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EDITORIAL

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Learning in the work process – a model for the future with potential for development!

Dear readers

Systematically imparted specialist and general knowledge is becoming increasingly more significant in the knowledge and information society. Such knowledge can, however, only unfurl its productive power in conjunction with know-how and skills acquired via experience and practice, a combination fundamental to dual concepts.

EFFECTIVE LINKING OF FORMS OF LEARNING AND LEARNING VENUES IN VOCATIONAL TRAINING

In Germany, learning in the work process is both a tradition and an established part of the system. This brings a significant competitive advantage. Good dual vocational education and training converts informal learning in the workplace which tends to be coincidental in nature into a systematic form of learning in the work process aligned towards binding stipulations. This means that it imparts occupational experience at the same time. It combines learning in real work situations with the imparting of knowledge which takes place at vocational schools, the latter form of knowledge being more strongly supported by theory and supplemented by general education. A third learning venue featuring professionally structured practical teaching is often added in the form of inter-company vocational training centres. Such a linking of learning venues can lead to a powerfully effective didactic and methodological mix. This provides a successful vehicle for the imparting of comprehensive employability skills in broadly defined occupations. The effectiveness of this linking has now been widely recognised, as is shown by such aspects as the growing number of dual courses of study (cf. www.ausbildungplus.de) which transfer the dual principle of vocational education and training to higher education. Evidence is also available in the form of the rising interest worldwide in German experiences with this successful mixture of practical and theoretical learning.

WORKPLACE RELATED TRAINING CONCEPTS AS A WAY OF COUNTERING THE SHORTAGE OF SKILLED WORKERS

This renders it all the more surprising that systematically developed and planned learning in the work process tends to be rarely encountered during the course of further working life. Although there are many good examples of this sort of continuing vocational training practice (cf. e. g.

HACKEL or ELSHOLZ in the present issue) and despite the fact that more recent Federal Government advanced training regulations also systematically integrate company-based projects (cf. MÜLLER/SCHENK in the present issue), it has not thus far become broadly established in practice. This is wasting opportunities for concepts of “work and learning” which could provide a systematic link between productive work and the higher level of training required by a large proportion of those in employment and by job seekers. German companies and German trade and industry as a whole could use such concepts as a vehicle for effectively addressing the impending shortage of skilled workers. This would also enable them to gain a competitive edge by deploying their broad background of experience with dual concepts internationally. Support from new media, which facilitate the acquisition of work-related knowledge and skills on a “just in time” basis, will also need to play a role in the implementation of such concepts.

MAKING USE OF THE DIVERSITY OF COMBINATIONS OF PRACTICAL AND THEORETICAL LEARNING

In order to remain a model for the future, dual vocational education and training will need to open up to new learning concepts and contents. The vocational schools need to introduce forms of “blended learning” very rapidly and on an extremely broad basis. Vocational school teaching according to the specialist (class) principle will otherwise no longer be possible in a large number of regions and occupations. The established structure of inter-company vocational training centres needs to be used in order to secure the ability of small and medium-sized companies in further branches to provide training on a sustainable basis and in order to maintain broadly based training provision which is in line with requirements. Dual VET will only remain an attractive alternative to (dual) courses of higher education study for the more able if more diverse combinations of theoretical and practical learning are opened up. Alongside conventional vocational education and training, provision required will include training in which companies work together with vocational schools and inter-company vocational training centres to facilitate aspects such as more additional theoretical and practical training, foreign languages, periods of training spent abroad and double qualifications. The Vocational Training Act expressly makes such developments possible, and it is time to make broader and more active use of this law.

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