



# Montessori in VET

A new approach to ON THE JOB LEARNING  
in Vocational Education and Training

## Teacher Guide



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## **Montessori in VET**

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### **Teacher Guide**

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### **Summary**

The following practical approach to on the job learning is the outcome of the European Leonardo da Vinci project FROJOL (2011-NL1-LE005-05061), Freestyle Montessori On the Job Learning. The project was carried out with six partners from six different countries. This guidebook is meant to be used by teachers and trainers in vocational education and adult training. It is based on the current situation in Montessori education in the six European countries. After having analyzed the basics of the Maria Montessori method, and shown the trends in user groups of the Montessori schools, we compared the use of Montessori methodology in secondary and adult training. As a result we have selected and adapted six basic principles that can be applied to VET (Vocational Education and Training). This without the aim of setting up Montessori institutes for VET. Examples of how to address the VET target groups and obstacles that some of these groups experience are shown. Teachers and trainers are provided with a toolbox to use the method. The theoretical background of this guide can be found on the website ([www.frojol-project.org](http://www.frojol-project.org)). This guidebook ends with printable versions of the toolbox.

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## Preface

This teacher guide is one of the main outcomes of the European Leonardo da Vinci project “Freestyle Montessori on the Job Learning” (FROJOL)<sup>1</sup>. It has been divided in two parts, this practical part and a theoretical one, that can be downloaded through the website.

Education is still a struggle with students that drop out of the school system. Also not every European citizen has the aimed educational level. Although these are political issues, it is also the responsibility of the professional schools, called VET<sup>2</sup>. And this brings us to the target group of this guide: teachers and trainers in education and tutors at the work place.

Educational systems do change during the decades, as we concluded in our project reports. All over Europe a lot of didactic and educational approaches came and went, although there are huge differences in approach between European countries. The learning by heart, for instance, makes way for learning by doing.

However, it is typical to see that the basic ideas of twentieth century educationalist Maria Montessori still fit so well into today’s educational strategies! The optimal learning environment had a crucial position in her didactical method. And, looking deeper into today’s education we found that in all European countries the value of an optimal environment is big. But this does not mean that students could only learn in a workplace or at school!

And it was Maria Montessori herself that made a strong connection between her home country Italy and her second country The Netherlands! So it was not by coincidence that Marsili, fully involved in today’s Montessori adult training, ended up with a Dutch contact to set up the FROJOL project.

Within the worldwide educational field the Maria Montessori method is well known, but until today it is only officially used in Montessori schools with the target group of 4-16 year olds.

Six partners from different countries collaborated in this 2 year long project, funded under the European Lifelong learning Programme Leonardo da Vinci, Transfer of Innovation call 2011. Transfer of the vision from the Italian partner Lingua Più on the possibilities of the Montessori method in Vocational Education and Adult Training (VET) was the basis for this new Leonardo da Vinci project.

We aim to use the basic principles of this method with a new target group, age 16+. As a consortium we will focus on future and existing students in traditional VET, as each 16+ year old student has had, more or less, his own lifelong learning experiences.

Being the writers of this method, we (Anabel Menica, Roberta Marsili and Margrieta Kroese) believe that it is the combination of learning in school and in a company that leads to the most effective path a student can walk. This, knowing that each student is different, has his own background and also his own best way to learn.

We address the following target groups:

- Teachers/ trainers - these are the professionals from school or training centres
- Tutors - these are the professionals from the work place, who tutor the trainees
- Students - these are the people still at school preparing for the work placement
- Trainees - these are the students on the work placement

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<sup>1</sup> You will find more information on the project homepage: <http://frojol-project.org/about-frojol>

<sup>2</sup> Vocational Education and Training (VET)

Note:

Writing this method we chose to use “He” and “his” referring to the student/ trainee, in order to make reading simpler, as we thought the use of “he/she” would cause reader confusion and slow it down. It must then be considered valid both for male and female students/trainees

## 1 Introduction

The Montessori method is based on the idea of the student's uniqueness and his ability and necessity to structure and design his own learning path.

The FROJOL team took this approach into vocational education and training by focusing on the student, starting with his needs.

Still the curriculum - as set by the countries' legal authorities - is leading, as this is the basis for the student's qualification/ diploma. The big difference is that there is an implicit trust in the capability and commitment of the student to choose and fulfill his obligations, following the opportunities that he has (at school or in the work placement) while providing him with support and encouragement.

The FROJOL team examined the 6 principles of Montessori methodology selected by the Dutch Montessori association and took them consciously into VET by suggesting different ways in which these principles can be applied both in the classroom setting and in on the job learning.

Furthermore this method provides four case study examples where Montessori approach could be applied and a toolbox with a Streaming Schedule for the tutor at the work place and an Blank Assignment to be filled in by the student together with his teacher/trainer.

The method also provides guidance for the teachers and the students on how to use this assignment.

The last chapter contains the downloadable and printable versions, ready to use.

**You are strongly advised to print the student assignment only as a lead-in document to start the conversation with the student, but let the student fill in the document online.**

## 2 A new learning method for VET

### 2.1 The theory

From the International report, based on the National Researches carried out by the six project partners, we concluded that the Montessori method is actually a well known method in Europe, effective and either old and modern. It has been used mainly for children, with a few applications to adult training, but never applied to the teaching of general subjects.

The Montessori method is based on the idea of the student's uniqueness and his ability and necessity to structure and design his own learning path. From the researches we deduce that in VET teaching student's individual competences are not always taken into full consideration.

In fact, we noticed that in some countries a VET student is sometimes left alone when he starts his work placement. In work placement it is also not common for a trainer to follow a training based on pedagogical and educational aspects aiming to better support the trainee. However, in some countries they do offer this workshops.

In some countries work placements for trainees are their first contact with the labour market, and sometimes it is quite hard for them to face the new reality in the short time often requested by the company's organization. This kind of pressure might cause a psychological block or a delay in the learning process, resulting in frustration for the trainee and uneconomic results for the company.

Besides, today's training approach does not always help learners' self-consciousness and self-determination that could bring them to realize what they want to do and how to get the desired job. This is caused mainly by obsolete training programs that teachers/ trainers and companies have to comply with, which do not always match the modern needs of the labour market.

Training programs do not always consider trainees' soft skills, individual learning times and processes, own abilities and psychological blocks.

The foundations of the Montessori method are actually based on helping the student, in this case on the job trainees, in undertaking the desired learning path and developing his comprehensive<sup>3</sup> abilities. The Montessori ideology respects all cultural and religious differences: using the method allows for extra sensitivity towards students suffering from any kind of discrimination (age, ethnic, impairment, religious and sexual discrimination).

In this guide teachers, trainers and tutors will find a practical support to get the best from work placements, increasing their students/trainees' self esteem and motivation.

The use of a common approach for European countries will also be effective in the internationalization of the trainees' job, ambitions and opportunities. Furthermore, teachers and trainers will have a tool to interact at EU dimension with a common methodology.

Motivation is one of the biggest challenges of training in all sectors, as we realized from the National researches and summarized in the International Report:

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<sup>3</sup> In Montessori theory this is referred to as 'cosmic', see Theoretical part, page 31 and Frojol website at: <http://www.frojol-project.org/>

*The involvement of students is one of the biggest challenges for educators and mainly for those who work with adults. The motivation, as well as keeping and raising interest or curiosity for more know-how, is the core part for the students' active participation.*

*For our target group<sup>4</sup> it is important to consider the learners' background, their knowledge, culture and their learning and life style.*

*Following the Montessori directions, a relaxed environment (where the student can express himself) must be set up to help learners to reach and improve their self confidence and the knowledge of their own capabilities. It is important for the teachers to remind students, at any time, of the initial motivations and present them not as a huge program, but as reachable goals.*

*..... It is very important for learners to feel a part of their educational process, with previous knowledge of the proposed materials, paths and methods.*

*The learners must feel free to choose their own learning path, but under a supervisor, who must give suggestions and tools to reach their goals.*

*..... motivation is the main reason to involve students in their own educational path. The involvement of students in their own path is the basis of the Montessori method and we find the same aspects and needs in the research in the partnership's countries.*

What we aim to achieve:

- Develop the trainees' sense of responsibility and freedom of choice
- Facilitate the trainees' respect for themselves, others' and the surrounding environment
- Facilitate the trainees' constant self-evaluation
- Arouse trainees' curiosity and constructive enthusiasm, as a natural incentive to self-education
- Encourage both in trainees and teachers/trainers the enhancement of self esteem to overcome anxieties and difficulties
- Supply an effective learning method able to develop the trainees' ability to read their curricula and to plan and carry out tasks
- Facilitate the trainees' ability for teamwork
- Encourage the teachers/trainers to share their own working experiences
- Enhance both in the teachers/trainers and trainees the ability to listen, understand and elaborate
- Encourage teacher/trainer's flexibility

From the list mentioned above it is possible to deduce that the freedom of choice matches the foundations of the Montessori method, which might be very effective in VET, to increase and exploit consciously the learners' individual skills and find their personal learning and working pathways.

The Italian partner has been using and adapting the basic Montessori principles for language teaching to adults. To transfer this approach to VET we have adapted them, using the six Montessori characteristics, selected by the Dutch Montessori Association ("Head, heart and hands", "Learning by choosing", "Reflection", "Social learning", "Integrated learning", "In and outside the school building")<sup>5</sup>. The latest have already been used in Secondary Schools. And we have given examples of how they can be used in VET education, both in the classroom and in on the job learning. Finally, it is extremely important that teachers and trainers understand that this method is not a substitute, but it can be a useful support in order to apply their own or traditional methods.

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<sup>4</sup> 16 +learners in VET

<sup>5</sup> See THEORETICAL PART B and Frojol website at: <http://www.frojol-project.org/>

## **2.2 Examples**

Below we'll examine the six Montessori characteristics, selected by the Dutch Montessori Association.

We will first give a general explanation of the principle, then check the possibility of transferring it into VET and suggest different ways in which these principles can be applied both in the classroom setting and in on the job learning. We will also highlight the main Montessori principles that need to be applied by the trainer.

### **A Head, heart and hands**

**GENERAL:** Montessori education is not only pointed to aimed at cognitive growth of the student but also on social, moral, emotional and creative growth. By integration of head, heart and hands, Montessori education strives for a deeper learning.

**VET:** VET students are looking at the labor market where the emotional/ social/ moral/ creative/ safety level of the student is as important as his cognitive level. Students learn better by practice, by doing (hands) in a good and safe environment where they feel part of the team (heart). But it's also important to make students aware of the importance of their own attitude when they start working in a company.

**LINKED TO THE GENERAL MONTESSORI PRINCIPLES ADAPTED BY LINGUA PIU:** In order to allow students to use their heads and hands at the same time as taking into account the improvement of their soft skills, the trainer needs to provide:

- A visual example of how to fulfill the task
- A suitable environment where the student can use appropriate tools and materials according to his professional career.
- Space for the student to work at his own rhythm and repeat the task if needed.

**PRACTICAL EXAMPLE:** The students can discuss the following question in small groups: who would a company hire first: a less skilled employee with the right attitude (involvement) and desire to learn or a very skilled worker without manners and wish desire to listen and learn? Why? This could be followed up by a visit from an the employer.

**ON THE JOB LEARNING:** when the student starts his placement, ask him to observe the relationships of this between his colleagues and find two examples ( positive or negative) where the right or wrong attitude have avoided or created a conflictive situation at work ( i.e: a misunderstanding that has caused a delay in an order; a meeting where all the participants have left with clear aims and motivation or not ...)

## **B Learning by choosing**

**GENERAL:** Choice is inherent in life. In the Montessori methodology the teacher, the student and the environment create a learning triangle. The classroom is prepared by the teacher to encourage independence, freedom within limits, and a sense of order. The student, through individual choice, makes use of what the environment offers to develop himself, interacting with the teacher when support and/or guidance is needed

**VET:** Learning how to choose is essential for the acquisition of competences. To learn how to choose, the VET student must gain experience in various practical situations, connected to their profession either through on the job learning or on simulations at school or in work related school projects, situations where he is given the possibility to make adjustments. He must learn how things work in reality, what his role might be, but also what he is capable of, what he wants and why.

**LINKED TO THE GENERAL MONTESSORI PRINCIPLES ADAPTED BY LINGUA PIU:** In order for the student to learn, to make appropriate choices, the trainer:  
Must step aside and trust the student's capacity to choose well. If the teacher shows a patronizing attitude or any kind of distrust, the student will probably not use his full potential and the fear of failure will hinder his judgment. This process must start small, so that the student can build up trust on his own decision making capability.

It must provide different, clear, available **possibilities** to the student. The more these possibilities relate to working life, the better for the learning process of the student.

**PRACTICAL EXAMPLE:** Give the student a set of X tasks from where he has to choose X in order to get a certain qualification. Once chosen, these tasks cannot be changed without a proven reason and must be delivered in the set time. Students must understand that the freedom of choice also involves responsibility.

Before starting his work placement, the student is given the possibility and responsibility to think about the kind of company where he would like to have his placement, and the kind of tasks he would like to carry out. He will seek information about that company and will try to get a placement there.

**ON THE JOB LEARNING:** During his internship, the student will find himself in one or more situations where he will have to make a choice. Ask him to write them down and explain why he made those choices.

## **C Reflection**

**GENERAL:** Self-correction and self-assessment are an integral part of the Montessori classroom approach. As they mature, students learn to look at their work critically, and become adept at recognizing, correcting, and learning from their errors. Students recognize and reflect on where they stand within their learning process and what they still need to achieve.

**VET:** For learning to take place it is not enough to provide the VET student with a practical situation (work process). Reflection is necessary. When choosing a practical situation, it is very important to determine beforehand what must be learnt. Then by reflecting with the student on what he has experienced and what his own role was, the “experience” changes into a learning process: the student will be able to assess whether he has learnt something and what he still needs to learn, but he will also understand how things work in his profession and how he has to handle different situations.

**LINKED TO THE GENERAL MONTESSORI PRINCIPLES ADAPTED BY LINGUA PIU:** The **coaching role** of a trainer naturally leads students/trainees to reflect on their own learning path and about the topics they are learning and better understand their strengths, weak points and **mistakes**. Any unnecessary interventions from the trainer can break the active role of the student/trainee in reaching, by reflection and can lead the student/trainee into a negative, passive role. After the reflection, the student/trainee may realise he needs to **repeat** a task again and he needs to be given the opportunity to do so. A **quiet environment (silence)** is helpful to reflect on what you are doing. Reflection can also be used to realise by himself if he has reached his goal in that task.

**PRACTICAL EXAMPLE:** Ask the student to fulfill a project or a task. Once finished, ask the student to reflect on what was the aim of that specific task and what he has learnt. Ask him also in which way he could have performed better and whether he missed some kind of knowledge or skill during the process.

**ON THE JOB LEARNING:** Before starting the work placement, ask the student/trainee to write down what he expects from himself, while on the job learning: what he expects to learn, to experience, personally and professionally. Then, after one month in the work placement, ask the trainee to look back at this document and to reflect on how far his expectations were right, and how much or how little he has achieved them. Do this again at the end of the work placement in order to get a general picture. Ask the trainee to reflect on the whole process.

## **D Social learning**

GENERAL: Although learning with and from each other is a very important part of the Montessori method in general, youngsters in the age group between 13 and 18 years old are very socially sensitive.

VET: Even in VET, social learning remains an important issue. Every student in VET has to learn how to behave when in a work surrounding. And he should be sensitive about learning in a social setting in the work place too. Because learning does not only take place when the work placement tutor explains a job related task, learning takes place while listening to the conversations during coffee breaks, or students have to learn how to enter the work place in the morning (saying good morning, showing interest in colleagues, asking about their welfare). Social learning is also about understanding when a colleague is trying to give a hint about your behaviour in the workplace. But social learning is also about learning new behaviours and achieving behavioural changes in fixed setting: observational learning.

LINKED TO THE GENERAL MONTESSORI PRINCIPLES ADAPTED BY LINGUA PIU: In principle, social learning can take place everywhere. However, a **suitable (relaxed and trusted) environment** will facilitate learning from each other (the trainer included). In this environment, students **won't feel afraid of making mistakes** but will realise this is part of the learning process as long as they can reflect on it. Therefore the trainer needs to give students the **time** (silence) and the space to reflect by themselves **trusting** they will be able to observe and learn by reflecting on their achievements and their mistakes.

PRACTICAL EXAMPLE: You can for instance let groups of students discuss situations in which students actually learned from each other. What was it that made them learn? Can they learn something from their discussion that they may use in school or working life?

ON THE JOB LEARNING: Once the trainee is in his work placement, social learning takes place through observation, imitation, interaction, the model role for own behavior and reflection:

The tutor prepares a machine for the production of an article. He follows a standard procedure, and the trainee observes what he does and accepts the leading role of the tutor. After some time the trainee is allowed to do the same task. He will imitate the tutor and follow the same procedure. After doing so he will reflect on what he did. 'Was this a good exercise? Did I do everything well? Is there another way to prepare the machine? Can I discuss this with my tutor?'

## **E Integrated learning**

**GENERAL:** Cohesion in lessons provides learners with the opportunity to research the reality as a whole. The barriers between separate courses will be lowered.

**VET:** In vocational training integrated learning should more or less be a 'normal' procedure. We are teaching our students to become professionals and once working, students will realize that their tasks are complicated too. Almost every task has several parts or actions to take. And even if you do the same work every day, circumstances can be different, meaning that the tasks will be different.

**LINKED TO THE GENERAL MONTESSORI PRINCIPLES ADAPTED BY LINGUA PIU:** Although it sometimes is more complicated to integrate separate teaching courses in one school task, this is a better way to learn for VET students too. Because on the job learning also demands the students perform comprehensive activities. The trainer must provide a **suitable environment** and suitable **proposals** (projects/materials) for the students to be able to integrate their learning.

**PRACTICAL EXAMPLE:** The students get a project assignment. They have to design a leaflet for the re-opening of the school building. Before 200 leaflets are ready to use, students will have been using: their language, computer skills, communication, design and they will have worked on several competences like: negotiating, working together, leading, organizing and planning.

**ON THE JOB LEARNING:** Once students are learning on the job, they will always be involved in integrated learning. Tasks are never the same and are never isolated. Even if a trainee works in a shop, and sells products, he integrates a lot of courses learnt; language knowledge, customer service, product knowledge, marketing, sales, communication, logistics, mathematics... We will ask the trainee to reflect on how he has integrated all the different courses he learnt at school into his placement. This is an integration of all of the earlier mentioned Montessori principles.

### **F In and outside the school building**

**GENERAL:** The learning of skills and the gaining of a child's own place in community or society both takes place in and outside the school.

**VET:** It is obvious that the curricula of VET-students contain work placement periods, beside their regular school schedules. Practice learning also takes place inside the school, for example when students work together on projects, or work on assignments related to the working field together with other students.

**LINKED TO THE GENERAL MONTESSORI PRINCIPLES ADAPTED BY LINGUA PIU:** To provide optimal learning results both in on the job learning and in school, a **suitable environment** is essential. This environment seems to be more easily achieved outside the school building, but one has to keep in mind that not every 'work environment' is suitable. This applies to learning in school too. The use of **functional materials in and outside the school** is very important when students learn. During on the job learning this is a very important aspect of the learning process. **Repetition** is a strong aspect and the fact that any activity or task can both be repeated in school and on the job makes it less enjoyable for students, as it makes a big difference for them, when they are performing the same task 'for real'.

**PRACTICAL EXAMPLE:** To integrate theoretical subjects with, on the work place learning, simulations can be used. Like the reception desk in the school class, where students can try out their conversations with clients that may take place at the desk (other students), on the phone or through mail or digital service desks.

**ON THE JOB LEARNING:** The best and most effective way of on the job learning is in combination with learning at school. The most effective transfer of knowledge is the knowledge given to students once asked for. So trainees will run into difficult situations in their work placement, return to school to get the required skills, knowledge and competences to solve the situation. The other possibility is where trainees can remember a subject more easily if they have seen it in practice too.

### 2.3 The practical translation

This Montessori method for professional education starts with the student. But still is the curriculum - as set by the countries' legal authorities - which leads, as this is the basis for the students' qualification/ diploma.

A big difference is that you are not following the books, but decide upon the learning program following the opportunities that the student has or gets (on the work place/simulation/at school). The approach may be different in each country.

Although an blank student assignment is used, it will be the expertise of the leading teacher/trainer, to decide how far the student can fill in the tasks by himself!

You can find some examples below. Some of them may not fit the situation in your country.

Examples:

Person A (A 38 year old, has been working for 15 years as a telephone operator/receptionist in a showroom)

- Person A comes to an Open School day and asks about the possibilities to take up studying again, but he does not want to enter a class of 17 year olds and does not want to be at school all week.
- In the first meeting a counselor or coach will talk through the educational options in the same or another sector that follow on naturally from his earlier diplomas/work experience combined with the gained skills/knowledge/competences.
- This gives person A the opportunity to get a clear view from their own situation, and come up with their own 'learning desire', connected to a curriculum. This may be on the same EQF level or on a higher level.
- Person A decides that he wants to be a project secretary, this means a necessary upgrade of one EQF level for him.
- The coach now can use the 'desired' curriculum to see which parts of his education can be excluded because of earlier gained competences/skills/knowledge.
- Person A now has a concrete view on what remains 'open', and has to be done.
- A work placement can be found by the student/teacher.
- Using the blank assignment and the remaining parts of the curriculum a learning content can be filled by person A, after been introduced in the work placement. The work environment is leading in what the student really feels like he wants to do.
- The learning path is planned, together with the coach, person A made his own personal 'curriculum'.
- Person A will find out that he needs to have some theory to do the job well (see blank assignment). Theory can be done at school, during future classes, appointments for this can be made and hours can be registered.
- When all is finished marking/ examination can take place.

Difference to previous learning situation: *the student is not led by schoolbooks or a fixed educational curriculum, but by the environment and the own decisions. This opens the way to higher motivation and self responsibility.*

Person B (A 20 year old student, second year EQF level 3 study, with a high school absence, possible drop-out)

- Person B is invited to have a meeting with the teacher and the coach, discussing the high number of absent hours.
- In a first meeting the teacher will try to find out what is happening. Person B states not to be interested in school any more, he does not want to be at school all day and is thinking about leaving.
- The teacher will check the curriculum that person B is involved in and show the student what he has achieved and what is still to be done (one and a half year of study).
- The coach now asks the student about his interests and also tries to find out if the student could be 'triggered' to stay in the school system by changing his qualification and being offered a shorter time in the school and/or one in a work placement.
- The coach can now search and find a curriculum that is one level lower and checks this with the curriculum the student was following. The student can now see the 'open' parts that he has to complete to get this diploma, meaning a shorter school period and less school and more work placement.
- This gives person B the opportunity to get a new and clearer view from their own situation, and come up with their own 'learning desire'.
- If person B is convinced that he may be able to commit himself to this opportunity a contract will be made through the blank assignments.
- A work placement can be found by the student/coach.
- Using the blank assignment and the remaining parts of the curriculum a learning content can be filled by person B after been introduced to the work placement. But, as this is another situation the coach will guide the student to cut the learning part in 2 or more assignments, because this means that person B will have the feeling that he completed something, not after 4 weeks or 6 weeks but after one or two weeks! The work environment is still leading in what the student really feels like he wants to do.
- The learning path is planned, together with the coach, person B makes his own shorter and personal 'curriculum'.
- Person B will find out that he still needs to have some theory to do the job well (see blank assignment). Theory can be done at school following classes, appointments about this can be made and hours can be registered.
- When all is finished marking/examination can take place

Difference to previous learning situation: *Our target student is out of the system that annoys him. He can design a 2 week contract with his coach, contracts containing what he plans to learn (responsible for his own doing); the environment is inviting (being on the job) providing enough input for learning. Our target trainee can get out of the class learning system for one hour shifts to a work system where he may have a chance to be more concentrated and once started, keep on going for a time period of 3 hours.*

Person C (A 23 year old who left the school system some years ago without a diploma, lost his job and now needs to get an education to get an opportunity to re-enter the labour market)

- This person may enter the first coach meeting through the employment exchange agency.
- The coach will try to find out which environment 'triggers' person C, or feels like an inviting work environment.
- Person C will have to take his own responsibility for choosing a sector, the coach can then introduce the curriculum of a low EQF level to start investigating with person C what formal and informal knowledge, skills and competences may have been gained already.
- This gives person C the opportunity to get a clear view from the own situation, and come up with their own 'learning desire', connecting to a curriculum.
- Person C now has a concrete view on what remains 'open', and has to be done.
- A work placement can be found by the student/coach.
- Using the blank assignment and the remaining parts of the curriculum a learning content can be filled by person C, after being introduced in the work placement. The work environment is leading in what the student really feels like he wants to do.
- The learning path is planned in small steps to start with, together with the coach, person C makes his own personal 'curriculum'.
- Person C gets informed by the coach about the theory needed to do the job well (see blank assignment). Theory can be done at school following classes, appointments about this can be made and hours can be registered.
- When all is finished marking/examination can take place

The difference from the previous learning situation: *We learn by using our senses: hearing, smell, taste, touch and sight etc. Assessment is by portfolio and observation of the teacher (during the learning period). Our target students (young adults) could design at least 2 week contracts with their teacher, this depending on their VET level and personal competences, contracts containing what they plan to learn; environment (being on the job) providing enough input for it. Our target trainees can learn wherever they want (simulated or real environment fitting with the curriculum/ school grades).*

Person D: A final year student (aged between 20-24), EQF Level 5, who has a reasonable/good school record of achievement but no previous experience of the world of work.

- This student has high expectations of the future but little experience of managing his own business. Their study programme has always been well defined, combining continuous assessment and exams, leading to the desired objective of an accredited certification.
- In the pre-arranged meeting to discuss compulsory 3 month work placements at the beginning of the final year, the student meets with the teacher/trainer responsible for monitoring this phase of their studies.
- The student shows little knowledge of the real situation in his professional field and has had little/no contact with companies.
- The tutor invites person D to fill in the blank assignment in order to complete his studies/preparation successfully. The student will probably state practical work experience and may outline certain expectations he has of that experience. The tutor can ask D to be as specific as possible at this moment to describe /brainstorm what he feels future employers will expect from him and what he desires to learn and how/where he would wish to learn it.
- Person D realises what he will need for the future and what he needs to do to work towards that goal. With this new sense of responsibility the person can start to fill in the blank assignment for learning goals during the practical work experience phase of training.
- The teacher/trainer can support/encourage the student to research companies he would like to do work experience in and to make contact with a certain number of them, with a view to finding a placement there. This may be the first assignment. Person D will meet with the teacher to discuss progress and experiences at regular intervals.
- The student who has no experience of the world of work begins to feel more autonomous. He will use competences and realise others that he needs but do not yet have to be able to visit or present himself to companies. The trainer may make comments on this progress and help person D review his goals and steps needed towards achieving that goal.
- Person D builds a new learning strategy through the experience as well as a new relationship with the trainer and the professional world.
- After finding a placement (exclusively/partly organised by person D) before beginning the placement phase, the trainer and person D follow the same process of goal setting and learning design for the future stages of the placement, involving the company tutor as far as possible in the process. The trainer and tutor clearly define what the school and company expect from person D and how they can support him towards the final agreed learning goal. Qualification minimums have previously been clearly established by the school.
- An informal learning contract may be made between the persons involved in the placement.
- Person D and the trainer should meet every 2 weeks at the start of the placement and be in touch at the same intervals during the whole of the placement period to review learning goals/the contract and results. Extra appointments can be also made through Skype, email or other means as necessary by person D who owns the process at this stage.
- Person D completes his learning experience, having passed several learning “peaks” and visited and consolidated several new key competences. He proceeds to qualify and begins his independent professional career.

Difference to previous learning situation: *The target student benefits in maturity and independence by having direct involvement in designing and fulfilling targets. Learning objectives and pathways which are usually pre established by the school, can be expressed personally, creating greater ownership and implication. The target student also reflects on his learning process and learning environment.*

## 2.4 The idea of the blank student assignment

- a. 'For a student/trainee being responsible for his own learning process includes making his own choices. Not only in general in school but also when performing tasks during work placement.'
- b. 'Teachers in general sometimes prefer to tell students what they should do and how they should act, but this lowers own responsibility and initiative of the student.'
- c. 'Not every student is the same and this counts for teachers too'
- d. 'Not every educational system in Europe is the same'
- e. 'Not every student has the same age and background'

These five statements will be addressed in the following introduction examples of the student assignment, to give you, as a teacher an idea about the flexible use of our method and assignment.

Ad a. As a teacher you can tell a student what to do. A student will follow your instructions and finish the task. However, the student did not need to think about what to do and why. The student did not need to think about ranking his tasks too. More or less this is a missed opportunity to get the student more actively involved in his learning process.

The idea of the blank assignment is that you trigger your student to think by himself, explore the learning possibilities (in school or at the work place), look at his learning path and then come up with a proposal to fill the assignment with one or more tasks. And by doing so, building his own learning path to a diploma!

Ad b. When you tell your students what to do, it may be hard to trust the idea that the student can also make his own choices, without doing less work than in the old situation.

Ad c. It is impossible to speak about the student in general: you may have to do with the standard student population, possible drop outs, early school leavers coming back to school, or even elder students returning for another or first qualification.

Ad d. There is a big difference between some countries' educational systems. Some countries already implemented a competence based learning system, whilst others still work in older/other learning systems. Also the different approaches of group learning and individual learning paths are to be noticed.

Ad e. In our project we address:

Regular students, aged 16 up to 22

Possible drop outs, in the same age

Early school leavers wanting to come back to school for a qualification, aged 20 to 30

People with low (or no) formal qualifications, aged 30+

### How can the blank assignment be used?

The assignment is addressed to the student/trainee.

The teacher/trainer has to fill in (more or less parts of) the assignment together with his student.

Depending on the EQF level and study year, a student may be able to complete the assignment by himself too.

The assignment is an agreement between the student and the teacher (and maybe even the work placement tutor). It leads the student/trainer through all necessary steps, so that all important issues have to be decided beforehand.

It can also be used as an issue to keep the student in education, when drop out seems to occur. By discussing and showing/framing the gap that the student has to fill before he can get the closest diploma/certificate, it may help to enthuse the student again to stay in school or finish study in a work placement with fewer hours in school!

## 2.5 A streaming schedule for the tutor at the work place

<b>Streaming schedule work placement for the tutor</b>	
1	The trainee would like to take a tour through your organization
2	Now you and your trainee can discuss the on-the-job-tasks that the trainee has to perform for his qualification / may perform in your organization
3	The trainee will work this out in a reasonable task schedule (considering the work environment and opportunities to learn that he is ready for) and discuss it with his coach from school
4	The trainee will show you the plan for his work placement period divided in one big or more smaller tasks in a format called: student assignment
5	You can place comments, and finally, agree on the assignment(s)
6	You (and your colleagues) can now support the trainee in learning how to perform his tasks
7	All necessary information, like how long the trainee has planned to learn a task and what theory he has to know, can be found on the student assignment
8	The teacher from school will contact you about the trainee's progress, but of course you will also inform the trainee about his progress yourself....
9	It may occur that the trainee asks you for an opportunity to show you what he has learnt. And ask you to give your feedback and approval (maybe even together with the school coach)
10	The student will give his feedback on the assignment too
11	After the student assignment is finished and signed by the teacher, another assignment may start

### 3 The practical toolbox for VET teachers and trainers

#### 3.1 The draft assignment

ON the Job learning assignment for trainees		FROJOL
<b>Number/ Name</b>  1 /	<b>Authors AM, MK, RM</b>  <b>Version 1.0</b>	
<b>This assignment <span style="color: red;">■1</span></b> May be part of a set, allowing you as trainee to plan your learning path in an on the job situation (simulation, internship or work)		
<b>When can you start with this assignment? <span style="color: red;">■2</span></b> You can start with this assignment after your consultation with the teacher/trainer and approval on your learning path		
<b>What is the assignment about?</b>		
a) <span style="color: red;">■3</span> b) c)		
<b>What do you need to show after finishing the assignment, What are you about to learn?</b>		
<b>What do you need to show (fill in after the approval of the teacher/trainer) <span style="color: red;">■4</span></b> Use the part 'central tasks, working processes, competences' out of your own educational curriculum, to build up a portfolio		
<b>What are you about to learn (fill in by yourself)</b>		
<b>How do you think you can learn this?</b>		
(fill in by yourself) <span style="color: red;">■5</span>		
<b>Coaching/ Feedback</b> Your teacher/trainer gives you (distance)feedback. You may also (want to) get feedback from your fellow trainees.		
<b>Methodology</b>		
<b>Build your own learning plan <span style="color: red;">■6</span></b>		
<b>What time do you suppose you need ? <span style="color: red;">■7</span></b> ... hours /weeks/months	<b>EU credits</b> <span style="color: red;">■8</span>	<b>Where do you make this assignment?</b> (fill in address of work placement/simulation/ etc.) <span style="color: red;">■9</span>
<b>Together or alone? *</b>		
<span style="color: red;">■10</span>		
<b>Information</b>		
(fill in the information that you come up with, together with your teacher or by yourself or by your company) <span style="color: red;">■11</span>		
<b>Facilities you need</b>		
(fill in, suggestions may be computer, www, ...) <span style="color: red;">■12</span>		
<b>Central tasks, processes, competences this task is about</b>		
<b>Central tasks <span style="color: red;">■13</span></b>		
Processes		
Competences		

### 3.2 The coach's guide on the draft assignment

How can you use the assignment with your student or trainee? A coaching guide:

- a. plan a meeting with your student
- b. remember 2.3 (awareness list)
- c. discuss the coming weeks with him
- d. fill in the assignment together or let the student prepare this before a second meeting
- e. explain how you will keep in touch with the student (phone, mail, skype, visit)

Below you will find each part of the assignment draft explained individually:

▣1 Depending on what a student can handle, a lot of tasks can be included in one assignment, or you can use a separate assignment draft for each task.

▣2 It is very important that the assignment should be agreed upon by all parties. This can not only be the teacher/trainer from school and the student, but also the work placement tutor may be involved.

▣3 Here the student/teacher can summarise the main content of the assignment.

▣4 The teacher/trainer should make it clear what he expects from the student. What results does the student have to provide? On paper, spoken, presentation, or it could also be possible that the student has to show an activity in the work placement.

It is important that the student himself thinks about what he wants to learn. Writing this down will help him to focus.

▣5 As a follow up on to number 4, now the student has to think about how he could learn what is written down before, summarize this and write it down now.

▣6 Now that the student knows what he is about to learn and how, he has divide this goal into smaller learning steps (tasks).

▣7 Several options are mentioned here (hours, days, weeks). The answer depends on the level and attitude of the student, but also on the size of the assignment. In case of a work placement it could be possible to have one assignment for 4 or 8 weeks or even more.

▣8 It may not yet be possible to fill in European credit points. The system, until now, has only been used in bachelor or master studies, and in some pilots tested with VET-students.

▣9 Again this depends on the situation. A student can do an assignment at school, in a simulation or in a work placement.

▣10 Most of the time a student will work alone on an assignment. But it is possible that students form a team, even on the work placement.

▣11 This can be used to fill in extra information. Even the teacher can give extra input here for the student, that the student himself did not think of. Or write down which theory (chapters from a study book) he has to study first to start with the assignment. Or what small task he has to practice before starting in the work placement.

▣12 It is important that it is written here what materials the student needs. Maybe this needs to be discussed with another teacher, coach or with the company where the student is going to fulfil this assignment. This may even mean that a student has to search for another company, when materials/machines/ instruments needed to fulfil this task are not available to use in the first choice company.

▣13 Depending on your own qualification structure and student reports you may need to rewrite this part. At the end, it should be clear that the student 'gains' this part of his school programme when finishing this assignment!

### 3.3 An awareness list for teachers/ trainers

The idea of the free choice performs practically with the drawing up of the “contract”, as an assignment between the teacher/trainer and the trainee, signed by both of them.

The psychological aspect is very important in the Montessori method and the assignment counts on the *trainees’ sense of responsibility*.

When you are going into the meeting with the trainee for preparing the contract or evaluating the progress, please remember the following psychological aspects and behaviour from your side, to keep and raise the trainees’ *motivation*, one of the most important basis to successfully reach the aimed goals.

Suggestions	Explanation
Be familiar with trainee’s educational background and future expectations	You can get this information from the school or after an interview
Following the previous activity, develop a general idea and main aspects regarding the trainee’s learning path to be established, and the best way to accomplish it	This attitude must not be considered as an obligation on how to fill in and perform the contract, but it is a constructive way for you to help the trainee to better reach his goal, to show the trainee he can choose his learning path and adapt it in the desired way
Be available to listen and let him understand that you are flexible to make any changes in the assignment, if justified	Changes can concern deadlines and all other parts previously agreed upon and found difficult to reach during the application
Do not create previous judgments, stereotypes and prejudices about the trainee	This can cause a series of drawbacks: a wrong assessment can lead to a wrong assignment, that can cause a slowdown of the learning activity
Put yourself in the trainee’s shoes	Try to remember when you were the same age and/or the situation of the trainee; with desires, expectations, fears, doubts, hopes for the future...
Smile	You have to convey to the trainee a positive attitude and your positive expectations from him
Care about your posture	Remember posture must convey willingness. You should control your position without folded arms, with your body leaning forwards, towards the trainee and a calm expression, using also non-verbal signs to encourage him

Considering that the assignment is a personal contract, please keep in mind the following points:

- The assignment must be constantly updated, changed, and extended with a reciprocal agreement between the trainer and trainee
- Each assignment can be divided in sub-tasks, if during the training period some tasks are too difficult to perform in accordance to the assignment
- The assignment must have deadlines during the ongoing process both for tasks and sub-tasks
- The agreed assignment must give the idea of trust to each deadline, being morally binding, as it shows the trainer’s respect towards the trainee

### 3.4 Feedback template for the trainee

In general this feedback form is a powerful instrument for the trainee himself. Because it is a structured table it invites the trainee to divide successes, topics or problems in pieces, getting a better overview. It also shows trainees that ‘things’ can be finished and questions can be answered.

Trainee's feedback (for discussion with the teacher/trainer or work placement tutor)		
Date	Success /subject/question	follow up
▣1	▣2	▣3

**Ad ▣1** This column is of special relevance when the trainee has filled the assignment with tasks that take some weeks. In this case it may take a while before the teacher/trainer from school have a meeting with the trainee. Then this form can be used by the student as an item list for evaluation of the latest period.

**Ad ▣2** The trainee has to make up his mind immediately, recognizing his success, formulating a question or how to bring up a subject. This can be about anything that occurs (or not). A trainee may feel that he is not allowed to do the tasks that he wants to do to continue his learning path. Formulating this fact on paper may help discussing it with the work placement tutor.

**Ad ▣3** It is very easy for the trainee (but also for the teacher/trainer or work placement tutor) to see if the trainee finishes his tasks or really uses the evaluation to continue his learning process.

Thanks to this template the follow up is clear and controllable for all parties. Even the trainee himself gets more control over his own actions, in line with the Montessori method. Having to write it down and formulate the follow up, also makes it easier for less independent or insecure trainees, to continue the path taken.

#### **4 Annex with Printable versions toolbox**

ON the Job learning assignment for trainee		FROJOL
<b>Number/ Name</b>  1 /	<b>Authors MK</b>  Version 01 (2011-11-03)	
<b>This assignment</b> May be part of a set, allowing you as trainee to plan your learning path in an on the job situation (simulation, internship or work)		
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<b>What is the assignment about?</b>		
a) b) c)		
<b>What do you need to show after finishing the assignment, What are you about to learn?</b>		
<b>What do you need to show (fill in after approval of the teacher/trainer)</b> Use the part 'central tasks, working processes, competences' out of your own educational curriculum, to build up a portfolio		
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<b>Coaching/ Feedback</b> Your teacher/trainer gives you (distance)feedback. You may also (want to) get feedback from your fellow trainees.		
<b>Methodology</b>		
<b>Build your own learning plan</b>		
<b>What time do you suppose you need ?</b> ... hours /weeks/months	<b>EU credits</b>	<b>Where do you make this assignment?</b> (fill in address of work placement/simulation/ etc.)
<b>Together or alone? *</b>		
<b>Information</b> (fill in the information that you come up with, together with your teacher or by yourself or by your company)		
<b>Facilities you need</b> (fill in, suggestions may be computer, www, ...)		
<b>Central tasks, processes, competences this task is about</b>		
<b>Central tasks</b>		
Processes		
Competences		

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The agreed assignment must give the idea of trust to each deadline, being morally binding, as it shows the trainer's respect towards the trainee



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<b>Streaming schedule work placement for the tutor</b>	
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9	It may occur that the trainee asks you for an opportunity to show you what he has learnt. And ask you to give your feedback and approval (maybe even together with the school coach)
10	The student will give his feedback on the assignment too
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