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What does success in lifelong learning mean?

Hello, my name is Amaury Daele. I work at the Haute École Pédagogique of Vaud (HEP) in Lausanne, Switzerland. I am a professor and I am responsible for certified continuing education programmes, i.e. continuing education programmes leading to a diploma for educators, such as school principals, school mediators, school librarians, etc., all of which come after the initial teacher training diploma.

I am very interested in research on, obviously, the professional development of teachers or educational staff in general. At the moment, my colleagues and I are interested in the question of success.

What does it mean to succeed in lifelong learning? Well, in the literature, we find quite a lot on this topic in higher education, in higher education training or lifelong learning, as well as in vocational training. Everyone knows what success is, in principle. Succeeding in your studies means passing your exams and getting a degree at the end. Then you can say you've succeeded. That's what we call academic success. You can measure it using lots of parameters: the rate of progression to the next year, the repeat rate, the validation of training credits, the number of diplomas awarded, etc. I mean, it's quantitative and a bit formal, let's say, objective.

But behind that, when it comes to lifelong learning, with adults who continue to develop professionally throughout their career, success isn't quite the same thing. Yes, it's nice to have a degree, but most of the time, these people are not required to get that degree. They choose it. Sometimes they pursue a degree because they are very interested in the subject...

People who train in school mediation or who want to be responsible for the Health Centre in their school (we have that in Switzerland) are people who do it partly for the sake of it. So academic success doesn't necessarily mean much to them. My colleagues and I were interested, not so much in academic success, because there's a lot of research on that, on initial training, university education, etc., but in educational success or professional success.

When you take part in a training as a teacher, when do you consider you have succeeded? Did I succeed because I feel I have developed new skills that I can apply in my classroom? Or did I succeed because I enjoyed the training with my colleagues? Or because it enabled me to get a new job in my school or in another school? So we have been looking into this, particularly from the perspective of people who are learning and developing professionally.

But we also examined this topic from the perspective of trainers, specifically trainers of teachers in lifelong learning. How do they operate? What professional practices do they employ, and how do they prepare their training programmes to support not only academic success, but also the educational and professional success of the participants? This is a very interesting area. It is an ongoing research project... We will have more precise and concrete results next year. We are going to publish some findings, but the initial results are very interesting because we interviewed teachers who participate in lifelong learning programmes and we also met with trainers.

And the trainers, for example, told us: "For me, the participants in my training course have succeeded if they feel comfortable with the new skills they have acquired. Another trainer told us: 'I make sure that once the participants leave the training course, they find ways to use their new skills in their school, possibly sharing them with colleagues and finding support from their management.'" This is something that can actually be learned in a school.



It's very interesting from the perspective of both trainers and learners, i.e. teachers who come for professional development. We realised that there were different reasons for enrolling in courses. I already mentioned: for the sake of the craft itself, or to be with colleagues you get on well with.

But success goes far beyond academic achievement. Success means feeling more comfortable in your job, feeling that you have developed your professional identity, i.e. being able to confirm the skills you already possess. All these elements contribute to and enrich the usual definition of purely academic success, so to speak.

For adults who are learning, for professionals who continue to learn, this is a matter that goes far beyond pure academic success.