

## Training in Mediation: An Educational Mechanism for new Professional Profiles

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**Abstract** *The need for Lifelong Education and Training has become a politically defined requirement and not just an intrinsic relevance to human beings. In this context, new training proposals arise, which are associated with young professionals in an emerging field that is known as Adult Education and Training. In this sense, over the last decade Portugal and France have embraced new challenges in this field with the establishment in France of the process of Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience (VAE) and in Portugal of the process of Recognition, Validation and Certification of Skills (RVCC) and of courses for the Education and Training of Adults (EFA Courses). From these innovations in the field of education new pedagogical requirements and new professionals have also emerged: namely, the Diagnosis and Referral Technicians and the RVC Professionals in the RVCC process, the EFA Mediators and the Professionals of VAE. Some of the objectives of this study are to get to know about and question the features of the profiles of the new professional and to identify their training needs. The data resulting from the predominantly qualitative multi-case study conducted in Portugal and France, namely, the analysis of semi-directive interviews and autobiographical narratives, points to the need for these new professionals to attend regular professional training in the areas of Adult Education and Training and Mediation and these are the results that will be questioned and discussed in this text.*

**Keywords** *Lifelong Learning Education; Adult Education; Training needs*

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### 1. Introduction

These days the concept of training is inserted into our daily lives almost without asking permission. Cruz (1998) reports that there has been an increase in formal training within organizations; namely, training organized in a formal program of learning, which is implemented in a particular place.

In turn, one of the most focused on aspects currently is training within the work context. In fact, several authors theorize about these issues. Ferry (1991) and Lesne (1984), in particular, refer to theoretical models in which training is based, especially, in work situations and on practices and experiences of subjects in a professional context and Canário (1997) also points out the training potential of working contexts. It is in this line of thought that Correia (1997) perceives the emergence of processes directed at a fusion between training and work, which is strengthened by the acquisition of concepts such as continuing education and retraining.

However, the relationship between training and work situations was not always peaceful. Initially, education and work were seen as two dichotomous realities. With the development of the capitalist system, there was a transformation of this dichotomy in temporal separation i.e. education preceded work in a sequential manner. Education - promoter of cultural mechanisms and socialization - took the form of education for work and in the latter the notion of skilled labor resulting from training was introduced.

Nevertheless, the crisis at work and in education, especially from the 1970s onwards, led to this relational sequence starting to be questioned, as the relationship between educational provision and labor supply began to be shaken up.

Presently, it appears that education has stopped being prior to the working sphere and is concurrent with it (Silva, 2005), due to the accelerated transformations of production processes. In turn, the instability of the world of employment has led to the acknowledgement that training cannot be limited to preparation for a steady job for life. Thus, the concepts of comprehensive training and re-training appear to be associated with a conception of work that, unlike a few decades ago, is marked by uncertainty and relative (but growing) instability (Correia, 1996).

Consequently, training in work situations has become an important and significant commitment, as underlined by Canário

(2000: 7), when he points out that it becomes necessary to “think the professional activity and the training activity in a perspective integrated on the one hand (the two spheres are not separable today) and, on the other hand, in a diachronic perspective, i.e. inserted in the arrow of time, while unique phenomena and endowed with irreversibility.”

As pointed out by Correia (1996), the field of training has been meddling increasingly in the world of work, which is meant to be a potential instance for training. It follows, therefore, that the relationship between training and work has become narrower and the first is no longer superior to the second but they are now dynamically and mutually interactive (Silva, 2005, 2072).

Canário (2000: 12) - in this context - stressed that “education basically reinvents new forms of professional socialization, which calls for the establishment and development in the work contexts of a dynamic both formative and of identity construction that makes this reinvention possible.”

Thus, “spaces and times of high density training” (Correia, 1996: 104) may arise, among others, from work and “the understanding of the dynamics of work situations may contribute to the understanding of the dynamics of training situations, if one does not confuse the real performance of work with the prescribed work and if one takes into account the systems of **human relations** in which these situations are inscribed” (*Ibidem*).

In fact, an emphasis on the valuing of professional practices, which are inseparable from work and contribute to (re)construction of the identity (Matos, 1999: 247-248) can be highlighted.

It is in this context that continuing education, especially that related to professional situations, has become increasingly important, particularly when one is facing - at first hand - the bulwark of Lifelong Learning and, second, when one is confronted with the demands of the present day job market. This framework can lead to the question of whether or not adults seek training, specifically, in their work context.

As Malglaive (1995: 244) mentions, “it seems clear that any training can be an “object” likely to become the target of the motivation of a human being who can find there a way to establish the relationships required for an optimal expression of their functional capabilities.”

Training is often required when it allows the solving of practical problems in the lives of individuals, particularly, in professional situations, which is one of the main motivations for its frequency.

Thus, with training, subjects may realize that this may present itself as a privileged way of personal fulfillment that encapsulates their needs.

How do the professionals that participated in this study see the need for training? How do they relate their motivation with the specific situations that they experience in their everyday context of action?

The data that allow an answer to these questions is part of a larger research project, whose theme is “Figures of Mediation in Adult Education: A Multi-case Study from the experience in Portugal and France.” This is a study focusing on Mediation in the context of Adult Education and Training in Portugal and France, which is an emerging area included in the wider field of Mediation, which has been under ever widening investigation given its alternate character with regard to resolution and prevention of conflicts.

## 2. Methodology

This research presents mixed instruments with regard to the use of qualitative and quantitative methodologies and it focuses on a phenomenological and constructivist perspective, which seeks to analyze and understand the meaning individuals give to their actions.

With this end in mind a comparative Multi-case Study of two Portuguese educational models - the Courses for the Education and Training of Adults (EFA Courses) and the Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences (RVCC) - and a French system - the *Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience* (VAE) - was developed. Autobiographical narratives (six), semi-directive interviews (nine) and direct observations were carried out and the data was analyzed using the NVivo Software, version 9.0.

Surveys were also applied to the trainees on four Courses for the Education and Training of Adults in order to obtain their perceptions about the work done by the Mediators responsible for their respective Courses.

Finally, in order to expand the study, surveys of the Mediators of Courses for the Education and Training of Adults (EFA Mediators), Diagnosis and Referral Technicians (TDR), Professionals concerned with the Recognition and Validation of Competences (PRVC) in Portugal and Professionals related to VAE in France were also carried out. The quantitative data from the surveys was processed using SPSS Software, version 18.0 and open questions were analyzed using content analysis.

Discussion regarding this paper will be based on the analysis of the autobiographical narratives and semi-directive interviews conducted during the exploratory phase of the investigation with seven Professionals working in the field of

Mediation in the context of the Education and Training of Adults, under the Courses for the Education and Training of Adults (two EFA Mediators), the Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences (one TDR and three PRVC) and VAE (one Professional from VAE).

### 3. Presentation of the main results

While in the 1960s initial training was seen as sufficient to discharge the duties of a given profession, continuous training is currently present in discourses and professional practices (Ribeiro, 2009). In fact, in this field of study the PRVC are clear, when they indicate that initial training, although it is a *sine qua non* condition for the exercise of their functions, is not enough and they mention the need to attend specific training. In this regard, it is possible to identify some of their significant statements:

*Then, I think there should be specific training for Professionals and Trainers of RVCC. There are people who work in the RVCC and they don't even know what a Recognition of Competences is, they will learn on the job and until they realize the logic, they also will not be able to explain the logic to the adults (...) we have to know well the subject, the concepts to succeed in realizing the dimension of it all* (Excerpts from the Interview with PRVC 1)

*Now, that I think that the Professionals of Recognition should have specific training. I do, because there is some, there is some inherent responsibility to what we do and there is a need to take things seriously and with rigor, there, there is a need to understand what we are doing and why we are doing it. I had training when I came in, specifically, for Professionals of Recognition, anyway, I think a contextualization of Adult Education is an important feature, therefore, training, in this context, to me is more important or crucial or central than the initial training, because it has direct consequences in what we do* (Excerpts from the Interview with PRVC 2)

Thus, it appears that training and its relationship to the world of work is seen as a process that goes beyond the period of schooling of the individuals. In fact, in the process of identity reconfiguration, "training occupies a prominent status, insofar as it facilitates the visibility of the specific knowledge of the profession and reflects the process of questioning the professional practices that are fundamental to the social and scientific demarcation of the profession" (Abreu, 1997: 149). The Professionals that participated in this study admit logically the need to articulate training and work, being in the first instance "an indispensable condition for the realization of work and for their own personal and professional achievement" (Silva, 2005: 2078). Their interest in attending training is evident, as can be read in their statements:

*I would like [to attend training]* (Excerpt from the Interview with Mediator 1)

*Yes, yes, always [frequency of training]* (Excerpt from the Interview with TDR)

*I think, I increasingly feel that need for training for my loyalty to the procedures and ways of working, effectively, at all Centers (...) and what happens is that a person that is simply of the area of Social Sciences can be a Professional and sometimes without a specific training and I think the responsibility of our work is too big to be done this way* (Extract from the Interview with PRVC 1)

*I would like to attend training* (Excerpt from the Narrative of PRVC 2)

*This is a hypothesis that arises in the future ... but not a too distant future* (Excerpt from the Narrative of PRVC 3)

In turn, this willingness to seek training is not recent, as they referred to the importance of past opportunities to attend training that enabled them to develop professionally, which leads one to reflect on the real importance attached to these training processes that relate to their work context:

*... and to the exercise of the profession I also did, at the time I was sharing the role with a colleague (...) even because she was doing it for longer than me, deep down, I also had some internal training (...) a lot of internal training with that person* (Excerpt from the Interview with TDR)

*Then, recently, I attended training* (Excerpt from the Interview with Mediator 2)

*She [the Coordinator] invited me to participate in any type of training that may be beneficial to my ownership of the job (Excerpt from the Interview with Professional of VAE)*

*Now I will attend training in online training management. I think this training will help me greatly in my job performance (Excerpt from the Narrative of 1Mediator 1)*

In terms of areas of training, the Professionals point out the need to increase knowledge in their current field of action, including: Training Management, Interpersonal Relationship, Time Management, Education and Training of Adults, Social Education, Referential of Key Competences of the High School Level; Mediation, Human Resources, Educational Policies. In terms of procedures, they referred to the desire to share experiences with peers in order to adjust content, understand practices and adapt procedures as is reflected in these statements:

*Yes, it would be good. (...) To do some training with Mediators of other institutions to see how they work elsewhere and try to improve, perhaps, a task that is not being so well developed (Excerpt from the Interview with Mediator 1)*

*Look, I got it, I was invited to participate in a (...) that involved the share of experiences about EFA's and it was an interesting experience, (...) each one reported how their groups were and how they managed their situations*

*Eventually, it was a very enriching training, in terms of what we learned, all of our surroundings in terms of experience, there was a big share (...) It was interesting (Excerpts from the Interview with Mediator 2)*

*... and I felt the need to talk, to exchange views in the sense even (...) to help me (Excerpt from the Interview with TDR)*

*I would like it to be here at the Academy (...) we make our self-training, we have weekly meetings, (...) and we discuss often these things but maybe it was important for someone to come from outside also to show us where we are wrong, because maybe we are not correct in everything (Excerpt from the Interview with PRVC 1)*

Thus, it was noticed that the Professionals see training as a need and a demand both personally and in terms of organization i.e. as a form of updating knowledge, improving their practices and helping to maintain their job. Therefore, "the quality of work, being a decisive factor of competition, is also a condition of keeping employed and, therefore, there is shown the convergence of interests between the demands of production and the need for qualification i.e. training" (Matos, 1999: 240).

#### **4. Analysis and discussion of the results presented**

The data presented indicated the necessity for the Professionals to develop training in the broader perspective of their professional context, in particular. The subjects revealed interest in attending training that enabled them to exchange experiences in order to improve their working mechanisms and, here, it is possible to highlight the reference to sharing groups, which alerts one to their need to share knowledge with their peers, which is essential for improving their professional performance.

Furthermore, this aspect leads one to reflect on the fact that training is seen not as a temporary space for learning but as a permanent activity, which allows the evolution of the individuals and acquires a significant expression in real work settings. As Silva (2003: 91) points out, "training (...) favors this construction of meaning as an enhancer of reflection, understanding and participation of the subjects as actors and authors in the social processes," thus stressing the importance of training and spaces for reflection about professional practices. In fact, the Professionals related training with work situations in order to seek the know-how that allows them to address problems presented to them in the workplace.

Their reflection on practice must, therefore, be present in the training context of the subjects, because "reflection awakens a critical sense, revealing the reality and integrating the personal and professional thinking" (Valente and Viana, 2009: 4). Consequently, the Professionals seek to develop an anticipatory reflection of change in their action, which involves an exercise of thinking about their acts and the assimilation of new knowledge, because "learning through reflection is, essentially, a process of enlightenment, enrichment and emancipation" (Meneses, 1996: 30-31). Since it "is in the action that the pedagogical knowledge is produced" (Valente and Viana, 2009: 4) by reflecting and understanding

their practice, the authors construct new representations of their context of action, thus responding with a new perspective to the situations/problems that arise in their daily lives.

As regards Lieury (1999: 279), "learning by doing will be more relevant and faster because it is closer to professional reality," hence the importance of discussion groups, the sharing of learning and analysis of real and practical cases. In consequence, the Professionals are looking for training that focuses on "the interiority of the subjects, on their professional experience and on the ability to communicate inter-subjectively" (Silva, 2000: 105), thus it is a training that articulates theory and practice, experience and reflection.

Here one is facing experiential learning, where experiences are processed to produce knowledge (Kolb, 1984) and they acquire, in this sense, a formative character, where one finds a link between knowledge and know-how, which is mediated by a reflective component. The Professionals seek, therefore, to play an active role in the transformation of their work situations by engaging themselves with training mechanisms, which refer to their actual work and the (re)building of skills. By examining their practices, they feel involved and committed to their educational process.

In terms of motivations to attend training, these emerge from the personal and professional demands of the subjects i.e. on the one hand, they feel happy to cultivate themselves, to deepen knowledge, to acquire new skills and to seek to exchange experiences; on the other hand, they want to improve their competences in order to produce a better job performance, which will help them to manage their career. As is realized, the motivation to attend training comes from a relationship between external demands and internal aspirations (Dubar, 1995: 93) and this aspect validates the importance and the impact that the concept of Lifelong Learning has in the construction of the identities of the Professionals.

## 5. Conclusion

As pointed out by Dubar (1997), companies are increasingly being "forced" to invest in training and in this sense they put pressure on their employees by calling for their participation and attendance in educational contexts. On the other hand, training may arise as a means of promotion, as a strategy to find a job or a more satisfying and ambitious job in terms of individual expectations. Therefore, the rule of professionalism and progress/success based on the completion of training prevails, as it is related to issues of mobility and qualification, which generate, therefore, training for progression.

Present day society requires individuals to develop a movement of constant adaptation to their professional situations (Fabre, 1994: 27), so one can recognize the need to complete or deepen training, to re-cycle knowledge, to improve techniques and to acquire new skills.

In the specific circumstances of this study, the Professionals revealed a strong desire to invest in their training for progression or to update knowledge and acquire skills in areas as diverse and demanding as Adult Education and Training and Mediation, which is related to the characteristics of their duties that are framed in new occupations for which there is little specific training.

Therefore, in conclusion, it can be stated that the subjects conceive their professional life as a system in permanent evolution, during which "they will never finish learning and in which they will have to forge an identity open to all possible progressions" (Dubar, 1997: 217) by establishing a positive (and necessary) relationship between training and work contexts.

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