

## The Sophisticated Adult Learning Supporter (SALS)

Savena BORISOVA, Ph.D., New Bulgarian University

The concept for the Sophisticated Adult Learning Supporter (SALS) is not simply a holistic approach highlighting the different roles and features of the effective Adult Learning Supporter (ALS). But it is a syncretism of the artistic skills and techniques of its personality, which is worth to be branded. The lucky thought has given rise, during the development of the “Training Concept EASY” and it has been clarified while piloting it with ten participants.

It is considered important to elicit the extended roles and new challenges in front of the adult learning such as the internal institutional needs (human and financial resources), external factors as economical, political – social inclusion of the minorities and immigrants and the climate of the demographic decline-pension system changes. How to respond to these tendencies? Are the Core Critical Competences of the ALS’s in innovative blended learning solutions enough? In attempt to answer to those questions we will focus on the eight descriptors that best depict the Sophisticated Adult Learning Supporter (SALS).

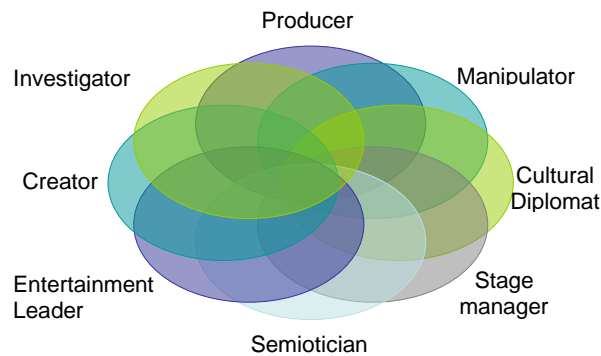


Fig.1: The 8<sup>th</sup> interrelated and interdependent valuable competences in the treasury tool box of the Sophisticated Adult Learning Supporter

**Producer** – The SALS bears the responsibility for the entire inexpensive production process with guaranteed audience, because of the location and the needs’ analyses of the targeted groups. Starting from the planning of the learning settings in terms of work plan, task descriptions, timetables, ways of effective information, passing through the design of the training tools, fundraising and managing the budget, he is the liaison person working on the borderland between the employers and the employees. The semiotic thinking for variety of tasks and situations is needed. “Be thought of semiotic means to think in many ways” [B. Bogdanov, 2006, 7-8 p.]. Success factors in terms of quality of the curriculum content and high didactic competence stressing on the good practical points are to be provided. Well-founded knowledge on safety measures and basic legal questions are essential. Acquaintance with the national governmental approaches for assessment and recognition of the non-formal and informal learning related to the European Action Plan on Adult Learning [COM(2007)558 final] is important for supporting learners to translate the learning outcomes to the labour market.

But to enhance the labour mobility the SALS is familiar with that the compatibility of the qualifications, acquired through non-formal or informal learning, could be described by levels 5 to 8 of the European Qualification Framework [Explaining the European Qualification Framework for Lifelong Learning (2008), 9-10 p.].

**Investigator** – The SALS is expected to survey the adult learning identities and their needs for learning. He is supposed to experience sociological instruments to analyse the targeted groups. The assumption that the learning process is a type of social institution assigns him the role of the social and practical psychologist, who is able to be flexible enough to possess the situation so that all learners' opinions and experience to be respected. The sophistication is hidden not in the competency of conflict solving but in the skills of prevention.

The different cognitive styles of the learners should be defined in order to address each of the interpretative strategies of the group to create an environment for better understanding. For the illustrations and confirmation of the utility of the semio-cognitive approach see (Umiker-Sebeok 1992). It is used to study the museum visitors' perception and to evaluate the learning effects of the displayed exposition, considered as the main form of Adult Learning Setting in a museum. Experience in the use of the Long Interview (McCracken, Grant 1988), skills in questionnaire development, based on Likert scale and ability to use factor analyses method to process the received data and make the proper conclusions are highly appreciated.

**Manipulator** – The true manipulation, according Josef Kirschner (1995) is intended here. After the Maslow's theory of motivation, (1943), the formal learning could be situated at the "self –esteem" fourth level of the "d-needs", where the needs for competence, status and recognition are. But the informal learning could not be ranked, because it exists at each of the five level of the pyramid. This implies the SALS should have knowledge in variety of techniques for intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to address the coloured needs of the different target groups of adult learners. He is expected to practise a methodology how to discover the expectations and the needs of a learning group. To perform the required motivation tools, adequate communication skills are needed, but the combination of both best forms the respectful manipulator. Thus it is essential for the SALS to have expertise in all aspects of the verbal and non-verbal communication and the global motivational theories and practices.

**Creator - Crafts Laboratory establisher:** The exploration of the potential of technology in designing of the training tools, combined with the creative thinking of the SALS, enhances the impact on trainee's learning. The development of instructional approaches, based on a real –life situations in which new ideas are related to the previous experience of the learners in an exciting way, is imperative in the spirit of adult education. Having the learning setting developed, the scenario written and the roles distributed, the SALS have to expand his repository of methods and tools to accelerate the learning process in an exciting way. The use of appropriate metaphors, analogies and interpretation of non-verbal messages is encouraged. The innovative options, non-verbal techniques and artistic solutions should be in the employ of the experienced instructor. Imagination and fresh original ideas for systematic rejuvenation of the training methods map the road towards powerful instruction results. To go beyond conventionality a crafts laboratory is to be established for various non-verbal aids elaboration in terms of building puzzles, drawings, maps, cards, boxes, figures, role-plays and artistic pursuits.

**Cultural Diplomat** – Cultural studies language is imposed to find the best concept for: attracting, developing and retaining the multicultural groups in the region of the learning setting provision. Proficiency in knowledge and understandings of the cultural diversity and cultural pluralism to address the cultural differences in the learners group is highly appreciated. Awareness of the European dimensions of the represented institution and region is indispensable for turning the learning space into a “European learning room”. The unique role of the Cultural diplomacy competence is to foster the mutual understanding and intercultural dialogue in the learning process and when the situation deserves to serve as a peace keeping force. The SALS acts as an informal cultural diplomat in the learning space. Thus he is supposed to update his knowledge and experience in the innovative modern methods and techniques for icebreaking, warm-ups, and interactive games as for example the recently wide used Norwegian psychological test Diversity Icebreaker (1). It is intended for easy application and understanding before the start of the training or seminar and helps management of diversity and is considered as more positive alternative of Myers Briggs.

**Stage-manager** - There is no doubt that the learning process is an art and artistic techniques are most recommended for better comprehension at the end. Therefore the learning setting is a performance without an audience because all the participants are actors on its stage. The SALS' responsibilities vary depending on the setting and running the production. Being the supervisor he sets the tone on the training stage. As a liaison person in the learners' team his duty is to keep up the positive attitude and encourage actors to perform the producer's views and artistic choices to maintain the quality of the learning process. After the training play is open the SALS should oversee the on time running of the tasks according the schedule of the planned Learning setting. Building a productive, problem-solving environment with respectful results is not possible without equipment provision; it appears to be an additional responsibility of the training provider. To complete the respective training performance means to summarize what was said and what was understood and make conclusions how helpful will be the gained experience in their future work.

**Entertainment leader** – The perceptions that adult learning process is beyond the transmission of knowledge presupposes rethinking of the practices to stimulate the interactive creative teaching activities and perform them in an entertaining way. The relation of the training topics to the learners' real life scenario should be presented in a more enjoyable way by making use of games, role plays, simulations with intelligent sense of humour. To provoke critical thinking and initiate expressing of ideas for problem solutions by brainstorming is highly appreciated as a competency in asking questions, but in a way that invites great fun. The Adult Supporter, who is able to be a good listener and greatly respects the individual skills and motivation of the learners, while working together, is the leadership style to which it is worth seeking. He in a compelling way smoothly directs them to the appropriate problem-solving solutions during the practical based trainings. Best communication command is an authority and power for those who possess its efficient use. Better understanding means to speak in the language of the recipient, having in mind that only 7 % of the information is received by the verbal communication. Therefore excellence in oral and non-verbal expression is desired to accomplish the training tasks and reach the highest learning outcomes, relying on the win-win approach.

**Semiotician** – If the SALS has the ambition to impersonate the paradigm of the 21<sup>st</sup> century for the Adult Learning Support, then he/she also should reflect the brand of the new philosophy of applying semiotic theory in teaching methods development. The possession of deep knowledge in the theory of signs provides a set of critical methodologies for addressing the different cognitive-styles of the learners group. One of the keys to enhance the learning capacity of the trainees is to help them develop all levels of perception. The science which studies the interrelated and interdependent meanings and role plays of the signs and symbols is part of our daily life. In the everyday communication it is used unconsciously by both the learners and the adult learning supporters. That is why it is vital to explore the semiotic nature of the verbal and non-verbal communication to broaden the scope and effects of the training methods. Hence for instructional approaches based on problem solving can help the use of pragmatics. For better understanding and avoidance of confusion, the semantics should be focused on. The development and evolution of the structure of the work is a subject of the syntaxes. The SALS skilfully uses the three of them and reaches the best training results.

### Concluding Comments

The briefly described roles in the above lines are an attempt to portray the Adult Learning Supporter of new type, who demonstrates the power of the Lifelong Learning Concept. The Sophisticated Adult Learning Supporters are part of the most valuable assets and a key to growth and new jobs in the aging society in Europe. They are great expected to contribute the benchmarks in education and training of the Europe 2020 Strategy to be achieved. Hence it is a critical demand to reconsider the competences related to the expanded influence and the new functions of the adult learning supporter. The possession of interdisciplinary knowledge and demonstration of ability to use the eclectic borrowings from cultural studies, media, sociology, semiotic theories, management sciences, psychology and the new technology as well as a new type of behaviour and attitude is considered crucial. It could be argued that some of the suggested surveys and duties can be delegated to experts in the respective subject areas and it will be true. But to be able to analyze data and apply it appropriately in the learning process, the SALS should have sufficient knowledge of the area. The standard for sophistication premises membership in adult education networks on national and European wide level. The development of the new type of SALS is essential, not a luxury contribution to the andragogy system of concepts and approaches and is imperative for the long lasting spirit of the adult education.

### Bibliography

1. Ekelund, B. & Langvik, E. Diversity Icebreaker. How to manage Diversity Process. Oslo: Human Factors Publishing, 2008.
2. Explaining the European Qualification Framework for Lifelong Learning, Luxembourg, Office for Official Publication of the European Communities, 2008, 9-10 p.
3. Bogdanov, Bogdan. In the rose garden. Lectures and speeches Part 2 - 2003 – 2006, Sofia, Planeta3, 2006.
4. Kirschner, Josef. Manipulation, but true, Sofia, Kibea, 1995.
5. Maslow, A.H. A Theory of Human Motivation. Psychological Review 50(4) (1943):370-96.
6. McCracken, Grant (1988). The Long Interview. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
7. Paul Jay Edelson, Creativity and Adult Education, New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, no.81, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers, Spring1999, 3-12p.
8. Umiker-Sebeok, J. (1992). Meaning construction in a cultural gallery: A sociosemiotic study of consumption experiences in a museum. Advances in Consumer Research XIX: 46-55.