

Adult Educators and Recognition of Prior Learning in Portugal: Guidance and Validation Tasks and Activities

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Abstract:

Under the European Union lifelong learning guidelines, in the last two decades the Portuguese adult education policy has noted the emergence of new offers that have enabled the establishment of new occupations, tasks and activities for adult educators, such as those referring to guidance and validation within recognition of prior learning. Guidance and validation are developed on the basis of a wide range of tools (recommendations, guidelines, qualification frameworks, standards of competencies). This circumstance has allowed adult educators to become lifelong learning technicians as shown by the research conducted for the writing of this essay.

Keywords: Adult Educators; Guidance; Portugal; Recognition of Prior Learning; Validation

1. Introduction

Several studies have focused on the discussion around adult educators (who they are, what formal and non-formal education paths they have followed, etc.). Nuissl and Lattke (2008), Research voorBeleid (2008, 2010), Jütte et al. (2011), Egetenmeyer (2014) and Egetenmeyer and Schüßler (2014), among others, have discussed the different aspects of adult educators' professional activities. Some of these analyses, of a comparative nature, have highlighted differences that can be observed at a national level, justified by the fact that adult education presents different characteristics from country to country and that it is a poorly regulated (especially when considering non-formal education), diverse and complex field (in terms of promoters, practices and the actors involved) (Canário 1999; Nuissl and Lattke 2008; Milana and Skrypnyk 2009).

In Portugal, Canário (1999), Rothes (2003), Lima (2006), Guimarães (2009, 2016), as well as Loureiro (2009) and Loureiro and Cristóvão (2010) have analysed the sociographic characteristics of adult educators, the teaching paths they have undertaken, in addition to the knowledge mobilised by those involved in

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formal and non-formal education. More recently, namely since the late 1990s, new provisions have been established, such as the recognition of prior learning (Reconhecimento, Validação e Certificação de Competências [Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences]). Within this purpose, new occupations¹ with different designations have emerged in the context of a movement to restructure adult education in this country (Rothes 2009). The debate around adult educators has since gained new contours. These discussions have highlighted, among other issues, the innovative education and training methods targeting adults and their learning through a reflection on their biographies, as well as the impact of such methods on the work of these technicians (Cavaco 2007, 2009); the influence of the European Union's lifelong learning guidelines on the activities carried out by adult educators (Guimarães and Barros 2015); as well as the knowledge and learning developed in the workplace (Loureiro 2009; Loureiro and Cristóvão 2010; Paulos 2014, 2015).

Few studies have focused on the professional tasks and activities² undertaken by adult educators. Hence, and building on prior research on the same topic (Guimarães 2016; Guimarães and Alves 2017), this paper seeks to discuss the tasks and activities of educators working on the recognition of prior learning. The tasks and activities carried out by adult educators are interpreted by means of a document analysis (Bowen 2009) of secondary sources, namely legal texts and official guidelines on their work in the context of centres promoting the recognition of prior learning. The aim of this analysis is to discuss the recruitment requirements (basic training, complementary continuing education and professional experience) and to identify the tasks of adult educators. In parallel, several studies focusing on the activities of adult educators in the workplace were collected. These studies were published in books (Loureiro 2009; Barros 2011), scientific journal papers (Cavaco 2007; Paulos 2014, 2015; Guimarães and Barros 2015) and integrated master dissertations and doctoral thesis (Cavaco 2009; Dias 2009; Loureiro 2009; Pereira L. 2009; Pereira N. 2010; Dias 2011; Martins 2012). This discussion highlights the fact that certain tasks and activity clusters are particularly valued in the legislation and in what adult educators effectively accomplish in their day-to-day work, namely within the scope of validation and

¹ The discussion on the differences between an occupation and a profession in adult (and continuing) education can be found in Egetenmeyer, Breitschwerdt and Lechner (2019). A profession is characterised by work tasks and activities related to a specific professional area, such as adult education. It includes the power held by a professional over a certain work field, social prestige in the development of professional roles and a significant degree of autonomy and responsibility that an individual who carries out an occupation does not hold. Owing to the lack of autonomy and responsibility of adult educators, as well as a brief or non-existent higher education path specialised in adult education, several authors such as Loureiro (2009) and Egetenmeyer, Breitschwerdt and Lechner (2019) have questioned adult educators as professionals and adult education as a professional area.

² Falzon and Teiger (2001) distinguish task (understood as a prescribed orientation for work, within the context of a prescription that is external to the operator) from activity (what is actually done, what is mobilised when someone performs a task).

guidance. These tasks and activities enable adult educators to be seen primarily as lifelong learning practitioners (Guimarães and Barros 2015).

2. The Work of Adult Educators

The term adult educator is a broad analytic category, due to the many definitions of the adult education concept (Merriam and Brockett 2007) and the significant diversity of occupations that can be found (Loureiro 2009). It is, however, a useful category in discussions on the work content of those who work directly with adults in educational initiatives.

Although it is not possible to find a designated adult educator professional category in Portugal and other countries, nowadays there is a broad consensus that the work in adult education requires specific knowledge and skills, as well as responsibility on the part of the technicians that intervene in this domain (Lattke and Jütte 2014; Paulos 2014, 2015; Guimarães and Barros 2015; Egetenmeyer et al. 2019). In addition to the references in many policy documents to the importance of the quality of adult educators' work (European Commission 2015, among others), a debate has emerged, mainly of a theoretical nature, around the professionalisation of these educators. This discussion has highlighted the complexity of tensions inherent to a labour market that reflect diverse power relations and different perspectives and discourses of adult education stakeholders (Jütte et al. 2011).

To complement these discussions, another debate has focused on the activities performed in the workplace by adult educators, supported by a theoretical model of the social division of labour (Dausien and Schwendowius 2009). In this context, Nuissl and Pehl (2004) specify four adult educator profiles: teacher; adult education manager; education practitioner; and administrative technician. Other authors have identified activity clusters, taken as sets of tasks and competences linked to different areas of adult education. According to this approach, Nuissl (2009) proposed six activity clusters: teaching, management, counselling and guidance, programme planning, support activities and activities involving media education. Loureiro (2009, 329) also advanced six types of activities: technical activities; coordination of technical teams; management; direction; administrative; and other activities.

On the basis of empirical data collected in several countries, Research voor-Beleid (2010, 35-39) presented thirteen clusters of activities performed by adult educators:

- needs assessment activities (to identify the various adult learners' needs; to identify and assess the entry levels, prior learning and experience of adult learners);
- preparation of courses activities (to identify learning resources and adequate methods; to plan and organise the learning process bearing in mind the various backgrounds, learning needs, levels, etc., of the adult learners; to set, negotiate and convey the objectives of the course and to inform the adult learners of the structure of the learning process);

- facilitation of learning activities (to relate the learning process to the living world and practice of the adult learners; to empower, to activate, to motivate and to encourage the adult learners, to be a challenger, inspirer of adult learners, and mobiliser of their motivations; to create a positive learning/development environment; to raise awareness and understanding of diversity and to promote insight into potential problems resulting from diversity in order to anticipate the consequences for adult learners, the group and oneself; among others);
- monitoring and evaluation activities (to provide support and feedback as a two-way process to the adult learners; to evaluate the context, the process and the outcomes of the learning process);
- counselling and guidance activities (to offer career information and basic information on work environments; to apply tests to obtain information on the relevant characteristics of adult learners for their career; to offer pre-entry, on-course and pre-exit guidance; to develop personal guidance and counselling skills; among others);
- programme development activities (to develop curriculum design at module and programme level; to develop programmes that are flexible in terms of their arrangement: full-time/part-time, timing, modularity and location, face-to-face/distance/blended learning =, taking into account adult learners' personal situations);
- financial management activities (to manage existing resources; to construct and manage budgets; to prepare applications for funding; to determine and to enlighten on the benefits of such applications; among others)
- human resources management activities (to manage daily teaching and non-teaching staff; to organise course teams, to build such teams and an institutional culture; to conduct interviews for appraisal and to organise professional development; among others);
- overall management activities (to work according to organisational procedures; to arrange committees and boards; to oversee learning environments; to monitor and evaluate programmes and to implement improvements; among others);
- marketing and public relations activities (to build marketing strategies for existing programmes; to assess the demand for existing provision and for new programmes; to build relationships with external communities);
- administrative support activities (to deal with administrative issues with regards to adult learners and adult educators; to inform adult learners and staff on administrative issues);
- information and communication technologies support activities (to design ICT-based and blended study programmes; to deliver ICT-based programmes; to collaborate in design teams, involving teachers, learners, administrators and instructional designers; to conduct and facilitate assessment within on-line environments; among others);
- overarching activities (to work with others – co-workers, stakeholders, managers, enterprises and adult learners – in order to develop the learning process;

to establish links to the social context, networks, stakeholders by creating relevant networks with actors in the field outside the workplace; to establish links to relevant professional networks, other co-workers, sharing experiences with co-workers; to contribute to the wider community, and the promotion of effective learning activities within wider social contexts; among others).

While this broad range of activities does not include others that are more characteristic of, for example, occupations within local development, sociocultural animation or social movements, where it is less frequent to find adult educators employed on a full-time basis, it is useful in the discussion of professional tasks and activities related to the recognition of prior learning, such as validation and guidance. When considering guidance specifically in the context of adult educators' work in the recognition of prior learning, this feature focuses on the personal/professional development of the individual learner (Ford 2007). It includes counselling, advising and assessing, with the aim of developing informative activities, career management skills and autonomy, direct support and capacity building, managing critical information and assuring the quality of choices made by the adult learner. These activities are offered in schools, training providers, public/state dependent employment services, private training companies, recruitment agencies, local administrations, company HR departments and NGOs, among others (Dzhengozova et al. 2019). As for validation, it refers to the formal recognition of the learning developed by adult learners, irrespective of how and where it has been acquired (Souto-Otero 2016). Within the European Union guidelines, validation includes a process resting upon four consecutive stages: identification, documentation, assessment and certification of knowledge developed throughout life, and it is common in education and also in vocational training (Dzhengozova et al. 2019). The aim of validation is to a) recognise and place value on knowledge and competences – passive/summative or instrumental validation; b) stimulate further learning, which places a value on personal education/learning development – activating/formative validation; c) focus on the person him/herself, a process in which the individual self-evaluates or assesses within a reflective form of validation (Harris 1999; Duvekot 2014).

3. Adult Educators in the Context of Public Policies in Portugal: The Recognition of Prior Learning

Due to the intermittent and discontinuous nature of public policies on adult education since the 1974 Democratic Revolution (Lima 2005), up to the late 1990s, adult educators had formed a strongly heterogeneous professional group, in terms of basic training paths, professional experience and status and employment status, etc. (Rothes 2003; Lima 2006). Many were teachers of second-chance education and, simultaneously, of formal education of children and young people; others were trainers in vocational training. Some were involved in emancipatory and autonomous social movements and projects; others led non-formal education activities in the context of socio-cultural animation and

local development. The diversity of the contexts of intervention and the heterogeneity of their practices showed how adult educators carried out a great variety of activities. They also suggested that they did not consider themselves as adult educators. In accordance with their professional activity or basic training, they saw themselves mainly as teachers, trainers, sociocultural promoters, local development agents and activists (Paulos 2015).

This situation also stemmed from the fact that many adult education practices, namely those connected to community education, local development, social movements, socio-cultural animation, etc., derived from the historical and philosophical foundations of adult education in which value was placed on collective participation, political education and forms of intervention that were strongly committed to resolving social and political problems and, therefore, did not highlight the action of a professional. Other practices, linked to other foundations, such as self-directed learning, autobiographical narratives, etc., attributed less significance to the action of the adult educator to focus more on the experience and learning of the learners (Murphy 2015). These practices led to a devaluation of the creation of a profession for which, albeit in professional terms, more and more knowledge and specific tasks are required, in addition to stricter regulations, new requirements for entry into the labour market, as well as innovative performance benchmarks defined by government or other entities (Nuisl 2009; Sava 2011).

Following the publication of the EU Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (European Commission 2000), as well as other European Union guidelines and specific legislation for adult education and training provision established in Portugal in the meantime, the situation of certain adult educators presents new contours in the framework of the public policy implementation in force since then. The new offerings proposed to adults, such as the recognition of prior learning, led to the emergence of new occupations, tasks and professional activities. One of the pillars of this policy was the enhancement of adult learner-centred educational and pedagogical methods and learning stemming from life experience in both non-formal and informal contexts (Cavaco 2007, 2009), to value the guidance and validation of competences (Lima and Guimarães 2011; Guimarães and Barros 2015; Guimarães 2016).

The official guidelines and the legislation published since 2000 fostered the emergence of new occupations and the creation of a labour market targeting adult educators, initially in Centres for the Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences³. Among these, the recognition, validation and certification professionals, and later, after 2007, the practitioners who were in charge of diagnosis and referral in the New Opportunities Centres, were confronted with a highly significant increase of adults enrolled in the courses on offer. Therefore, between 2000 and 2005, 153,719 adults were enrolled in the recognition of prior learning and, of these, 44,192 received school certification.

³ Order no. 1082-A/2001, 5/09.

While these figures already reflected a considerable increase in the number of adult learners enrolled and certified by second-chance education in the 1990s (Pinto et al. 1998), under the New Opportunities Initiative (2005), between 2006 and 2010, that difference increased as 1,163,236 adults were enrolled in the New Opportunities Centres⁴ and, of these, 365,449 received a school and/or vocational certificate through recognition of prior learning. This situation led to the presence of 11,611 adult educators in the existing Centres in 2010 (Agência Nacional para a Qualificação 2011).

The legislation in force introduced the requirement of a higher academic certification as a condition for the employment of these educators. Therefore, in several studies (Guimarães 2009; Conselho Nacional de Educação 2010; Guimarães and Barros 2015; Guimarães 2016) it was argued that these educators were more qualified than those working in other fields of adult education, such as, for example, in socio-cultural animation. With regard to (professional) associations, after 2008, the national association of adult education and training (Associação Portuguesa de Educação e Formação de Adultos) was created, although few developments were seen in areas deemed important by Afonso (2008) and Loureiro (2009) for the construction of a professionalization process, such as the adoption of codes of ethics and conduct with respect to professional autonomy and responsibility.

In 2011, the suspension of the public policy on adult education and training led to the unemployment of the adult educators working in the Centres. However, as in 2013, the Centres for Qualification and Vocational Education were established⁵, and (some) technicians for the guidance, recognition and validation of competences were recruited. More recently, in 2016, the published legislation provided for the establishment of Qualifica Centres⁶ and the significant recruitment of these technicians. Today, in 2021, there are more than 300 Qualifica Centres operating throughout the country, in which adult learners' validation and guidance are developed⁷.

4. New Occupation

Denoting the importance of the role of the State in the construction of new occupations (Steiner 2014), according to the official documents, the criteria for the recruitment of technicians for the guidance, recognition and validation of competences refer to basic training and complementary training and/or work experience. As far as the recruitment of these technicians is concerned, no specific basic training at the level of higher education is required⁸. The 2002 docu-

⁴ Order no. 370/2008, 21/05.

⁵ Order no. 135-A/2013, 28/03.

⁶ Order no. 232/2016, 29/08.

⁷ For more information, see <<https://www.qualifica.gov.pt/#/pesquisaCentros>> (2023-03-15).

⁸ Order no. 232/2016, 29/08.

mentation (Agência Nacional de Educação e Formação de Adultos 2002) and the legislation published in the meantime, such as, for example, the legislation of 2016⁹, indicate that these adult educators should have a higher education certification, at a degree level. Yet while the document of 2002 specifies basic training in social sciences and humanities as an entry requirement, the later legislation does not refer to this specification.

According to Rothes (2003), until 1989, there was no formal basic training for adult educators in Portugal that specifically addressed adult education themes. This circumstance reflected the marginal status of the field within the education system and public policies, as well as the alienation of higher education in the definition of formal education paths for a sector that was barely acknowledged socially. In the 1990s, graduate training offerings emerged, at first at the bachelor's level, and later at degree, master and doctoral levels. Some of these offerings included adult education as a field of specialisation. Initially, the animation and intervention (community and socio-cultural) courses were the most prevalent; at a later stage, social education, education, education sciences and education and training degrees were established. However, despite the existence of these degrees, weaknesses were still denoted in the social and academic recognition of adult education (Steiner 2014), reflected in the lack of an indication of the specific basic initial education required for recruitment. Thus, several authors (Cavaco 2007; Loureiro 2009; Barros 2011; Paulos 2014) reported in their studies that many of these recruited by centres promoting the recognition, validation and certification of competences since 2001, had basic training in a variety of areas, such as psychology, sociology, education sciences/education/education and training and other fields, mainly of a social and educational nature. Therefore, many of these were not aware of the theoretical developments concerning adult education.

As for the adult educators' complementary training and/or previous work experience, the documents under analysis state that technicians for the guidance, recognition and validation of competences should have knowledge and professional experience in adult education methodologies, namely in the assessment of competences and the construction of learning portfolios. Additionally, they should be familiar with and have professional experience in the techniques and strategies for diagnosis and guidance, academic and vocational guidance, for the monitoring of young people and adults in different training modalities and in training in a work context. On the one hand preference was given to candidates with knowledge in the field of validation (related to the assessment of competences, to the construction of life stories and learning portfolios which would highlight the competences acquired by the adult learners throughout life), on the other hand, the importance of knowledge in the field of guidance was emphasised, an area which is characteristic, for example, of a psychologist's work.

⁹ Order no. 232/2016, 29/08.

4.1 Tasks Foreseen

As regards the tasks foreseen in the legislation, the technician for the guidance, recognition and validation of competences should¹⁰: promote guidance sessions for young people and adults; identify education and training paths; organise information sessions on education and training offerings, the labour market, career avenues, training needs, as well as mobility opportunities within Europe and overseas with regard to training and work; refer them to education and training offerings; monitor them while attending education and training courses and later, upon insertion in the labour market. Tasks are also intended to frame the adults in the recognition, validation and certification of school, professional and double certification, according to their life experience and competences held; inform them of the content and stages of that process; accompany them throughout the process, by dynamizing the recognition sessions, providing support in the construction of the portfolio and applying specific assessment instruments, in liaison with the trainers and/or teachers; and identify the training needs, considering the work of others, such as trainers and teachers.

With a view to interpreting these tasks in light of the proposal of Research voorBeleid (2010), value was found to be given to the following clusters:

- assessment of the education and training needs through an analysis of the life history of the learner and the recognition of knowledge developed throughout life;
- information on existing education and training offerings, in coordination with guidance processes, including those geared towards school and professional careers, work and work contexts;
- identification and/or facilitation of learning through competence validation and certification, namely in the relationship between acquired learning and adults' life contexts; development of motivation and encouragement strategies; creation of positive individual or collective learning environments; promotion of individual strategies for the identification of acquired learning and group dynamics; monitoring and evaluation of activities focusing on lifelong learning, regarding contexts, processes and results obtained.

5. Activities Carried Out in the Work Context

Overall, the activities carried out by the adult educators corresponded to those suggested by the legislation and official documents. Additionally, the studies under analysis referred to activities focusing on two dimensions (Martins 2012):

- the technical, pedagogical and educational dimension, which globally involved guidance and validation of competences, supporting adults in their autobiography construction (Cavaco 2007, 2009);

¹⁰ Order no. 232/2016, 29/08.

- the organisation and procedural management dimension, referred to by Barros (2011) as handling paperwork and by Dias (2011) as back-office work, including administrative activities such as preparing minutes, reports, appraisals, referral proposals, completing various forms on paper or on electronic platforms, drawing up schedules and summaries or other records of an administrative nature.

While the latter activities consumed much of the technicians' working time and were not particularly challenging in terms of mobilising theoretical and relational knowledge and know-how (Barros 2011), the former, which fell within the technical, pedagogical and educational dimension, consisted of three levels:

Level One

This first level specified the weight of the activities with adults within the scope of the validation of competences, including the connection between the competences specified in the Key Competences Benchmarks (fundamental mediation instruments in the work of these technicians), and the knowledge acquired by adult learners throughout their lives, in the context of portfolio construction. In this context, the relationship established between the technician for the guidance, recognition and validation of competences and the adults in the construction of their biographies was highly relevant, as far as the validation of competences was concerned, based on dialogue and cooperation which stemmed from their remembrance of life experience, the explicitness of those moments and the writing and reflection on events and life stages. Cavaco (2007) also highlighted the importance of promoting the stimulation and motivation of adults to identify what they had learned throughout their lives, which involved a variety of activities (such as indicating what had been learned, reflection and self-analysis, self-recognition and self-evaluation of acquired knowledge). Martins (2012) also underlined guidance activities related to receiving and informing adults about the recognition of prior learning, assessing education and training needs, coaching and mentoring.

As at this level the experimentation and application of instructions, benchmarks and guidelines, etc. were central (Pereira 2009) within the scope of validation, it also included activities with a strong relational component. In this regard, Cavaco (2007) went further and argued that these technicians emerged as the adults' gatekeepers (who helped adults with where they wanted to go and the extent they were able to go) and allies (namely when they listened to them, helped them, guided them in their autobiographical reflection). Martins (2012) also argued that, due to the specific nature of the educational relationship established, the technicians for the guidance, recognition and validation of competences practised guidance and emerged as tutors, mentors, counsellors and companions. Such work characteristics, particularly the close relationship with adults in validation and guidance, led Barros (2011) to state that there was even a psychologization of the process of recognition and validation of competences, which devalued the political and critical dimension that could be included in this adult education offering.

Level Two

The second level involved the individual reading of legislation, benchmarks, guidelines, instructions, namely the documentation produced internally by the centres, an analysis and appropriation of the prescribed tasks which would later be carried out in professional daily life. This level included several stages, according to Pereira (2009): preparation for performing a task; production of knowledge and meanings, theoretical preparation, often shared with other co-workers and which fostered an understanding of ways of doing; and the development of an activity followed by reflection on the action, such as by assessing the work performed, awareness, a reflection on action that could lead to the re-organisation of knowledge (Schön 2000). Since this level was centred on the adult educator, it resulted from a period of self-directed learning or *formation expérientielle* (Pineau 1988), of reflection on what had been done and how it had been carried out, with a view to doing it better and faster. In this respect, Barros (2011) argued that these technicians often sought the correct interpretation of the centrally defined benchmarks, with the purpose of reproducing technical guidelines, in a process of implicit acceptance of top-down action logics. Thus, there were practices of adjustment to a model of educational and pedagogical intervention defined outside the space of the centres but imposed on the daily life of these technicians which, in the case of some entities based in civil society organisations, was not in line with the mission of those institutions. It was at this level that the pressure regarding the fulfilment of the certified adult learners' benchmarks imposed on the centres and consequently on individual productivity was felt, namely when assessing the efficacy and efficiency of the public offering, which translated into a significant technicalisation of the work of these technicians (Guimarães 2009; Guimarães and Barros 2015).

It should also be noted that this level was highlighted in the analysed texts, especially as the technicians interviewed and observed were young adult educators with little professional experience, particularly in the field of adult education (Dias 2009; Pereira 2010; Barros 2011; Dias 2011) or, when they had some professional experience, it had been acquired in other professional areas, such as teaching (Pereira 2009) or vocational education and training, culture and community intervention (Paulos 2014). Professional development was being conducted by means of successive adjustments (Martins 2012). In this context, the processes of recontextualisation, mobilisation, interpretation and adaptation of the knowledge held to new contexts and professional situations were dominant, allowing previous practices, after being understood, internalised and reflected, to give rise to new knowledge and ways of acting (Dias 2009; Loureiro 2009).

Level Three

The third level referred to the work carried out with co-workers. Here the references in the analysed texts to the validation of competences involving the processes of reading and interpreting the prescribed work, referred to as decod-

ing, deconstruction, de-occultation, simplification, translation, etc., particularly of the Key Competences Benchmarks, but also of the guidance guidelines, are particularly noteworthy. Working with co-workers with the same or other occupations, from the same centre or from other centres, in teams, was frequently mentioned, and references to periods of sharing work materials, discussing problems faced in daily life with technicians from other centres in networks or collaborative spaces were also made. In this regard, Martins (2012) emphasised the role of networking performed by these technicians. Dias (2011), in turn, pointed to the emergence of practice communities (Lave and Wenger 2003). They stemmed from the educators' discussions of the problems encountered in their professional daily lives, with the purpose of improving practices and correcting deviations from the guidelines of the official documents. In this process, joint decision-making was valued, framed by the centre coordinator who defined the standards to be followed. In this respect Dias (2011, 63) argued that adult educators, in particular the technicians for the guidance, recognition and validation of competences, were more concerned about taking action than about the reasons that had led them to take action, and therefore little value was given to the critical and political dimension of the work conducted (Barros 2011).

Resorting once again to the proposal of Research voorBeleid (2010), the activities carried out by the technicians under analysis included those already specified in the previous point, related to validation and guidance, as well as the assessment of education and training needs and the information on education and training offerings. These activities have a strong technical but weak educational component, thus accentuating the technicalisation of the work, but devaluing the political and critical dimension of education. Additionally, largely due to the (little) professional experience of these technicians and the (lack of or little) continuing training, many of the activities resulted in self-directed learning (Pineau 1988) through the reproduction and recontextualisation of knowledge and know-how (Loureiro 2009), referring to the preparation of education and training activities involving the reading and analysis of various documents (laws, guidelines, resources for education, training, learning, etc.), the construction of knowledge regarding the recognition and validation of competences and the understanding of the stages of a process that differed from those that were characteristic of formal teaching and education. Finally, the connection activities, namely working with co-workers, dialogue and sharing and on-the-job training, were particularly highlighted in the analysed studies, in moments of reflection in action and, above all, on action (Schön 2000). In this context, the hidden curriculum (Apple 2002) inherent to work contexts was brought to light, reflected in the weight of these locations as spaces for mobilising knowledge and developing new knowledge associated with practice. The new learning acquired by these technicians emphasised the informal knowledge constructed and learned on the job. These periods of eco-training with other technicians focused on the problems encountered and the thought through, applied and evaluated solutions. They transformed the centres into spaces of collectively developed knowledge

which was built, rebuilt, shared and used in practice. Thus, these technicians were able to manage the margins of (some degree of) autonomy and to recontextualise the defined tasks (Loureiro 2009).

6. Final Considerations

This chapter has addressed the expected tasks of adult educators, such as technicians for the guidance, validation and certification of competences and the activities they perform in the workplace in light of a proposed analysis framework (Research voorBeleid 2010). The ensuing discussion highlights the importance of validation and guidance in the work of these adult educators. However, it is important to note that activities of an educational and pedagogical nature carry little weight for these technicians. Therefore, these tasks demonstrate the individual learning of adult learners (devaluing social learning and the collective dimensions of education). Additionally, the stress upon guidance and validation considering labour market needs (devaluing other kinds of needs and problems adult learners might have that can be fulfilled by adult education offerings) places a strong emphasis upon knowledge that is relevant for work (devaluing other sorts of knowledge). It is important to note that adult educators who develop guidance and validation may be seen as lifelong learning technicians (Guimarães 2016), fostering knowledge that is relevant for making people employable, work performance, anticipating employment/work problems and promoting adaptative solutions, thus devaluing the transformative and emancipatory dimensions of adult education.

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