
THE COMPETENCE PORTFOLIO: FROM A COMMON BACKGROUND TO DIFFERENTIATED PRACTICE. TOWARDS THE E-PORTFOLIO IN THE VOCATIONAL TRAINING OF CANTON TICINO (SWITZERLAND) - ABSTRACT

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Introduction

The Swiss Federal Institute for Vocational and Educational Training (SFIVET) of Lugano, has set up – in cooperation with the public administration of Canton Ticino (Division of Vocational Training) – a project aiming at consolidating and to coordinating some measures for supporting the transition of the young people attending vocational courses from the school to the job market. These measures are situated in the different phases of the training path: at the beginning – by promoting the creation of new workplaces for apprentices; during the training path – by promoting in the apprentices the capacity of identifying, arguing and of gathering information about their own skills and competencies; at the end of the training path – by supporting those who have difficulties in finding a job.

The present contribution, starting from a brief presentation of the Swiss Vocational Training system and the mentioned projects, intends to deepen the characteristics and the modalities of construction and diffusion of the Competence Portfolio Project in all the vocational schools of Canton Ticino, by describing how the tool and its methodologies have been differentiated, depending on the characteristics of each school, and by analysing its development towards an ePortfolio.

The characteristics of the Competence-Portfolio Project

The Competence Portfolio Project aimed to the conception, to the development and to the diffusion of a tool which allows the young apprentices to attest their competences. In this perspective both strategies related to the traditional *competence synthesis* and to the *learning portfolios* have been integrated. The goal was in fact to accompany in the identification of knowledge and competences achieved in prior learning and/or extra-scholastic situations and to allow the monitoring of those which gradually are acquired at school and at work.

At the end of the portfolio project, the young apprentices, besides to having achieved a set of meta-cognitive and argumentative capacities, are able to produce some documents useful to entering the profession. As support to the whole process of the Portfolio Project, a Guide and a CD-Rom with numerous didactical activities have been developed by the teachers. In particular, the accomplished Portfolio Project, intends to be an integration element of diverse procedures and didactical modalities, already used in the vocational training: therefore it is a tool aiming at the continuity and the meaning in the educational history of students and apprentices.

Elaboration and diffusion phases of the project

The prior experience (2001-2003)

The Competence Portfolio Project started from the necessity to overcome some limits of a previous unique portfolio tool that collected to the competences acquired the whole vocational training of Canton Ticino.

It was a complete and standardized guide, directed to all users (adults and young people of every origin field), formulated in an exaggerated specialized language, not adjusted to the target of the young people, lacking in didactical materials, and scarcely flexible. On the other hand the value and the scope of this initiative were appreciated, as the guide was a first attempt to develop an instrument for allowing everyone to process their own portfolio of competences. Moreover, it was an opportunity

to open a lot of discussions and reflections among the teachers of every training curriculum about the changes acting in the actual professional world.

The concept and the operative proposals (2003-2004)

Taking into account the above mentioned limits and in particular the necessity of having didactical material as a support suitable for young people, a team of work, composed by some teachers, some institutional referents, and some specialists, has developed a project-concept based on some principles and has constituted an operative path. The main elements could be summarised in the following points:

A) Conditions of achievement:

- Safeguarding the inspiration principles and the finalities of the previous experience, taking into account the tools and/or the activities (e.g. European Languages Portfolio) already proposed in the field of the vocational training, aiming at the competence valorisation, the orientation of young apprentices, favouring the harmonisation among them;
- Taking into account the different terminologies related to the competence concept, existing in the vocational training;
- Taking into account the fact that those who elaborate the competence portfolio need a specific accompaniment which particularly considers the needs of those who have peculiar personal, scholastic and professional histories or who have specific learning difficulties;
- Taking into account the importance of instituting in every school a referent for the portfolio activities, able to coordinate them in general terms and to provide advice to the colleagues.
- Promoting some activities correlated to the portfolio training in the training enterprises;
- Connecting the tools for young apprentices and those directed to and adult target in general.

B) Operative proposals

Considering the necessity to 'scaffold' both the teachers and the apprentices, in the realisation activities of the competence portfolio, some proposals were identified:

- promoting some sensitizing activities or tools related to the problematic passage school-work;
- elaborating a complete guide for teachers;
- giving advice for the constitution of the personal competence dossier for the apprentices;
- elaborating an official competence dossier, directed to the adults and to the young people, with a support function for job searching.

The materials production, the experimentations, and the progressive diffusion (2004-2007)

A specific team edited in July 2004 a first version of the *Teachers' Guide*, integrated with a CD-Rom of didactical activities, both object of testing in the following years, in order to refine them and to allow a better integration. Afterwards the official competence Dossier, entitled "*Qualifications and Competences Dossier*" was developed; it is now in a testing phase with an adult target.

In the testing phase the *Teachers' Guide* has revealed the necessity of specifying and adapting the general indications, the activation and managing modalities of the portfolio course for different scholastic curricula so, the teachers involved were asked to analyse the characteristics of their scholastic curriculum (differentiated on the basis of the professional sectors), to build a discussion network of teachers of the same professional sector, in order to work out the guide-principles for the implementation of the Portfolio course in a coherent and functional way for a specific professional domain. In the definitive implementation a common framework with some peculiarities and some differences among the specific professional fields will emerge. In this specific context the necessity of introducing an *ePortfolio* clearly emerged, considering it as a logical consequence of the accomplished training path. For this reason, from the scholastic year 2007/2008 an experimental and research project

about e-portfolio will begin, integrated for the moment in two schools with curricula particularly familiar with the ICTs usage.

One of the most peculiar aspects of this project was the teachers' involvement in the development of the project itself. Over the years different working team and teachers of different professional curricula participated: until now about 80 teachers have been directly involved, 12 of them with a referent function in the scholastic seats.

This allowed the gradual diffusion of the portfolio which, in the scholastic year 2006-2007, has been covering all the training system of the Canton Ticino, in all the different sectors and curricula of the vocational training. This means that currently the project involves the ensemble of the vocational schools, that is 4 commercial schools, 4 artisan and agrarian training schools, 4 industrial training schools, 1 artistic training school, 3 social and nursing training schools, for a total of about 8700 students (including both full-time school and alternation school-enterprise) and about 1200 teachers.

The participation of the teachers with specific referent function has allowed the progressive constitution a specific competence domain in the field of the counselling to young people for the orientation and support in the professional and training development

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