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# Work and Learning Assignments as a Central Element of a Work-Process Oriented Curriculum

## Abstract

The article evaluates an example of how a curriculum can be developed for a multiplier-training that is based on the individual work-processes of the participants. Besides this action-oriented and "pragmatic" approach to curriculum development, document analyses and expert interviews were conducted to derive further components for the content of the training. These additional foundations enclose framework conditions of the occupational tasks as well as a systematic review of the interaction between the levels of the TVET market and the labour market in Azerbaijan.

The curriculum was carried out in Azerbaijan by skilled career counsellors using a mixed-methodapproach. It followed the objective to teach and practice consulting techniques that can be applied within the counselling process with young people in the phase of vocational orientation by using action-oriented methods. The main focus is set on work and learning assignments which will be evaluated based on the preliminary central questions as well as previously self-chosen objectives. Altogether the curriculum followed three objectives: it a) strengthens the action-oriented competences, b) is dealing with the topics and requirements of real work situations by the orientation towards real work-processes and c) aims at enhancing the systemic structures of career counselling.

After pointing out the main setup and content of the developed curriculum, this article will reflect on how this work-process oriented training can be enhanced by embedding work and learning assignments. This includes selected evaluation results of the training and their relation to the theories of the development of work-based learning-oriented curricula and finally some further remarks on the ongoing process of establishing vocational education as a scientific discipline.

**Keywords**: *Work and Learning Assignments, work-process oriented curriculum, career counselling.*

# 1 The Meaning of WLA for Curriculum Development in Azerbaijan

## 1.1 The Concept of Work and Learning Assignments (WLA)

Work and Learning Assignments (WLA) support experiential learning in a real work environment and its validation and accreditation. The real work, preferably a holistic work assignment and its subsequent work-process, is constitutive for the competence development of the individual learner (Schröder 2009) and can be combined with organizational learning and development (Schröder 2017). Work and Learning Assignments need to be systematically distinguished from Learning and Work Assignments which are in many aspects similar, but are being employed in institutions of formal learning, such as vocational training centers or vocational schools.

The concept of Work and Learning Assignments (WLA) has already been developed and established during the 1980s in the light of the change of different models of work organization used as new forms of in-company training. The starting point of this innovative didactical approach can be seen within the work action manifesting itself within real work-processes. The hands-on development and implementation of WLA is based on cognitivist learning psychology on experiential learning (Dewey 1950) and on the theory of action (Schröder, Dehnbostel 2007).

During the 1990s WLA were evolving and established themselves. They were also approved as new organized and structured learning methods. The usage of WLA was also accompanied by the orientation of TVET towards a new key objective, comprising the development of vocational action competences with specially stressing reflexivity as a precondition for lifelong competence development, regardless of the learning environment.

The aspiration towards the WLA from the didactical point of view is obvious, above all by the work-process context, so that the close connection between working and learning is stressed. Moreover, by using work assignments within learning processes, the quality of the workprocess and the content of work must not be reduced (cf. Rauner 1995).

The following criteria can be mentioned as important guidelines (cf. Schröder, Dehnbostel 2007) for the development process of a WLA:

- The WLA should be defined with regard to a holistic work and learning activity. Moreover it should include aspects of occupational, social and personal competences.

- During the handling/ process, the WLA considers a high self-responsibility and self-guidance.

- The learning process stimulated by the WLA is work- and experience-related, but also includes theoretical content/ background.

- The structure and organization of work should be reflected.

- The WLA are chosen and enriched in order to reach the objective of competence development.

Today, WLA are acknowledged worldwide and applied as a method for teaching and further education and training, particularly addressing informal learning processes, experiential learning and the documentation of newly gained competences.

With respect to the didactical aspiration of WLA, learning is seen as a unit of participatory planning, cooperation-in-action, problem-solving activities, an assessment of working results and reflection steps. An important demarcation feature against eponymous concepts of Learning and Work Assignments lies within the aspect that a work-process is seen as an unchangeable, constitutive element of WLA. It is *not* primarily *about the question of how to organize a learning process*, *but rather about the question for the elements within the work-process that are relevant for learning*.

In the presented approach the WLA are assuming the issue to combine theoretical input with team-oriented, specific work assignments and thereby promoting competence development. The gained experience knowledge and problem-solving activities will be documented, reflected and could e.g. be transferred into knowledge management activities.

## 1.2 Framework Conditions in Azerbaijan - Challenges of the Labour Market

The impulse of conducting a training regarding job guidance and career counselling activities was triggered by the main goal of the further development of the current institutional and legal framework conditions in Azerbaijan. The general objective consisted of the improvement of career counselling by participants of the Employment Centres (EC) and State VET Agencies (VA) through two "state-of-the-art"- trainings which aimed at enhancing career guidance capacities.

Moreover, a central study also stated some aspects that led to the awareness of a need for further training (GIZ 2016). The study mentions the predominant role of the government as well as of the VET Agencies. While the first stakeholder, the Ministry of Education (MoE), is mainly aiming their political activities at the improvement of the quality and standards of TVET, including investments in the infrastructure, the second stakeholder, the VET Agencies, are expected to cooperate with the MoE "in the areas of curricula, training and infrastructure development regarding initial Vocational Education and Training" (ibid. p. 7).

Azerbaijan has a total population of round about 9.6 million (50.3% women; 47% living in rural areas, 23% living in the capital city of Baku). The economy counts among the fastest growing ones worldwide (the per capita income (pci) increased from 300 US $ (in 2004) to nearly 8.000 US $ (in 2013), however, very strongly depending on the oil sector (due to the collapse of the oil price, the pci also decreased to around 6.000 US $ in the year 2015). An ongoing diversification of the economy towards different strong sectors (e.g. agriculture, tourism) is the most important present challenge. The labour market is currently employing a workforce of 3.7 million, 1.3 million in the public sector and 2.4 million in the private sector.

Most of the people are working in the agriculture industry while the building sector and the service sector are becoming increasingly relevant (cf. BAMF 2014). The unemployment rate amounted to 5.1% in 2016.

At the moment, the activities in Azerbaijan are primarily aiming at improving both the supply and the demand sides of the labour market in order to provide a better foundation for employment and will operate in the following intervention areas:

- Strengthening the capacities for improving competitiveness in sectors relevant for employment (especially for tourism and agriculture sector);
- Cooperation between private and public sector to improve the labour market relevance of training courses;
- Strengthening the regional and international exchange of experience in (dual oriented) vocational training.

In Azerbaijan the programme is focusing on the fields of agriculture and tourism, generally included in the priority areas of the developed "Strategic Road Map" for 11 sectors. The Strategic Road Map indicates the need for a qualified labour force and associated skills and knowledge. Therefore it was decided to support the Employment Centres and VET Agencies in improving their quality of services in the area of career guidance and counselling.

In spite of this overall strategy, the country is currently facing economic and educational challenges, involving the efforts for an annually increasing Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the need of fighting poverty especially in the rural regions, supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in their search for skilled workers and finally matching the qualifications of the educational system with the needs of the labour market.

## 1.3 The Training in Azerbaijan – Objectives and Participants

On the one hand the objectives of the training were derived by cooperative activities between members of TU Dortmund and experts from central stakeholders in Azerbaijan, particularly the Ministries and skilled workers from counselling institutions. On the other hand, the objectives have been stated and detailed by a demand analysis (cf. Chapter 2.3). As a summary, the following aspects had to be fulfilled by the training:

- Improving the current status of career counselling.
- Improving the quality of career guidance and counselling activities via improving professional capacities of the relevant staff members engaged in these activities.
- Introducing new approaches on career guidance via conducting a range of training courses and offering advisory support to the relevant institutions (Employment Centres and State VET Agency).
- Acquiring new up-to-date and work-relevant knowledge on structures and procedures of Career Counselling and Guidance for the VET system and Employment Service System from Germany as a benchmark.

- Learning from other participants about the specific conditions in Employment Centres and VET System in Azerbaijan.
- Developing own ideas and concepts on how to improve the existing system with a special focus on enhancing the cooperation between the two institutions at local level.

As for the participants, it was discussed to work together with experienced staff members from all the stakeholders (EC, VET Agency, Vocational schools) in order to train "multipliers" who would spread their (new) knowledge after the end of the training. The invited participants have to meet requirements that were detailed as follows:

- The participants should have experience in their relevant field and must show above average performance.
- The participants should show a high degree of motivation to learn and to improve the system they are working in.
- The participants should be able to act independently and self-reliantly if they are given the freedom to make their own decisions and to shape their work environment.
- The participants should be creative thinkers, open minded, communicative, and innovative team workers.
- The participants should be prepared to act as future-oriented Agents of Change.
- The participants should be willing to proceed as multipliers, learning facilitators and to share their knowledge in their relevant community.
- The participants should show basic leadership qualities such as critical thinking, quality awareness, responsibility for work outcome, and teamwork.
- The participants should be prepared to discuss, to present in front of a group and to share knowledge during training.

It was the main goal to develop a common understanding of the specific needs of the participants of this training from the different points of view of the respective experts. Finally the training course encompassed 27 participants (13 women, 14 men, aged between 25 and 50; two participants of the MoL; eight participants from vocational schools; participants from EC; 17 participants from VET Agencies).

## 2 Development of a Curriculum

### 2.1 The Term "Curriculum" from a Scientific Perspective

In Germany, there is a constantly on-going tradition of discussing the term "Curriculum". At the beginning of the last century, terms like "curriculum" or "curriculum development" had been subordinated under the debates about general didactics and questions about the learning content. However, since 1967, the term curriculum was oriented towards the discussion in the Anglo-Saxon countries, particularly the USA. From that point there has been a more and more scientific orientation and an establishment (of research about theories and approaches) of curriculum development (cf. Robinsohn 1969; Reetz 1995; Huisinga 2005). However, the

follow-updiscussion in the decades of the 1980s and 1990s did at first not very closely follow or rather did not generate a lot of new input.

Nevertheless, on the one hand a didactics-driven discussion about teaching and learning research and on the other hand research on concepts of curriculum development were emerging, further developed among others by Robinsohn, Frey, van Hentig, Blankertz, Achtenhagen as the best-known researchers. Altogether the debates about the term Curricula are held from different perspectives. The discussion about subject-orientation as a reference for different types of training could as well be in the focus as concepts for framing and contextualization of content or even on curricula that are conducted on the ground of learning theory approaches.

Later, the discussion of curricula development again played an increasingly important role in European scientific communities (Spöttl, 2009). This discussion has taken place in an interdisciplinary way and gradually increased links to the world of work and to the employment system. The merging economic systems of the European Union provided the background and impetus for this discussion. Education systems are thus challenged to safeguard the acquisition of competences and to work according to standards known and acknowledged in all (European) countries. The impact on the further development of approaches of curriculum development was based on the political position of the European Commission, which has formulated five objectives:

- The improvement of educational standards in Europe.
- An easier access to learning in all phases of life.
- The actualization of the definition of basic skills for the knowledge society.
- The opening of general and vocational training to the local environment, to Europe and to the world.
- The best possible use of resources (Commission of the European Union 2001).

While the idea of a common European educational policy has long been established, education and training in the individual countries are carried out according to highly diversified curricula structures. Nevertheless there is a close interrelationship between employees' competences and curricula: "Curricula determine the framework conditions and the prerequisites for competence development. They determine the extent to which the competences to be developed will be broad, flexible and adequate for the labour market" (Spöttl 2009, 1628).

The understanding of the term curriculum in the context of this paper is focusing mainly on the content and the objectives of vocational education and training. At the same time the aspects of organization, planning, implementation and evaluation of teaching and learning processes belong to a holistic comprehension of curriculum. Thereby the development of a curriculum comprises a complex process that cannot be separated from questions about the aim of qualification and normative decisions about the content-related justification. Curriculum development is seen as a more action-oriented approach compared to curriculum

research (cf. Huisinga 2005). At the same time, curriculum development is a part of the duty of TVET research as well as of educational policy (ibid.). Nowadays, there are a lot of different approaches that are emphasizing e.g. action-orientation, time aspects, the meaning of institutional settings or teacher vs. learner orientation.

As soon as researchers are aiming at in-depth measurements of competence development in the context of work-related challenges and within vocational settings, it is to question which particular approach of curriculum development is appropriate. Especially in Germany, the empirical foundation of curriculum research along with qualification research is seen as an important objective of occupational research that needs a better legitimation and establishment. International approaches (e.g. DACUM or Competency Based Training Concept) are in contrast focusing on a more pragmatic implementation and use of curriculum development concepts.

## 2.2    General Approaches and Aspects of Curriculum Development

Learning in and during vocational work-processes and/or work-oriented change in vocational training is being discussed everywhere triggering the question of sources for the structuring and shaping of the respective curricula. The important task for conducting training courses is to find out which learning contents should find their way into vocational education and training, followed by the justification of how the learning contents has to be didactically structured. Contents with a special relevance for curricula are ground-breaking work interrelationships that have to be identified with the help of qualifications research. Such contents are the basis for conceiving complex learning and work arrangements for the qualification of employees for occupational fields. Numerous curriculum approaches - above all when developed by work scientists - reveal a work orientation.

The orientation towards "real work-processes" has been one of the central principles in TVET since the paradigm change in the 1990s which replaced the traditional, Tayloristically oriented work organisation by the enrichment of occupational tasks and "supported by further accompanying measures resulting in the implementation of self-organized team or group work, the reduction of corporate hierarchy levels and in the continuous further development of the necessary specialist and individual competences of the staff. At the same time the companies were prepared to establish a new learning culture calling for a life-long and self-organized learning of the employees in order to successfully face the swiftly changing and ever more complex world of work" (Spöttl, Schulte 2009).

Today, the relocation of learning into the company and the ongoing work-processes is increasingly dominating the organisation of work- processes and the shaping process of curricula. Companies and educational approaches in TVET are acknowledging the "direct usability of learning outcomes in the work process, the relevance of problem-oriented learning for skilled workers and the long-term value of acquired experience knowledge for the occupational practice" (Molzow-Voit, Schulte 2015). This new perspective finally enables companies to increase the effectiveness and sustainability of further training courses. Thus

also employees are benefiting from the approach of a more holistic way of competence development.

As a summary, there are some challenging requirements for shaping curricula in a sustainable way: "A curriculum must not only perform better than simply answering to the needs of the labour market and to ensure that the imparted qualifications can be made use of. It must also react to the changes in the labour market and take into consideration the multi-dimensional requirements of employees/apprentices and the learning process. These are all normative determinations for the quality of a curriculum which are subject to different criteria depending on their purpose" (Becker, Spöttl 2006). In order to ensure a work orientation for curricula, vocational education scientific work-process analyses concentrate on the identification of work interrelationships and the dimensions of skilled workers. Scientifically oriented work-process analyses for vocational education pursue the following three aims:

- − To identify the competences for coping with and shaping of occupational work tasks;
- − To access the most important coherences for competence development;
- − To determine the work-process knowledge for the shaping of business and work-processes.

With their three categories of objectives, i.e. competence, competence development and work-process knowledge, these objectives hint at competing principles for the determination of the contents of curricula. Reetz and Seyd presume three different curriculum structures and approaches (science principle, personality principle and situation principle) and predicted well in advance of the introduction of learning fields that there would be an increasing importance of the principle of personality in vocational education practice and a continuous dominance of the principle of science at the macro-level with its specialized scientific structures (cf. Reetz, Seyd 1995). Work-process analyses take into consideration all three principles as conceived by vocational education science (cf. Spöttl 2008).

## 2.3    An Example: Identifying the Needs by Demand Analysis

The approach of conducting a curriculum for the (learning) content of the mentioned training in Azerbaijan mainly consisted of the application of three methods: It was a mixture of ) a document analysis, b) a group expert interview and c) an online questionnaire for a requirement analysis filled in by the participants prior to starting the training. This combination picks out two central methods of the vocational and educational science approach (cf. Becker, Spöttl 2015) and pursues an international common, pragmatic approach by questioning the prospective participants.

a)   *Document analysis:* A study named "The Potential for Dual Vocational Education and Training" and the "Strategic Roadmap for Vocational Education and Training Sector in the Republic of Azerbaijan" have been analysed with respect to identified needs for job guidance and career counselling in Azerbaijan. Based on the current framework situation and in the context of medium- and long-term objectives, the strategic targets of

Azerbaijan's government are aiming at closing the gap between the labour market and the need of skilled workers by reforms of the educational system and especially by improving the training of teachers and counsellors. The targets are followed by an action plan emphasizing the need of better cooperation between educational institutions, public and private sector and describing a recruiting process for new qualified specialists for the VET system. The analysis came to the conclusion that the German Dual System and the way of job guidance and career counselling in Germany should be used as a best-practice example and should be discussed in reference to a transfer of options or at least development inputs for Azerbaijan.

b) *Group expert interview:* During a start-up-meeting with experts and stakeholders from Azerbaijan, an expert group discussion provided the basis for the structure and the content of the training. The interview guideline was based on information collected through the analysis of relevant documents provided by GIZ. It was the main goal to develop a common understanding of the specific needs of the participants of such a training from the point of view of experts. This interview was conducted in January 2018 with seven experts working in the Ministries (MoE and MLSP) and the VET Agency and with two experts from GIZ. The interview was documented and analysed by the TU Dortmund. The summary of these findings served as a basis for a demand-oriented design of the training on career counselling and guidance.

c) *Requirement analysis:* An online-survey was developed by TU Dortmund and GIZ, based on the initial results of the analysis as above. The objective of the online survey was to find out which topics were most relevant for the participants. 30 persons participated in the online survey, but not every person completed the entire questionnaire. The questionnaire comprised 56 items (and five questions on the biographical background) covering the following topic areas:

- Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)
- Employment Centre Structures and Services (ESS)
- Job and Study Orientation (JSO)
- Counselling Approaches and Methods (COM)

The questionnaire was analysed on the level of the single items and added up the answers that "strongly agreed" (++) or "agreed" (+) to the question whether this mentioned topic should play an important role during the training. The following aspects reached the highest amount of approval and therefore  are in the centre of the theoretical input during the training:

- Influence of educational background towards the job and study orientation? (~95%)
- Overall objectives of Vocational Education and Training? (~87%)
- Regional and local cooperation structures in career counselling? (~85%)
- Ways of cooperation between local players and employment Centres? (~85%)
- How to address labour market relevance of VET programs? (~84%)

- Insight into the difficulties and problems in VET? (~80%)
- How does employer commitment contribute to the quality of VET? (~80%)
- What are the central areas of activities for career counselling? (~80%)
- Which competencies are required for counselling processes? (~79%)

## 2.4 The Core of a Work-based Curriculum: Work and Learning Assignments and Action Orientation within Group Work

To bridge the first and second training, the participants were given the task to develop a concept related to the WLA-approach. The intended idea was to combine the two trainings in a productive and learning conducive manner and to initiate a transfer of knowledge into action-oriented projects. The "concept-to-be-developed" should have a relevance to the participant´s work situation. Moreover it should include the perspective to be implemented in their institution. The concept of this approach of a work-integrated work and development task is well-known in TVET (cf. Schröder 2008) and emphasises the meaning of a work process for the development of occupational competences. In order to more strongly emphasise the work-process orientation, the paper will rely more on the term "Work and Learning Assignment" (WLA). The WLA approach contains a didactical perspective that is referring to the combination of working and learning within real processes and is thereby using the contents of daily work for curriculum development. It can be assumed that the linking of learning processes with the accomplishment of real work-processes is furthermore interesting for companies, human resources managers and especially vocational pedagogues for conducting further vocational training courses (cf. Figure 1).
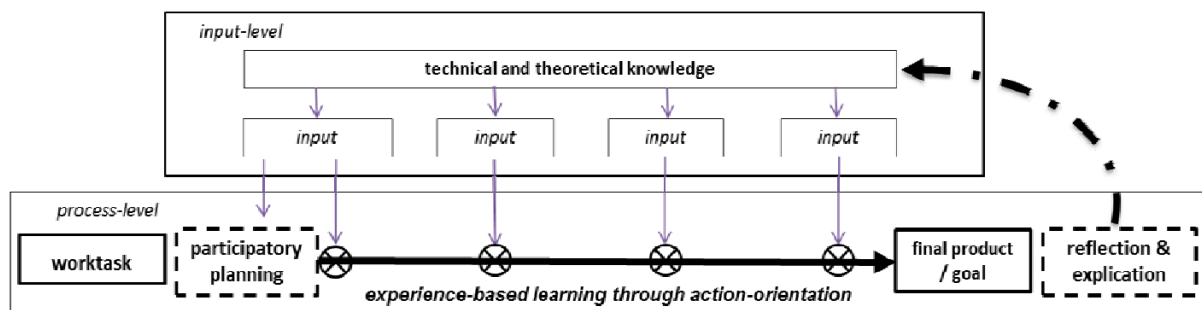


Figure 1:   The work process as a basic for action-orientation, didactical
             inputs and reflection (Schröder 2017, 179).

In more detail, the task was to jointly develop a concept on a system element likely to contribute to an enhanced career counselling in the future practice. The participants were asked to form groups according to their needs and to draft an initial idea, preferably in a team of at least one participant from each institution/stakeholder. During the group work some general questions guided the groups and gave an orientation of thinkable important aspects that should be considered (cf. Figure 2).

Figure 2: Steps and ideas for creating a WLA

The groups documented their conceptual idea in a short paper, describing the idea, the objectives and milestones of their own WLA. The results were presented and reflected during the second training. The development of the WLA implied the chance that relevant results were produced for Azerbaijan and that the participants learned to collaborate in a target-oriented manner.

# 3    Results of the Demand Analysis and Structure of the Training

## 3.1    Learning Content of the Curriculum

The main goal was specified during the expert group interview on the aspect that by supporting vocational training and qualification the supply of qualified labour will increase, i.e. by trainees that have successfully completed initial and continuing education. As a result of the training the participants should be better prepared to cope with the requirements and their tasks in enterprises. In the medium- and long-term, it will contribute to reduce structural unemployment and underemployment and to support a social and sustainable economic development. The scope of content of the Training on Job Guidance and Career Counselling was determined and divided into four central topics (cf. Figure 3):

| | | Exercises |
|---|---|:---:|
| **Module I: TVET Systems (TVET)** | | |
| TVET I | Structures and Institutions of TVET in Germany | |
| TEVT II | Dual System of TVET in Germany and Employer Engagement | |
| TVET III | Elements and developing processes of TVET Systems | |
| TVET IV | Innovative Didactics in TVET, Organizational Development and Career Counselling | |
| TVET V | Assessment, measurement and validation of competencies | |
| | | |
| **Module II: Employment Service Systems (ESS)** | | |
| ESS I | Structures of the labour market (Labour Agency in Germany) | |
| ESS II | Matching processes and entrance into the labour market in Germany | |
| ESS III | Regional and local structures of cooperation | |
| ESS IV | Current Challenges (lack of skilled workers, refugees) | v |
| | | |
| **Module III: Job and Study Orientation (JSO)** | | |
| JSO I | Transition system for school dropouts in Germany | |
| JSO II | Areas of activities for career guidance | v |
| JSO III | Best practice ("Career choice Passport" as Portfolio-Instrument) | |
| JSO IV | Career choice theories | v |
| | | |
| **Module IV: Counselling approaches and methods (COM)** | | |
| COM I | Challenges of Counselling | |
| COM II | Structures of Counselling Situations | |
| COM III | Attitudes of counsellors | |
| COM IV | Roles in Counselling Situations | v |
| COM V | Methods Part I (Narration, Questions, Reframing) | v |
| COM VI | Process model of counselling situations | v |
| COM VII | Customers in Counselling (Target groups, young people, long-time-unemployees) | |
| COM VII | Stakeholders in career counselling (School, Company, local politics) | |
| COM IX | Orientation and decision-making in counselling | v |
| COM X | Methods Part II (Networking cards, circular questioning) | v |
| COM XI | Information offers and possibilities (e.g. platforms, databases) | |
| COM XII | Methods Part III (Card Sorting, My Skills) | v |

Figure 3:   Overview of the content of the modules/units

Within the first Module, *TVET Systems*, the structure, function and central elements of the German TVET System have been in the focus. During the various units, the presentations gave an overview of the structures and institutions of TVET in Germany, explained the so-called "Dual System" of TVET and the reasons for employer commitment in Germany and discussed elements and developing processes of TVET Systems in general. Moreover one unit focused on innovative didactics and organisational development in TVET while one input also outlined the issues of assessment, measurement and validation of competences.

*Module II: Employment Service System (ESS)* was mainly about the structures of the labour market in Germany and about the ways of matching job seekers with the activities of the Federal Labour Agencies in Germany. Moreover the module showed how the regional

structures and cooperation between the different stakeholders are working, which laws are fundamental and how the organizational and financial support is given to persons who are seeking either training or a (new) job. The module was embedded into the question of current challenges and into possibilities of transferring some aspects to Azerbaijan.

*Module III: Job and Study Orientation (JSO)* is about examples and activities of different ways of orientation and decision making processes for starting an apprenticeship or choosing a further training for a changed job orientation. These activities are embedded in the educational system and supported by various rural and local stakeholders and institutions. Moreover, there are already some instruments and career choice models available in Germany and even theories about influential factors in reference to career choices of young people.

The fourth Module, *Counselling Approaches and Methods*, was the most important one for the practical part of the participants. Moreover, this module guided the training during the second week and mixed up some short inputs and some exercises and methods about the counsellor him-/herself, the relationship to his/her clients and about communication and counselling situations and frameworks. Starting with challenges and structures of counselling situations, the attitudes and roles of a counsellor played a major role in this module. Beside this there were some very useful methods, like different types of questions, reframing techniques, circular questions as well as methods to support decision making processes or to know your client better (and his/her skills and social environment).

## 3.2   The Presentation and Discussion of the WLA

The following findings represent in a nutshell the presentations and discussions from the group work activities referring to the *Work and Learning Assignments*:

### 1.  Career and Job Guidance Centre

The first group developed a WLA dealing with the "Establishment of a Career and Job Guidance Centre". The main purpose was to initiate and continue a stronger cooperation between the relevant stakeholders, in that case VET Agency, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, Labour Office, Trade Unions, and additional International Organizations (like GIZ) and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO). Three main objectives have been named by this group:

- In order to improve the availability and dissemination of information about occupations, the new centre should be comparable to an information centre working with the possibilities of new digital media. Every occupation, its requirements and preconditions should be described, complemented by further information and addressable contact persons.
- The ongoing promotion for TVET: The TVET System is not highly appreciated in Azerbaijan compared to academic education. Due to the lack of skilled workers this aspect was seen as an important way to change this situation.

- Decreasing unemployment aimed at activities especially for job-seekers who should benefit from a cooperative and holistic counselling approach and guidance during their job-seeking activities.

The group did not see any greater challenge that could prevent the idea from realisation, but emphasized the need of to involve the employers. Two main phases of realisation are mentioned: construction of the centre and equipment (with information technology and staff). Social Media should play a greater role in PR-activities and should point out the benefits of this centre for improving the success of job and career guidance.

## 2. *"Road of Your Life"*

The second group argued about a concept called "Road of Your Life" and discussed the whole biography of an individual on his/her way from school until retirement. The idea mainly emphasized the need of coordination and cooperation between Employment Centres and VET Agencies. The following objectives are justifying the concept:

- The better the cooperation between both mentioned institutions, the better it is possible that the individual can make a good choice of his/her profession. The cooperation should aim at providing the individual with information, by counselling him/her in his/her decision-making-process and by working together on searching for suitable apprenticeship and job vacancies.
- The cooperation should already take place during the last years in the general schools. This includes teachers, but also employers in pre-vocational activities.
- Finally the advantage also lies in the positive economic aspects: By helping unemployed persons they are no longer in a need to receive a basic income. On the contrary, the worker is paying taxes and is thus increasing the GNP.

Altogether, the preparations in school and the cooperation should lead to a most effective and professional consultation. The group also emphasized the fact that especially teachers, but also the staff in EC and VET Agency, should be trained. This is one of the main challenges, as well as the financial aspect for the activities, the trainings and the prevocational measures. One explicitly mentioned activity was an "open house day" at school, inviting experienced experts that can tell about their profession and answer questions posed by interested pupils.

## 3. A *"Complex Comprehensive Approach"*

The third idea concentrated on a complex comprehensive approach. Not only one aspect should be specified. Moreover, a number of activities should be collected that together would present a holistic way of job guidance and career counselling. This includes e.g. job guidance activities that already start at schools, the preparation for the educational staff by training them to highly skilled professionals of counselling, the strengthening of the position and duties of VET Agencies and by starting an alliance between EC and VET Agencies in order to better match the different activities and at the same time to avoid a repetition of activities. The following objectives and advantages were mentioned by the group:

- It is important to have an early starting point for Job Guidance activities. It is considered an important contribution to the country to increase the employability (with all the inherent positive effects).
- Like the other groups, this approach also saw the need and the positive aspects of cooperation between employers, teachers and local TVET staff. Besides that, a strong connection to the private sector was also mentioned as a precondition for improvement.

The main efforts to promote and support Job Guidance activities should be made by newspapers and by the use of digital media to keep the ideas and their importance in the minds of pupils and every involved institution.

## 4. *"Discover Yourself"*

The fourth idea presented as a WLA was called "Discover Yourself" and started with a short historical background that showed the importance of higher education (with the example of reading skills and the success of scientific achievements).

- In general the group stressed the point of counselling as a holistic, lengthy process starting in Kindergarten and followed up until graduation with a Master's Degree.
- The guidance activities starting at an early age should culminate in concrete implementation activities leading to a decision-making process especially in the 9th and 11th grade.
- One important aspect was dealing with the child-parents-relationship. The objective is to avoid that the pupils are being pushed too much by their parents instead of making their own choice. This gap should be closed.

Two ideas have been mentioned to support the "Discover Yourself"-project: first there should be advertisement on TV, and second the parents should be actively involved in the consultation process (and maybe should visit some training activities themselves). The activities should be accompanied and supported by the Ministry of Education, but also by international organisations like ILO or GIZ.

## 5. *Finding Skill Professionals for your Work*

The fifth group came along with the idea of creating and shaping a general approach combining best-practice examples from Europe. The discussion showed that the country is facing similar challenges as observed in different regions in Europe. Thus the following objectives were identified:

- The main key has been seen in an improved cooperation between the EC, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, NGO and Trade Unions. The cooperation should be oriented towards examples from European Countries with similar challenges. Moreover, the cooperation should not be pushed, but be based on voluntary activities.

- The measures of counselling activities should also be based on best-practice examples. Ideally some of these examples could be transferred to Azerbaijan or could be adjusted to the present requirements.

In general the group pondered that this idea could be hampered by the question of how to fund these activities. As a result, the WLA-idea should be supported by the GDP/ by taxes.

## 3.3 Selected Results of Evaluation

The training was evaluated by the participants with the aid of a questionnaire containing items regarding the training content, the approach of the training and the framework conditions (setting, organisation etc.). This paper is focussing on the results of the questions related to the work-process orientation of the training and the quality of the learning contents/curriculum.

The first considered question related to the action-oriented approach and the implementation of WLA concepts and is shown in Figure 3. The results reveal the success and the highly rated acceptance of the connection between the training and the (work) experience of the participants. In total 92% of the answers (22 out of 24 persons) are rating the training within the positive part of the scale, while the remaining two persons chose an average value. The positive results for this item are indicating a highly matched correlation between the WLA idea of taking the (work) experience of the participants into account as well as the participants' awareness of the how far real work experiences were part of the training, the discussions and the exchange of knowledge.



Figure 4:   Relation of the training to the experience of the participants

A similar evaluation item is shown in Figure 4. In this case it was a question about the general satisfaction of the participants with the content of the training. The results are showing a very high approval while all answers are located on the two positive scale values.

Figure 5:   Evaluation of the training topics in general

Overall the training content has obviously matched the expectations in a very good way, as it is also recognizable in Figure 5, showing the answers to the corresponding question. In total, 71% (17 of 24 persons who answered this item) have agreed to both positive scale values, while 29% (7 persons) rated at least an "acceptable" matching. Thus no participant of the training was disappointed or missed some content. This is underpinned by the fact that the negative categories have not been chosen.



Figure 6:   Matching of training expectations with individual needs

## 4    Reflection and Outlook

### 4.1    Reflection of the Process of Curriculum Development

The presented example shows how the curriculum for a "Job Guidance and Career Counselling" training course in Azerbaijan was conducted. There was a method mix,

combining central elements of the vocational scientific research approach (document analysis, expert interviews) with a need-based questionnaire distributed to the participants prior to the final development of the curriculum. Moreover it was taken into account to integrate an action-oriented procedure (part of) the training. From the didactical perspective it was the approach to integrate WLA in order to use work-process orientation for the improvement of the learning outcome. Finally, the following aspects could be identified (based on the evaluation and the feedback of the participants) as success factors:

- *Needs orientation (research and questioning the participants):* The document analysis as well as questioning the needs of the participants were acknowledged as very positive elements in the final evaluation results. This aspect is not very surprising, but especially by using the document analysis as a stand-alone method it might occur that the results of the development process of a curriculum miss central requirements and needs regarding the participants of the training. The expert group interview with skilled workers and central players on the meso-level of the education policy proved the approach and combined the scientific oriented way of curriculum development with a more pragmatic but nonetheless target-oriented procedure.

- *Work-process orientation:* The alignment towards real work-processes from the vocational (counselling) context of the participants was supported and considered in different ways: There were the implementation of the didactical concept of WLA, the training of counselling and communication methods in pairs/groups and the discussion of the transfer of best practices (from Germany to Azerbaijan). Those principles and methods made it easier to rely on real work situations and to increase the probability of using methods and examples later on at the individual workplace. "Real" work-processes could not be fully integrated during the training. However, a noticeable reference was possible due to the examples given and the expertise of the counselling trainer from Dortmund as well as during the group work activities. Finally the participants acknowledged and extolled the didactical setting in general.

## 4.2   Outlook: Effect of the Training and Curriculum on Further Activities

The following activities are intended as follow-up activities in order to continue with the achievements of the training so far and in order to pursue the objective of improving the job guidance and career counselling in cooperation with all stakeholders:

- *Implementation of an inter-institutional Working Group*

The participants are altogether experts in the context of JG & CC, but all with a different institutional background and with different objectives/tasks. This aspect did open the eyes of the participants, because they learned about the different points of view by working together in group activities. At the same time the participants became aware of the fact that that only common efforts will result in a sustainable development and improvement of the system in Azerbaijan. As the participants are not the final decision-makers, the idea emerged to

establish an Expert Group as a kind of a steering group. This group should meet regularly and together they could develop recommendations for the Ministries or create ideas for new projects.

- *Evaluation of the ideas for WLA regarding possibilities of realisation and transfer*

A small group of experts (one each from MoE, MoLSS, GIZ, TVET School, EC, VET Agency) should discuss and evaluate the ideas generated within the WLA together. Each of these five ideas should be considered in reference to a) its impact, b) the financial resources needed and c) the possibility of realisation or rather the integration into the existing system. It should be the objective to pick out the idea with the best evaluation and make a plan for its realisation if this idea is appropriate for the current educational and political action plans in Azerbaijan.

- *Developing a standardized profile for counselling activities*

The requirements for the competences of counsellors may differ with regard to their institutional background and their target groups, but some expectations have to be fulfilled in every counselling situation. Therefore a competence profile should be formulated as a mandatory standard for every counsellor. A profile would be the basis for a comparable, high quality standard in counselling situations in every region and situation. This profile should therefore be a kind of curriculum for interdepending training activities that have to be done by every counsellor and that have to be documented and certified by a central institution, e.g. the Ministry of Education. In Germany, there are eight central "attitudes" that are guiding any counselling activity and that are mandatory for everyone. Based on the first ideas provided by the participants of the training, a counselling profile should be detailed within one year and should be combined with training offers.

- *Synchronisation of activities*

Compared to Germany, the participants saw a lack of working together. All the stakeholders working in the context of JG and CC are having good ideas and are successful in their activities in different ways. However, in many situations there could be a better matching of activities, a more useful coordination and cooperation between schools, companies, Employment Centres and VET Agencies. Especially the rural activities could be more effective if they were coordinated by one local institution that knows a) the requirements in the region and b) the needs and strengths of the local stakeholders/partners. But also from an overall point of view a better coordination could set standards and obligatory methods/measures for the whole country and have a positive medium-term effect.

- *Establishment of TVET research as a scientific discipline*

In differentiation from educational research, TVET research is focussing on the content and objectives of occupational education (cf. Rauner 2005) and therefore has to be established as an academic scientific discipline in order to appropriately meet the manifold and interdisciplinary requirements. Besides the content- and development-related tasks on

different levels of education, economic and labour market policy the priority and vision of (further) development of research methods is necessary in order to be successful with the "decoding of the knowledge and expertise incorporated in practical daily work as well as with the examination and evaluation of occupational competences" (Rauner 2005, 11). This aspects can be seen as the basics for a work-process oriented curriculum development. The presented example shows one possible way and moreover includes the starting point for further vocational educational science activities in TVET – at least in Azerbaijan and for the area of vocational orientation and career guidance.

- WLA: Status quo and research desiderata

The idea of focusing on one's own work-processes has proved to be a highly motivating aspect for the process of mind mapping ideas for further improvements and for visions and goals for the future. The challenge for shaping a curriculum lies within the long-lasting time period of using scientific methods prior to starting to develop the learning content and at the same time trying to be an objective researcher. Moreover participation and empathy during the development process are the basics needed besides methodological competencies. Finally, there still is a need of thinking about a related work-process oriented didactical approach that is supporting the development of a curriculum.

Thereby the current issue for vocational education and research lies within the theoretical foundation as well as the promotion of the didactical fields of application for WLA. A strong foundation can be found in the illustrated model (cf. Figure 1) showing the connections between a real work task, a process- and action-oriented realization and possibilities of didactical starting points for (occupational) learning inputs.

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