



Descriptive Paper from the Learners' Perspective

Topic: the Accreditation of prior and experiential learning (AP(E)L) of Trade Union activists

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

Contributors : R. Bagorski (CGT) and E. Polès, A. Nicolas and F. Rogard (UVSQ)

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General context of the case study:

Among the existing relationships between Trade Unions (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. Motivation of TU activists as regards the AP(E)L method

The implementation of AP(E)L applied to the TU activists also approaches the issue of career evolution, as it involves skills identification with a view to taking an APEL step. It thus involves, on one hand, the question of motivations and, on the other hand, the problem of skills to be assessed.

The interviews that have been conducted showed the possible refusal by certain TU activists to join with the logic of competitiveness that is generated by companies.

They thus seek a third position often offered by trade-unionism, which makes it possible to address simultaneously two fundamental requirements:

- A. the possibility of influencing the decisions regarding employment and professional life (without taking a “leader’s” position in the company),
- B. the need of thinking within the group logic, collective working, without necessarily developing a personal ambition.

These are two main ways that TU activists can adopt in working on an ideal of justice and equity.

Other motivations make up integral parts of the TU member’s commitment and constitute as such some elements of the TU activist identity:

- Altruism: the activist is often acting through generosity and is motivated to resolve the difficulties of his/her colleagues or members of his/her circle
- Interest: to be at the heart of fundamental information concerning the company and/or labour law, which can contribute to his/her personal development
- Recognition: having to exercise the functions which sometimes extend his/her potential, the activist finds in their TU commitment the possibility of mobilizing an intellectual dynamic not used before
- The opportunity of revenge, which could be taken with a view of the company, the managers, school or life, through responsibility previously inaccessible
- Advantages related to the exercise of TU mandate: flexibility of working time (for example hours of delegation taken without having to report)
- Protection: the statutes of TU representative and staff representative make dismissal more difficult.

The thinking about their career, retraining, possible changes in the nature of their commitments, calls to their feeling of identity and membership, and can require deep personal reorganization and decisions.

It is thus not surprising to notice in certain Trade Unionists the development of some resistance before taking an AP(E)L step.

II. Specific skills/competence

The TU activists that have been interviewed are used to remaining “a part of a group”. It follows that even if they have managerial and decision-maker’s positions, they have difficulty

recognizing their real individual role and their personal part in the work done and thus their capital of competence related to it.

So the work of defining their competence is strongly affected when it is a question of creating a personal portfolio.

In the reflections of TU activists, the individual "Me" can be easily submerged in the collective "We".

The TU activists often confuse their engagement and their position, so they sometimes have difficulties in explaining their competence in their AP(E)L application.

III. Feedback from the Trade Unionists

Comments have included:

« To have difficulty to pass from “we” to “me”, because “we” adds a lot in comparison to “me” »

« We are specialists of nothing, but we are able to do many things »

« The TU competence is difficult to explain because it touches everything »

« The APL may give access to a life after the TU activity »

« It is impossible to find my original job, because it was suppressed; furthermore, I do not wish to do it any more, because I evolved with the TU activity »

« For me personally, I want to stop my TU activity, I would like to return to study now after having this experience »

« I am not at all sure of my capacity to do another thing than the TU activity »

« The APL should not be a tool of management of crisis but management of the Trade Unionists pathways ».

IV. Constraints

Independently of the constraints that the APL method represents for TU organisations (restriction of number of workers) and universities (cultural resistances), the TU activists note two major obstacles:

1. The availability:

- At professional level: deeply involved in his/her TU engagements, turned, as we saw before, towards the "common cause", the TU activist does not easily decide to spend his/her time for a quite personal step.
- At private life level: by implementing an APEL step, the activist has to ask for a supplementary effort from his/her family.

2. The Motivation issue:

The achievement of an APL step can bring confrontation to the life of the TU activist, for example it may require **integration into another social and occupational category** (to pass for example to a managerial position). He/she then has to accept this may involve being taken off /leaving his/her initial group, and facing what they may consider as a **conflict of loyalty**.