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# Work-based Learning as a Pathway to Competence-based Education

A UNEVOC Network Contribution



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*Claudia Jacinto and José Pozzer*

## ► **Work-based Learning as a Concept “under construction”: Evidence from two Internship Schemes in Argentina**

### **1. Introduction**

With a background of a mainly school and university-based education system (only around 20% of students attend technical education),<sup>1</sup> Argentina has lately started to promote policies that include work-based learning (WBL).<sup>2</sup> WBL has been the subject of debates and new legislation. Previously there were few precedents and the country had almost no tradition in this learning modality. In fact, in the middle of the thirties of the last century, an apprenticeship system was created addressing young persons who worked and attended supplementary training courses. The promoters of these were the employers’ associations. But apprenticeship was a minor practice that became less common after the 1950s. It was only in the 1990s that internships were introduced into vocational training courses for unemployed young people (as a part of youth transition programmes) and in secondary education institutions (not compulsory but optionally).

The ups and downs and unexpected turns in the course of this development were due to the fact that it occurred in a context of disputes among the stakeholders in the world of work, i.e. businesses, unions and government. Indeed, the legal framework and experiences relating to work-based learning as part of the educational process, particularly in secondary education, were far from being a matter of consensus. The debates circled around two main arguments: The first relates to the issue of child labour. As the legal age for children to enter the world of work increased, it became questionable whether students below this age could participate in such internships. (By the mid-1940s the legal minimum age for working was 14 years; in the 1990s it was raised to 16 years.) A second argument was the resistance of

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1 This forms part of a long-standing debate: the ministries of education tend to favour general education over professional training (Wallenborn & Heyneman, 2009).

2 In this article, we will conceive WBL as an educational strategy that provides students with authentic work experiences where they can apply academic and technical skills and develop employability skills.

trade unions, which considered internships as a risk that could result in the substitution of workers with interns. In the case of work-based learning as an element of youth transition programmes, these were short *ad hoc* programmes.<sup>3</sup> As a result, the scope of these experiences was small. Only few companies in the country have entered into sustainable internship arrangements with technical secondary schools and/or participated in youth transition programmes.

In the middle of the 2000s, with the recovery of the economy, an increased demand for skilled workers for industry became apparent. Not only was there an insufficient supply of technical workers, but also their skill sets in many cases were no longer suited to the needs of the world of work (do Pico, 2013). At the same time, youth unemployment and precarious employment were high. These were frequently linked with the low skills in those who had not completed compulsory education. In fact, even nowadays only 66% of students finish secondary compulsory education (12–17/18 years old) in due time. Young people continue to be the age-group with the highest labour informality rates: 59% compared to 35% of the active population as a whole. Thus, social and active employment policies addressed to these youth became an important political issue.

In this framework, since the 2000s, new laws have been established that address both technical and professional education as well as university internships and vocational training. Other decrees regulate the system of practices in companies at the secondary educational level. At the same time, as part of active employment policies, programmes are established that promote work-based learning aimed at vulnerable young people.

Currently, the WBL policies addressed to young people focus upon two types of programmes:

- a) internships related to secondary technical schools (through the model known as “*vocational practicum*” (VP) (*prácticas profesionalizantes*) consisting in a specific number of hours in companies as part of the technical education and vocational training
- b) the “*on-the-job training*” (OJT) model (*entrenamiento en el trabajo*), linked with youth transition programmes encouraged by the Ministry of Labour.

In this context, some central questions concerning WBL have moved onto the public agenda, namely how to consolidate a system of technical and vocational education and training where work-based learning could be developed and institutionalised, and how to create a “culture” that valorises this component and involves the key stakeholders at different implementation levels.

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3 The programme *Proyecto Joven* (the “Youth Project”) was funded by the Inter-American Development Bank and included a school-based “demand driven” training during three months, combined with three months of work-based learning (Moura Castro, & Verdisco, 2002). However, the programme was operated during a period of massive increase in unemployment figures. Consequently, it did not succeed in integrating young people into formal employment (Devia, 2003). The programme finished at the end of the 1990s, and it was only in 2008 that a new youth transition policy was installed.

This paper analyses the implementation process and challenges faced by these two types of WBL linked to youth initial training in Argentina.<sup>4</sup> Since both types are public WBL policies, they encounter many demanding issues in implementation, as regards the regulations, the financing, the decentralisation procedures, the place of different stakeholders, and the learning elements, including the profiles and roles of tutors involved in each model.

To gain a better knowledge of the challenges in both schemes was the main purpose of our on-going exploratory study, which is the basis of some of the findings discussed in this paper. The study was based on a qualitative methodology including: a) an analysis of the historical background of WBL in Argentina to show advances and setbacks in its implementation; b) a document analysis (laws, decrees and resolutions organising the management of the two new WBL models; management reports from the handbook prepared by the Argentine Business Association (ABA) to provide guidance for companies); and c) qualitative field-work including interviews with stakeholders involved in both models. The field work has taken place in two provinces: Buenos Aires, Chaco and Corrientes. As informants related to the field of education, interviews were conducted with three provincial or regional authorities in charge of the general management of the training system and three of the school tutors in charge of managing the VP. As informants related to the field of labour, for VP, interviewees included two members of the School/Company Programme of the Argentine Business Association, three referrals from the Human Resources areas and three company tutors (from one large and two medium-sized companies); and for OJT: two heads of local Employment Services were interviewed, as well as two Human Resources area managers, and three company tutors (from one large, one medium-sized and one small company) who implemented the model. In short, the total number of interviews was 21.

The article is structured in three parts. First, the characteristics of the two models are presented, comparing one with the other. Second, tensions and challenges in the implementation process are discussed. Third, some findings about the nature and challenges of the role of tutors at schools and in workplaces are revealed. As a conclusion, some reflections and recommendations about the construction of work-based learning models in Argentina are proposed.

## 2. The two work-based learning models: similarities and differences

The first model is based on a new law on technical education enacted in 2005. It increased the number of years and hours of training required, reorganised the diplomas and ensured financing. It expanded the concept of internships, creating “*vocational practicums*” as a part of the curricula of secondary technical school education (which lasts 6/7 years – including theory and practice-based courses). These internships consist of 200 hours of compulsory

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<sup>4</sup> Another important type of internship in the country is addressed to university students. It is frequently the way in which they are hired for their first jobs. The focus of this paper, however, will be on WBL linked to initial training only.

practical training outside the school, which includes both a phase of actual practice and a phase of observation and reflection on the practicum. One option for *vocational practicums* is a period of work-based learning in a company, NGO or public agency. In this model, WBL is conceived of as a useful complement to the theoretical and practical training offered by the schools. It is assumed that they will introduce students to the routines and rituals of a real workplace and to the professional codes, values and norms of an occupation and an employment setting. The *vocational practicums* take place in the student's seventh and final year of secondary technical education.

Being responsible for the management of *vocational practicums*, schools have created a new role, "the tutor", who is also responsible for getting in touch with companies and finding the placements. In these tasks, schools are supported by middle-ranked education authorities (supervisors) and by the provincial management. So far, companies with previous experience of internships have evidenced a greater openness and understanding of the model and its purpose. The rest of the business community, ranging from business associations to the companies themselves, has little knowledge of the system.<sup>5</sup>

The second model, named *on-the-job training*, was created in 2008 as part of a Youth Transition Programme addressed to unemployed youngsters up to the age of 24 years. The programme is managed by the Ministry of Labour. It aims at training competencies and skills while the young people perform in real jobs. It consists of theoretical and practical training, emphasising the latter, in the workplace. The period of on-the-job training can last between 160 hours and 480 hours according to the complexity of the task in question. The participants receive a monetary incentive. Prior to their placement in the company, young people receive brief introductory training by way of guidance to the world of work. In this model, work-based learning is an element of a social policy approach targeted at providing disadvantaged youth with more opportunities to enter formal employment.

One of the directly responsible parties in *on-the-job training* are the employment services, who receive youth and, after a guidance period, reassign them to available positions. The staff look for the placements in companies. Sectorial unions have a greater say over this model, basically due to the fact that young people joining the programme are older and the training period is longer; this action is seen as risking the substitution of workers.

As relatively new arrives, both instruments are under a continual social construction process; their implementation is full of new challenges both as to the regulatory framework and the involvement of stakeholders is concerned (government at different levels, unions, companies). Critical issues for the achievement of quality in work-based learning are still far from being considered, such as the evaluation of internships, the development of monitoring tools, etc.

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5 There is an exception: in the case of the province of Buenos Aires, the Argentine Business Association has assumed a supporting role in the creation of linkages with companies and in technical issues. Specifically, a guide to implementing training on the job was developed for associated companies. This document was prepared by education authorities and the Association.

Table 1 shows similarities and differences between both models, according to their scopes and regulations, learning subjects addressed in each model, and their durations.

Table 1: The two forms of work-based learning: general similarities and differences		
	Secondary technical education <i>Vocational practicums</i>	Youth transition programme <i>On-the-job training</i>
Scope	Regulated by laws at national and provincial level	Governmental regulations linked to the creation of the youth transition programme
National Authority	Ministry of Education	Ministry of Labour
Forms	Compulsive VP as a part of the last year of secondary TVET. It is promoted that the VP are done in companies, though they may take other formats	Transition programme for disadvantaged young people to enter formal employment
Length of work-based activities	Minimum 200 h	Minimum 160 h/maximum 480 h.
Learning subject	Students in the last year of the secondary technical schools. 17 to 19 years old.	Unemployed or informally employed youths aged 18–24

The learning subject is quite different: while the first scheme represents an educational format addressed to students in the last year of secondary school, the second is focused on unemployed youth and/or young people in informal employment, that may or may not have finished secondary education. Three factors clearly differentiate the profile of the young people that access each type of work-based learning: their age (in-school adolescents in the first case and out-of-school young people in the second), their previous work experience and their social and economic backgrounds. In connection with age, some companies interviewed by us mention that hiring adolescents causes a serious concern with regard to “the risks” in the workplace. With respect to work experience, while it is probable that participants enrolled in *vocational practicums* have not yet had a job or have only had minor jobs in the short time available when they were not attending school, those in the second group, by definition, have already had some experience in the precarious and unstable world of employment. Some companies consider this greater experience an advantage, since the young people have undergone a previous socialisation process where they acquired the basic skills of organisation in the job. However, the fact that youth within the *on-the-job training scheme* come from low-income households, lack experience in formal jobs and in many cases have not finished secondary education, represents a basic profile that *a priori* places them in unqualified positions and far from the general, social, and emotional skills sought by executives for a medium qualified position. In contrast, adolescents who are finishing technical education have

already demonstrated their competences to remain at school and finish their compulsory education, and have a more specific training to hold medium qualification positions. Hence, their social and educational profiles seem to be the key point of distinction between them and concerning the sense it makes for particular working environments to hire trainees on placement.

Table 2 shows the elements of work-based learning in the two schemes.

Table 2: Work-based learning elements		
	Technical education <i>Vocational practicums</i>	Youth transition programme <i>On-the-job training</i>
Learning venues	School-Companies. Large and SMEs	SMEs
Learning target	On-the-job experience complementing practical skills developed at schools workshops.  Technical hard and soft skills	On-the-job-experience oriented to employability.  Very specific technical skills and soft skills
Learning method and context	Participating on a specific work task or activity. Discussion at school sharing experiences	Participating on a specific work task or activity
Learning assessment	The school is in charge of the evaluation of the student.	The company is in charge of the evaluation of the trainee.
Financial incentive received by the young people	No incentive. Only a per-diem for transportation/ feeding, depending on the company. Work insurance paid by the regional authority	Fixed amount paid by the government and the company. Companies pay health and work insurance

As the table shows, both models differ significantly with regard to their learning elements. In the first case, the purpose is to provide training closer to the world of work for students in technical education: technical skills should be put at stake when dealing with the solution of concrete problems in a working environment. In the second case, the purpose is to seek training-on-the-job opportunities for low-rated youth; the emphasis is placed on specific skills, enticing labour socialisation processes and increasing employability in formal jobs. As will be discussed in the following, assessment is still a big challenge in both models. The assessment stage may have different implications: in a *vocational practicum* these range from the approval of the syllabuses to the possibility for the trainee to be included on an internal jobs board for a future vacancy. In *on-the-job training*, if the company had the intention to take on

personnel, it might mean subsequently being hired or at least the possibility of being included in an applicant database for future vacancies.

A common factor is that both models are part of public education or employment policies where the core initiative falls on the State. Both initiatives are based on regulations that protect the "student" status of trainees, not only with respect to labour insurance, but also to established working hours and environment. But in order to participate, companies have to comply with different requirements: only in the case of *on-the-job training*, companies that have been sanctioned after inspections of the Ministry of Labour or have undergone massive layoffs during the last six months are excluded.

Taking into account their similarities and differences, which challenges of implementation have been recorded in the field-work so far?

### 3. Challenges of implementing the two models

Research literature shows that the learning quality achieved in WBL is strongly related to the companies' training management. This means responding to questions such as how the work is structured and allocated to novices, and what kind of support and feedback trainees receive from co-workers and mentors (ETF, 2012). This implies "translating a working position into a training position" (Marhuenda, 2000). At the current stage of development of these reviewed instruments, these questions have, for now, only initial responses. Rather, concerns are focused on the organisation of placements and management of the trainees.

#### 3.1. Tensions/challenges detected in the implementation of vocational practicums

a) National and provincial governments must solve legal issues (for example, set the legal labour provisions for the role of the "workplace trainee") and bureaucratic issues (organising the whole administrative system of articulation, follow-up and control) to establish the system throughout the provinces. It was not until 2013 that the system started to be implemented in some provinces. As one interviewee said:

There was a lack of regulation for schools to enter into agreements directly with companies; we had to create them because if everything was centralised, there would be no flexibility.

b) Since *vocational practicums* are compulsory to obtain the vocational training certificate, this encourages the players in the education system to create possibilities for completing this training in settings other than companies. There is more emphasis on meeting the obligation of providing placements than on the quality control of what the students learn during the training. Creating the relationship structure with organisations means appointing an institutional representative to start visiting companies and "convincing" them. All this is a handmade process operating at different levels; from provincial authorities sign-

ing agreements with big companies (there is a provincial council where stakeholders from both the world of work and the world of education should meet), up to school supervisors and school tutors promoting local connections, especially with small and medium-sized companies.

- c) As long as those supports are not institutionalised, many schools with no previous experience in organising internships are unaware of the mechanisms, steps and supports necessary to carry out the search for in-company training. Instruments such as the handbook recently developed by the provincial education agency and a business association provide resources that may be valuable for guidance and information purposes.
- d) Some sectors are particularly complex as workplaces for potential training placements, such as the construction sector (due to the risks entailed by the activity) and ICT (due to the typical development forms of the activity, even though it is a growing sector). As an example of this, and of the alternative strategies that need to be pursued, there was the case of an ICT company that provides services to other companies. Students were organised in groups that did not work on-site at the company, but rather off-site, developing an HTML solution to a real-life problem, with continuous support from the company.
- e) Student learning assessment is still weak. On the one hand, the school is formally responsible for evaluating the student's performance, but as yet, the extent to which this evaluation should be a collaborative process with the company has not been fully specified. This is brought up by a key informant:

Education authorities do not reach the stage of controlling whether VPs were good or not. If the school is good, training is good, but if the school is deficient in developing the instrument, the quality cannot be ensured even though the company is good; it depends on the school.

In addition, there is mistrust and fear in the education system because *vocational practicum* management reveals some limitations of the very offer of technical education. How many specialisations are actually correlated with the real work that students encounter in the workplace? And if they do not get any training, does it mean that they will have no job after graduation? This is especially critical for technical schools with a specialisation in contexts where there are clearly no companies requesting that knowledge.

In spite of these limitations, reported experiences show that once there is some initial experience with internships, the system starts operating and a great value is attached to the learning process of the student. As expressed by a human resources manager at a company,

the training provided includes technical education, but also incorporates a strong component of personal and social skills development. Vocational practicums are far from being merely “on-the-job training”; they also have a strong capacity-building element, which is intended not only to complement the practical training provided, but also to address deficiencies identified in school-based technical training.

Sometimes, businesses are motivated to take on student interns who may have an impact on the organisation of the company's own work groups. This was the case in a Japanese automobile company, which proposed that interns should be mentored by the supervisors of company work teams, thus enabling those supervisors to develop new leadership skills and teaching abilities.

These signs that WBL is beginning to be recognised and valued in the business world seem to be consistent with research literature about the importance of the employer's support and commitment.

### 3.2. Challenges reported in the case of on-the-job training

As *on-the-job training* is only one of several options for young people participating in the youth transition programme, most of them were referred to vocational training in educational environments and not to *on-the-job training*. This is because the challenges in the organisation of WBL are greater, and because finding business placements for the low-rated youth and low-income sector is rather complicated. In fact, the respective interview partners declared that the only young people belonging to the programme and referred to WBL were the ones whose profiles were most attractive for executives.

Concerning the local employment offices that should manage the model, there are difficulties at various levels.

- a) Having the physical and human resources to meet sizeable demand from youth participating in the programme.
- b) Having well-trained human resources available to identify organisations and establish a solid relationship with them; there are not enough positions for training in the private sector.
- c) Establishing agreements with the organisations. Apart from the above-mentioned structural weakness of employment services, another reason is associated specifically with the mistrust generated by the Ministry of Labour among entrepreneurs due to its labour inspection role. Companies also complain about the overload of administrative and bureaucratic tasks that their participation would entail, and a major lack of information about the programme was observed.
- d) Defining the profiles of the training positions and those of young people to be referred, to adjust them to the expectations of the applicant organisations.
- e) Carrying out a follow-up during the training period. Mentoring is limited to the intermediation stage, when the Youth Transition Programme starts and is under the responsibility of the company.

Concerning the companies, it has been reported that they may put the programme to many different uses, and these determine whether learning conditions are favourable or not so favourable:

- a) For some companies, *on-the-job training* is a resource to obtain a workforce that allows them to give a temporarily rapid and economic response to the expansion of demand. But this does not mean that they emphasise the learning achievement of youth.
- b) For other companies, the *on-the-job training* is used as a trial period to assess performance before making the final offer of employment. This may constitute a good learning environment.
- c) On certain occasions, reasons to participate are related more to corporate social responsibility than to the development of human resources. This may weaken the genuine interest of the organisation in training young people.
- d) In the case of a start-up, *on-the-job training* provides a useful resource that allows the company to go through its launch stage without incurring employment commitments.
- e) For micro, small and medium-sized companies, their limited levels of organisational development make it difficult to create qualifying environments. *On-the-job training* is primarily carried out in the context of low-complexity operational tasks, but ensuring that training takes place in formal companies is not a minor issue.

#### 4. The role of tutors and mentors in both models

Literature on WBL talks about the central role played by the availability of good trainers and mentors in the workplace for the overall quality and success of WBL (Masdonati & Lamamra, 2009). Finding the right people is particularly difficult in the case of micro- or very small enterprises.

A particular characteristic of both models in the Argentine case is that they propose the involvement of two tutors. In the *vocational practicum*, a tutor is responsible on behalf of the school and another one on behalf of the company. Meanwhile, the role of tutors is different in both schemes. While in the *vocational practicum* the greater responsibility falls upon the educational tutor from the school, in *on-the-job training* the responsibility falls to companies, both with regard to the work plan and to the tutoring. However, in both cases, the plan is discussed or at least agreed upon between the State official and the company or the tutor. Plans are similar and describe the trainees' tasks in their position or in the different positions previewed.

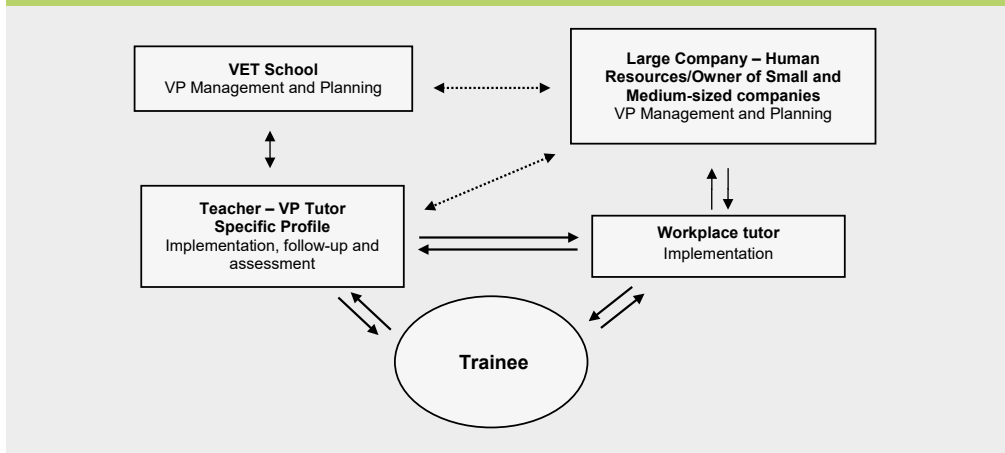
The school tutor is a teacher in charge of *vocational practicums*. His responsibilities include, among others, seeking and making contact with companies to carry out *vocational practicums*, organising an activity plan, and maintaining a link with and follow-up of students at the company. He is the one who assesses and grades the *vocational practicums* as a syllabus.

The assessment is quite informal for the time being, but is intended to become more organised using resources such as the Argentine Business Association guide. This guide includes indicators and the trainee's level of assessment in terms of theoretical knowledge, practical and cognitive skills (equipment operation, solving production problems, etc.) and

attitudes (autonomy, initiative, collaboration and teamwork, assistance and punctuality, responsibility and interest in work).

The criteria of school tutors' selection are: that they have a connection to the specialisation area and that they have personal work experience in the sector. The company tutor is an employee who is responsible for the trainee in the workplace. The following figure<sup>6</sup> shows where tutors are in the management structure and describes their roles in the *vocational practicum*.

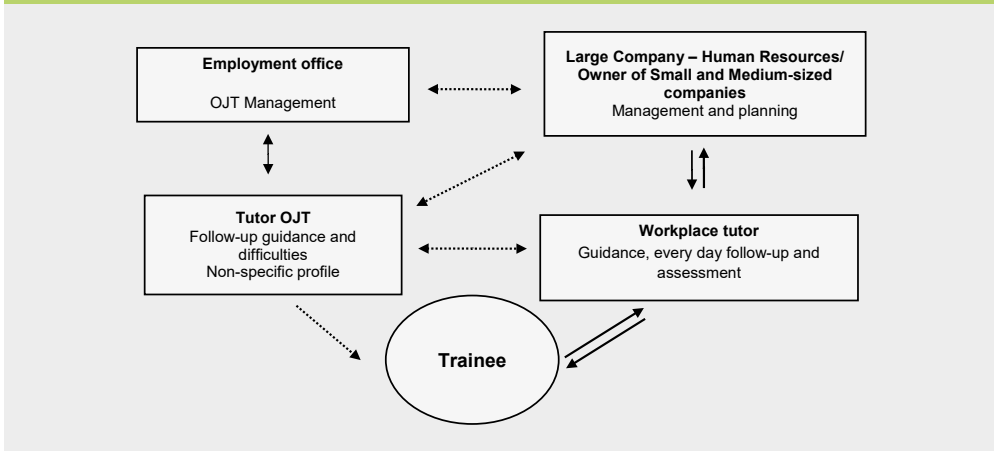
Figure 1: The structure of tutoring in the VET model



In *on-the-job training*, tutoring appears to be related to the youth guidance process and follow-up that should be carried out by the employment office. The role of the workplace tutor includes verification of activities and follow-up of the experience of young people in the company. The employment office staff responsible for these tasks may or may not have a specific training profile. As was mentioned, in many instances the mentoring support and follow-up can be inhibited by the diversity of tasks of these public agents (involving different types of beneficiaries; registration and loading of employment records in platforms; benefits guidance; search for profiles; relationship with companies, etc.). Figure 2 shows this structure.

6 In the figures, the connecting arrows show the intensity and permanence of the bond between actors during the WBL process. The full arrows mean a permanent linkage during the process and the dotted arrows mean an initial and discontinuous linkage, difficult to maintain during the process. The double arrows stand for the stronger linkages in the tutoring process.

Figure 2: The structure of tutoring in the OJT model



On the part of companies, the mentoring role shows similar characteristics in both models. The assignment of interns and the mentoring role is associated with a hierarchical responsibility; tutors are section managers. This is a part-time activity; the mentoring-training role is added to the daily activities performed in their positions.

Depending on the company size, some peculiarities may be observed. In large and medium-sized companies, when there is a Human Resources department, it assumes a linking role between schools or employment services; it manages that link and supports the trainer. The internal support to tutors is reflected in their involvement at the time of selection, induction and follow-up of the interns' activities, using strategies that have to do with evaluation, adaptation to work and to the company, review of personal interests, etc. In small companies, the whole process is usually under the responsibility of the entrepreneur-owner, who only oversees and controls the work done.

In general, the trainee's learning process is developed in the position at work, while it is the tutor who transmits the knowledge necessary to perform the activities. The tutor-trainee relationship involves indication of the tasks to be performed, review and feedback in terms of adjustment to the task performed; their direct link is supported by sharing a working space. This result matches research background that stresses the importance of the interpersonal relationship both for the transmission of knowledge and for the quality of the school-to-work transition (Masdonati & Lamamra, 2009).

In every case, company tutors are selected according to certain profiles. The following characteristics are emphasised:

- a) Attitudes/experiences and personal background. When the implementation of training placements is managed within the Human Resources department, it is usual to consid-

er certain characteristics of those responsible for the working areas, identifying in themselves those aspects that may be useful for accompanying the apprentices:

he's a life fighter, he had to struggle in life and managed and I thought he would have a good profile to host children"; "they are people who have already experienced this system, everyone responsible for the areas where trainees are working, at some point they were also trainees.

b) Competencies and skills for guidance. Apart from previous career pathways/one's personal biography, some necessary attributes are also considered helpful in order to accompany and support a learning process in the workplace:

know how to teach, know how to transmit, communication is essential in the moment I am teaching an activity, know how to transmit, and, if necessary, repeat it once and again, be a flexible person and open to change.

Although in some companies, calls for tutor positions are open, in others they seem to be addressed to section managers, who show some of the above mentioned attributes. This is mostly observed in *vocational practicums*, where training areas are not always considered based on the needs of a particular working area, but based on having someone available ("the tutor") who is equipped to accompany the process. Instead, in *on-the-job-training* the internship is frequently used as a way to build experience in the short term and to have a new worker; thus the area requesting the need is more important than the characteristics of the potential tutor. A woman working at a small company offering *on-the-job training* said, about the appointment of tutors:

the truth is there are no options about who will be the tutor; there was only one person in the sales department and the apprentice came to collaborate with that person. Naturally, the area manager was the one who accompanied the process.

With respect to the relationship between the two types of tutors involved, in *vocational practicums*, experiences are observed where the schoolteacher and his company peer create spaces for dialogue and joint work. The teacher accompanies the training (with periodic visits), does the follow-up and review of the activity plan, receives the company assessments and gives support by developing content when necessary. This type of activity is not observed in *on-the-job training*. Here, the employment service and its "guide" do not maintain a relationship with the trainee on placement, and the whole training, support and assessment process lies on the company tutor.

The training process in both cases shows that the tutor, throughout the placement, offers increasingly sizeable tasks and gives greater responsibilities as long as the trainee responds and satisfactorily completes the tasks assigned. According to a company tutor:

you do not have much time, but you may see how the person evolves (...), the method we adopt is the progressive assignment of tasks and see how it works, for example, the one who is now in administration has to check stock movements against invoices, against the daily invoicing or against delivery notes and this is his task; routine tasks are assigned, but he is responsible for them. There is an increasing responsibility as the tasks are being assigned and we see how he complies with them.

## 5. Final reflections

Both models face a poor national tradition around an “internship culture” compared with other countries, and those with strong dual systems in particular. Historical ups and downs have shown resistance from every stakeholder in the world of work and the world of education as to its implementation:

- ▶ unions, arguing that it is a way to substitute workers;
- ▶ companies, considering that it is both a loss of time and a safety risk;
- ▶ schools, arguing that it is a supplementary task to be added to the principals’ already overloaded daily agenda;
- ▶ local employment services, because of their recently created activity (6 or 7 years) and the precarious employment conditions of technical staff at the offices.

*Vocational practicums* are imbued with an educational logic, and creating bridges with companies can be a difficult task. But the pros are that it is a currently compulsory and valued mechanism; that a specific position has been created in technical schools to organise VP; and that young students’ profiles may potentially be of interest to productive companies as future workers.

*On-the-job training* appears to be closer to a labour logic, with an emphasis on intermediation between young people and companies for job-placement. The model shows more shortcomings in support, but the young people’s profiles (due to their weak formal education and poor life conditions) may adjust to low-rated positions in formal employment.

The study reveals differing degrees of institutionalisation in both models. While educational *vocational practicums* are ruled by laws and are compulsory (though not necessarily carried out in companies, work-based learning prevails), *on-the-job training* placements are only a part of a youth transition programme which, by definition, may be ephemeral. In fact, although in both cases the models were initiated by the national level, in the case of *vocational practicums* they are based on a law that changes the structure of technical education; instead, the other model is one that might change more easily. It can be said that the *vocational practicums* are in a process of institutionalisation, but the current efforts are not yet directed towards the quality of the learning process as such, but rather the organisation of

the system. By contrast, the second model is not highly structured. Monitoring depends on the specific case, but as the follow-up is a very important component of quality, the latter is not yet assured.

This short background to the implementation of both systems clearly shows that there is still a long way to go. From the recommendations standpoint, it seems to be evident that a critical core hinges on the relationship with the quality side of the world of work. There is a need to address an active clarification and sensitisation in the entrepreneurial and union sectors, so that they understand the models and start a feedback process which, in turn, facilitates their implementation. All the background and early experiences, which have been well considered by the interview partners, show that the involvement and interest of the organisations is a key issue for the quality of WBL.

As to the role of tutors in the organisations, their role for supporting learning seems to be key. The recent implementation seems to be a process of trial and error that needs further systematisation, training of future tutors (so as not leaving everything to certain personal characteristics of the individual, but providing support by developing other tools), and also the recognition (not solely in economic terms) of this position within the organisations.

It is surprising that the two models are not in a mutual dialogue, which may be seen not only at a national level, but also at provincial or local levels. Since schools report to the provincial governments, they coordinate *vocational practicums* and adapt the national model to the provincial territory. The provincial system provides orientation and human resources to make them operational. However, in the *on-the-job training* model, the programme depends on the Ministry of Labour, while local employment services are the ones responsible for managing the on-the-job training period. The management structures work in parallel and, if anything, compete to achieve a position in WBL. Depending on different public authorities, one of them belonging to the field of education policy and the other in the field of employment and social policies, each model is establishing its own linkages with the other social actors, mainly with the companies, and eventually with the unions.

But it is evident that the articulation of both models in an integrated system supporting youth labour transitions would potentiate the resources and strengthen stakeholder participation and youth opportunities.

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