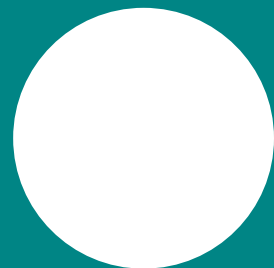
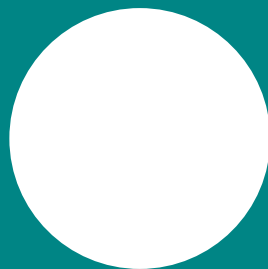
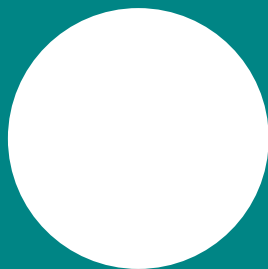


PODER

Competence
Framework



Competence Framework

Why deal with a competence framework ?

Competences are often conceptualized as the sum of three different levels of psycho-social resources: skills (behaviour level), attitudes (emotional or motivational level) and knowledge (cognitive level). A competence framework basically helps to give a precise answer to the question of what professionals really need to develop as skills, attitudes or knowledge in order to face specific demands. In the case of the PODER project these are: demands related to the presence and impact of power relations and hierarchies in adult education. The different products developed in PODER are partially parallel to this three-level conceptualization. For instance, the primary focus of our “Reader of Identity-based exclusions” is on the level of knowledge: it has to offer the vocabulary and information about different types of exclusions. Other products however, such as the toolkit for creating “Brave and transformative learning spaces”, draw on all three types of psychosocial resources.

What for?

A competence framework is a model useful in any professional development enterprise: it gives a model to orient the development efforts. Frequently competence frameworks are based on individual competences, orienting individual training, though competence frameworks could also point at institutional development needs. Ours is primarily focusing on the individual educator, even if we always consider the individuals with their social complexity. This seemingly individual focus is only needed so we can stress that even individual educators have agency, a margin of freedom to develop competences to face power-related challenges. This way the framework can be used as a compass offering readers ideas on what trainer postures, skills could help to overcome the challenges stemming from power dynamics and inequalities¹. In our own process, the competence framework is also expected to give specific targets for the consecutive project products.

How did we create it?

Our competence framework is derived from the collection of critical incidents experienced by adult educators and learners in France, Hungary, Italy and Spain. These were situations where the protagonists faced some challenge that could be related to power dynamics or hierarchy – either individual or based on groups. We used the incidents to identify and systematize these challenges so that we could identify the competencies needed to overcome them.



¹_ The reflection might be even more interesting if the framework is discussed by a group of educators.

COMPETENCE AREA	DEFINITION
Awareness of hierarchy / status in our own communication style	Capacity of self-reflection to become aware when one is assuming a dominant position in an interaction. Negotiating an appropriate level of horizontality adapted to the situation and to the proximity between participants.
Sensitivity to group dynamics	Sensitivity to changes in group dynamics, to the emotional state of the group or individual participants. This sensitivity should enable the educators to perceive whether or not they need to interfere, when to interfere, how to manage the emotions of the group, how to create good dynamics between the facilitator team and also between the participants.
Recognising and dealing with the diversity of identities amongst trainers / participants	Take note of, address, and respond to the specific diversity in the participants' group. This implies stepping out of a "colour-blind" position which minimizes or ignores diversity, to be ready to address any possible implications in the learning process.
Dealing with discriminatory accusations / manifestations	Having a clear understanding of how different social identities or their intersections can become targets of discriminations. Ability to step up against such manifestations.
Creating an awareness of structural inequalities / power dynamics.	Being able to stimulate a process of conscientization with participants to facilitate a movement from unawareness or even from resistance to the recognition of the existence of structural inequalities and power dynamics and readiness to act against these inequalities.

1. Awareness of hierarchy / status in our own communication style

As soon as class starts, and some have the role of learners while others the role of teacher, trainer, facilitator, there is some power asymmetry present. Even if the facilitator has a wish for a rather horizontal process, they will have a better knowledge of what will happen, better access to information, what's more he/she is usually paid for this interaction while the learners most of the time are not paid. However, such a power difference emanating from the different roles does not necessarily become a critical incident. It does become one, when the educator seems to abuse this power position. Indeed, we collected several incidents where the narrators describe educators using their power position excessively, developing into some unfair treatment of the learner (humiliation, directive instruction, etc.). In one incident ("Angry" (FR)) described by an educator, a participant complains about her assuming an authoritarian position.

There are no incidents where educators realized they were assuming a hierarchical position over someone, though there are many where they assumed an authoritarian position such as threatening a learner to put her out of the room (incident: The Door). It seems that such breaches of reciprocity and horizontality are notoriously invisible to those assuming the higher position. Authoritarian positions can trigger resistance, they can become an obstacle of productive learning. Interestingly such power asymmetries also appeared between educators and trainers. In the incident "The Divines" (IT) a small group of teachers has much more status than the others, and allow themselves special privileges such as not wearing a mask during pandemics when everybody else has to. In "Do not mansplain me" (ES) during a group work a (female) trainer asks a question to her male colleagues just to break the ice and start some interaction, to which they start to lecture her as if it was evident she needed some explanation.

Whether the situation is between learners and educators or amongst educators, it seems that not only power positions are asymmetrical but also their perception: people in a higher power position or with more status can be entirely oblivious of resulting power dynamics - either willfully or by being blind to them. It seems that there is nothing evident in becoming aware of power dynamics when one has the upper hand. For this reason our first competence area consists in the capacity to prevent, or gain awareness of, dominant positions one may be assuming in an interaction. This implies mapping the possible power distribution amongst participants and actively planning for negotiating an appropriate level of horizontality (we talk about an "appropriate level" of horizontality as full horizontality may not be possible if the roles cannot completely equalize).

Connected incidents:

"We must submit" (FR),
"Standing up" (FR), "The door" (FR), "I don't want to" (FR),
"Academy vs activism" (ES),
"Do not mansplain me" (ES)
"Unconditional acceptance" (HU) "Do what he says" (IT),
"The divine" (IT).

Implications for the PODER products:

R2	R3	R4	R5
<p>Understanding what is power, hierarchy</p>	<p>Establishing rules of communication, explicit mention of what type / level of horizontality we want</p>	<p>Becoming aware of speaking from an authoritarian/ privileged position - no matter if it is based on a group privilege, role or individual hierarchy</p>	<p>Practicing horizontality, how to have authority without being authoritarian</p>
		<p>Understanding that our resistance can be an indicator that we don't feel recognised or balanced in our role of educator or in our relationship with a learner</p>	<p>Understanding what's behind our own resistance as educators, and how to go beyond it</p>
	<p>Being aware of the impact of body language, space arrangement</p>		<p>Being aware of the impact of body language, space arrangement</p>

2. Sensitivity to group dynamics

At least three incidents illustrate a similar doubt: educators perceive something is not happening as it should, there is something wrong, but this wrong is not clear or strong enough so that they stop the process and intervene. For instance, in the “Caricatured Accent” (FR) during a theatre exercise a participant playing the role of an immigrant starts to use a very caricatured accent. The facilitator has some unease when he witnesses that, but does not intervene, as he does not wish to break the dynamics of the play. However, later on he hears murmuring in the class, some students also got concerned because of the caricature. The facilitator now regrets he did not intervene, but he doesn’t know how he could have done it.

When there are several facilitators the situation gets further complicated by the doubt concerning who should intervene. If the lead facilitator does not intervene, should the co-facilitator step up? “Inappropriate” (ES) describes such a situation, where a co-facilitator witnesses a participant making inappropriate remarks, but she does not intervene because she does not dare to take the lead facilitator’s role.

It is not easy to sense the need and the right moment to intervene. Sometimes, the facilitators make the call too late, sometimes they don’t decide at all, and there may be an open conflict such as in “Revolution at the training” (HU) where participants decided to step up against the facilitator.

Hence our second competence area is sensitivity to group dynamics, in particular to changes in group dynamics, to the emotional state of the group or individual participants. This sensitivity should enable the educators to perceive whether or not they need to interfere, when to interfere, how to manage the emotions of the group, how to create good dynamics between the facilitator team and also between participants. It would comprise skills of observation, of recognising emotions and tensions, and a willingness or flexibility to stop the process initially foreseen to address the problem.

Connected incidents:

“Revolution at the training” (HU), “Caricatured Accent” (FR), “Leave the Room” (FR), “More time” (FR), “Inappropriate” (ES)

Implications for the PODER products:

R2	R3	R4	R5
	<p>Agreeing on how we deal with emotions</p>	<p>Understanding the emotional reactions of participants as a sign</p>	<p>Practicing dealing with emotional reactions (from participants and also as an educator)</p>
	<p>Tackling resistance explicitly in the «ground rules» / “collaboration agreement”</p>	<p>Understanding resistance can be a strategy to communicate when explicit verbal communication is not possible</p>	<p>Understanding what’s behind resistance and how to go beyond it</p>
	<p>Defining the role of facilitator / co-facilitator</p>	<p>Perceiving the weight of what is happening</p>	<p>Practicing in situ of impact of interfering or not, when to interfere</p>

3. Dealing with the diversity of identities amongst trainers / participants

Fortunately, adult education classes are more and more heterogeneous in terms of ethnicity, origins, abilities, ages, sexual orientations and so on. This fortunate development is a consequence of having lifted or lightened several previous barriers. However, the new diversity in the classroom can sometimes become an occasion to replicate discriminations and oppressions that learners may have lived elsewhere. In order not to replicate inequalities the training room - both physically and pedagogically - should offer an inclusive space, for which educators don't always have the right preparation or recipe. In the "rules of the road test" (HU) the teachers were so surprised at the arrival of a candidate that had no arms, that they tried to convince her not to take the test with the others. The incident "heterosexual white women" (FR) took place during a training about intimacy and friendship black activist participants told the facilitators that they should only make such a training to people like themselves, as it is inadmissible that the diversity of participants is not reflected in the training team. In "Gender balance crash" (ES) a trainer duo is criticized, because the male lead trainer had a longer part than the female co-trainer, and the explanation offered did not change this assessment that there was an important imbalance in the process.

Our third competence area is to take note of, address, and respond to the specific diversity in the participants' group. This implies stepping out of a "colour-blind" position, a certain "cultural daltonism" (Luiza Cortesão), taking the multicolored «rainbow of cultures» as one colour of identical interests, knowledge and needs, which minimizes or ignores diversity, to be ready to address any possible implications in the learning process. Being honest with yourself on the way you feel with the diversity and admitting your limits and what you ignore, to not see the diversity as a problem, but an opportunity to learn. At the same time, do not fall into an empty posture of cultural relativism, and ignore the power tensions that exist when different cultures coexist in the same space². There can be several such implications:

What does it mean for someone who is socially discriminated against (for one or several factors) to feel alone in the training room? How can we ensure inclusion, acknowledge her identity without forcing her identity? What does it mean for a diverse group of participants if the group of facilitators are part of socially dominant identities (and the other way round)? How to take into account this diversity without minimizing it, and without rigidifying it? At the same time, how to be aware of not falling into a kind of "folklorisation" of diversity?³

Connected incidents:

"Homophobic remarks" (FR), "Heterosexual white women" (FR), Standing up (FR), "Respecting needs" (FR), It's not my job to educate you (HU) Rules of the road test (HU) "I'm more than just my disability" (HU), "Do Not Assign" (ES), "Gender balance crash" (ES), "Being normal" (IT)



2 _ Stoer & Cortesão, 1999

3 _ Mariet, 1991; van Binsbergen, 1994

Implications for the PODER products:

R2	R3	R4	R5
<p>Understanding what is an identity and why they matter.</p>	<p>Dealing explicitly with the diversity of identities present / missing</p>	<p>Being aware of the impact of the (lack of) diversity of the group that is socially minorised</p>	<p>Protecting socially minorised groups when discrimination happens in the training while engaging in a discussion with all of the participants</p>
<p>Understanding what identity politics are</p>	<p>Making explicit, discussing and creating tools to address expectations of formal equal participation/ diversity representations , legitimacy, special rights for members of minorities</p>		<p>Creating inclusion without forcing too much one identity / forced recognition</p>

4. Dealing with discriminatory accusations / manifestations

Participants and facilitators in adult training are not necessarily immune to social biases, stereotypes and prejudice characterizing the wide society. They can inadvertently or perhaps intentionally make discriminatory remarks.

The accusations might happen from participants and between them (incidents as “Schwul”, “Illiterate” and “Foreigners ruined everything”, for example, where participants use offensive terms between them), from facilitator regarding the participants (the “Racial Justice” incident illustrates a participant who is offended by the way the facilitator talks about a cultural practice); and from participants regarding the facilitator (“Homophobic remarks”, for instance, where one of the participants of a workshop on discrimination says homophobic comments to the facilitator who was LGBTQIA+). It is interesting to point out, in this last cited incident, that the facilitator herself identified as LGBTQIA+, but this information was not known by the participants - raising the following questions: what are the limits of neutrality in the role of facilitator? Moreover, could legitimacy be an argument to be used in this type of situation?

We believe educators / trainers have a responsibility to use these occasions as learning opportunities – all the more so that if they leave the remarks without noticing this may be interpreted as condoning the judgmental attitude. Our fourth competence is then to deal with discriminatory accusations and manifestations in the training room. To step up against such remarks and manifestations trainers need to have a clear understanding of what can be interpreted as an act of racism, LGBTQI+phobia, sexism, validism, xenophobia, homophobia or other type of discrimination, and also how they can engage the group in deconstructing them. On occasions trainers may themselves inadvertently make comments / acts in a way that some participants can perceive as an act of exclusion. Knowing how to react to such a “calling out” is another important aspect of this competence area.

Connected incidents:

“Homophobic remarks” (FR)
“Sudden departure” (FR),
“Illiterate” (FR), “Racial justice” (ES) Gypsy Mothers (HU) “All Italians are racist” (IT) “This is your job - because you are a woman” (IT), “The foreigners have ruined everything” (IT), “George” (IT), “Schwul” (IT)

Implications for the PODER products:

R2	R3	R4	R5
Understanding different identity based exclusions and how different social movement try to fight these exclusions	How to anticipate this possibility in the «ground rules» and have an agreed manner to deal with it is if emerges	An understanding of what is behind discriminatory accusations	What do we do when we witness or when others perceive we committed discriminatory manifestations
How to anticipate taboo words, what will be perceived as culturally appropriate?	How to anticipate taboo words, what will be perceived as culturally appropriate?	Understanding the weight of some words on behalf of minorised groups	

5. How to create an awareness of structural inequalities / power dynamics

As we have seen before, participants in adult training are not necessarily immune to social biases, stereotypes and prejudice characterizing the wide society. Even if they do not display discriminatory acts, they may be reluctant to acknowledge that minorised groups face discriminations - particular or structural, systemic. As a facilitator, it can be especially challenging to see that a person from an exact discriminated group would not see the harm behind certain actions or agree that they can be mistreated - in the incident "Not all women believe in sexism" (ES), a woman herself states not be affected by patriarchy. In other cases, this competence is essential when participants sometimes do see the systemic discrimination, but at the same time believe it is justified. Victim-blaming narratives can also be especially hard to hear for a trainer. In a sense, they are aware of the structural power inequality, but maybe only partly (for example, they don't understand the inner mechanisms of it, but can acknowledge it, which is possible to see in the incident "Loppings" (HU)). Additionally, facilitators can also face situations where some people who experience discrimination might not see the harm behind the actions or even think that it is justified that they are treated differently (for example, in the case of internalized racism/sexism).

The last competence composing this competence framework is the ability of being able to lead a group from a position of unawareness or even of resistance to the recognition of the existence of structural inequalities and power dynamics. In conjunction with this process, this competence also aims to incorporate the aspect of encouraging a transformation of the world and a reduction of the structural inequalities - in other words, not to remain on the plane of consciousness, but to be able to go towards real transformation.

Connected incidents:

"Material limitation" (FR),
"Not all women believe in sexism" (HU) "Loppings" (HU),
"International projects" (IT)

Implications for the PODER products:

R2	R3	R4	R5
<p>Understanding structural inequalities on several dimensions</p>	<p>Anticipating being the only one in the room with awareness vocabulary</p>	<p>Understanding / tackling resistance to the idea of structural inequalities. Triggering motivation to go beyond this position</p>	<p>Practicing leading discussions to move from individual responsibility to structural inequalities</p>
<p>Being aware of our own privileges</p>		<p>Practicing how to find allies among the participants (if the trainer feels alone with his or her opinion) and supporting their voices during a discussion about structural inequality</p>	<p>Knowing how to stimulate «conscientization» process</p>

Power dynamics
in education
revisited

PODER ●
