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Apprentice, journeyman, master – is there an analogy to teacher, trainer, mentor?

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In this article we are going to bring up an idea about an analogy between the traditional vocational training and education model, namely apprenticeship training: apprentice - journeyman – master, and the changing role of a teacher and VET personnel from a teacher to trainer to mentor.

Jobs and occupations are changing so much that we are not always aware of what the future holds. The development of technology is fast and VET cannot always keep up. VET organisations in general can be heavy and clumsy in being adaptable and therefore it can take years to change the curriculum to meet today's needs. There seems to be a need for a more flexibility within the education system in general and less hierarchy in formal training. In order to succeed in the future, also VET organisations need to change and be more adaptable in line with many modern companies.

Prerequisite of current working life is that learners need to have a wide combination of competencies, and not just one set of skills. Due to technological development, jobs are in constant evolution or change, and this also means that an increasing number of jobs and occupations disappear. Therefore companies need workers with a wider set of skills to be able to adapt to the changing needs. A lifetime position in a company is no longer a valid option; instead, we all have to have skills, such as soft skills and key competences, which enable us to maintain employability. Are we preparing people for a future career path or a specific job?

VET personnel need a variety of skills to be able to address the needs of working life and individual learners. Vocational teachers' competences are developing towards a new competence identity, says an article written by vocational teacher training lecturers, Anu Raudasoja and Soili Rinne, from HAMK, Häme University of Applied Sciences. In the article, they present an idea of vocational teachers' identity positions. Vocational teachers work on three different levels: individual, communal and societal. They can be seen as experts within their field and didactics, as well as developers of their organization and of working life. They are also experts on everyday life: supporting students, constructors of the working community and educators on the societal level, says the article.

It seems that a teacher is no longer only a teacher, and the roles of in-company trainers and workplace tutors emerge. The competences they need are much the same. They can all be seen as having identity positions on individual, communal and societal level, as outlined in the previously mentioned article.

An answer to the need of a more flexible VET system could be part-time work that combines teaching with in-company training: a person who is a part-time teacher and a part-time company worker. Such a person would have current knowledge of working life processes and methods and of what training is needed in a VET organisation accordingly. In the future, are VET personnel 50 % teachers and 50 % company workers? One can easily think of the benefits that such an arrangement could have: if the teacher is present at a company, the company does not have to use a production worker for tutoring. The companies could get better workers when the teacher/in-company trainer can really give state-of-the art or up-to-date vocational education to students as well as workplace specific tutoring.



One solution to a more flexible VET system would be to increase internal and external networking activities and teamwork. Teachers, trainers and mentors have to be in close cooperation with companies, public organisations, trainers in other companies and other VET providers forming an interlaced network like a spider's web. They cannot stay in their own cocoon, but have to have contacts and have to understand the societal level, have an overall view. Professional networks and learning communities are easier to create and maintain in the modern digital environment. Without networks it is stressful to survive, one needs a support group.

When thinking about history, the basic idea of training or transferring ideas to others has not changed. In the past, the logical progression was from apprentice to journeyman to master. The master had responsibility to train the next generation. Knowledge was passed down from one generation to another. In modern society we see a return to this idea. Mentors in companies fulfill the role of the master in the past. They have knowledge, they have skills and they have a responsibility to transfer this knowledge and train the next generation (the next apprentice). The apprentice starts by copying a set layout of basic skills. When you begin as a tutor, you also have the role of an apprentice as well. In this role, you can teach basic routine tasks, which have clear formulas or methodology. After a while, as the tutor's skill and knowledge grows, the way of training changes focus. Rather than concentrating on standard skills, you have the ability to teach processes and concepts and have a better understanding of how these connect together.

The final level of ability to train is mentor (master). In this level problem solving, interaction of different tasks is understood and can be trained to others. As a mentor, you have the awareness to apply the knowledge, which you have learned to different situations and processes, even those that you have not faced before. You also understand the whole process, the bigger picture, and have a deep knowledge of the field in which you work. At mentor level you have the ability and experience to transfer knowledge in the way that actually touches someone's heart and be a companion in their learning journey.

In conclusion, the cycle is complete. The process of learning has not changed dramatically. A noticeable change has been in the viewpoint: the modern approach is learner-centred whereas earlier we looked at learning from the teaching point of view. During this project we have seen the need to focus on learning guidance in work-based training, management involvement in this process and the necessity of building and maintaining networks between all actors. This requires commitment and involvement from all stakeholders in this process to ensure high-quality work-based learning in the future.

An apprentice = a traditional teacher: learning and teaching by repetition (behaviorism)

A journeyman = a tutor: more independent ability to apply knowledge, aiming to find new ideas and to search for new skills in other areas of life. (constructivism)

A master = a mentor knows the field of work really well, whether it is the teaching profession or industrial manufacturing. A mentor has excellent collaborative and networking skills, both inside and outside of their own organization. The mentor looks beyond their responsibilities, and keeps an eye on things that would need to be developed. Environmental and cultural sensitivity and awareness helps to transfer ideas. (collaborative and active learning)

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