. He is registered in parallel at the Institute of the Legal Studies of the University of Strasbourg and at the Legal Training Centre, but he has difficulties to follow, as a learner-employee, all the courses with assiduity, because after the Bachelor's level, he cannot benefit any more from the university derogatory mode.

B) Candidate 2

**III.B.1 The profile:**

CGT permanent official

**Learning pathway**

Studies : 2005 : Master's degree in international economics and management with speciality: socio-economic expertise and realization of organisational changes

1984 : State certificate 1st degree of canoeing

1980 : Training for directors of Vacation centres

1973 : Baccalauréat (secondary school diploma) of type F1 (mechanics).

Vocational Training :

**2004 : AP(E)L of TU activists**

2002 : Assessment of competence

1991 : Training in sales (customers' behavior study, diffusion of tourist products)

1991 : Training in management (balance sheet, profit and loss account, preparation of budget, staff management)

1990 : Training in management of collective assets

TU training : 1987 : Confederal TU training course on the work's councils

1984 : TU training at second level

1980 : TU training at first level

1972 : Federal training for instructors in canoeing

**Vocational experience**

**1980/currently : TU activist**

- Defense of employees (setting up cases and legal defense)
- Legal adviser within the staff representatives or the work's councils
- Teacher/trainer
- Implementation of contents for different specific trainings
- Participation to different local and national working groups on the following topics: living environment /economic development /leisure activities
- International cooperation
- Manager of local union

2000/2004: Director of association for advising, leisure activities and social tourism in Saône et Loire region (ACLTS)

1991/currently : President of the district's TU Association

1986/2004:	First vice president of the National Union of Associations for Tourism in the Rhône Alpes region ( UNAT)
1983/1986:	Director of the international festival of movies on canoeing to Vénissieux
2003/ currently :	Administrator of the Economic and Social Council to Communay and to the secondary school of Givors
1982/1986 :	Member of the committee for employment in the south Rhône region
1978/1986 :	Administrator of the municipal sports office to Vénissieux

### III.B.2 The AP(E)L method

Two-steps action:

- a. Competence assessment
- b. Validation of prior and experiential learning

Where the third step was very quickly added:

- c. an academic year

But in all the cases, the most important thing was: **to find a job.**

The candidate is mainly autodidact with two diplomas of level IV (secondary school degree).

Five following sectors had been identified for retraining after AP(E)L:

1. Manager of local development, operational manager or manager in charge of studies
2. Manager of social economics
3. Director of a small company or a small unit
4. Administrator of leisure activities equipment
5. Teacher, trainer

Degree aimed for through AP(E)L: Master in international economics and actor's strategy in the following domains: socioeconomic expertise and realization of organizational change.

Result: Master's degree obtained (i.e. a diploma of level 1, with a diploma of level 4 at the beginning), after an additional academic year.

## IV The mechanism developed inside of the UVSQ

### IV.1 Recognition at institutional level

TUs are represented in the authorities of the university, in particular in the Continuing Education council.

A particular effort must be made in order to represent them in the juries of AP(E)L.

## IV.2 Teaching units of « Citizen activities »

The university set up the teaching units validated by 9 ECTS, which allow a clear recognition of TU activists competence. The programme of these teaching units:

- The first part relates to the legal aspects supervising the associative sector: it informs about the law of 1901, the structure and the functioning of the association (the role of the board of directors, the office, the general assembly, etc.), the current regulations as well as the relations (rights / commitments / responsibilities) to different actors of the associative sector. This part informs also on the various institutional environments created by the authorities and the place of associations in society.

- The second part of the course is about economic specificities defining the relations between associations and the economic/commercial sector. From an economic point of view, the association for leisure activities is creating, consuming, managing and distributing. The economic aspects of these associations are studied according to four additional axes: the internal economic functioning of the association, its economic relationships with, on one hand its private sponsors and on the other hand, its public partners, and finally the role of the association in the leisure activities world.

- The third part consists of practical implementation of the knowledge acquired in academic courses within the association reality.

## IV.3 The competence validated by the teaching units

The competence to be acquired:

- to invest oneself voluntarily in actions related to citizenship aspects;
- to create and organize these actions;
- to set up the needed legal structures;
- to find and manage the available means

***They must allow :***

- to create legally an association;
- to put on the leading authorities;
- to introduce a democratic life into its choices and decisions;
- to develop an action plan;
- to assure the financial and material management;
- to assure an effective communication;
- to invest oneself personally in the main activities of the association.

In summary, we define here *two types of additional competence*:

**1. theoretical knowledge:**

- on the law steering the associations,
- on the tax system of associations,
- on the labour law,

**2. experiential knowledge /skills attested by:**

- actions realized within the university framework;
- actions carried out in outside associations ;
- activities characterized by a voluntary engagement.

This competence will translate:

- a voluntary engagement;
- the citizen proceeding;
- the exercise of the associative democracy.

## **V Conclusion**

A common work between universities and TUs must allow for the recognition of competence acquired during TU activity.

The main difficulty is to translate an individual experience into a mainly collective method.

The work carried out is helping to list the acquired competence depending on the types of position/activity.

The recognition of the 'citizen attitude' in initial education and in lifelong learning will become accepted as evidence in the university. This validation allows a person to obtain ECTS.

Much work still remains to make people aware of AP(E)L opportunities, and the TULIP project represents the starting base for a closer cooperation between CGT (French TU) and the University of Versailles Saint-Quentin for coaching – advising TU officials in the description and the validation of their TU competence.