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A Practical Quality Assurance Guide for Training Providers to Improve the Quality of their Accredited In-Service Teacher Training Programs



1. Why to improve? Preconditions for practicing quality improvement

Quality improvement is not an overall concern in education. Quality becomes a hot issue when

- the supply of accredited in-service teacher training programs is growing fast,
- more and more training provider are competing in the field of training,
- and schools have the right and resources to choose from the rich supply of providers and programs.

The current situation in Romania is transitional. In the area of Category I. programs, for instance, fixed contents, methods, trainers and venues are accredited. Once you have the accreditation, you have few interest to make continuous improvements in the implementation of your trainings.

But regardless of all current challenges, there is a governmental will to decentralize public services like education. CNFP is developing the capacities to create a flexible, up to date accreditation system. Forthcoming resources of EU Structural Funds might help the development of the whole in-service teacher training sector.

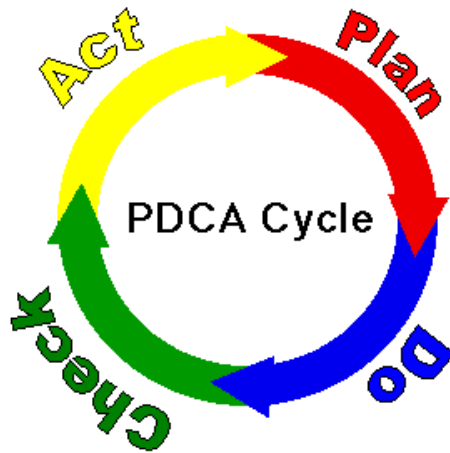
This manual was planned for those training providers who have accredited in-service teacher training program(s) and interest in further expansion. Some advices you might find inappropriate in the current system, but soon they will be practical in a developing training environment.

2. The PDCA cycle as a practical quality assurance tool for training providers

2.1. Short Description of PDCA

The PDCA cycle was originally conceived by Walter Shewhart in 1930's, and later adopted by W. Edwards Deming. The model provides a framework for the improvement of a process like training.

The PDCA cycle is designed to be used as a dynamic model. The completion of one turn of the cycle flows into the beginning of the next. Following in the spirit of *continuous* quality improvement, the process can always be reanalyzed and a new test of change can begin. Using what we learn in one PDCA trial, we can begin another, more complex trial.



In the forthcoming part we provide a short overview on the practical implementation of the four steps of training improvement.

2.2. Short overview on the practical steps of training improvement

2.2.1. Start – overview of the existing training practice

As a training provider, you have one or more accredited training program(s). Accreditation means that your program proposal and initial training practice has met the state standards set by NCPTE. But permanent implementation is a different thing. You must ensure that the implementation of all your local training could meet the standards and more...it could also meet the expectations of the local participants. First make an overview and select the program you want to improve first.



2.2.2. Plan - a change in your training practice, aimed at improvement

In this phase, analyze what you intend to improve in your training activity, looking for areas that hold opportunities for change. The first step is to choose areas that offer the most return for the effort you put in. To identify these areas

for change consider using the feedbacks of previous training. Here are the practical steps of planning:

- Make a customer needs analysis



Your training serves mostly teachers, school directors and schools. Once you plan improvements, you should know the needs of your customers. Sometimes their needs cover the flexibility of technical organization sometimes they require fresh elements in content or some excitement in teaching methods. In order to carry out a needs assessment, you can use cheap and easy solutions like focus group discussions with teachers and school directors. Here are the most typical customer needs in training (the bottom up direction shows the level of sophistication of needs):

Making yourself understood and accepted as a learning adult	Openness to trainees' feedback, readiness to make flexible changes in the training program if needed, giving personal advice and help for trainees in need
Learning	Student centered training methods
Trainers	Skillful and disciplined trainers, friendly working atmosphere
Content	Relevant and well designed content from the point of the participant, up-to date elements
Basic needs	Good information, easy access to the training location, good organization, comfortable and safe training venue

- Prepare Course Objectives



In the course of the accreditation you have already described the general objectives of your training program. In the implementation phase however, you should define a coherent set of requirements concerning training goals, related content and teaching methods, ways of trainees evaluation and expected learning outcomes including knowledge, skill and attitude development of trainees. Identify the need for changes in the existing set of course objectives with the help of the tool below.

General goals of the training:			
Module	Content	Applied training method	Learning outcome (development of knowledge, skills and attitude)
Module 1		Presentation	
Module 2		Teamwork	
Module 3		etc.	
Module 4			
Cross checking of coherence			

- Prepare Evaluation Tools



In this step of the phase of Plan we speak about two types of evaluation: (a) evaluation of the participants performance by the trainers and (b) evaluation of the training by the participants. Evaluation of your practical implementation is a crucial point of internal quality assurance and continuous improvement. As a provider of in-service teacher training programs, you should seek feedback mainly from participating teachers, from your own trainers and from the concerned school directors. Evaluation should be simple, pragmatic and useful.

As far as the evaluation of participants performance is concerned, you should use the way you described it in your accreditation proposal. But even in this case you have some room for improvement. Evaluation of adult learners should be personal combined with advices on their further learning and personal development (both didactic and individual).

As far as the evaluation of the training is concerned, the most often used tools of evaluation are (a) daily and final evaluation sheets and (b) built-in time slots for oral feedback from the side of trainees. Since you already use evaluation tools, your task is to identify the need for modification. Some questions might be irrelevant or the evaluation sheet might be too short. In Annex 1. you can see here a well tested questionnaire for daily evaluation as an example.

It is important that in this phase of Plan you should only plan the necessary changes in your evaluation practice.

- Prepare Course Materials



Although the current accreditation system works with fixed training curricula, you have some room for modifications and improvement. Course materials are not photocopied scientific articles but carefully selected pieces serving the successful and comfortable individual learning of the training participants. Here are the most necessary elements of a training package to be distributed to the participants: (a) short description of the training, (b) photocopied Power Point presentations of the trainers, (c) description of the tasks for team work and for individual work (homework),

(d) daily and final evaluation sheets. When you plan to improve the training materials, take into account the previous training experiences: some parts were well received and some others were perceived as boring or irrelevant by the participants. In the Plan phase you only identify the need for change in the content and composition of course materials.

- Select Trainers



Although the current accreditation system works with the previously constructed list fixed trainers and CVs, sooner or later a more flexible selection and use of trainers will emerge. At the moment you select your trainers for your accreditation proposal (educational level, scientific achievement). Later on, hopefully you will select them rather according to their training skills and personality. A trainer is a professional who has some academic background and scientific knowledge but his/her main strength is his/her training experience and his/her working tool is his/her personality. Here the idea is that you seek trainers for the implementation of your content and not vice versa. In the Plan phase you should summarize the trainees' feedback concerning the actual performance of your trainers and plan sanctions (positive and negative) or some changes in the composition of the trainers' team.

- Select Teaching Methods



Your accreditation proposal has already fixed the training methods, mostly university type presentations. In a student centered approach however, you

should follow the most efficient teaching methods from the point of the participants. It means a combination of (a) presentations, (b) team works and (c) sometime individual work (homework). Participants should have time to present their own ideas and products as well. In the phase of Plan you should only identify the necessary changes in teaching methods on the basis of the feedback taken from evaluation sheets.

2.2.3. Do - carry out the change

This is the phase when you should implement all the changes you planned in the phase Plan. Implement the change you decided on in the plan phase. Modify the training itinerary, the content, the teaching methods, the way of evaluation or the training arrangements. Inform your trainers and organizers about the changes. Make your trainers interested in the implementation of the improvements.



Summarize the necessary changes on the basis of previous feedback of trainees	
Customer needs analysis	Modify your previous way of needs analysis
Course objectives	Modify your course objectives on the basis of trainees feedback as far as the accreditation permits you
Evaluation tools	Rewrite your previous evaluation sheets, incorporate some time for participants' feedback in planning training time
Course materials	Refresh your course materials on the basis of new developments and participants' feedback, make it more relevant for practical use in education
Composition of trainers	Get your good trainers awarded and bad

	trainers sanctioned on the basis of participants' feedback (evaluation sheets). Try to refresh the trainers' team as much as your accreditation proposal permits it.
Teaching methods	Refresh your teaching methods on the basis of new developments and participants' feedback, make as student centered as possible.

2.2.4. Check - the results. What was learned? What went wrong?

This is a crucial step in the PDCA cycle. After you have implemented the change for a short time, you must determine how well it is working. Is it really leading to improvement in the way you had hoped? You must decide on several measures with which you can evaluate the level of improvement. Most important feedback should come from the trainees. Your trainers' feedback is an important supplementary contribution.



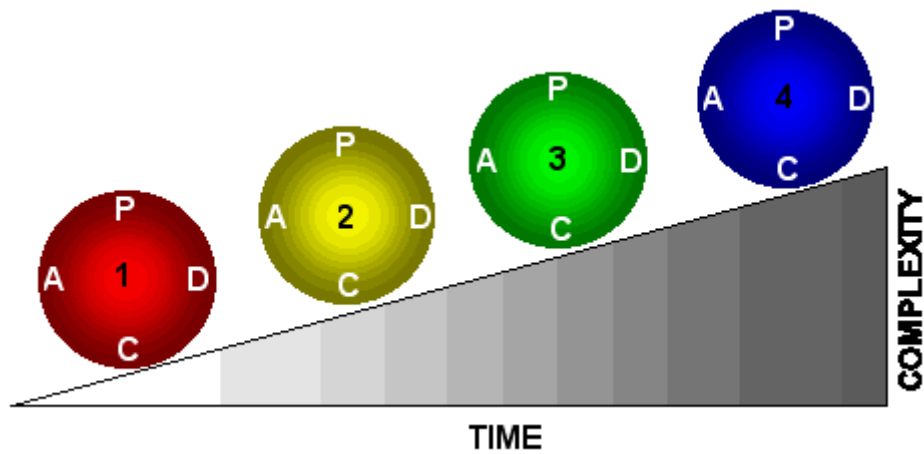
2.2.5. Act - Adopt the change, abandon it, or run through the cycle again

After planning a change, implementing and then evaluate it (see the step above), you must decide whether it is worth continuing that particular change. If it consumed too much of your time, was difficult to adhere to, or even led to no improvement, you may consider aborting the change and planning a new one. However, if the change led to a desirable improvement of your training, you may consider expanding the trial to a different area, or slightly increasing your complexity. This sends you back into the Plan phase and can be the beginning of the new cycle of improvement.

In this phase you should standardize those changes which seemed to be useful. Standardization means that useful modifications become a normal

daily practice of your training providing activity. Improved contents, student centered teaching methods and evaluation practice becomes a daily routine.

You have improved your training practice for a while....but other providers don't take a rest either. So it is time to go back to phase Plan and start the quality improvement work once again. As you already know, quality is rather a moving target and a process than a stable concept.



Annex 1

Dear Colleague,

We kindly ask you to help us to evaluate our training course. We ask you to assess on a six-point scale where in general 5 means full satisfaction, 3 means unimpressed acceptance and 0 means total dissatisfaction (please circle the appropriate answer). Additional comments in writing are welcome in each box.

Thank you for your answers.

1. How did the training course as a whole meet your expectations?

(total dissatisfaction)

0	1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---	---

 (full satisfaction)

Comments:

2. Recollecting the whole period of the training course how would you rate the novelty of the substance covered?

(there was nothing new for me)

0	1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---	---

 (everything was new for me)

Comments:

3. Recollecting the whole period of the training course how would you rate the applied methodology?

(completely inadequate)

0	1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---	---

 (super, totally adequate)

Comments:

4. Recollecting the whole period of the training course how would you rate the balance between theoretical content and practical skills training?

(complete imbalance)

0	1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---	---

 (adequate balance)

Note: if your score is a 3 or lower, please tell us below if the course was (a) too theoretical or (b) too practical without providing enough theoretical background.

Comments:

5. Recollecting the whole period of the training which exercises do you consider the most effective? Why?

Most effective exercise:

Second most effective exercise:

Third most effective exercise:

6. Recollecting the whole period of the training which exercises do you consider the least effective? Why?

Least effective exercise:

Second least effective exercise:

Third least effective exercise:

7. Recollecting the whole period of the training course.....

.....was there anything disturbing for you?

.....what was the best moment of the training for you?

8. Please give us your opinion concerning the work of our trainers

Trainer 1:

(totally dissatisfied)

0	1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---	---

 (super, fully satisfied)

Comments:

Trainer 2:

(totally dissatisfied)

0	1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---	---

 (super, fully satisfied)

Comments:

Trainer 3:

(totally dissatisfied)

0	1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---	---

 (super, fully satisfied)

Comments:

Trainer XX:

(totally dissatisfied)

0	1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---	---

 (super, fully satisfied)

Comments:

9. Please write us with the strengths and the weaknesses of the training course

The strengths

The weaknesses

10. Could you provide us with your suggestions for other training courses that would be needed in the future, apart from the present one?

Suggestion 1:

Topic of the course (or area of interest):

Is this: - a personal need of yourself (please √ the appropriate box or
 - reflecting a need of your school boxes - more than one is allowed)

The major innovation of the course would be in the area of:

- The content/curriculum of the course
- The methodology applied in the course (please √ the appropriate box or
- The topic/subject of the training course boxes - more than one is allowed)

What would be the appropriate number of training hours for the course?

Which would be the appropriate training methods for the course?

Suggestion 2:

Topic of the course (or area of interest):

Is this: - a personal need of yourself (please √ the appropriate box or
 - reflecting a need of your school boxes - more than one is allowed)

The major innovation of the course would be in the area of:

- The content/curriculum of the course
- The methodology applied in the course (please √ the appropriate box or
- The topic/subject of the training course boxes - more than one is allowed)

What would be the appropriate number of training hours for the course?

Which would be the appropriate training methods for the course?

Suggestion 3:

Topic of the course (or area of interest):

Is this: - a personal need of yourself (please ✓ the appropriate box or
- reflecting a need of your school boxes - more than one is allowed)

The major innovation of the course would be in the area of:

- The content/curriculum of the course
- The methodology applied in the course (please ✓ the appropriate box or
- The topic/subject of the training course boxes - more than one is allowed)

What would be the appropriate number of training hours for the course?

Which would be the appropriate training methods for the course?

Suggestion 4:

Topic of the course (or area of interest):

Is this: - a personal need of yourself (please ✓ the appropriate box or
- reflecting a need of your school boxes - more than one is allowed)

The major innovation of the course would be in the area of:

- The content/curriculum of the course
- The methodology applied in the course (please ✓ the appropriate box or
- The topic/subject of the training course boxes - more than one is allowed)

What would be the appropriate number of training hours for the course?

Which would be the appropriate training methods for the course?

Note: If you have more suggestions for additional training courses, please feel free to continue on the reverse side of this page.

Thank you for your co-operation and best luck for your future work.