

# Moving from ‘One-Fits-All’ to ‘Personalised’ education in VET.

Erasmus project: ‘Personalised Approach of Learning for Students with Special Educational Needs’

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## Abstract

*In the Palssen project, VET-providers from the Netherlands, Slovenia, and Portugal, work together with the aim to increase the competences of teachers and VET-organisations providing a more learner centred approach for all students and in particular for students with Special Educational Needs (SEN). The project is funded by the Erasmus+. It wants to move away from the "One-size-fits-all" to a more personalised approach in education and training.*

*The objectives of the project are:*

- *understanding the concept and core-aspect of Learner-Centred-Approach and characteristics and elements of Individual Planning*
- *describing innovative teaching methods, techniques and materials which contributes to a more Learner-Centred Approach in VET*
- *identifying criteria for developing more individualised and flexible curricula*
- *gaining and to improving competence of teachers in developing an Individual-Learning-Plan for each student.*
- *evaluating and to implementing a more Learner-Centred-Approach and Individual Planning in the daily practice of the teacher in VET.*

## Keywords:

Inclusion

Personalised Approach of Learning (PAL)

Differentiated Instruction (DI)

Person-Centred-Planning (PCP)

## **Inclusion starts with tailor made support in school**

Our society is composed by individuals and groups with diverse ways of functioning. Having a disability is part of everyone's lifecycle and it can appear in different moments of life. In general, students with SEN face disabling conditions in schools for Vocational Education and Training (VET). In other words, VET-providers are in many cases insufficiently prepared on the diversity of their students. The key to Inclusive Education is the acceptance and the support that ensure education facilities are accessible for all.

All European countries are committed to working towards ensuring more inclusive educational systems. Inclusive educational systems are seen as a vital component within the wider aspiration of more socially inclusive societies. The European Agency of Special Needs and Inclusive Education states that 'the ultimate vision for inclusive education systems is to ensure that all learners of any age are provided with meaningful, high-quality educational opportunities in their local community, alongside their friends and peers' (European Agency, 2017). Such vision requires a change in teaching and in supporting the learning process of the students with SEN. It also requires moving away from the approach a 'one-size-fits-all' education and training, towards a more person-centred and tailored-made approach to education and training that aims to respond to individual needs of students. In the research report "Inclusive Education and Classroom Practice"<sup>1</sup> the researchers stated the following conclusion: **"...dealing with diversity in the classroom forms one of the biggest problems within classrooms ..."** and **"... what is good for students with Special Educational Needs is good for all students..."**. Ensuring diversity of students in the classrooms requires a more personalised approach to learning that engage all students, various learning strategies and support the active participation of the student in his/her learning process.<sup>2</sup> This involves the development of a more learner-centred curriculum that responds to the individual needs of the student. In order to implement learner centred approaches, educational staff should gain specific competences to enable them in identifying and in meeting the needs of the students.

The European Agency of Special Needs and Inclusive Education formulated the following recommendations to Learners-Centred Approaches:

- Learner-centred approaches with regard to planning, goal setting and curriculum design need to be used in the VET learning process, so that the curriculum, pedagogical methods and materials and assessment methods and goals are tailored to individual needs.
- With regard to assessing needs, planning, goal setting, tailoring the learning program and monitoring, a Learner-Centred-Approach requires an Individual Plan for each student. Therefore, the learning process needs to use flexible approaches which allow for the development and implementation of individual plans. A good individual plan informs and is informed by a multidisciplinary team approach. It is an easy-to-use document that is regularly reviewed and further developed by all who are involved or have interest. Students are actively involved from the beginning of the individual planning process and their voices are heard throughout. The effective use of individual plans Vocational Education and Training is supported by:
  - implementing individualised and flexible curricula, and safeguarding learner-centred approaches;
  - supporting learners and employers during the transition phase and providing follow-up activities;
  - matching labour market skills requirements and work opportunities and learners' skills, wishes and expectations.

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<sup>1</sup>European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education: "Inclusive Education and Classroom Practice", 2003

<sup>2</sup> European Agency of Special Needs and Inclusive Education: "European Patterns to successful practice in Vocational Education and Training" Participation of Learners with SEN/Disabilities in VET, 2013

**The ultimate goal of the project is that students with SEN can receive meaningful, high-quality vocational education and training together with their peers in mainstream VET-providers. Therefore, students with SEN will work with an individual learning plan which reflects their individual needs, talents and opportunities. This new way of working aims to achieve formal professional qualification in the mainstream VET-system. The key to equal opportunities is equity, not equal treatment. Only by delivering tailor-made programs based on the outcomes of an individualised needs assessment this can be accomplished**

## **Design of the project**

In the project “Personalised Approach to Learning for Students with Special Educational Needs” (Palsen), project partners will work together to explore, to identify, to exchange current practice. They will also build up competences with the aim of implementing Individual Planning that facilitates a more personalised approach for each individual student in their own organisations. Partners in the project are three service providers and one expert partner: Stichting REA College Pluryn (the Netherlands); Biotehniški izobraževalni center Ljubljana (Slovenia); Agrupamento Escolas Rafael Bordalo Pinheiro (Portugal) and All About Quality Consultancy (the Netherlands). RijnIJssel College (the Netherlands) and APPCDM Coimbra (Portugal) joined the project as active associated partners.

The project is structured around 11 Transnational Meetings (both on-site and on-line events). During these meetings relevant topics are identified, clarified, and discussed. This often starts with desk research, collecting experiences and defining key topics. This information is analysed systematically and experiences on the topic in daily practice are exchanged. The project also aims to develop, test, and evaluate concrete project results. Also, students of the project partners are invited to be involved in several Transnational Meetings.

## **Personalised Approach of Learning**

The following description of Personalised Approach of Learning in Vocational Education and Training (VET) could be considered as a definition: "The term Personalised Approach of Learning in Vocational Education and Training refers to a diverse variety of educational training programs, learning experiences, instructional practices, that are intended to address the learning needs, interests, aspirations, or cultural backgrounds of individual learner/students.". A concise summary is given by Kennisnet who states that Personalised Approach of Learning means "... meeting individual differences between learners with a rich variety of learning situations".<sup>3</sup> In this regard, student, and teacher, each with their own role, are jointly responsible for the learning process.<sup>4</sup> The learning environment allows for a student demand management, considering the student's needs, expectations, and interests. "Personalised Approach of Learning in VET is the alignment of didactics, pedagogy, curriculum and the learning environment, for students and by students, in order to meet their different learning needs and aspirations".<sup>5</sup>

In a Personalised Approach of Learning environment, students are co-owners of their own learning process. Therefore, instructions to students should be responsive to students' needs,

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<sup>3</sup> From: “Scholen om van te leren”, Kennisnet 2015

<sup>4</sup> From: “Personalising learning 6: the final gateway: school design and organisation”, Hargreaves 2006

<sup>5</sup> From: “Personalising learning 6: the final gateway: school design and organisation”, Hargreaves, 2006

abilities, and interests.<sup>6</sup> Education and training are designed more based on student involvement and independence, offering more variety in learning objectives and/or learning routes. Personalised Approach of Learning in VET presupposes a VET-organisation that focuses on the diverse needs of the individual students rather than a 'one size fits all' model for students.<sup>7</sup>

Learning in VET is personalised when it meets the individual learning needs of the students. However, this does not mean that the learning itself is also an individual matter. The learning of students in VET takes place in interaction with peers, teachers, praxis, and the learning environment. Learning of students also requires participation in joint activities.<sup>8</sup> "Personalised Approach of Learning in VET is more than individualised coaching. In PAL, students participate in collective, structured activities with scaffolded support from their teachers, including modelling, guidance in goal- setting, and timely feedback".<sup>9</sup> With scaffolded support of the teachers, the teacher challenges a student to think aloud and come up with answers themselves. This form of instruction is tailor-made: students take independent steps to continue learning.

### **Dimensions for the degree of Personalised Approach of Learning in VET**

Personalised Approach of Learning (PAL) in VET can take shape in various ways at school. In this context, we talk about different constellations of PAL, in which there is congruence between the operationalisation in the primary process and in the VET-organisation. The various constellations are based on 4 dimensions. The choice regarding a dimension determines how the degree of Personalised Approach of Learning at the VET-organisation may look like. To explain the variation in constellations, the dimensions on which these constellations differ, are explained in more detail.

Two dimensions are distinguished, namely:

1. External direction versus self-governance;
2. Collective interest versus individual interest.

### **External Direction versus Self-Governance**

The first dimension is that of directing the learning of the student. That is, the influence on and responsibility for the learning process in terms of what, when, where, how, why, with whom and at what pace the students learn. At one end of the dimension, the direction lies entirely with the teacher, a programme, or the method. The teacher, a programme or the method indicates what students learn, where, when with whom and how long it takes them to complete the learning process. The learner/student is more considered as a receiver and not an active player and developer of his learning process (OECD, 2013).

On the other side of the dimension is the student who is in full control of his/her own learning process. Between the two extremes are all kinds of hybrid forms, in which students are more or less co-owners of their own learning process. A choice on these dimensions can have consequences for the role of teacher/trainer and students for the VET-organization.

When the student co-directs his/her own learning process<sup>10</sup>, this requires a more democratic

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<sup>6</sup> From: "Personalised learning: an overview", Bartle 2015

<sup>7</sup> From: "Personalised learning: Implications for curricula, staff and students", Bates et al., (2014)

<sup>8</sup> From: "Developing socially just subject-matter instruction: A review of the literature on disciplinary literacy", Moje, (2007)

<sup>9</sup> From: "Personalised learning: Ambiguities in theory and practice", Campbell et al., (2007).

<sup>10</sup> Prain et al., 2014)

approach to learning<sup>11</sup> than when the direction rests entirely with the teacher. This more democratic approach to learning is achieved by the teacher by engaging the students about their learning goals, their learning activities and the monitoring and evaluation of these<sup>12</sup>. In addition, there is dialogue between teacher and student about what motivates students and what their educational needs are. Students are expected to take initiative and develop self-regulatory skills<sup>13</sup>.

In a Personalised Approach of Learning in VET, students must actively participate in education. They formulate their learning goals, they reflect on their learning process and learning outcomes and they participate in thinking about the next step in their individual development. This requires the development of self-regulating skills of students<sup>14</sup> in which co-regulation of the learning process by the teacher is important<sup>15</sup>.

Instead of the teacher, ICT can direct the learning process of the student (external direction). Knowledge transfer and acquisition of learning material then take place by a computer-controlled program (program control). Based on student responses, the adaptive system performs an intervention in the form of feedback or provision of new learning material for the student. If the control lies with the teacher, ICT can support him/her in gaining insight into the educational needs of students<sup>16</sup>. Finally, ICT can support self-regulation<sup>17</sup>. The analysis of the learning behaviour allows students to compare their own learning behaviour and activities with those of large (sub)groups of other students. Based on this, they can, for example, find out what students with the same profile as themselves have done to achieve good learning performance and what their next steps might be. A choice on this dimension has consequences for the VET-organisation, such as learning sources, ICT infrastructure, grouping, time and place of learning, tasks, roles, and functions of teachers.

### **Collective interest / individual interest**

In the education system, choices are made as to what needs to be taught. This involves weighing up individual and collective interests. Vocational Education and Training does not only serve the interests of the individual, but also the interests of the society. This involves socialisation, that is, the ways in which we become part of existing traditions and practices through education<sup>18</sup>. Socialisation is related to things such as being able to communicate with each other, to organise events, to make and to observe rules<sup>19</sup>. The formation of an individual into a reflective and critical human being is also important in this context. In this process of formation, emancipation, freedom, and responsibility play an important role while the educational system qualifies the outcome of this process<sup>20</sup>. In the VET-organisation, it equips students for work, and it provides diplomas.

This includes both cognitive and non-cognitive knowledge, skills, and competences<sup>21</sup>. There is also an economic importance of Vocational Education and Training, where Vocational Education and Training is considered an investment in human capital<sup>22</sup>.

But Vocational Education and Training also serves individual interests: the development of

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<sup>11</sup> Kubow & Kinney, 2004

<sup>12</sup> Kubow & Kinney, 2000

<sup>13</sup> Prain et al., 2015

<sup>14</sup> Boekaerts & Corno, 2005; Butler & Winne, 1995

<sup>15</sup> Zimmerman, 2008

<sup>16</sup> Brandsford, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 2015

<sup>17</sup> Bannert et al., 2015; Bonestroo et al., 2012; Driessen et al., 2005; Marquenie, Opsteen, Ten Brummelhuis & Van der Waals, 2014

<sup>18</sup> Biesta, 2015

<sup>19</sup> In 't Veld, 2015

<sup>20</sup> Biesta, 2015; In 't Veld, 2015

<sup>21</sup> Gabrieli, Ansel & Bartolino Krachman, 2015

<sup>22</sup> In 't Veld, 2015

the talents of students and responding to the individual wishes, needs and expectations. The degree of Personalised Approach of Learning changes as the balance between individualisation and collectivisation shifts.<sup>23</sup> As the collective interest weighs more heavily, there will be far-reaching form of collectivisation and standardisation in the provision of Vocational Education and Training, in which there is little or no Personalised Approach of Learning and all students receive the same education (one-size-fits-all). The more that is laid down at the collective level, the less scope remains for making individual choices.<sup>24</sup> As individual interests become more important and Vocational Education and Training matches individual goals and learning needs, there is individualisation and differentiation, with students following highly personalised learning pathways or designing their own learning pathway (one-size-fits-one).

As with the previous dimension, choices on this dimension have consequences for the role of the teacher, the student, and the VET-organisation. A strong collectivisation leaves little room for differentiation and variation in educational approaches. There will also be less room for using of ICT learning resources. Whereas individualisation leaves a lot of room to offer a programme tailored to each student, depending on his/her performance and preferences. With strong collectivisation what, when, where, how, why, with whom and at what speed students learn is the same for all students. After all, at the end of each school year, all students must achieve the same learning goals and are taught in the same way. Individualisation can be achieved at different points, namely at what, when, where, how, why, with whom and at what pace students learn.

### Consequences of choices on the dimensions

There are consequences of choices on the dimensions or some constellations of Personalised Approach of Learning. In practice, these constellations are often not found in their pure form. The elaborations indicate what the interpretation of the dimensions mean for the personalisation of Vocational Education and Training.

- Classroom teaching
- Group differentiation and individual learning lines
- Personal learning routes
- Self-regulated learning in a fixed program
- Learning Partnerships

### Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated Instruction (DI)<sup>25</sup> will be applied in the project. The process of differentiating instruction for students depends on the ongoing use of assessment to gather information about where students are in their learning process and about their readiness, interests and learning preferences. In the project, teachers will use this information to vary the learning environment, the instruction, and the assessment and the evaluation.

- **Readiness** refers to the student's starting point for learning, relative to the concept being studied.
- Attention to **students' interests** enhances the relevancy of learning by linking new

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<sup>23</sup> OECD (2013)

<sup>24</sup> In 't Veld, 2015

<sup>25</sup> Kelly M. Anderson: Differentiating Instruction to Include All Students, 2020

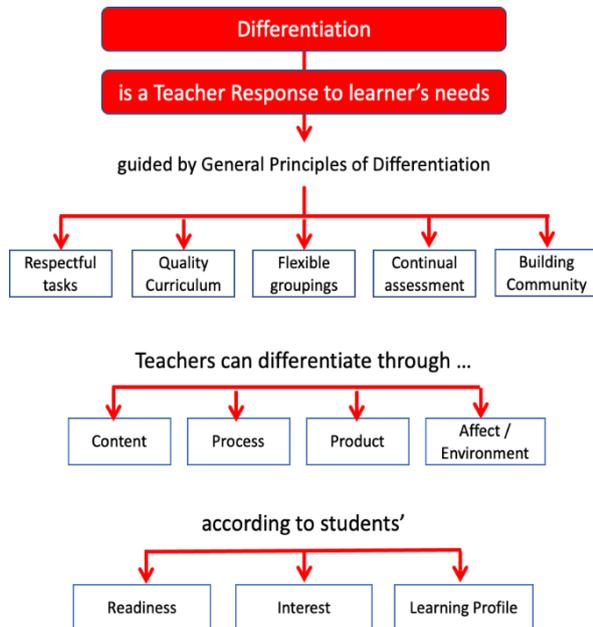
information to students' experience and enthusiasm.

- **Learning preferences** are the many ways in which learners prefer to acquire, process and work with information. Learning preferences are influenced by gender, culture, the classroom environment, learning styles and multiple intelligences.

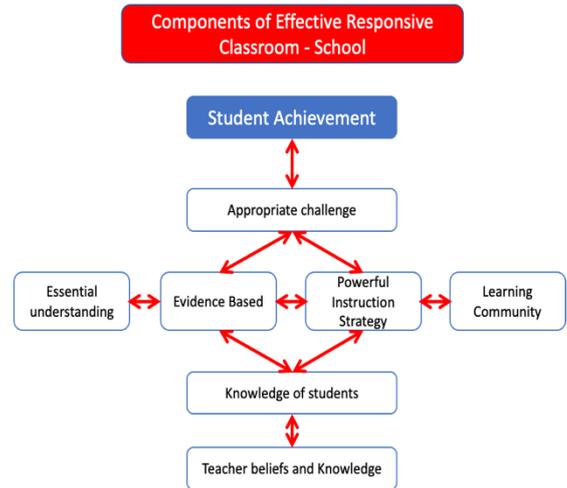
Differentiated Instruction is effective instruction that is responsive to students' readiness, interests and learning preferences. All three characteristics of the learner, readiness, interests, and preferences allow teachers and students to build new learning through connections to existing knowledge and preferred ways of working. Differentiated instruction as a manageable, creative, practical, and proactive response to the quest for enhanced student engagement and achievement in the face of significant student diversity.

### Differentiated Instruction from the Teacher's Viewpoint

Below, you see an overview of most relevant aspects of Differentiated Instruction (DI) from the perspective of the teacher. The diagram 1 (on the left site of the page) emphasises the concept of differentiation. The diagram 2 (on the right site of the page) emphasises the components which must be considered for an effective response in the classroom.



Source: Carol Ann Tomlinson (2008). Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD)



Source: Karen Hume (2007). Start Where They Are: Differentiating for Success with the Young Adolescent.

### Person-Centred-Planning Framework

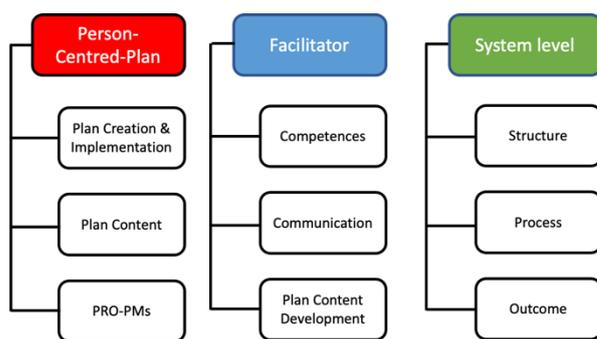
The project will use a Person-Centred-Planning Framework<sup>26</sup> for designing and implementing an Individual Plan for each student. The framework provides and structures for organising measures, identifying gaps, and prioritising future development. The framework comprises domains and subdomains, including ideas within a (sub)domain to be considered.

The framework has three domains:

1. The Person-Centred-Plan (Individual Plan)

<sup>26</sup> National Framework for Person-Centred Planning in Services for Persons with a Disability March 20218

2. Facilitator
3. System-Level



## Results

The project aims to deliver four concrete outcomes to inform and to inspire other VET-providers in their efforts to move towards a more Personalised Approach of Learning for their students with SEN. In total there are 4 Project Results to be expected:

1. A description of the concept, methods, and techniques of the concept ‘Learner-Centred-Approach’ and ‘Individual Planning’: background, application, challenges in the implementation, specific methods, techniques, and examples. The description may give more confidence to teachers to create VET that take diversity of learners into account.
2. A comprehensive overview of facilitators, barriers, and recommendations of implementing a more personalised education and training in national VET systems in the partner countries. Barriers are categorised in two categories: within the scope and outside the scope of influence.
3. An instrument that supports VET providers to assess their current performance of applying personalised education and training. The self-assessment instrument can be applied at individual, department and at organisational level and can be used to monitor achievements of actions.
4. A manual for implementing Individual Planning. The manual comes with a flexible digital tool (Excel file). The manual can easily be adapted to specific contexts and/or needs of the student with SEN.

This project is funded with the support of the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union more information about the project and the project results is to be found at: [www.palssen.eu](http://www.palssen.eu)



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