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Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



# Teaching and Learning Approaches for a Personal Development Plan

For better readability the male form was chosen in the text. Nevertheless, all information in this document refers to members of all genders on equal terms.

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## **Training and Teaching Approach**

In traditional education methods, a teacher first explains all the theory and afterwards trains students to apply this theory. The disadvantage of this way of teaching/training is that the learner has no context to process the information in. The theory is conceived as vague theoretical concept without a direct relation to the working practice. The learner does not only need to understand the theory, but also needs to imagine a reality in which all this knowledge can be applied.

In the working practice of stage and event technicians this method won't necessarily lead to the required results. Therefore, alternatively, we would propose the opposite. First, we let the learner try things out in a real or simulated working environment and afterwards we explain and evaluate why it works that way. The advantage of this approach is that the learner has a "frame" to put the information in. The essence of vocational education and training is this direct link of newly acquired knowledge with the working practice.

Any curricula or training plans should be written in such a way that they fit the individual learners needs and the contents to be learned. It should be possible to use them independently from each other and that one can start with the practical side as well as the knowledge or theoretical side. For example, it does not matter if fire safety is taught before or after electricity. And it doesn't matter if we first train how to handle objects on stage and later on why we do this or vice versa.

### **Delivering the content**

The way the content is delivered depends on the type of content. Competences will need a more hands on training approach, ideally working on the floor. The deliverance of knowledge depends on the expected level of understanding. If a chapter only handles knowing / recognising, the learner can probably read the text and check with rehearsal questions if he/she understands it. But a chapter that requires understanding or one where the learner needs to be able to apply the theory will need a more face-to-face approach, for example with discussions. Below, we describe different types of content distribution, each with their advantages and disadvantages. Different structured teaching and training methods will be explained to give mentors and assessors a guideline how they can enable learning of the TeBeVAT candidates. It helps them pick the suiting strategy to teach the contents that are needed.

## **Training and Teaching Methods**

When we want the candidates to master a set of skills, it will not be enough to tell them what to do and how to do it. They will need training. Mastering a skill means that the

execution becomes a normal part of your work routine. You need repetition in different contexts to be able to perform almost without thinking. We have to make a distinction here between training and practical work experience. Practical work experience means that a student, that already has had an introduction in a set of skills, works along professionals to gain more routine in a real-life environment. Training, on the other hand, is a steered process in which the candidate acquires a set of skills bit by bit in practice. A mentor will introduce the set of skills bit by bit, starting within a safe and limited environment, moving up to more complex situations. While practical work experience follows the rhythm of the normal work activity, the training needs to be organised to create space for learning, reflection and, sometimes, failing. The mentor will step out of the normal daily routine and give the candidate background or let him/her experiment in a safe environment. Training is a synchronized activity, with two-way communication on individualised, structured content. It is a way of pushed learning, based on the initiative of the mentor and with a short feedback loop. Learning is intensive, with a long attention span, and the learner needs to be at the work place. The training program is easy to adapt and allows all types of teaching materials to be used. Presently, in this time of 'lifelong learning' there are plenty available methods. And you can as well state that learning is indeed a continuous process. However true that is, we do want to distinguish some more structured learning and training methods, to give the right guidance to candidates, mentors and assessors. Books, websites, or learning platforms can be used in the training and can also support the mentor. The candidate can be steered to learning content that is connected to the skills that are trained at that moment. In this way he/she will not only know what to do, but also why. Of course, the learning content can also be useful in practical work experience as reference material. Our approach to learning and training can be put into practice by the following basic methods and/or principles.

### **Learning by Doing**

How did you learn how to walk, talk, climb, run, play a game, or learn how to behave? Did your parents deliver a series of lectures? Or did they just let you do these things? Did they let you fail? And retry? Learning by doing is a very natural way of learning. This was thoroughly researched by Albert Bandura and captured in his Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977). Children learn by observation, imitation and confirmation by their parents, and adults as well in similar way. In our working practice this way of learning still exists in the age-old method of an apprentice trained by a master. Most of the vocational training programs are centred around this type of internship in the working field. Of course, not all skills can be learned in reality without risk. And not all knowledge can be learned in practice. We need to create a safe environment to learn and allow the learner to fail, without

endangering him/her or the environment he/she is working in. Role-plays, gaming or simulation can help in case the reality is too dangerous, too expensive or where failure would be interfering too much with the production. We need to feed the learner with information, so he/she does not have to find out everything by himself. But we should be aware of what method we use to optimise the learning experience.

### **Face-to-face**

Face-to-face teaching is the most traditional way to transmit information (knowledge) from a teacher to a candidate. This does not necessarily mean that we have to lecture in the sense of a "professor" in front of the class and "students" only absorbing what the teacher says. If you only tell what is in the book, the candidates can also read it. This would be a waste of expensive face to face time. Face-to-face teaching should involve interaction, a process of feedback and collaboration. It is a good way to find out what is difficult to understand, and to listen to the questions of the candidates. The type of questions being asked usually reflect the level of understanding by the candidate. It is a valuable way to introduce concepts, point out relations, and work on subjects that need interpretation.

Face-to-face teaching is a synchronized activity, with two-way communication on collective, structured content. It is a way of pushed learning, based on the initiative of the teacher and with a short feedback loop. Learning is intensive, with a long attention span, and the learner needs to be at the school. Courses are easy to adapt and allow all types of teaching materials to be used. The courses can be supported with the learning material provided in the trainers' manual. Activities and exercises can be integrated in the courses. Candidates can read knowledge chapters that are on a "know" or "recognise" level in advance or after the face-to-face sessions. Rehearsal questions can be used to check if the candidates master the content.

### **Book / Course**

Using books for delivering learning content seems old-fashioned. But still, a lot of learners appreciate to have a physical object to read from or to look things up in. A book gives the images of a defined set of knowledge that can be managed and finished. This contrasts with web resources that seem to be "never ending". The use of books seems to give added value to the content. Learning from a book is a non-synchronized activity. It is one-way communication of collective content. You can read it in any order. It is a typical example of pulled learning, where the initiative lays with the learner who receives no feedback. Learning is as intensive as the learner wants. The learner needs to have the book to access the content. Books are difficult to adapt, and cannot contain video, audio, or interactive tools. Knowledge is conserved in printed format which of course also brings the danger of it being outdated. A book supports face-to-face training and provides the opportunity to

re-read the content in another format, providing new insights. During training on the floor, a book is useful as a reference when discussing issues on the floor. It can also support the mentor that is training the learner.

### **Website**

Websites are useful for informal learning, because they reach a wide audience without any intervention of the content provider. They can help spread the news and create support in the working field. Learning from a website can be a non-synchronized activity, a one-way communication of collective content. You can read it in any order. It is a typical example of pulled learning, where the initiative lays with the learner who receives no feedback. Learning is as intensive as the learner wants. The learner needs to have Internet access and a computer to access the content. Websites can be updates regularly in contrast to a printed book. They may contain video, audio, or interactive contents and elements. During training on the floor, websites are useful as a reference when discussing issues on the floor. They can also support the mentor that is training the learner. E.g. the mentor may give the candidates a list with websites that contain relevant background knowledge to read. One disadvantage of online resources is, that the sources of the contents are not always easily to verify. On the internet everybody may share and spread information.

### **Learning platform**

A learning platform is a sophisticated, closed website of a content provider, that integrates different types of content, tools, and evaluation methods. The learner is identified by a login and his/her activity can be monitored. A teacher can give feedback within the platform. Learners can follow the foreseen learning path, but also look up information when necessary. The use of e-learning is NOT less work, not for the teacher, nor for the learner. It is not less intensive or cheaper, but it is more flexible and easier to combine with work. The organisation of learning with a learning platform is easier, because it is time and place independent. It is less time consuming in the sense that no indirect time is wasted on transport or waiting of the trainer and the learner. They form a flexible way to support classical teaching as well as hands on training, where they can also support the mentor. Learning from a learning platform is a non-synchronized activity, but it allows two-way (non-synchronised) communication. It contains collective content. You can either steer the reading or the learners can read it in any order. It is a typical way of pulled learning, where the initiative lays with the learner who can receive feedback. Learning is as intensive as the learner wants. The learner needs to have Internet access and a computer to access the content. Learning platforms are easy to adapt and can contain video, audio, or interactive contents. Ideally, the content of a learning platform is built up out of small elements

that only ask for a minimum of time to "consume". This means the learner only needs a short focus, which generates a high impact.

However, more and more training institutes provide their students with the possibility of following webinars, which is a synchronized activity, with usually the possibility of a two-way communication between student and teacher and/or a feedback process on the offered content. The participants connect in a live online session to exchange and communication on a certain topic.

### **Micro learning**

Micro learning is an alternative way of e-learning. The learner receives (on a smartphone or other device) small bits of learning content (5 to 10 min. of learning) on a regular basis. This can include text, video, or activities. At the end of each block, the learner answers questions. If the answers are not satisfactory, the block returns after a while. If they are satisfactory, only some questions return as rehearsal at the end of a larger whole. Micro learning is a non-synchronized pushed learning activity, with two-way communication. The individual content is steered, and the initiative lies partly with the teacher, even if this can be largely automated. The learner gets feedback, which can be partly automated. The activity is as intensive as the learner wants, but it is steered and can be followed up by the teacher. The learner needs Internet and a smartphone or computer. The content is easy to adapt and can contain video, audio, or interactive tools.

### **Blended learning**

In most learning situations, there is not one single best method to bring the content to the learners. Different subjects or practices need a different approach, or even better, a combination of approaches. This what we call blended learning. A competence will need an introduction, training, and repeating until it is mastered by the learner. These different methods can be supported by reading text or watching videos. Many knowledge blocks will require deep understanding, based on face-to-face introduction and discussion. After this, learners can look independently at examples and complete exercises to deepen the understanding and apply what they have learned. Other knowledge blocks may be studied completely online, without any interference of the teacher. To remember the meaning of different signs, you don't need valuable face-to-face time. It is probably more effective to rehearse them in the format of a quiz or game. Blended learning can be organised in a sequence of different types of learning. For example, the learner first prepares by reading a text in the textbook, then there is a face-to-face teaching session to deepen the understanding. The advantage is that the learners already have been introduced to the subject, so the teachers can start with the discussion immediately. After this session, learners can practice online and answer rehearsal questions. Again, the teachers gain valuable time,

that can be used to support learners. A secondary advantage of using different methods is that it keeps learners fresh and motivated.

### **Peer Group learning**

Stage and event technicians are also being trained and train themselves by arranging a workshop like environment in which a group or team of peers exchange their knowledge in order to get the full understanding of how for instance a new piece of equipment works. The great advantage of this type of learning is that every member of this peer group might have a different approach and knowledge, which in consequence leads to a deeper understanding and knowledge. This learning by exchanging and sharing knowledge is a wide spread method of a synchronized learning activity, with two-way communication. In the case of a very experienced group, peer group learning can be called 'intervision', a process of feedback and reflection, which leads to a more internalized higher level of understanding and skills. In 'intervision', a member or members of the group can introduce topics connected to the desired learning outcomes. The peer group then collaborates to discover and discern the knowledge, skills and competences needed to solve the task at hand. Peer Group Learning can be organised in the form of a virtual platform or as a real time workshop situation.