

Name: Ovidiu Gavrilovici
University: "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iasi, Romania
Email: gavrilov@uaic.ro
Unit or project responsible for creating the innovation: Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Department of Psychology
Theme: Innovative student-centered approach to teaching
Title: A definitional ceremony approach to formative evaluation in higher education.
Summary of the good practice: <p>The narrative practice applied in education was the Definitional Ceremony (White 1998, 2002, 2005) consisting in a group (community) storytelling, in structuring storyteller and witness roles. The core of the narrative facilitation consists of the engagement of the storytelling/auditory "communities" in the development of a richer story stimulating members' identity reflections of the participating groups (communities). Thus, this practice entails the concept of "narrative identity", where identity formation is a relational product, a public and social result of identification and authentication of personal preferences and desired expressions of experience, in this case, of learning experiences and conclusions based on them. The practice consists of a final course "event" organized as a celebration of learning and transformation in a genuine formative evaluation of master courses using narrative approaches.</p>
Context of the good practice: <p>Master students in leadership, human resources management (Faculty of Economics and Business Administration), master students in clinical psychology and psychotherapy (Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences). Approximately 200 master students, aggregated, may participate in such a practice, in each academic year.</p>
Rationale: <p>The highly participative, interactive conversation aimed at enriching the conclusions about a course and/or a program value, beyond the quantitative quality measures already in place, formally. The process focuses on student engagement and participation in the co-creation of their own evaluations of personal and group experiences related to learning, centering on student experience and facilitating reflective engagement with other relevant audiences (stakeholders).</p>
Alignment with program and module learning outcomes: <p>Transverse competencies as they are defined by national quality assurance for higher education agency in Romania (and stated specifically for each master program, and subsequently, for each master course). Reflecting on own learning and own career development (for example).</p>
Resources (time and persons): <p>The practice was designed, explored and piloted during the academic year of 2008-2009, during the first semester, in a Human Resources Management Master Program with about 80 to 100 master students and 3 academics as well as 8 to 10 key invitees, practitioners, human resources managers in companies in Iasi city who voluntarily participated in at least one course as a guest speaker, contributor, or facilitator, along with the course provider. The preparations for the final participative narrative formative evaluation included individual and small group explanation and debate with academics and the key guests invited, as well as a special methodological seminar about the social constructionist positioning of this project and the principles that guide the facilitation and the participation with the master students involved. That is, each party involved in this reflective and interactive event were briefed about the scope, the goals, the method and the principles behind its application before the meeting was organized as a conclusive open course. A total of 3 to 5 working days were used to prepare, contact, organize and brief and clarify with the stakeholders the formative evaluation event.</p>
What were the main enabling factors (conditions) in creating and implementing the innovation? <p>The coordinator of the master program was highly supportive of the pedagogical experimentation and supported by co-inviting the guests and participating in the organizing phase and in the implementation. The facilitator benefited from an intensive professional training in narrative therapy provided by world leading professional training institution (Institute of Narrative Therapy, UK) and also</p>

benefited from disseminating the pilot implementation after the event at a major professional European Conference (European Conference in Narrative Therapy and Community Work, Brighton, UK, 2009). With the authentication from narrative practitioners and researchers, the pilot was revised and the "Definitional Ceremony" became part of the semester's formative evaluation practice at selected courses from both economics and psychology master programs. The context of this type of interaction was created by the excellent relations with alumni of our faculties, former students who are practitioners and who have a variety of reasons to freely contribute in unique ways to applied academic courses, usually in the position of a special guest or invitee.

What were the main challenges in creating or implementing the innovation?

The focus on the "learning experiences" of participants, expressed in terms of personal insights, and the constant appreciative positioning of the facilitator contrasted and, at times, perplexed the participants who were used to more directive and quantitative (less expressive and less interactive) evaluative practices. The repositioning from a predominantly "culture of evaluation as control" to an "appreciative formative evaluation" surprised at times some participants, due to the creation of a "sense of community" with clear identifiable shared interests, intentions, and values. Thus, a tension arose, almost each implementation, between the evaluation as a tool for validation and the formative appreciative processes as a shared experience of celebrating both shared themes and diverse positions in the learning process. Managing the moments of tension between these perspectives require attentive facilitation using "unpacking" and deconstructive narrative practices.

What have been the main methods of dissemination so far?

Academic and professional conference presentations, professional meetings and training workshops.

With which groups or organizations has the innovation been shared so far?

The coordinators and colleagues (academics) from both faculties where the experimentation took place, during the years. The European network of practitioners in narrative therapy and community work. Academics and researchers from Romanian universities and from other collaborating universities with UAIC.

Mainstreaming: What are the possibilities for extending and/or mainstreaming this innovation?

Promoting this practice via a video-documentary and pilot experimentation in various other programs who use multiple audiences in the learning processes. Designing a systematic research in order to strengthen the evidences of desirable effects in terms of reaching learning objectives and institutional objectives (at individual, programmatic and departmental levels). Providing spaces for valuation and appreciation for master students in rapport to their own descriptions of learning may strengthen the centering of learning and evaluation processes on the student experiences and their agency and participation during their studies.

Sustainability: Please comment on the sustainability of the innovation, including elements which need to be put in place to make this sustainable.

Promoting the practice as an instrument for formative evaluation both for coordinators of master programs and for the Teachers training department would be an important development to support its maintenance, research, and development. Offering the results to the various quality assurance practices relative to master program evaluation (beyond course evaluation).

Evaluation: How have the success and impact of the innovation been evaluated? Is there an established way of continuous evaluation?

The participative "definitional ceremony" is digitally audio recorded and/or video recorded with the permission of the participants and a thematic qualitative analysis was performed. Via increased sense of participation to a shared, intense, and varied learning experience, there is evidence of increased sense of belonging, of increased academic and professional affiliation, and increased further collaboration with the program/ academics, potentially fostering stronger university - alumni ties and relationships, beyond the program life.

Contributor's reflections: Briefly reflect on your innovation from your own perspective including its strengths and limitations/challenges of implementation/potential implication for wider practice.

The Definitional Ceremony requires a degree of practice with narrative facilitation and a keen understanding of the potential uses of narrative identity descriptions in experiences of learning. Also, the facilitation requires a certain degree of habituation with constructing safe contexts for student participation, maintaining the focus on their experiences, even if other constituents are invited to collaborate. Due to this higher level of narrative facilitation expertise the practice has some limits in its generalization and dissemination. A training phase and the support of a small community of narrative practitioners would greatly support further development of this practice. Additional research is highly needed to strengthen and identify its specific use and test its potential in a variety of course aims, objectives and structures.

Does your unit or other units of your university have any plan to further develop this innovation? If yes, please briefly describe the plan.

The Department of psychology at our Faculty is highly supportive of further documenting the results of this practice. There is a plan to develop field practicum activities for master students and training workshops for master students in order to develop narrative facilitation competencies thus supporting further experimentation and research in various (academic) settings.

If available, please provide a link to complete the description of the initiative.

There is not yet an official description formally adopted by the department but will be included during next semester in the list of field practicum for selected master students.