

Asturias Local Action Group: Looking back to move forward

Our Local Action Group had its final meeting last week (13/06/2017). Just to provide some context, this was a diverse group formed by 2 Primary school teachers, 2 Secondary school teachers and 1 VET teacher



alongside 2 staff from our organisation. Action kicked off in November 2017 and we got together every four weeks to explore, design and put to test practical methods for the assessment of the entrepreneurial competence in a real classroom setting. In the first place, we tried to gain a thorough understanding of what's actually going on at schools when it comes to the assessment of this competence. Key conclusions were duly reported in a previous blog post – but let's just say there was plenty of room for improvement.

It needs to be highlighted that none but one of the members taught business or entrepreneurship-related subjects so it was important to come up with a more inclusive definition of the competence. Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS) sounded like a good candidate to act as a proxy of the fuzzy “Turning ideas into action” definition in a non-business classroom context. We tweaked the OECD definition of CPS a little and this was our working definition of CPS:

“The capacity of an individual to effectively engage in a process whereby two or more agents attempt to identify, understand and provide solutions to an open-ended problem by sharing the understanding and effort required to come to a solution and pooling their knowledge, skills, resources and efforts to reach that solution.”

Truth be told, CPS had been on our radar for some time. Last year we mapped 2-3 behavioural indicators to each phase of the CPS process before we embarked on a (with hindsight, naive) attempt at drafting a progression model for the EE key competence across levels. (This was way before EntreComp was released.)

Shortly after, we stumbled upon an impressive and certainly inspiring body of practical knowledge into the assessment and reporting of generic skills in the VET sector in Australia, and more specifically the assessment of problem-solving (Curtis & Denton, 2003; Matters & Curtis, 2008). The assessment processes described offered a vast array of inspiring insights that informed the subsequent actions of this local partner group, mainly our decision to...

- Adopt an approach that requires key competencies to be assessed on a selection of existing tasks in order to overcome the perceived assessment load barrier;
- Put the focus on informing students of the key elements of generic skills and on encouraging them to analyse their use of the skill and to contemplate alternative situations in which it might be applicable which suggests the need to reinforce the ipsative and formative aspects of assessment.

Some personal insights from the teachers involved...

Carlos Hevia-Aza (Secondary School Teacher at Colegio Sagrada Familia El Pilar)

"We would have needed some more time but I've learned a lot. My plans are to give it a go next year with a slightly older group of students. [...] From a professional perspective, getting to know different assessment approaches and contexts has been a very enriching process and it has helped a great deal in making competence-based assessment more doable and action-oriented."

Paz Fernández de Vera (Secondary School Teacher at IES El Batán)

“I really liked the workflow in this Local Action Group. On the positive side of things I reckon that the CPS process facilitates activity design and assessment of entrepreneurial competence. I found the Australian experience very inspiring and it has given me some important hints to improve my approach to assessment. All the documentation, articles and summaries provided as well as the input from peers in the local action group have expanded my understanding of this difficult topic. And finally, putting the whole thing to test in the classroom and seeing students reaction has been very clarifying for me. On the negative side, I missed some more interaction in the group and I felt being such a diverse group, which is a great thing, hindered progress at times.”

Paulina Álvarez Suarez (Primary School Teacher, CP El Parque)

“CPS informed the design of our biodiversity challenge for our 7-year old pupils. Putting them in front of a complicated rubric is out of question, but it was surprising to see how quickly they got familiar with the different phases of the CPS process. Pupils had no difficulties in relating the things they were doing with a particular phase and more importantly, when confronted with an altogether different challenge they have spontaneously started talking about CPS stages.”

This is essentially the road we traveled so far. It's been a bumpy ride. Mental potholes, blocks and at times I even felt like I could smell it burn from our overloaded (cognitive) engines. Let us just share some achievements and shortcomings.

Key achievements

- We designed a simple assessment protocol that may

contribute to a more coherent assessment of the EE key competence across subjects and levels.

- Each teacher designed/adapted curricular activities and assessment tools that were put to test in a real classroom setting in the 5 schools represented in the local action group.
- The CPS process, and the fact that each stage is linked to a small set of behavioural indicators, was useful to align curricular learning outcomes, assessment tasks and teaching and learning activities across a broad range of contexts.
- CPS provides a good scaffold for students and signals the cross-curricular aspect of the EE competence. Even the younger students seem to identify common CPS patterns in very different tasks and transfer some of the learning to new situations.

Key shortcomings

- Contrary to our expectations, it was hard work to derive level-specific tools (e.g. rubrics) from the descriptors in the progression model. The devil is in the detail some say but in this case, over-specification hindered rather than helped the design of assessment.
- Language used in the descriptors was also an issue but teachers did a great job in adapting and simplifying the sentences to facilitate students understanding.
- Rubrics overshadowed the potential of other assessment tools. It seems like the level descriptors of the progression model conditioned teacher response. It may also have to do with teachers being unfamiliar with a wider range of assessment tools they can use.
- Pilots were undertaken in May-June, so the opportunity for ipsative and formative assessment protocol was lost.
- Pilots were isolated efforts (1 group, 1 subject) while the protocol foresees CPS process informing assessment across subjects. It would be great to engage in the

process at least 2-3 teachers teaching same group of students and see how it works.

Maybe next year?

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