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Adult learning towards an autonomous and active citizenship: the example of an adult education and training plan based on a “pragmatics of responsibility”

Introduction

From the discourses on post-modernity, an idea stands out that the contemporary society is, among other distinctive traits, characterized by high risk and uncertainty, but also by a greater individual freedom for choice and decision. In such a context, the neo-liberal school of thought has been valuing individual responsibility as a “moral or ethical” principle that allows each one of us to seek his well-being, free of constraints. But, as a consequence, each individual also becomes the main, or only, responsible for all his difficulties and faces the duty to find means that allow him to reverse these conditions.

Promoting a distinctive analysis of individual autonomy and responsibility, authors such as Scott Lash, Anthony Giddens or Ulrich Beck, underline the way in which modern society, or risk society, appeals less to the idea of “how to be an individual” and more to the challenge of “how to become an individual”. Facing uncertainty and new domains of choice and decision, which before were regulated by the Welfare State, the School or the Labour Market, the individual assumes the liberty (or obligation) to think, choose, decide or adapt his own biography. Scott Lash calls it as “responsible self-monitoring”. Two ideas are associated to this concept: on one hand, “becoming an individual”, or this self-construction, is still done among communities where interpersonal bounds are established, although with the fundamental distinction that these are more and more bounds of signification and not of belonging; on the other hand, the way in which a “responsible self-monitoring” requires competences of reflectiveness that are unequally distributed and threaten the individual access to the autonomy of choice and decision.

1 - Quoting Ulrich Beck (2006: 34), “I speak, then, of a second, a reflexive modernization where modernization finds itself ever more occupied with the mastering of problems arising from the process of modernization itself. (…) This is not without consequences for modernity’s own self-understanding, which finds to an ever diminishing degree its foundation in simple formulae of control and supervision, of progress and human welfare. It is a contention of the theory of a second modernity, however, that this reflexivity is not to be confused with reflection; rather, reflexivity tends to undermine the foundations of modern self-descriptions. It becomes a problem for reflection” As Arie Rip (2006: 94) explains in a further note on the same book “Beck contrasts reflexive with reflective, the later indicating
Therefore, to which extend are individuals prepared to meet this challenge and this responsibility, in particular those who are excluded from fundamental resources? Or, in other words, how can an individual learn to be autonomous and responsible?

It is precisely on this “development of transversal competences that value and (re)place the role of women as responsible and active citizens in the decision making process regarding themselves, and the development of their communities” that the Fundação Solidários (organization that promotes local and communitarian development) has been promoting EFA (Adult Education and Training) courses. This text analyses the concrete example of courses that are intended for adult women from rural low-density territories, combining scholarly qualification (9th level of schooling) and professional qualification (in gardening, biological agriculture or personal care). The main focus of attention will be on the innovative way in which the Fundação Solidários has been developing training courses aimed at the socio-professional integration and an active citizenship, by investing in the capacity to act autonomously and through self-reflection and negotiated responsibility sharing processes. A training program based on a “pragmatics of responsibility”, that aims at contributing for the struggle against social exclusion and the empowerment of less favoured populations, regarding the challenges of the reflexive modernity.

**Freedom has a price**

"Risk society", "individualism" and "freedom of choice" are three of the most common expressions used to define the post-modern or second-modernity societies of today, regarding the essential changes they encompass.

According to Giddens (1999), the word “risk” seems to have come into English through Spanish or Portuguese, where it was used to refer to sailing into uncharted waters, facing its insurance and uncertainty. With the consolidation of modern capitalism and its project of facing the future as a territory to be conquered or colonised, external risk, or a risk experienced as coming from the outside (tradition or nature), was progressively substituted by a manufactured risk, or a risk created by the very impact of our development knowledge upon the world. At the same time, overcoming its neutral character regarding the mathematical probability of the occurrence of a phenomenon, the idea of risk also became associated to vitality and change or to excitement and adventure, in the context of a global world which particularly treasures those preferences (Hespanha reflexion on what is happening. If such reflection is part of further action and interaction, it would enhance reflexivity". 


and Carapinheiro, 2001: 198). But it also became connected to uncertainty and a greater probability of the emergence of unexpected and undesirable outcomes. Quoting Giddens once again, “our age, is not more dangerous – not more risky – than those of earlier generations – but the balance of risks and dangers has shifted. We live in a world where hazards created by ourselves are as, or more, threatening than those that come from the outside” (Giddens, 1999).

However, when Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens or Scott Lash refer to "risk societies", they particularly stress the fact that that the concept of “risk” has crossed the barriers of environmental issues and also applies to organizations as well as social relationships, where it has developed new features. Uncertainty and instability settled within the social order and the common citizen's life. The profound changes the fundamental social institutions (such as family, school, State, market, groups and associations…) went through have, consequently, made the outcome of individual decisions more erratic in certain spheres of daily life, also increasing the awareness of risk. Let us consider, for example, the case of families, where the certainties of the two or three last generations (that were largely embedded by tradition and usage) have given rise to a feeling of insecurity. Nowadays, when people get married and raise a family, they deeply feel that they do not know what they are doing, that is, they have to deal with a new order.

Should these be reasons for the existence of a plain pessimism towards the society of the new modernity? During an interview concerning globalization issues, conducted by the philosopher Danilo Zolo, Ulrich Beck asserted the possibility of facing the second modernity with both pessimism and optimism. The second modernity surely involves some important disruptions and the adversity of finding new balances. However, that is the same social order that provides new conditions and opportunities for the development of the human condition, such as: deeper equality and equity, a greater range of individual freedom as well as new opportunities for self-education. The uncertainty of marriage is, at the same time, a consequence of the freedom of choice between two people who are trying to find a balance between the demands of autonomy and safety.

It is undeniable that the institutions that helped us arrange our lives are no longer there, at least with the same configuration they had in the past. They were transformed into zombie categories (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2003: 341-342), still present though unable to provide answers to the new risks and needs. Zygmunt Bauman goes even further, in his usual blunt style, when referring to labour: "deregulation’ is the hip word, and the most acclaimed strategic principle applied by everyone who has a share of power. There is a demand for ‘deregulation' because the powerful do not want to be regulated: they do not want their freedom of choice to be restrained, as

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http://www.cc.nctu.edu.tw/~cpsun/zoloback.htm
well as their freedom of movement; probably also (or perhaps most of all) because they are no longer interested in regulating others”. Controlling and upholding an order has become a sort of hot potato, which they feel more than happy to be rid of.”³ (Bauman, 2003: 51). Thus, not only do the individualization processes allow, but they also demand one’s active participation in the analysis of opportunities and threats and the managing of weaknesses and strengths. This means as well that life projects are, today, more demanding in terms of personal investment (Hafford-Letchfield et al.: 52-53).

We can look at individualism and freedom of choice as the main expressions of the neoliberal concept that each one of us is more and more responsible for his destiny and fate, being completely unrestrained from all fetters and constraints. Or, in other words, they stand for the triumph of meritocracy, “…in a society where the inability to display a special talent is reason enough for an individual to become subject to a life of submission” (Bauman, 2003: 72). We tend, however, to share another crucial idea: that the reflective project that guides the individual in the modelling of his identity, or the "process of responsible self-monitorization", as Scott Lash dubs it (in Beck, Giddens and Lash, 2000: 129), embodies a dialogic element and continues to be developed within social communities. Not the old-fashioned-communities of belonging (stable reference points of solid structure), but in the midst of the new communities of meaning, which are less formal, more flexible and time-restricted, constantly subject to reinvention so as to respond to the most instant needs of the ones who chose to join them. One of the main features of these new communities, whether they are self-help groups, consumer associations or internet forums, is based on the fact that they constitute increasingly "reflective communities". In fact, within these communities, the act of sharing is more cultural and symbolic, communication replaces tradition and knowledge becomes the touchstone for the acquisition of new skills (know “how to be”, know “how to do” and know “how to know”) and for the exercise of power, since the politics of choice replace the politics of loyalties (Norris: 2003).

However, we believe there are two main factors that have been slightly minimized (or, at least, scarcely mentioned) in the frame of the debate around the second modernity's social change. They refer to the two terms that form the expression "responsible self-monitorization": on the one hand, the debate about the conditions in which each person performs the reflective monitorization on his own life, which are subject to several skills and resources that enable it; on the other hand, an analysis of the way the very concept of responsibility (or, more precisely, its exercise) has undergone a number of significant changes.

³ - Underlined by the author
As for the first mentioned element, a lot has been said about the "winners" and "losers" of the new social order. Nevertheless, the difference between the first and the latter is not only a matter of material inequality but, quite frequently and just as treacherously, the fact that they do not have the same opportunities to perform their individuality. In fact, reflectiveness is far from being a democratically disseminated right and skill. The skills and resources that enable the exercise of that reflectiveness (trust, non-compulsion, access to knowledge and to the means that spread it, an understanding of rights and possibilities, access to relationship networks and collective entities that solidify certain identities) are not equally available for everyone, and so generate different abilities for knowledge, choice and decision. Going back to Bauman's ideas, the individuals called as "winners" are the ones who are able to transform individuality \textit{de jure} into individuality \textit{de facto}. That capacity draws the distinction between them and the majority, at the point of leading them to think that they can give up their community in the pursuit of self-interest. Conversely, the "weak" are the \textit{de jure} individuals who are unable to exercise \textit{de facto} individuality and, therefore, are compelled to share.

The "freedom for choice" is, as we have already discussed, becoming less and less an exercise of self-determination, and more an obligation, a constraint or a responsibility, that compels the individual to fulfil his destiny, with the same respect for other people's destiny.

Hans Jonas, in his book \textit{Das Prinzip Verantwortung}, first published in 1979 (Jonas, 1990), was the first to depict the essential difference between retrospective responsibility and prospective responsibility, when referring to environmental hazards and the consequences of current technological progress. In tandem with the meaning of the old Indian saying: "we did not inherit the Earth from our Ancestors, we're borrowing it from our Children", moral and ethics are inferred from the principle of responsibility, and have implications on humankind's future survival. (Lenk, 1997, Zandvoort, 2007).

But the understanding of the notion of responsibility and of the principle which establishes it is not complete without a different approach, one not exclusively focused on individualistic perspectives and concepts of ethics and rights, allowing instead for a more relational interpretation of the concept of responsibility, more open to the concept of the "social tie". In today's parent-child relationship patterns or in the establishment of development-oriented partnerships, the structure of responsibilities is not completely defined \textit{a priori}. It is gradually revealed as a result of the very process of a pragmatic mutual interpellation: what power relationships are at stake, how are tasks negotiated, what kind of rules are being built, what are the types of communication used, how do practices evolve over time, how relevant are the emotional elements and the feeling of obligation? (Charbonneau et Estèbe, 2001: 8). If these processes are inter-subordinated, then these dynamics are what Michel Métayer calls "interpellation practices" (2001: 23-26), since they are sequential
changes in which the role of the individual who speaks (questioning or asking) and that of the one who answers (for his actions) are repeatedly swapped. The individual who demands responsibility from another has to be "accountable" for his actions as well, depending on the engagements he committed himself to and the degree of obligation, which will compel him to fulfil his duties in a greater or lesser degree.

In a complex societal context, as the one that structures the advanced modernity, being responsible for oneself is something that is built and enriched through the reticular articulation with others and when answering to their questionings. Likewise, the responsibility ties that connect us to others are closely associated to the realm of reflection and the modelling of a personal identity. Finally, and questioning some theories of apathy, several studies demonstrate the close relationship between the development of personal ventures and civic participation. The main difference, as stated above, relies on the fact that this civic engagement is of a more flexible and less institutionalized nature, with a more restricted timeframe and pursuing very specific intents. (Monteiro, 2004: 127-135).

**Autonomy, (self)- reflectiveness, co-responsibility: the three pillars of adult education**

The second modernity's social organization features and requisites described above form the reference structure under which Fundação Solidários⁴ (a non-profit organization, created in 1985 and associated to local and community development) has been developing education and training strategies towards disadvantage groups. More specifically, women over 18 years old, who left school prematurely without having completed the 4, 6 or 9 years of mandatory schooling⁵ and were born in rural regions (Aveiro district, municipality of Sever do Vouga), where 71% of residents are below the 9th year of schooling⁶.

The main goal elected by Fundação Solidários is to "raise the necessary opportunities to enable children, the young and the men and women of rural regions to have a major role in their personal, social and community development". Thus, since 2000, this institution has been promoting local Adult Education and Training (EFA) courses. At the national level, Agência Nacional para a Qualificação (ANQ)⁷ is the main authority who coordinates these EFA courses, as a service especially oriented for adult training and education, observing a somewhat rigid structure: a previous

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⁴ - http://www.solidarios.org.pt
⁵ - In Portugal, during the last decades, mandatory schooling rose from 4 to 9 years. Recently, there is a public debate in order to decide if it should be increased to 12 years.
credit and validation of the skills the adult individual acquired throughout his life; co-ordination between basic education and professionalizing training, corresponding to a double certification, both schooling-orientated (first and second cycle) and professional-orientated (levels 1 and 2); a curricular structure organized in a system of units, that complies with the skills-orientated configuration conceived. In Fundação Solidários in particular, the professional qualification courses have focused on subjects such as gardening, biological agriculture or personal care.

However, respect for the stability of the core structure is not inconsistent with the flexibilization of training strategies, which are open to experimentation and modernization. Fundação Solidários chose to follow that path, with a very specific goal in mind: “the development of multipurpose skills that qualify women and (re)define their role as responsible and active citizens in the decision process that relates to their own development and to the development of their communities.” The strategy adopted in this programme is based on three pillars: “autonomy”, “self-reflectiveness” and “co-responsibility”. These three principles aim to the personal and social empowerment of the adult learners: “being a citizen, developing skills in order to learn and have an enterprising attitude, this is a possible way”.

Solidários’ emphasis on the principle of autonomy is clearly visible in the way they establish - apart from schooling and professional qualification goals that are fitting with the EFA qualification - an agenda based on a very specific purpose: "learning with autonomy". This main goal encloses others, more specific ones, such as: developing self-esteem and positive self-affirmation within the frame of the redefinition of women's roles; investing in the interpersonal relationship within families or communities; improving decision-making skills as well as negotiation skills, group motivation and enterprising skills; and, finally, learning how to learn. In the learning assessment process, the goal by which students reactively "display and apply their acquired skills" was deliberately avoided, in order to promote the autonomy of decision. Learners have to cope with daily life situations, which require an individual interpretation of the circumstances and the search for solutions in a context of multiple potential options.

This principle of autonomy is, furthermore, associated to self-reflective and self-determination processes. Since the first session, when a detection and validation of former skills

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8 - Education in Portugal starts at the age of six in the first cycle (1º ciclo), lasting for four years. Then follows the second cycle (2º ciclo) consisting of two years. This is followed by the third cycle (3º ciclo) of 3 more years, which ends with exams. These three schooling cycles are mandatory and amount to a total of 9 years. Next is the secondary level (ensino secundário), that lasts for three years and that may be followed by upper education (university studies).
9 - From 2000 to 2008, Fundação Solidário offered 5 courses: a B1 course (First cycle and level 1 Professional Qualification) and four B2 courses (Second cycle and level 2 Professional Qualification)
10 - Quoted from the brochure about the Final Session of the course "Developing skills" - In Portuguese, the course is called (Des)Envolver competências, which implies the idea of integrating the individual in his community.
11 - Quoted from the brochure about the Final Session of the course "Developing skills"
takes place, until the development of an individual and reflective portfolio, but also while self-defining multiple personal and professional projects, each woman is encouraged to involve herself in her own individual training process. The educational team commits itself to respect this process and help the learner execute it, with the various adjustments this implies.

This idea of mutual commitment leads to the third constructive pillar of the training strategy: co-responsibility. In fact, the completion of the former principles can only be effective when training is inscribed in the flexible frame of "mutual interpelation" and commitment negotiation. The learners are asked to "answer for themselves" but also to "answer others": training classmates, educational team as well as the expectations of their families and community. The educational team, in an experimental and challenging method, commits itself to respect all solicitations, new tasks and rules in the making. The successive self-assessment activities enable both learners and educational team to adapt the constantly transitory training strategies to the shifts in their personal and professional projects or to conclusions taken from the reflective portfolios.

But that same assessment, conducted by the educational team, gave rise to some uncertainties, which define, at the same time, new challenges for a continuous improvement: "It is, nevertheless, necessary to state that the learners are safer during the training sessions, because they have the support/attendance not only of the promoting entity but also of the educational team, developing many multipurpose skills. However, when they complete the training period and return to daily life, they seem to recede, which leads us to conclude that skills like autonomy, self-assurance and the ability to do things (creativity and originality) should be heavily promoted during the training period and, if possible, even after its conclusion, especially in the form of short-term training sessions."

Aside from the three principles followed by Fundação Solidários for the organization of their training courses, and although each training course is distinct, with specific goals and an orientation towards particular groups, there is a set of instruments that have been constantly used in all of them. In the remaining of the text, we will present, in short, the most significant and matured instruments that were used in the successive EFA education and training courses: joint and multipurpose planning models; combined assessment exercises; development of personal and professional projects; development of reflective portfolios.

The choice of a combined and multipurpose planning model implied the disruption with skill domain-oriented planning\(^\text{13}\), in which each skill domain defined its particular goals, towards a joint

\(^{12}\) Solidários' internal document, *Reflect to (re)build*, 2003, page 6

\(^{13}\) In the "Cuidar Pessoas, Cuidar Local" ("Caring for the People, Caring for the Place") training course, the skill areas were: mathematics; citizenship and employability; communication and information technologies; language and communication; human and health care; nutrition and dietetics.
planning within the context of "Life Subject" themes. This new methodology still acknowledges skill areas, but, at the same time, attempts to dilute the borders between them. In order to do so, the training process is organized to approach some problematic situations or "Life Subject" themes, so as to establish a combined planning of several subject areas, key skills and professional areas. In order to achieve this goal, "...we decided to have as starting point one of those problematic situations and then define combined goals, methods and multipurpose subjects that were common to several subject areas, thus establishing goals that enabled the learners to develop useful and necessary skills to face the problem that afflicts them" (Solidários, 2006). In the particular case of the training course, "Cuidar Pessoas, Cuidar Local" (Caring for the People, Caring for the Place) (B3, 2006-2008), the learners suggested that the first "Life Subject" theme to be studied should be "Environment and Health". When the study of this "Life Subject" theme was completed, the following problematic situation was introduced: "How to support the learners' social-professional integration/inclusion?" From then on, it was that problematic situation that guided the learning of all subject areas.

Because of the former choice - "in the presence of combined planning, assessment also has to be combined" - a similar option must have influenced the educational team's decision of using "life situations" as a way to develop the learners' assessment procedures. As an example, in the above-mentioned training course, the simulated situation was the "recruiting of a Family and Community Support Assistant". From then on, the method applied was similar to a clues game, in which each learner carried out several tasks, in order to meet her identified needs, while each one of the tasks was assessed according to the structure defined by each subject-area.

As for the creation of personal and professional projects, it is relevant to mention the strategy defined in the 2002-2003 training course, which was reused in the three following courses. The defined goal was that the learners should begin by defining their personal skills, as a basis to grow their awareness about the skills they thought they needed or wanted to develop until the conclusion of the training process. The procedure started with the facilitator's presentation of a document that summed up some "life situations" and the skills that were necessary for their accomplishment ("job situation", "I", "Me and others"). Based on this text, each woman reflected and identified the skills she already possessed and the ones she was lacking. During an interview with the facilitator, she defined a clear individual training path through self-analysis. Finally, a document written by the learners and named "my training path", where they detailed the skills they wanted to develop until the end of the training process, was publicly shared with the other learners, educational team and some institutional delegates. In the final session of the training course, each of the learners

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14 - "Developing skills" training course
presented, once again publicly, their personal and professional project. The learners not only reflected upon the most significant skills they had developed, but they also declared what they thought their near future would be, identifying the drawbacks they would have to overcome in order to fulfil it.

This whole process required from these women a considerable diligence of self-reflection as well as self-determination, in order to define an individual training path. The educational team also committed itself, in a partnership, to put into practice and carry out each one of those individual plans. This way, a foundation of co-responsibility was created, based on the successful negotiation of both parts that managed to define specific goals and engaged themselves in order to fulfil them.

Finally, it is also important to point out the use of the reflective portfolio as a self-learning and self-assessment tool during the training process. Moreover, that exercise holds a particular significance because, as Judith O. Brown puts it, the successive experiences "of the use of portfolios with adult learners suggest that portfolio development increased students' understanding of what, why, and how they learned throughout their careers, enhanced their communication and organization skills, and reinforced the importance of reflection in learning (2002: 228).

The portfolio development involved a common strategy that valued the learning process: "we selected the most significant assignments", "we reflected upon them"," we organized several assignments under one topic", "we asked the educational team to comment on our assignments and reflections", "we chose a physical medium and an icon, so we could present our portfolio". As for the educational team, the portfolios were, on the other hand, another tool for hetero-assessment, analyzed according to a grid: (1) Creativity; (2) Organization / Structure; (3) Several Displays of…; (4) Reflections about significant assignments; (5) Development achieved through time; (6) What was revealed during the assembling of the portfolio; (7) Autonomy.

As a result, the reflective portfolio proved to be a very significant space not only for creativity but also for self-narration. On the other hand, it defined a new challenge: to explore its "interactive" side with greater insight. That is, its potential as a space for "emotional and idea interchange" between its author and her interlocutors (classmates, pedagogic team, family and the rest of the society). In other words, the challenge of turned it into a collective creation.

Some final remarks
From the evaluation\footnote{This essay's author was involved in the external evaluation of all five EFA courses offered by Fundação Solidários} of Fundação Solidários' path throughout the last eight years, in the promotion of adult training and education courses, the most important conclusion to infer is rooted in the fact that this NGO has achieved a significant level of maturity in its training and educational strategies. They apply a strategy based on innovation, as well as experimentation and learning, enabling the consequent consolidation of know-how and educational solutions more adjusted to the contexts and target audience. However, at the same time, the journey so far has revealed new challenges. Among other factors, is important to stress the interest Fundação Solidários shows nowadays for the support and attendance to former learners, after the conclusion of the training and education courses.

This interest is at least partly motivated by the fact that Solidários has concluded a "Study for specific training in the rural communities: evaluating impacts and designing fitting models", during 2007, as a result of a partnership with the Centre for Transdisciplinary Development Research (CETRAD) of Universidade de Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro (UTAD). Fundação Solidários' training courses were only a part of the study, which analyzed 88 courses promoted by 11 different entities within the period of 5 years. But the conclusions, suggestions and recommendations about the training and guidance models adapted to the rural communities one can garner from the study, are seen as fundamental orientations towards the way this organization deals with opportunities and limitations that contextualize the carrying out of EFA courses (and others), while, at the same time, they give hints of how to maintain constant innovation and experimentation.

As for the benefits arising from these training courses, it is important to state that the former learners, instructors and institutional actors have all specifically stressed the improvement these modules brought to their life quality and personal, family and community enrichment. Nevertheless, it is inevitable to mention that the impact of training courses on the employability of the individuals who were their subject is very far from what was expected and, above all, desired. All the stakeholders recognize the harshness that illustrates the lives of these individuals and communities: isolation and low mobility, population decline, an acute aging trend, scarce employment opportunities, emigration of the most qualified and competent. And, at the same time, the awareness of the insufficiency of the measures provided in order to aid the creation of self-employment or the conditions for being admitted by a company or public services.

Today, in the search for new answers, Fundação Solidários takes the responsibility of post-training guidance as a crucial (and increasingly more incorporated) element of its education and training duties. In this field, there are two main areas of intervention: mediation and enabling. In the
mediation area, Solidários recognizes its main role in the promotion of individual guidance activities, which also applies to the creation of an inter-municipal partnership for the endorsement of training and employability. On the other hand, in the context of a more enabling intervention, it is useful to recall John Friedmann’s words (1996) and his belief that domestic units (commonly called families) are fundamental headquarters of a social empowerment, the first place where the crucial relationships are tested, which eventually allows us to become the individual Person we are. This justifies a future investment in domestic unit-oriented projects as a whole, not only in a social-economic dimension, but also in terms of culture and symbolism16. In short, to invest in a domestic unit is to invest in the closest unit that may infuse these women with the necessary strength to keep them investing in their life project, in an autonomous, reflective and co-responsible way.

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16 - For example, the reflective portfolio may be an interesting way to analyze the relationship between individual training and family action, enabling the reflective reciprocity between the trainee and his family.
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