

Wittorski, Richard

Professionalisation and the development of competences in education and training

Cohen-Scali, Valérie [Hrsg.]: *Competence and competence development*. Opladen : Verlag Barbara Budrich 2012, S. 31-51. - (Study guides in adult education)



Quellenangabe/ Reference:

Wittorski, Richard: Professionalisation and the development of competences in education and training - In: Cohen-Scali, Valérie [Hrsg.]: *Competence and competence development*. Opladen : Verlag Barbara Budrich 2012, S. 31-51 - URN: urn:nbn:de:0111-pedocs-103422 - DOI: 10.25656/01:10342

<https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0111-pedocs-103422>

<https://doi.org/10.25656/01:10342>

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Study Guides
in Adult Education

Valerie Cohen-Scali (ed.)

Competence and Competence Development

Barbara Budrich Publishers



Competence and Competence Development

Study Guides in Adult Education

edited by

Regina Egetenmeyer

Valerie Cohen-Scali (ed.)

Competence and Competence Development

Barbara Budrich Publishers
Opladen, Berlin & Toronto 2012

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This book is available as a free download from www.barbara-budrich.net (<http://dx.doi.org/10.3224/86649462>). A paperback version is available at a charge. The page numbers of the open access edition correspond with the paperback edition.

ISBN 978-3-86649-462-6
eISBN 978-3-86649-514-2
DOI 10.3224/86649462

Barbara Budrich Publishers
Stauffenbergstr. 7. D-51379 Leverkusen Opladen, Germany

86 Delma Drive. Toronto, ON M8W 4P6 Canada
www.barbara-budrich.net

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from
Die Deutsche Bibliothek (The German Library) (<http://dnb.d-nb.de>)

Institutional Editor: University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany
Jacket illustration by disegno, Wuppertal, Germany – www.disenjo.de
Copy-editing: Carsten Bösel

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Preface

In recent decades, the term competence has become a keyword in the international discussion about education. This international discussion was accompanied by several national discussions, which mostly had a different emphasis compared to the international context. Especially in the European Union, competences became the central term in discussions about learning outcomes. Here, competences emerged as a counter-concept to the idea of qualifications – which are strictly bound to (national) educational systems. As the European Union, in the Maastricht Treaty, has agreed not to harmonise the educational systems of its member states, national differences tend to become more pronounced; thus qualifications cannot bring transparency and comparability to European education. Competence, in contrast, is a concept that can be used to compare people's knowledge and skills across national education and training systems.

To look at competences rather than qualifications means to shift the focus from educational input (length of a learning experience, type of institution, etc.) to the outcomes of learning processes. Competences as learning outcomes have nowadays been defined in almost all educational programmes. Furthermore, referring to competences highlights the fact that they can also be developed outside of educational programmes. Therefore, a variety of contexts became relevant that enable or constrain competence development. These contexts include the workplace, social class, family, and friends, for example. As a consequence, the validation – that is, the evaluation, recognition, and certification – of competences acquired outside of educational systems became relevant. To address this issue, a variety of methods and instruments were developed throughout Europe. On this basis, competences can support transparency and comparability in education and lifelong learning in Europe.

What is more, the term *competence* also serves to introduce a new didactic approach to adult education. The competence discussion helps strengthen

individuals' self-responsibility and self-efficacy as they engage in their learning processes. In other words, it is up to the learners to decide whether, where, when, and how they learn or not. Adult education programmes can merely provide contexts to facilitate learning processes and stimulate motivation. This is especially relevant in the education of adults, since adults are much more independent than children in their decisions about what and when to learn.

In this study guide, Valérie Cohen-Scali, Alain Kokosowski, Thierry Piot, and Richard Wittorski introduce the topic of competence development with a special focus on the working context. They give an insight into the Western backgrounds of the competence discussion and show the consequences of this discussion with respect to professionalisation and competence development in adult education. Furthermore, they present a variety of instruments for validating and evaluating competences. Finally, they raise the issue of competence management in adult education and highlight some of the changes in vocational education and training brought on by the competence discussion.

All of the authors are French researchers with special expertise in the area of competences. The study guide, therefore, gives an insight both into the European discussion and into the French discussion about competences. Valérie Cohen-Scali developed this study guide during her guest professorship at the University of Duisburg-Essen. By bringing on board her French colleagues, she created an interdisciplinary team of experts from psychology, human resource management, and education. As a result, the study guide provides an interdisciplinary perspective on the topic. Thanks go to Valérie Cohen-Scali for coordinating this study guide and to all the authors for their contributions to this volume.

Regina Egetenmeyer

1. Introduction

Valérie Cohen-Scali

Since the 1980s, questions around people in the workplace have been addressed more from the point of view of competences than the time match between an individual and a particular role. Approaching work through competences appears to be at odds with a tradition which conceives of work as the association between an individual and a task. This traditional conception of people at work emerged with the development of industrialisation in Europe and the United States in the nineteenth century. It was profoundly influenced by the principles of Scientific Management developed by Frederick Taylor, an engineer, who was invited into factories in the United States in order to help them introduce a more rational way of organising their work. Taylor's primary preoccupation was with the best way of doing a particular job, what an appropriate workload would be, and what fair payment was, with the aim of increasing workers' efficiency and performance. He carried out numerous studies (Kanigel, 1997) of the work stations of manual workers and made recommendations in order to provide workers with the most appropriate tools for the way they worked.

This conception of work as an activity was strengthened in the twentieth century with the advent of the Second World War, which prompted an acceleration in the development of occupational psychology. Military activities led, on the one hand, to the development of psychological evaluation tools to be used on soldiers, and on the other, to the creation of military equipment which was easier to handle and better suited to the morphology and cognitive abilities of its users. Later, social conditions at work came under intense scrutiny, addressing questions such as motivation, job satisfaction and supervision. Nonetheless, work as an activity continued to be perceived in terms of the relationship between the individual and the task.

This may have seemed relatively well suited to a context of stable industrial production, a booming socio-economic environment, and homogeneous demand. The 1970s are associated with the first world economic crisis linked to an increase in the price of fossil fuels. This was accompanied by a harshening of the socio-economic environment and an increase in unemploy-

ment in Western societies. Businesses needed to be more vigilant about the changes occurring in a more uncertain and complex environment. They also needed to prove that they could be more responsive and more flexible. Many national governments focused on vocational training to tackle the changes taking place. This meant training employees with inadequate skills and qualifications to carry out increasingly varied and changing activities, which often required a more extensive range of cognitive abilities.

From this point onwards, the traditional conception of work as a relationship between an individual and a relatively simple task no longer seemed appropriate. Researchers in sociology, psychology, and training reflected on other paradigms which might be better suited to defining the new reality. The term *competences* gradually came into common use. It was initially used by Chomsky in 1960 in relation to linguistics, as a document published by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) explains:

The use of the term 'competence' goes back to Noam Chomsky and was related to his creation of the theory of generative grammar as well as being part of his contributions to linguistics and cognitive psychology ... Chomsky distinguishes between linguistic competence as the speaker/hearer's knowledge of his language on the one hand and linguistic performance as 'the actual use of language in concrete situations' on the other hand. (Cedefop, 2009b, p. 108)

The term *competences* is used to describe the actual use of a particular aptitude in a given context. In the working environment, the term *competences* emphasises on the one hand, the role of the specific context of a particular activity as a determinant of the way a worker will approach a given task, and on the other, highlights the fact that work is essentially an individual and/or collective process of problem solving. According to Weinert, implementing competences in the workplace relies on the use of several processes: 'ability, knowledge, understanding, skill, action, experience, motivation' (Winterton, Delamare-Le Deist, & Stringfellow, 2006, p. 34).

Two terms are now commonly used in adult education: competence and competency. According to Eraut, there is a subtle difference between the two:

There is a distinction mostly in the American literature between the term 'competence' which is given a generic or holistic meaning and refers to a person's overall capacity, and the term 'competency', which refers to specific capabilities. However even the word competency can be used either in a direct performance-related sense: a competency is an element of vocational competence, a performance capability needed by workers in a specified occupational area or simply to describe any piece of knowledge or skill that might be construed as relevant. (Eraut, 1996, p. 179)

Other, more specific shades of meaning are also found in the literature. For example, instead of generic competences, there are references to key competences:

Key competences are context-independent, applicable and effective across different institutional settings, occupations and tasks. These typically include basal competences, such as literacy, numeracy, general education; methodological competences, like problem solving, IT skills, communication skills, including writing and presentation skills; and judgement competences, such as critical thinking. (Winterton, Delamare-Le Deist, Stringfellow, 2006, p. 33)

A series of other terms used in the literature on competences are defined in the box below.

Keywords: Knowledge, understanding, and capacities

Wittorski (see Chapter 3) defines a number of concepts similar to competences: knowledge (theoretical, action, and professional), understanding, and capacities.

A piece of knowledge can be defined as a socially validated and communicable statement. It is therefore a descriptive or explanatory statement about a given reality. Knowledge can be differentiated in a number of ways:

- Knowledge is described as theoretical when it is established and recognised by a given academic and cultural community at a given time (certain laws of fundamental physics, for example) as a dominant phenomenon, based on a *truth criterion*. Knowledge of this kind is disseminated through encyclopedias, textbooks, and specialist publications in the place and at the time concerned (in the form of slate tablets, papyrus or parchment rolls, papers or books, or files).
- Knowledge can be described as 'action' knowledge when a social community (made up of people who engage in the same activity) decide to validate a statement describing a sequence of actions judged, as a dominant phenomenon, to be 'effective' (*the criterion here is its effectiveness for action*, whilst the challenge is to organise effective local practices and produce a *social identity*).
- Knowledge can be described as 'professional' when an actual or prospective professional community decides to validate a statement describing a sequence of actions judged, as a dominant phenomenon, to be 'distinctive and legitimate' in order to have it acknowledged and recognised in the social arena (the criterion here is that of legitimacy and better recognition in the selected arena, whilst the challenge lies in social intelligibility and the production

of a *professional identity*). Knowledge therefore has a very strong social dimension, combined with an identified or codified process of formalisation.

The judgement or validation criteria mentioned here are not exclusive, but are dominant criteria for each type of knowledge (some theoretical knowledge, for example, may also be validated according to an effectiveness criterion).

Understanding, however, is a social construct which refers both to the process of internalisation and assimilation (transformation) by the individual of the knowledge and/or information passed on to them or which they contribute to producing, and the result of this process. From this point of view, understanding is on the one hand, the process (and the product) of comprehension and memory (i.e. what the individual retains in qualitative and quantitative terms of the knowledge passed on to them), and on the other, the process (and the product) of drawing conclusions from their actions by the individual, which constitute the value they derive from their experience. In this last case, experience, in the sense of 'known' experience, lies more in the subject identifying their modalities of action and the results they produce. Experience is therefore constructed primarily by a process which consists of deriving understanding from one's actions. Understanding therefore has a much stronger subjective dimension.

In the same way that there is a close link between competence and identity, there is a close relationship between understanding, knowledge, and identity. Effectively, knowledge and understanding constitute a communicative situation about or for actions and people, and act to some degree as 'markers' and 'foils' for identity.

Capacities are social constructs which describe a relatively transversal ability to take action. Capacities represent an acquired potential to take action: they are not in use at the point at which they are described but are nonetheless available to be brought into play when needed.

Whilst the notion of competence and research into competences is now widespread, particularly in the context of studies carried out by the European Union (published by Cedefop) in the area of Vocational Education and Training (VET), it must be said that guides to this area aimed particularly at students are rare. The aim of this study guide is to provide European students with an overview of competences and their development, as far as possible from a European perspective. Its objective is therefore both to describe the main theoretical developments in relation to the concept of competences, and to underline the way in which the European Union deals with the question of

competences at both a reflective and practical level in order to support the development of qualifications. The guide has been written by a number of French authors specialised in adult education and training, and tackles the question of competences from a number of different and complementary points of view, with an emphasis on VET professionals and activities.

Chapter 2 describes recent changes in the working environment that explain why competence-based approaches now appear to be particularly relevant in adult education.

Chapter 3 addresses competences from a theoretical perspective, given the imperatives of professionalisation for individuals and the continuous emergence of new activities.

Chapter 4 addresses the question of the transmission of competences and learning in the workplace, with a presentation of professional didactics.

Chapter 5 discusses options for evaluating and validating competences, identifying the evaluation methodologies and validation practices currently in use in various European countries.

Chapter 6 outlines the main features of management practices in relation to competences, which are currently emerging as a recent but major concern in major European businesses.

Chapter 7 focuses on changes in employment in adult education and training and the consequences of these changes on the competences of professionals.

The guide is designed to enable students to work independently or as a group, both inside or outside the classroom, by referring to the suggested exercises and tasks at the end of each chapter. The bibliography lists a large number of English publications and documents to help students gain a more detailed understanding of the theoretical aspects or explore practical illustrations and examples implemented in a number of European countries.

3. Professionalisation and the Development of Competences in Education and Training

*Richard Wittorski*¹

The word *competence* in relation to training and working practices appears to be closely associated with the word *professionalisation*. Why has this association come about? The main reason is probably to do with the fact that adult education is supposed to prepare people as effectively as possible for employment, a return to employment, or a change of career. Its main focus is therefore on professional ‘traits’ which can be used directly and effectively to manage a particular professional situation. As a result, it is hardly surprising that there is a close association between competence and professionalisation. The word *competence* also carries positive connotations of operational effectiveness and efficiency in relation to action. European and international texts increasingly emphasise the need to professionalise the provision of adult education in conjunction with the promotion of competence frameworks (for example, the European framework of basic competences), which are used to define learning objectives more clearly. The fact that competence frameworks have ‘come back with a vengeance’ is linked to this approach. Furthermore, as soon as any reference is made to professionalisation, increasing importance is immediately placed on the work situation or, in a broader sense, on the activity, in relation to the development of competences. According to what is now a well-established conception, competences cannot be taught but are developed by engaging in the activity as closely as possible.

The aim of this chapter is therefore to help readers gain a better understanding, initially, of the meanings of the word *professionalisation* and those which link it particularly to the term *competence*, and secondly, to present what is known about the ways in which competences are developed through engaging in a particular activity. Thirdly, we will explore the idea that if professionalisation and the development of competences are closely linked, the

1 This chapter focuses on professionalisation and refers to numerous French publications, given the extensive research carried out in this area in France. It draws heavily on two previous publications by the same author: Wittorski, R. (2007). *Professionnalisation et développement professionnel*. Paris: L'Harmattan, and Wittorski, R. (2008). *La professionnalisation: Note de synthèse*. *Revue Savoirs*, 17, 11–39.

individual but also the collective challenge must above all be one of identity, in the sense of recognising where one stands within systems of professional activity.

3.1 Professionalisation: A polysemous word

The word *professionalisation* has appeared in a number of places at different times (in social groups from the end of the nineteenth century inwards, and businesses and the education world for a few decades), and for a variety of intentions, from groups of individuals performing the same activity who want to organise themselves on a free market, to organisations and institutions which want to ‘shift’ employees towards supporting increasingly flexible working patterns, and individuals who want to contribute to the development of their own competences through training, whilst at the same time increasing the effectiveness of the training process.

3.1.1 Professionalisation and the professions

The word *professionalisation* comes from American functionalist sociology (in particular the research by Parsons) (Gerhardt, 2002) and refers, in its primary sense, to the process by which an activity becomes an independent profession driven by a service-oriented ideal. The word *profession* appears in a free-market context, where economic players feel the need to develop a rhetoric concerning their contribution to the market to establish and enhance their place in it. This is probably where we should situate the appearance of the word *profession* in English-speaking countries in the early twentieth century, when it was also associated with the image of the independent professions. In some European countries (such as France), it appears in a different context, characterised by a hierarchical state: in this case, the idea of a *profession* is based not so much on the model of the independent profession but more on a central government model. The issue then was therefore to ensure one’s position was recognised in order to obtain a better position in the state hierarchy.

The word *competence* has no real place in this primary meaning.

3.1.2 Professionalisation and efficiency at work

The various uses of the word *professionalisation* in working environments, in particular by businesses that produce goods and services in highly competitive markets, and tasked with changing the way their activities are organised, lead us to another meaning.

The issues faced by these organisations are obviously not concerned with the development of professions in the social arena, but with the professionalisation of employees, understood as an intention to *develop competences likely to support flexible working* (through continuously modifying competences linked to changing work situations). In conjunction with the above, the fact that businesses talk about professionalisation is a recent phenomenon and reflects a number of changes which are closely connected to each other, such as:

- the shift from an approach to production driven by supply (work is planned by the business) to an approach to production driven by demand (employees are invited to be ‘key players and drivers of change’)
- the shift to a results-oriented approach
- the move from a centrally controlled system to a degree of decentralisation of responsibilities.

This second meaning of the word associates it very closely with the word *competence*, emphasising not only competences associated with the exercise of a particular profession, but also competences which are directly useful for the needs of the work immediately at hand. This then prompts the emergence of interest in so-called *transversal competences*, which may come into conflict with specific professional competences. The search for more transversal competences goes hand-in-hand with a trend towards the institutionalisation of work (in the sense of its more local definition, in particular organisational contexts, independently of the activity markers defined by professional groups).

3.1.3 Professionalisation and adult education

Training environments have also seized on the word *professionalisation*: which training actions today do not claim a professionalising aim? Professionalisation clearly has ‘the wind in its sails’, driven by national and European guidelines on the organisation of initial and continuing education and advocated by the private sector.

What are the reasons for this and how does it manifest itself? On the one hand, we are seeing a change in the issues related to the training process in working environments. As a result, we are seeing experimental schemes based on an attempt to link training more closely to the work itself; it is no longer a question of deductive transmission of practical and theoretical content or, conversely, of learning on the job (informal training) but of bringing together action in the workplace, an analysis of professional practice, and experimenting with new ways of working. Approaches to the use of training are therefore changing: they are no longer based so much on helping the workforce to adapt to change but more on implementing and supporting organisational change. This means anchoring training programmes more firmly in actual work situations. This is resulting, for example, in more partnership-based training schemes, which are more complex and involve a variety of players. The issue then becomes one of questioning and connecting three things which are usually separate: the act of 'active production' (working in the business), the act of reflecting on and/or researching the conditions needed to change working practices, and the act of training itself.

Furthermore, training environments highlight the professionalising nature of the training provided in order to increase the perceived efficacy (as experienced by clients) of training schemes and improve the status and legitimacy of training practices. From this point of view, professionalisation constitutes an important issue of identity for training environments (often in conjunction with the introduction of quality procedures).

As we have seen, the aim of professionalisation thus becomes part of a system of social regulation. We can conclude that the word *professionalisation*, which is highly polysemous, because it reflects a variety of issues and therefore has different meanings depending on who is using it, has at least three senses: the constitution of an autonomous social group ('professionalisation and the profession'), support for flexible working ('professionalisation and efficiency at work'), and the process of 'constructing' a professional through training ('professionalisation and adult education'). These meanings, far from being interconnected, are opposed to each other and therefore drive social debate.

The second two of the three ('professionalisation and efficiency at work' and 'professionalisation and adult education') form part of a particular social context marked by converging changes in work and training, which are introducing a new conception of the professional (autonomous, responsible, adaptable, a reflective practitioner) and which, at the same time, place particular emphasis on the necessity of developing competences which can form the basis of greater professional effectiveness for individuals in the work-

place. The question is now to determine what we know about the ways in which professional competences are developed.

3.2. The development of competences: Varied processes

If it is accepted that competences cannot be taught but must develop within a professional situation, it then becomes necessary to understand more clearly how they are developed through work: this is the idea behind professionalisation through action.

Several research projects, in different theoretical fields, are thus particularly interested in the ways in which organisations (the notion of ‘qualifying’ and learning organisations), the presence of a third party (the notion of support), or finally investment in a professional activity can facilitate learning and professional development (see box below).

Keyword: Professionalisation vs. professional development

These two terms are frequently used synonymously, even though there is a fairly distinct difference in the main research projects conducted on them. *Professionalisation* is often seen as being linked to social expectations and the training actions offered by firms to support the development of competences amongst individuals. *Professional development* is more about the way in which an individual learns from the situations they encounter and how they develop their competences.

3.2.1 *The development of competences within the organisation: ‘Qualifying’ and ‘learning’ organisations*

The term *organisation qualifiante* (‘qualifying organisation’) was introduced in 1987 by a French business leader, Antoine Riboud (Chairman and Managing Director of BSN). According to one of his supporters, Zarifian (1992, p. 16), its principles are as follows:

- A qualifying organisation is an organisation which reveals an events-based approach to industrial activity, in an economic environment characterised by uncertainty.
- The qualifying organisation presupposes a reorganisation of industrial activity based communications.

- By principle of communication, we mean the principle that people agree on both common objectives ... and on the interaction between their activities necessitated by the practical realisation of those objectives.
- A qualifying organisation is one which allows its members to re-write the objectives of their work activities.

Overall, ‘an organisation only becomes a qualifying organisation from the point at which there are choices to be made, proposals to be produced and a position to be taken to guide professional activities’ (ibid.).

In tangible terms, qualifying organisations can be recognised on the basis, for example, of collective working, training through action, project-based working, and group participation (developing an ability to analyse one’s own performance in the workplace). According to supporters of these forms of working, they are organisations which foster the development of competences and therefore the professionalisation of individuals.

The notion of *organisational learning* comes from work done by English-speaking researchers (notably Argyris & Schön, 1989). It is based on the idea that the organisation itself can have the ability to learn (and can develop collective competences) by remembering processes which have been implemented and have proved useful.

The notion of a learning organisation has thus been developed primarily to structure the process of transforming an organisation when managing *ad hoc* events (for example, a motor manufacturer installing a new production line or a breakdown occurring in a workshop). The new rules and standards produced as a result of managing these situations create organisational learning opportunities if competences are capitalised. The process of capitalisation is often based on defining new procedures. Argyris and Schön (1989), inspired by the work of the Palo Alto school of communication (especially Bateson and Watzlawick), identify three distinct types of organisational learning (see box below). They describe the process of organisational learning as follows:

For organisational learning to take place, it is important for learners’ discoveries, inventions and evaluations to become part of the organisational memory. These need to be encoded in the organisation’s shared images and cognitive maps of ‘theories in use’, which staff will continue to use as the basis for their actions. Otherwise, the individual will have learnt but the organisation will not. (Argyris & Schön, 1989, p. 125)

Keyword: Three types of learning according to Argyris and Schön:

Single loop learning consists of making simple adaptations to existing knowledge without fundamentally challenging them.

Double loop learning involves challenging an existing organisational standard or rule, fundamentally transforming one or several items of shared knowledge.

Deutero learning refers to the resources with which the organisation equips itself to manage the two previous learning methods (the organisation 'learns to learn').

3.2.2 The development of competences through a third party: Support

So-called 'support' schemes seem to be increasingly common today and are closely associated with competence development approaches, and therefore with professionalisation: they can be offered in the form of work-based learning schemes (tutoring, for example) or as part of an induction process (often referred to as sponsorship). Their primary function is often to help employees settle into the workplace in order to improve efficiency.

According to Boutinet (2002), the emergence of support situations characterises a change in society around 1970–80, when

the major integrationist structures of the family, school, religion, and professional life began to malfunction in a significant extent. Providing support then became a way of managing borderline situations, crisis situations, and problematic decision points ... for adults questioning their personal and professional future.

The provision of support

expresses the overlaying of a new existential paradigm on one that is beginning to be worn out as a way of addressing the nagging concern that social integration has represented for a generation. In being superimposed on the project, the new paradigm of support suggests the idea of an endless and insecure career path, in which we wander from transition to transition both as young people and in our adult lives. (Boutinet, 2002, p. 7)

Practices in this area fluctuate. They include coaching and the idea of training, counseling and the idea of offering advice, tutoring, and learning or socialisation (tutors today have more of a role as facilitators), as well as mentoring and the idea of education. The mentor – a role originally created in the United States, 'is one of the figures who provides support, whose role is justified by the fact that an individual cannot develop solely by being in contact with their peers: they need to be in touch with people who are older than themselves' (Paul, 2002, p. 48). Further support practices include apprentice-

ships and the idea of transmission, sponsoring and the idea of sponsorship, and mediation (the introduction of a 'third-party trainer': experiences of self-guided learning and cognitive remediation practices). One of the questions raised here is therefore how to acquire a better understanding of how professional development operates in the process of providing support.

3.2.3 The development of competences in and through work activity

Another area of research is specifically interested in how an individual's activity can support learning and even professional development. As Champy-Remoussenard (2005, p. 37) says, 'the fact that work activity prompts continuous learning and produces new knowledge is a major element for those who work in training and from the point of view of professionalising key players.'

We should first draw a distinction between *learning* and *development*. We would argue that learning is essentially local in temporal and spatial terms, insofar as it is linked to a particular place and time, whilst development works over a more extended time frame, constructing the subject over the long term.

Intuitively, people often distinguish between a number of different ways of learning: through action (by doing), or through the acquisition and/or construction of knowledge. This relates to some extent to the distinction between formal and informal learning. The next section provides a quick overview of the six main theses that seem to be particularly influential in current research.

There is a variety of situations that have a positive impact on an individual's competence development.

According to Le Boterf (2007), professionalisation, in the sense of the development of competences, stands at the crossroads of the subject (their history and socialisation), the professional situations they have encountered, and the training and educational situations and paths they have experienced. According to him, an individual's progress towards professionalisation (based on a 'professional navigation' approach) reflects their experience of varied situations (in addition to just 'face-to-face' training), which all represent opportunities for the subject to engage in an activity with a positive impact on their development: examples include supported self-guided training, simulations of work situations, supported work situations, opportunities to provide feedback on their experience, shared practice situations, study trips, drafting memos, and business meetings.

Competences are developed through the increasing inclusion of action-based competences and their hierarchical organisation.

As far as learning in the workplace is concerned, one of the dominant conceptions of workplace analysis proposes that people first learn ‘built-in competences’, either through impregnation, or through action, or in a controlled way (Leplat, 2001). Built-in competences enable the acquisition of broader competences, because they ‘provide rapidly available units of action for higher-level activities, based on knowledge’ (Leplat, 2001, p. 42). Professional development thus relies on increasingly incorporating action-based competences and a gradual process of selection and prioritisation of these competences.

The development of competences is closely linked to the constitution of experience.

Several conceptions (see Argyris & Schön, 1989; Dewey, 1967; Kolb, 1984) can be identified in research on the construction of experience. They are united by the fact that they view experience as a subjective construction based on the actions carried out by the individual, and therefore the competences they develop. They vary in the importance they attribute to the subject’s awareness of the learning taking place.

Keyword: Experience

Experience is knowledge linked to a particular activity and mode of acquisition. It operates on two levels: doing and knowing. There is an ongoing debate between those who think that built-in practices constitute experience in the same way as those of which individuals are able to ‘become aware’. In relation to this, Ricoeur (1977) differentiates between *idem* identity (experience as a repertoire of memories and knowledge) and *ipse* experience (experience as an active transformation of previously constructed resources for action in the future).

Competences develop through contact with oneself, with others, and with things.

Trends in informal learning (which include, but are not limited to, the question of learning in conjunction with participating in professional practice) and self-guided learning emphasise the fact that we learn through contact with ourselves, with other people, and with our physical environment, but that

learning is not automatic: it depends on self-efficacy,² on our ability to manage ourselves, and on self-monitoring.

Moisan (Carré, Moisan, & Poisson, 1997), on the other hand, argues that a work situation prompts more self-guided learning the more it exists within a professional bureaucracy-type organisation (referring to work by Mintzberg), where the non-routine nature of the work makes it impossible to define procedures for it (prescription therefore decreases). The development of competences is therefore fostered, in particular, by the indeterminate nature of the work situation and the necessity of reflecting on one's actions.

Carré and Charbonnier (2003), in their work on informal learning in the workplace, based on a vast ethnographic-type field survey, show that this type of learning takes place not only when problems arise or when there is a break between two activities, but also when there is an opportunity for dialogue between older and younger staff (inter-generational relationships), in 'third times' or 'third spaces' (transitional situations), at the point at which someone starts a new job (the idea of testing and being put to the test), and so on. Informal learning in the workplace is fostered both by a harmonious relationship between the culture of the business and the motivation of individuals to learn, and by a favourable attitude to formal or informal learning, which the authors describe as *apprenance* or 'a proactive relationship to knowledge' (p.25).

In more general terms, everyday situations, depending on the work involved, may be conducive to learning: examples include do-it-yourself, gardening, and the like. The art of do-it-yourself and the ability to 'make do and mend' reflect, for the authors, the *metis*, which is a form of practical intelligence with a focus on efficiency; it produces many forms of knowledge which are useful in life (such as the artisan's dexterity, resourcefulness, the ability to seize opportunities, and so on (the *kairos*).

2 The sense of self-efficacy has been studied in particular in the context of the theory of social learning, by Bandura (1997). According to this theory, a person finds it more or less easy to engage in a particular activity based on the system of expectations and self-images they have constructed for themselves previously. Bandura distinguishes between expectations relating to the sense of competence (a person's degree of conviction about their ability to execute a given behaviour successfully) and expectations relating to the results of the action (the conviction that this behaviour will make it possible to achieve the desired results). Self-knowledge (interests, aversions, abilities) and self-esteem (the individual's perception of themselves and the values they attribute to themselves) together form the basis of an individual's representation of themselves.

The development of competences supports a co-determination and co-transformation of activities and actors.

The theses examined here have in common the fact that they consider it to be essential to study the action in conjunction with the situation to understand the mechanisms by which competences are developed.

According to constructivist and social-constructivist theories³, the development of competences is conceived as a co-construction and co-transformation of the subject and their environment: 'the agent, the activity, and the world each play a reciprocal part in the construction of the other' (Lave & Wenger, 1993, p. 33).

The approach of professional didactics (examined in Chapter 3 of this book) sees the development of competences as a process of developing schemas, operational invariants, and concepts of organising action.

According to cognitive ergonomics and cognitive anthropology/sociology (e.g. Hutchins, 1988; Theureau, 2000), professional development also relies on the communications produced as part of the activity: these have the status of transactions and a role in coordinating the actions of individuals (situations such as exchanging information within work teams, for example in an aircraft crew). Savoyant (1974) picks up the notion of task interdependence proposed by Weick (1965). The author distinguishes between three forms of task interdependence:

Cumulative interdependence: what is produced by one individual becomes the input for another individual; *disjunctive interdependence*: there is a disjunction when, in accomplishing a task, it is sufficient for a single member of the group to give the right answer, and subjects can therefore work independently; and *conjunctive interdependence*: in this situation, all the members of the group have to give a specific response for the group to succeed. (Savoyant, 1974, p. 228, emphasis added)

This third level seems to relate to interactive situations seen as problem resolution situations in which new forms of coordination between individuals appear. Woods and Roth (1988), for their part, speak of a 'shared cognitive system', which can be used to trace the movement of information and describe the cognitive processes at work in an interactive situation. This notion is also close to that of 'socially distributed cognition', introduced by Hutchins (1988) in cognitive anthropology.

3 For Piaget and those who followed him, particularly, learning consists of modifying one's schemas based on interactions with the environment, a mental activity of reorganising data, or developing a representation. Some research projects following on from Piaget created the social-constructivist trend, in particular the work of Doise and Mugny (1981), which showed that learning also takes place in a context of cooperation and interaction.

Individuals develop a meta-competence and become reflective practitioners.

The model of the 'reflective practitioner' (referring to the work of Argyris and Schön, 1989), seems increasingly omnipresent whenever one hears professionals and researchers in adult education speak of professionalisation and the development of competences in individuals. According to this model, professionalising an individual means ensuring that they are able to step back from their own actions and that they develop competences geared to an analysis of their own actions.

The use of reflection by individuals in relation to their professional practices is growing. Programmes are often based on the intention of transforming an individual into a professional who is capable of developing a view of their practices so that they can adapt more quickly to changing working environments. From this point of view, the challenge of such schemes probably lies in the 'flexibilisation' of people in order to support flexibility in the workplace.

As a result, practice analysis processes are appearing in fields as varied as social work, education, and industry. Formalising this process either orally (in a practice analysis group) or in writing (through writing about practice) is comparable to the production of statements, sometimes referred to as action knowledge (Barbier & Galatanu, 2004).

As we have seen, there are various models in relation to the development of competences. Sometimes, they rely on an analysis of the contribution made by the organisation (via the resources it offers: primarily the notions of the qualifying and learning organisation) or a third party (support, whether it is referred to as coaching, tutoring, or mentoring) to the development of competences; sometimes they rely on an analysis of the joint development processes of the work activity and competences (construction of experience, ability to reflect, etc.) in a professional context.

At the end of the day, however, what is the main issue in the development of competences and professionalisation? It certainly involves developing effective means of action in individuals but the main challenge, viewed from the point of view of the aim of efficiency, is that of attributing a place (being recognised as a competent professional by the firm), which presupposes a transaction with the environment (between the aspects of themselves the individual wants to have recognised and what the environment expects of them via the competences they are assumed to have). Taking the issue of identity into account results in a certain conception of the word competence, which has less to do with an individual characteristic than a social attribution in relation to quality.

3.3 The development of competences and professionalisation: A question of identity

Finally, the development of competences comes down to the close interplay between what the individual shows of themselves in a work situation (primarily through the competences they use, what the environment expects (the task, in the sense of work psychology) and recognises about them based on effectiveness criteria (the attribution of a competence to a subject based on what they do) or according to legitimacy criteria (the attribution of the qualifier 'professional' to the actions carried out by the individual).

3.3.1 *The attribution of competences to individuals based on the action processes they are engaged in*

The term *competence* is a word taken from social discourse but also the product of an inference based on observing the activities of an individual; moreover, it is often difficult to define the content of competences (because they are always complex and liable to change in a given situation), but at the same time it is valuable and useful to understand how the activity has developed. Taking into account the fact that the word *competence* has appeared relatively recently in educational and working environments, often as a substitute for the word *qualification*, and that the reality it describes already existed, despite being referred to in different terms, we have chosen, in line with a constructivist epistemology (see box) to reserve the word *competence* to describe the view the environment has of what the individual does (the social attribution of 'qualities' by the environment to an individual who acts in a way which is considered to be effective). We will therefore later use the term *action process* to describe what the individual does in a particular situation and the word *competence* to characterise the social attribution of a quality to the individual by their environment based on a judgement of their effectiveness.

Keyword: Constructivist epistemology

Epistemology is both the study of the methods by which fields of knowledge are constituted and developed and the way in which each of us conceives of reality or produces knowledge about ourselves. We thus all have an epistemology. It is in this second sense that the word is used here.

In brief, there are two contrasting epistemological options:

- a so-called 'ontological' option, which considers that what surrounds us constitutes a reality, an 'order of things', which predates human beings and imposes itself on them as something which was 'already there' without human intervention
- a so-called 'constructivist' option, which considers that reality does not exist independently of the people who construct it, particularly in relation to social concepts (one therefore uses the term 'social construct').

Two 'levels' can be distinguished:

- At a micro level, action processes (giving rise to an attribution of competences) can to some extent be seen as the operating methods and ways of working of individuals and are in this way impossible to dissociate from their behaviours. Ergonomics and occupational psychology provide useful frameworks in relation to this.
- At a macro level, the attribution of competences (to subjects whose action processes are recognised as effective) sits at the intersection of the production and educational systems which use, shape, quantify, describe, and classify competences. Sociology provides some interesting frameworks in this area.

Our intention is not so much to characterise the content of an action process (what it is) but the way it is constructed using the combination of resources the individual has available to them (in themselves and in their environment). From this point of view, we believe it is important, in order to understand the development of an action process, to comprehend the configuration in and through which it is constructed ('configuration' here is defined as the inseparable combination of the individual, the context, and other actors, including anticipating and gambling on the judgement made by society).

Action processes (which give rise to the social attribution of competences) are constructed in configurations which constitute particular forms of connection between five components in three spaces (Wittorski, 2007):

- the cognitive, cultural, affective, social (these last two components are particularly relevant to identity), and 'operational' components
- the space occupied by the individual or group which produces or creates the action process (the 'micro' space), the space occupied by the immediate social environment (the 'meso or social' space, which is the level of socialisation, group membership, work communities, and service), and

the space occupied by the organisation of which the individual is a part (the 'macro or societal' space). The meso and macro arenas will attribute the status of competence to certain action processes based on specific criteria (often related to the effectiveness of the action).

Let us explain each of these elements in detail.

- The **cognitive component** (which includes knowledge, understanding, capacities, and ways of viewing and thinking about situations), is part of the microsocial space (the individual or group which creates the competence). It is made up of two elements: on the one hand, cognitive representations (knowledge and understanding acquired through training but also through experience), the action schemas which can be brought to situations (capacities) and implicit theories; and on the other, the representation the subject creates about the situation in which he/she finds himself/herself, that is, the active construction by the actor of the meaning of the situation (the image they create for themselves of the context and environment, based on Lave's 'setting' (1988)). This second element appears to play an essential role in the production of an action process.
- The **affective component** is one of the drivers of the action process. It combines three elements: on the one hand, the *affective relationship to self-image* (does one see oneself as capable of acting or not? What is our relationship with self-image?); on the other hand, our *affective investment* in the action (i.e. whether we enjoy or simply tolerate what we do), and finally *commitment* (i.e. motivation). This affective component, which characterises the space occupied by the individual or group which creates the action process, is primarily influenced by the space occupied by the immediate environment (the meso or social space). Effectively, when the working environment (the department or team) makes a positive or negative judgement on the action process implemented by the individual, this will have a corresponding positive or negative effect on motivation, and influence the affective relationship with the individual's self-image. Some action processes may therefore be eliminated or, conversely, strengthened, as a result of the affective conditions in which they are produced.
- The **social component** of an action process sits at the intersection of the three spaces mentioned (the individual, colleagues, and the organisation). This social component includes, on the one hand, the choice the individual (or the group) makes to implement and therefore seek recognition for a particular action process, primarily based on what they know of their own capacity for action and their place in the organisation, and depend-

ing on the gamble they have taken with regard to future recognition of their action by the environment or organisation. The production of an action process is then located in this anticipation of the nature of the social evaluation of the action process. It includes, on the one hand, an act of formulation and description by a third party, which consists of qualifying and recognising (according to specific effectiveness and relevance criteria) the action process as soon as it is implemented successfully (in the eyes of the third party). This equates to the attribution of a competence (the action process is described in terms of competence). This means that competences (in the sense of a social evaluation of action processes) form part of a dynamic of negotiating identity with the environment, and are one of the key elements which enable a social affirmation of identity (action processes are also produced according to what one wants to show of oneself to others). From this point of view, there is a strong link between the two notions of identity and competence.

- The **cultural component** of the action process relates to the way in which the organisational culture (the rules and values it conveys) and/or the professional group to which the individual belongs will prompt them to act in accordance with the expectations expressed: for example, an organisation which conveys a strong culture of autonomy and responsibility at work, or recognition by peers of status as a 'true professional' as soon as someone has mastered a particular knack, even though the same work could be accomplished in different ways. It is clear that this cultural component, which functions as a model of identity ('be autonomous and responsible', for example) comes from the influence of the macro space (the organisation) on the meso (team) and especially the micro space (the individual taking action). The criteria used to attribute competence to the subject are obviously influenced or even determined by this cultural dimension.
- The **'operational' component** of an action process, for its part, relates to the level of the individual taking action (the micro space) and to the activity, that is, the work carried out (based here on the distinction between task and activity introduced by occupational psychology). The activity is made up of several operations in which the action processes implemented by the individual each play a part.

These five components appear to be inextricably linked. They are closely connected to the three spaces mentioned. For the sake of simplicity, we could say that the organisation (the macro space) and teams/departments (meso space) attribute the quality of competence to a subject based on a judgement

of effectiveness applied to a certain number of action processes implemented by the individual. The organisation thus often has the task of evaluating, codifying, and creating a hierarchical structure for the attribution of competences used to define levels of responsibility and levels of compensation. What social actors designate as competence therefore becomes the subject of negotiation and a question of recognition between actors.

The word *competence* is therefore a useful designation for the social attribution of a quality to an individual, based on observation of the success of their action.

3.3.2 Professionalisation and the development of competences in identity negotiation

Socially, what we call identity characterises the ‘interplay’ (in the strategic and dynamic sense of the term) between on the one hand, the subject’s affects and representations of their place and that of its action in the environment (past, present, and future) and, on the other hand, the social recognition of the subject by this same environment. From the individual’s point of view, the interplay resides in the development of a strategy of self-recognition and, from a social perspective, of a set of situations which will allow, for example, the attribution of competences to action processes that prove successful (this is one of the main tools used to recognise identity in current work systems). In the context of professionalisation, we can add that a scheme offered to an individual constitutes a model of identity (an ‘injunction’ to comply with the expectations expressed by the organisation), which may be congruent or conflict with the plan the individual is pursuing for themselves. Training actions designed to further professionalisation and the development of competences may then lead to tensions around the question of identity, which give rise, as Kaddouri says, to the development of identity strategies, ‘as the role of all acts and discourse is to reduce, maintain, or prevent the development of discrepancies between one’s identity for oneself and one’s identity for other people, and between inherited identity and desired identity’ (Kaddouri, 2005, p. 109).

Kaddouri (2002) adds that,

in constructing their own identity, the subject is (in our view), faced with two kinds of tension. The first arises from the confrontation between two identity orientations. The first is that of the subject themselves, who, in an interpersonal struggle with the other, fights to self-design. The second is the attempt to impose on them what they should be in order to

comply with the other's person's plan for them. The second type of tension is a consequence of the first: it is fueled by socio-affective relationships of interdependences and the power struggle between the subject and the other in the battle for the authenticity of the construct concerned. This is a question of determining the place and role the subject assumes in defining the outline and direction of the process of constructing their self. These tensions and struggle are necessary in order for the subject to construct their own identity, seen here as an indivisible whole in spite of its multiplicity of components. (p. 31)

As soon as one begins to think about identity in terms of transactions, as a dynamic process rather than a state, it becomes a process of managing discrepancies and tensions rather than a stable condition.

Identity, however, is not only a matter of social negotiation (the social and cultural components of competence: identity for the other is negotiated and is for the other person) but also of action (the cognitive, affective, and operational components of competence: identity is for oneself). The development of competences is therefore both about action and a dynamic process of identity construction at the same time, with the two elements appearing to be inseparable.

The following table shows professionalisation and the development of competences as a process of identity negotiation between the subject and their environment (organisation or professional group), based largely on a process of social construction (social recognition) of competences.

Table 2: Conceptual relationships between competence and identity

Professionalisation and the development of competences as a process of identity negotiation.						
		5 related components				
		Cognitive	Affective	Social	Cultural	Operational
3	'Micro' space (the individual or group which creates the competence)	Availability of knowledge, understanding and capacities; meaning assigned to the individual taking action	Affective relationship to self-image, affective investment, motivation	Identity for oneself; identity strategy (related to an identity plan)	The action process is geared to the expectations of colleagues and organisational or professional injunctions	The action process takes place during a work operation which forms part of the current activity
S	Space in which identity seeks recognition					
P	'Meso' space (work colleagues (as observers), situation)	The particular dynamic of the teams defines the shape of the work situation experienced by the subject	The views of colleagues have a positive or negative influence on the affects felt by the individual taking action	Identity for others and, in the end, recognition of identity (attribution of competence to the subject based on a judgement being made of the effectiveness of the action process implemented)	Expectations of colleagues about ways of working	The activity depends on the activity system in use within the service or department
A	Space in which identity is negotiated					
C	'Macro' space (organisation / professional group)	The organisation defines work situations and the requisite knowledge and understanding	The organisation defines work situations and the requisite knowledge and understanding		Injunctions from the organisation or the professional group to which the subject belongs	It also depends on the choices made in respect of the organisation of work and the tasks prescribed.
E	Space in which identity is modelled and given recognition					
S	Facets of identity	Identity is 'known'	Identity is 'felt'	Identity is 'negotiated'	Identity is 'assigned'	Identity is 'enacted'
	Role of experience	Draw on available experience to act				Experience is constructed 'in action'

Source: Adapted from Wittorski, 2007

A number of comments should be made on the table. The three spaces (individual, work colleagues, and organisation) in which action processes are implemented play different roles in relation to identity. The micro space (the individual taking action) is, as we have seen, the space in which identity seeks recognition (seeking, in particular, for action processes to be recognised as competences); the meso space (the department or team) is the space in which identity is negotiated (on a daily basis, in the working environment); and the macro space (the organisation) is the space in which identity is modelled (through the assignments given) and also in which identity is recognised (for example, through the employee's performance review, carried out by their line manager).

The aspect of identity which is 'worked on' (from the individual's point of view) varies across the different components of the action process. It is sometimes anchored in cognitive dimensions with a practical application in terms of action ('known' identity), sometimes in the affective dimension related to the action ('felt' identity), sometimes in implementing a negotiation strategy with peers in a professional situation ('negotiated' identity), sometimes in the acceptance (or not) of an identity assigned by the organisation or professional group ('assigned' identity), and sometimes, finally, in the action process implemented ('enacted' identity). This can be used to highlight the various aspects, each closely linked to the others, which comprise the identity process in play in the activity.

As far as experience is concerned, it has two supposed functions in the production of action processes. On the one hand, it constitutes an 'asset' (as described by Schwartz) on which the individual draws in order to act (the cognitive component); and on the other, one which evolves according to the new action processes implemented (the operational component).

In the end, professionalisation and the development of competences are therefore not only linked to a social intention (coming from an organisation) finalised by the quest for ever-greater efficiency of people at work, but are also based on a game of identity or transaction between a 'recognition of self-hood' (from the individual's point of view, through the actions produced) and actual recognition by the environment (thus attributing 'qualities' of competence and professionalism to a subject).

This chapter has highlighted the close relationship between professionalisation and the development of competences by outlining the main models available to help acquire a better understanding of the process of developing competences. In the end, the development of competences is first and foremost a development of action processes, which may or may not be socially qualified by the term *competence*.

Exercises and tasks

Exercise 1

Based on your reading of this chapter, what importance would you attach to the work situation in the development of competences? Outline your argument on two pages.

Exercise 2

Work with another student. Each find an example of a situation to illustrate the fact that the development of competence involves an issue of identity. Discuss the examples you have found and justify your argument.

Task 1

Refer to Argyris & Schön (1989), *Theory in practice: Increasing professional effectiveness*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass (available in your university library), and define the main steps involved in the *reflective practitioner* approach. Take an example extracted from your own experience of work, and apply this approach to this experience. Try to identify, with the help of this approach, the main competences you acquired during this particular experience.

Task 2

Have a look at Kolb's model of experiential learning (see Kolb, 1984). Then imagine a training situation in which trainees can be confronted with the four phases of learning defined in this model. Discuss your training situation with another student and try to improve it.

List of Abbreviations

CCEC:	Competences Elicitation Career Counseling
ECVET:	European Credit for Vocational Education and Training
EQF:	European Qualifications Framework
HR:	Human Resources
NCVER:	National Centre for Vocational Education Research
PISA:	Programme for International Student Assessment
SMEs:	Small and Medium Sized Enterprises
TIMSS:	Third International Mathematics and Science Study
TTnet:	Training of Trainers Network
VET:	Vocational Education and Training

Annotated Bibliography

Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy. The exercise of control.* New York: Freeman

A key book by Albert Bandura, one of the world's leading researchers in social psychology working in the field of social learning and self-efficacy. This book develops the theory that forms the basis of the self-efficacy concept – that is, social cognitive theory – and summarises a set of convincing research results on different topics. It shows the impact of self-efficacy beliefs on the daily life of individuals. Self-efficacy emerges as a key psychological mechanism governing a variety of human activities. This approach suggests that it is possible in certain conditions to question social determinism.

Collin, A. & Young, R. A. (Eds.). (2000). *The future of career.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

The fragmented nature of modern working life has led to fundamental changes in our understanding of the term *career*. Few people now expect to have a lifetime of continuous employment, regardless of their qualifications or the sector they work in. This book presents a kaleidoscopic view of the concept of career, reviewing its past and considering its future. The chapters are wide-ranging, exploring topics such as the changing issues of career, individual career experiences, multicultural issues, women's careers, and the implications for practice and policy-making.

Savickas, M. L., Nota, L., Rossier, J., Dauwalder, J. P., Duarte, M. E., Guichard, J., Soresi, S., Van Esbroeck, R., Van Vianen, A. E. M. (2009). Life designing: A paradigm for career construction in the 21st century. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 3, 239–250.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, a new social arrangement of work poses a series of questions and challenges to scholars who aim to help people develop their competences and working lives. In this article, the authors formulate potentially innovative responses in a kind of international forum. It presents a career counseling model: the life designing model for career interventions. The article offers an overview of different approaches of career counseling models and develops a framework for new methods and tools in career counseling.

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