

Family Competences Portfolio

Validating Competences Acquired in Family Life

Dewispelaere, J.¹, Jennes, G.², Schuhegger, L.³, Thiessen, B.⁴

Abstract: In their roles as educators, home makers and care givers, men and women obtain a lot of competences in family life. The FamCompass is a portfolio tool that enables illustrating and validating these family competences. Developed in accordance to profiles of educational curricula and professions in the field of family science, social work, remedial pedagogy and care for children and elderly, it can be used in procedures of Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) proving competences to shorten educational careers and to enter the labor market.

Rezumat: În rolurile lor de educatori și îngrijitori, bărbații și femeile obțin//își formează multe competențe în cadrul vieții de familie. FamCompass este un instrument, sub formă de portofoliu, care susține ilustrarea și validarea acestor competențe familiale. Instrumentul a fost dezvoltat în concordanță cu profilele curriculare educaționale și ale profesiilor din domeniile științei familiei, activităților sociale, pedagogiei remediale și îngrijirii copiilor și bătrânilor și poate fi folosit în procedurile de acreditare a învățării anterioare /apriori (APL), validând competențele pentru a scurta parcursurile școlare și pentru a intra pe piața muncii.

Key words: Family competence, portfolio, Life Long Learning, Accreditation of Prior Learning, formal learning, employability

Cuvinte cheie: Competențe familiale, portofoliu, învățare de-a lungul întregii vieți, acreditarea învățării a priori/anterioare, învățare formală, angajare

Introduction

Women and men get substantial life experience in raising children, living with a partner, taking care for elder relatives and managing their household. A lot of this experience is relevant to professional training and work in the social and educational field and the field of care. Think for example of organizing to live with a child with a mental handicap or taking care for a partner with a chronic illness.

It looks obvious to valorize competences obtained in family life when a mother or father wants to re-enter the labor market after some timeout for instance having cared for children or when as an 'older student' entering a course to find a new job. However, although some tools exist to describe (general) competences acquired in family life with view to the labor market, (for instance KompetenzBilan (2000)), no instrument especially focuses on entering formal learning curricula. FamCompass Portfolio fills this gap. Based on experience of working with the portfolio method and according to developing standards in APL-procedures and assessment of competences (Janssens (2008), Lichtenberg (2007), Imhof (2009)), we developed a specific portfolio instrument within the

¹ Dr. J.Dewispelaere, Higher Institute for Family Sciences, Brussels, Belgium, Joris.Dewispelaere@hig.be

² G. Jennes, Ma.So.Sc, director Higher Institute for Family Sciences, Brussels, Belgium, Gaby.Jennes@hig.be

³ L.Schuhegger, Dipl.Theol., Deutsches Jugendinstitut e.V., Munich, Germany, Schuhegger@dji.de

⁴ Dr. B. Thiessen, Deutsches Jugendinstitut e.V., Munich, Germany, Thiessen@dji.de

European Grundtvig-project FamCompass⁵. Partners in this project were: Higher Institute for Family Sciences (BE, coordinator), Comenius University, Department of Andragogy (SK), Deutsches Jugendinstitut e. V. (DE), Institute for Creative Proceedings (PL), Romanian Institute for Adult Education (RO), Vilnius College of Higher Education (LT) and Västra Nylands Folkhögskola (FI).

The scope of FamCompass is in the center of the target of the European Life Long Learning Program. This aims to help adults to improve their knowledge and competences, develop their personal skills and increase their employability. The FamCompass is especially in line with the Grundtvig-Subprogram among others aiming at the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Family competences in educational and professional profiles of competences

Developing a portfolio to look for family competences starts with questioning what 'a family' means and what 'family competences' mean. To us a family means relationships between a parent (parents) and children (own children, adoption relationships, patchwork family...). It also means the relationship(s) between partners. Further it means the relationship(s) between parents and/or children and/or grandparents. Education and care are main topics in family-life. Family can be defined as intergenerational welfare work on a continuing basis. Household management and social security is a third topic.

To find out which could be a common list of relevant family competences for the 7 participating countries, we gathered competences that can be trained in family as described in educational and occupational profiles. Then we looked which competences from the different profiles for instance in pedagogy are common and which you could learn in a family for instance raising a child with a handicap. For the purpose we analyzed:

-educational profiles: Family Sciences, Social Work, Remedial Pedagogy, Palliative Care (Belgium), Educators, Nursery School Teachers, Family Child Day Care, Home Visitors in the Opstapje Program (Germany), Vocational Qualification in Management (Finland), Maternal Assistant (Romania), Pre-school educator (Lithuania)

-professional profiles: Childcare, Care for the Elderly (Belgium), Family Child Day Care (Finland), Social Emergency Worker (Poland).

Starting from these profiles offers the possibility to grant exempt of parts of educational curricula or entering a job after having demonstrated the competences acquired in family life by the portfolio. To raise the reliability and validity of the instrument, we choose to follow the guidelines for portfolio development as used in university associations working with APL-procedures (Associatie KULeuven, 2005).

The instrument

The FamCompass Portfolio has several parts that complete each other and cross-validate the stories persons tell about their family experience.

⁵ Grundtvig 1- project Famcompass. In this project participated: Mikas Balkevičius, Ausra Simoniukstyte, Ingrida Stanceviciene, Mariana Crasovan, Beata Marcinkowska, Jūlius Matulčik, Dorora Nawrat, Elzbieta Michalska, Tanja Nuelant, Simona Sava, Radu Szekely, Veronica Vasilova, Lut Verstappen and Lisa Vernon

A first glance: general information

Beneath the 'classics' as level of education and occupation, in this part of the portfolio we ask for a detailed family description and especially for a short review of important phases in family life. For instance a person can point to a life time in which he/she took care for a father with dementia. Later in the portfolio the person can extend on this.

Part 1 The kaleidoscope of family experiences: listing your competences

Following the general information, the first part of the portfolio gives an overview of family competences as to different areas of family life.

The list of competences starts with the area: education of and care for children. These competences are both about more or less uncomplicated development and about specific problems persons are confronted with, when raising children. It is about sustaining physical, psychological and social development, about dealing with school problems or with more or less severe illness.

Examples of competences in the field of education of and care for children

16 I am able to support a child to build social contact, relationships and have a sense for social rules (how to behave)

23 I am able to provide the necessary care and nursing to enhance the wellbeing of a child

The person is asked to mark on which level (rank 0 - 4) a competence is owned. When a competence doesn't seem relevant for the purpose of the portfolio, it can be skipped. The levels on which a competence can be obtained are defined in relation to the European qualification framework. They suppose a growing amount of experience with and autonomy in applying the competence. For instance level 2 states: "You have family experience of the competence but you do not or only seldom reflect on it", while the highest level (4) states: "The competence is an integrated part of yourself, you use it readily also in an unpredictable situation and you reflect on how to improve it".

The second area of competences is about partner relationship. What did a person learn by living in a partner relation? Again the competences are about the partnership, experiencing an uncomplicated stage of the relationship and about the need for more extended caring for instance when a partner gets ill.

Examples

74 I am able to create a balance between standing up for myself and being close to my partner

90 I am able to organize help in case of family violence

The third major field refers to family competences obtained by caring for the **elder relatives**. Again the scope is from helping with the typical transitions as getting retired up to the care for a parent who needs special care in a home for elderly.

Examples

95 I am able to give guidance to a senior during difficult transition in his/her life (retirement, going to a nursery home: information about services, emotional support)

102 I am able to apply techniques (hoist and lift or other nursing) correctly

As a fourth field we insert the household management and the social security. The relations with children, partners and elderly ask for a lot of time management and for specific actions in the field of running the everyday household and the administrative obligations or necessities.

Examples

110 I am able to manage complex tasks of organizing life with children, partner, grandparents in between different institutions (e.g. school, day care, care for elderly, work places, medical care)

116 I am able to run a household economically (keeping an eye on the finances, e.g. budgeting)

The overview of competences ends with a section of general competences. These are about problem solving, communication skills, stress management. These competences are very open because of their general content. Therefore they open the reflection about family competences in a broader way.

Examples

2 I am able to identify individual learning points based on critical reflection of my own

Functioning

19 I am able to mediate

Part 2 Unfolding the competences

The second part of the portfolio enlarges the colors and patterns of the family kaleidoscope by offering the opportunity to write in depth about what a person experiences as his/her strengths and weaknesses as to the competences. First this can be done in an open, spontaneous story like way. In a second move competences are made concrete in the six steps STAR-method, looking for the specific description of the starting situation, task, action, result, evaluation, strengths and learning points.

These two steps of deeper reflection are made for each of the domains of competences described above.

Example reflection on strength and weaknesses as to the field 'Relationship with, education and care of children'

'As strength I see "being there for your child": to buy the toys which are appropriate to their age, to know them, look for eventual school problems, give them possibilities to develop themselves at home (...) As a weak point: sometimes I don't follow my rules after longer insisting.'

Example reflection with STAR-method as to competence 94 'I am able to understand elderly people when coping with retirement or loss of physical abilities'

1 Situation: My father did need to learn to live with a partner with a handicap

- 2 Task: I gave support in the household
- 3 Actions: -Organizing family-care –structuring of his life – support with the process of acceptance:
a lot of time for talking about it
- 4 Result: They got through it together and are happy although the handicap
- 5 Evaluation: In the beginning I gave a lot of support and then slowly less. At the moment they can take care for themselves being supported by professional help
- 6 Reflection on further learning points: It is a difficult task to support elderly during a digestion of a sudden handicap. I keep searching for the literature about this process to assimilate new information

The examples show that the two ways of exploring the competences are complementary and give the person different entrees for reflection. These reflections are also a good starting point for eventual competence oriented interviewing in which frequently the STAR-method is used.

To help the users to make the best possible use of the reflection file, they are offered the main guidelines that will be used by the assessor to evaluate the descriptions. Among other these deal with levels of concreteness of examples and with more or less mentioning of growth areas.

Part 3 Adding evidence by way of references and other documents

The listing and reporting of the competences is a narrative way of presenting oneself. To raise the validity of the reporting, it is useful to ask for relevant references as to the competences persons want to be seen qualified for. Although it is not evident to obtain references for family competences, we received some interesting examples when testing the instrument. For instance, detailed letters and e-mails about a revalidation route and/or therapy, about a divorce or a witness letter of being a mother of an anorexia patient, certified by a medical doctor.

The criteria used to evaluate the quality of the pieces of evidence are in accordance with those used in other procedures of recognizing prior learning. Among other they deal with authenticity, relevance, actuality and context variation of the evidence.

Part 4 Exploring spontaneous reflection on difficult family-situations

In this section the person is offered two cases. One about a family situation which shows a common conflict in relationships that is mostly solved without external help and one situation in which professional help is necessary. We developed a battery of cases which are relevant to persons using the FamCompass to have different profiles of competences proved; for instance cases relevant to competences for daycare for elderly and cases relevant for taking care of children.

The users are offered some questions as to how they would deal with the cases and the criteria on which the answers to these questions will be assessed. In accordance with the levels of the European Qualification Framework, the assessment looks for levels in which steps of problem analysis, grades of autonomy in handling the situations and integration of competences are evaluated.

Using the instrument

Beneath the paper version of FamCompass an electronic version is developed. It offers the same possibilities to show the competences. Marking competences and describing them in depth are both possible. To support the use of the instrument, different manuals were developed. The User's Manual gives an overview of the step by step which the portfolio is to be done. The criteria which will be used by the assessor are listed to help the person make his portfolio as convincing as possible. The Guide's Manual offers some experiences from the testing phases to address different target groups in the best possible way. The Assessor's Manual specifies the general and specific criteria the assessor has to take in account.

The time persons need to make the portfolio is dependent on a lot of characteristics such as capacity of reflection, knowledge of the language and motivation. The FamCompass as a whole was made in 5 to 20 hours. Of course this can be spread in time, not only with the paper version, also with the electronic version.

Depending on the aim of using the instrument and depending on the characteristics of the users, the instrument has high flexibility and can be adopted in different ways. When to be used in a route of recognizing competences in a formal APL- procedure to shorten an educational curriculum, it is possible to shorten the list of competences, for instance only to the competences about education of and care for children. If necessary, the portfolio can be extended by a competence oriented interview. When the portfolio is used in coaching, it could be less relevant to ask for extensive pieces of evidence. Depending on the motivation of the user or on his knowledge of the language in which the portfolio is offered, it can be useful to have some parts of the instrument done by interview. For instance the discussion of the cases can be organized in this way. In any case the user is offered a manual in which the parts of the instrument are discussed with the criteria for assessment.

Assessment of the competences, reliability and validity

Following the aims of using the portfolio, the assessment criteria need to be more or less rigid as to validity and reliability. Especially when using the instrument to recognize competences in a formal educational curriculum, these criteria are severe. Therefore the Assessor's Manual gives an overview of general principles in assessing prior learning and has specific assessment criteria for each part of the portfolio. The assessment is then done conform the validity and reliability criteria for APL-procedures. This means among others that the assessment should be done independently and with guarantee of the privacy of the applicant. Mostly this will ask for a training of the assessors. The assessors should be very well informed about the competences the institution looks for and it is of use to have an in service training as to reaching same interpretation of levels of assessment criteria.

The assessment of the portfolio should be done as a global assessment, which means that throughout the assessment is looked for cross-validation of the different parts. Depending on the indicators used, part 1 of the portfolio offers an overview of the relevant competences and the level on which they are marked. Part 2

(reflection file) can together with part 3 (pieces of evidence) prove some competences. Part 3 and part 4 (cases) can also show competences proven.

At the end of the assessment it is clear that the assessor will have enough information to accept some competences proven and some needing further investigation, for instance by interview.

To enhance the quality of the portfolio assessment several steps can be taken. Reliability of an instrument means that repeated measurement leads to the same result at different times of measurement and as measured by different assessors. The clear structure and administration of the portfolio does as much as possible to do right to the former. Because persons are changing and memory is not all-embracing, of course this can't be perfect. Concerning the assessors the criteria should be as concrete as possible and training of the assessors is important to reach awareness for sources of bias as: halo-effect, sequence effects and contamination effects. Institutions using the FamCompass are recommended to offer a training for assessors beneath the extensive guidelines which are formulated in the Assessor' Manual.

An instrument is valid if on ground of the results definite conclusions can be made about the competence you want to measure. Content validity of FamCompass is enhanced by taking competences from educational and job profiles, working with levels of owning a competence, asking for concrete examples and the possible use of a criteria oriented interview. As to construct validity, rules of good practice as to portfolio were followed: the different parts of the portfolio sustain each other (for instance the levels in part 1, the detailed descriptions in part 2, the pieces of evidence (part 3) and the reached level in discussing the cases (part 4). But also by using clear criteria for evaluating the reflection file (STAR) and the cases. Face validity is high, taking into account the representativeness of the competences from the point of view of the users. The criterion validity is to be tested by the institutions using the portfolio for their specific purpose.

An organization can develop indicators⁶ that specify when a competence is proved by the FamCompass Portfolio. Developing an indicator is done in three steps: (1) specifying the condition or the results you want to find evidence for, (2) specifying the elements that provide this evidence, (3) evaluating the use of the specified elements for providing evidence as to the aimed condition or results and change them if necessary. Each organization will have its own aims using the FamCompass. For instance the FamCompass can be used to measure competences needed for a course or for an educational curriculum. Or it can be used to achieve awareness of family competences in a coaching process to find a job.

⁶ *Definition of an indicator: Element(s) providing evidence that a certain condition exists or certain results have or have not been achieved (Harvard Graduate School of Education)*

Example of developing an indicator for a specific competence from an educational profile

Step 1: In the educational profile of Bachelor Remedial Pedagogy from the High School University Brussels, competence 3.5.3 is stated as: 'Promotes and maintains cognitive, emotional, social and motor developments'.

Step 2: The institution could decide that competence 3.5.3 is achieved if the following conditions are met:

- part 1: level 3 or 4 is reached for FamCompass-competence 63: 'Ability to support a child with a physical handicap (concrete and promoting self worth)'.
- part 1: level 3 or 4 is reached for the FamCompass competences 14 (I know the theoretical basis of the cognitive, physical and socio-emotional development of a child), 15 (I am able to stimulate the development of self reliance and social adjustment)
- FamCompass competence 63 is discussed in detail in the second part of the portfolio: reflectionfile, part 2: detailed and relevant description of the six steps following the STAR-method to illustrate a competence
- Part 3 of the portfolio provides at least one piece of evidence that supports having experience in raising a handicapped child

Step 3: When the student is doing practical work, the evaluation can show if the competence is indeed owned. If this is not the case, there is a need to change the conditions to approve the competence.

Generally the development of indicators asks for a group of experts who decide which competences could be proven by using specific parts of the FamCompass, and which variable can be used to check the link. Because the FamCompass can be used in a flexible way, for instance by adding a competence oriented interview or discussing part 4 (cases as to family problems) in an interview, the indicators could also in that sense be very different. For example reaching a specified level of reflection during an interview can be part of it.

Testing-phases in the development of the FamCompass

The first testing was done in October-November 2008. All partners participated in the first testing with a total of 89 users and 2 or more assessors for each country. This first testing was done with students, course participants of the partner institutions and a minority of external participants. Users, coaches and assessors were offered a questionnaire evaluating their experience of the portfolio. Although the evaluation illustrated that most users and assessors were positive as to content and style of the portfolio, there were also a lot of stimulating remarks. Most important conclusions were to reduce the number of competences and have them formulated in a less formal way. Part 3 then was enlarged with the strength-weakness-analysis beneath the STAR-analysis. It was also clear from assessor feedback that specific target groups would be helped with more coaching or with additional interviews. Some guidelines should be repeated and written more extensively.

The second draft of the instrument and manuals was finished by April 2009 and the second testing done May 2009. In this testing we looked for more diversity in level of education and cultural background and had different organizations working with our target groups involved. For instance in Belgium 18 persons participated who were coached by organizations focusing on persons with low level of education and/or being members of cultural minority groups. Or in Germany: young single mothers starting vocational education as nursery school teachers. 7 first or second generation immigrants (Turkish, Moroccan, Croatian) with low education level participated in the testing. In the second testing 84 users participated and again several assessors for each country. 5 of the test persons were offered an electronic version of the portfolio.

Again users, coaches, participating institutions and assessors were asked to give feedback by way of a questionnaire.

The overall feedback from users and assessors was clearly positive. The content of the portfolio and possible flexibility in use of the instrument were main positive topics. 91% of the participants in the second testing found that the FamCompass Portfolio looked for the relevant competences as to family-life. Without specific coaching the list of competences was evaluated as enough comprehensible to very comprehensible by 80% of the users, the cases enough to very comprehensible by 82 % of the users. The User's Manual had 77,6 % positive evaluation.

Although this positive evaluation, some further adjustments were made to finalize the instrument. More questions were added to help the users to describe their competences in part 3: strength-weakness-analysis and STAR-method and the introductions to the different parts of the portfolio and the manuals were more specified.

The testings showed that for people with lower levels of education and language skills careful guidance is necessary. The testings indicated the FamCompass as a challenging instrument for these assesses, because it is based on the ability to reflect on one's competences and describe them in written language. Reflecting on and documenting once competences is a competence on it's own that has to be trained and improved. Guidance of the FamCompass process has to take this into account and be designed as an educational learning module.

Discussion on the evaluation of the testings also showed that family live through the different participating European countries on the one hand provides the possibility to acquire similar competences on the other hand clearly disparities can be observed. These derive from diverse living situations, family traditions and family values. At the same time the differences in one country can be more distinct with view to social milieus, rural and urban social contexts or family concepts of minorities in comparison with other countries. For example: Urban live styles and family concepts tend to adjust in all participating countries, but rural or minority family life is quite different from country to country, but also in one country. The FamCompass takes that into account through testing in all partner countries with diverse target groups and the possibility for each participant to add competences or leave out some. Nevertheless there are some questions left that need further research.

In the Eastern European countries it turned out that because of the political history retention against documentation and assessment of family competences may occur.

Perspectives in the Use of the FamCompass

The FamCompass Portfolio will be used and further developed in different settings. The concrete forms also depend on the different stages of development concerning APL in the participating countries (Van Tartwijk, 2007). The Department of Andragogy at the Comenius University (SL), the Romanian Institute for Adult Education (IREA), the College of Higher Education (LI), the Institute for Creative Proceedings (PO) and the Higher Institute for Family Sciences (BE) will use the FamCompass in evaluating competences when entering educational curricula. In Germany, Poland, Slovakia, Finland and Romania, the instrument will be used developing a standard in care for children or selecting men and women (re)entering the labor market. In Belgium the public employment service VDAB will together with the Higher Institute for Family Sciences work on using the FamCompass to assist job seekers in their search for work, to coach employees in their career development and to advice employers in their human resources policy.

The use of FamCompass is but guaranteed if the governmental authorities validate the instrument as part of APL-procedures. The project partners and other stakeholders therefore take action to have the instrument recognized by the official testing centers.

In the perspective of need for as many persons as possible participating in the labor market or being active citizens, and because of the needs of lifelong learning and personal growth in quickly developing societies, competences obtained in family life should be validated by governmental institutions. FamCompass is a tool that because of its flexibility can be used in many contexts to recognize and validate the family competences.

References

- Associatie K.U.Leuven (2005). Monitor EVC/EVK-gids. Leuven.
- KAB Süddeutschlands, Deutsches Jugendinstitut (2000). Kompetenzbilanz. Ein Instrument zur Selbsteinschätzung und beruflichen Entwicklung für berufstätige Mütter und Väter, an Weiterbildung Interessierte, Berufsrückkehrer/innen, München.
- Imhof, M, Picard, C. (2009). Views on using Portfolio in Teacher Education. In "Teaching and Teacher Education", 25(1), pp. 149-154.
- Janssens, K., Peeters, A. (2008). Kwaliteit van EVCprocedures (Quality of APL-procedures). Unpublished presentation at APL Quality Conference, Brussels.
- Lichtenberg, J.W., Portnoy, S.M. et al (2007). Challenges to the Assessment of Competence and Competencies, in "Professional Psychology: Research and Practice", 38(5), pp. 474-478.
- Van Tartwijk, J., Driesen, E, Van der Vleuten, C, Stokking, K. (2007). Factors Influencing the Successful Introduction of Portfolios in "Quality in Higher Education", 13 (1), pp.69-79

Website of the project: www.famcompass.eu