

WBL-PRO Professional Peer Network: The team talks with the professionals – Laura Parenti from Italy

Today it is our pleasure to present to you one more of the professionals we have talked to - **Laura Parenti** from Italy.



Please find below what she shared with our team:

"I was born in Verona on the 26th of December, 1956. I got a high-school diploma with specialization in classical studies and a degree in Biology. I also have a postgraduate degree in School Management.

Since 1991 I have been working as a teacher of Sciences and Microbiology at the Vocational upper-secondary School "Fermi" in Verona; for more than ten years I have been the person in charge for career guidance and have been participating in the activities of career guidance networks funded by the Veneto regional authority.

Since 2005 I have been dealing with WBL and taking part in training courses organized at regional level.

In 2009/2010 I took part in an ESF project on competences - AZIONI DI SISTEMA PER LA REALIZZAZIONE DI STRUMENTI OPERATIVI A SUPPORTO DEI PROCESSI DI RICONOSCIMENTO, VALIDAZIONE E CERTIFICAZIONE DELLE COMPETENZE - DGR 1758/2009 - and then I became a trainer for using the elaborated model.

Currently, I work at one of the USRV local branch and I deal with WBL and career guidance."

1. Please share with us what the main advantages of work-based learning are.

When the work environment becomes a learning environment, you can improve your competences by applying them in practical situations. This is an advantage for students who need a less-theoretical learning approach; however, WBL can be a motivating experience for everyone. Checking if competences and knowledge are spendable in the labor market helps to give importance to the learning path and stimulates reflection. On the other hand, thanks to WBL, the student develops technical as well as personal skills related to socialization and useful for the entrance in the labor market, such as collaborative attitudes, the ability to establish positive relationships, sharing of rules and many more. The advantage, thus, is to facilitate the transition towards the labor market while maintaining the educational value of the learning pathway. The positive consequence of WBL consists in the reduction of drop-out and a higher rate of employability for young people.

2. Please share with us what the main challenges of work-based learning are.

The main challenge deals with the guarantee of a proper cultural preparation, even outside the school environment. Any kind of work-related activity involves the proper use of one's mother tongue and at least one foreign language, a lot of digital tools, Maths and Sciences literacy, without neglecting the use of the ever-evolving world of technology. In the past, one's training to start working involved a preparation focused on a specific job; the expression "learning outcome" indicates, instead, the result of a path involving more subjects, competences and a greater awareness and mastery of one's own knowledge.

3. Please describe any solutions to challenges and/or weaknesses related to work-based learning.

To address the challenges, first it is necessary to organize training courses for teachers and tutors; this opportunity entails flexibility in the organization of teaching and requires above all the ability to observe and evaluate processes; secondly, teachers need to know better the characteristics of the labor market, especially companies, in order to support students, dialogue with external tutors and also enhance the learning outcomes acquired by students in a non-formal and informal context.

However, one difficulty concerns the need to meet assessment requirements that are closely linked to a model based on an exclusive measurement of knowledge and skills, on which the evaluation of competences is required. Particularly in high schools this type of pathway meets resistance and difficulty of implementation. WBL can be seen as an approach to solve this problem.

4. Please share what the most important knowledge, skills and competences for the work-based learning professional are according to you. What kind of trainings are necessary to acquire them?

The WBL Professional is a tutor, usually an employee of the hosting organization, but also an external consultant who is responsible for following the students during the experience. The tutor should facilitate the student placement into the work environment and guide him/her in understanding the features, processes and rules. The tutor should also observe and evaluate the student according to his/her degree of autonomy and responsibility in carrying out significant tasks. It is indispensable that the tutor is trained to perform this type of role; in particular, the training should include the knowledge of the principles of WBL and how to use evaluation tools based on explicit criteria. The tutor must be able to communicate with teachers using a common language.

5. Please share information about work-based learning projects you are involved in - the name, the funding program, the main aims, the target groups, the intellectual outputs, link to website, facebook group, etc.

I have experience in WBL projects implemented in traditional learning pathways. WBL is an innovation in the Italian education and training system. The implementation of these projects is mandatory for third, fourth and fifth year students attending upper secondary schools; funding is provided by the Ministry of Education. Information on how to implement and design WBL projects is available at www.istruzione.it/alternanza/ and <https://scuolalavoro.registroimprese.it/>. At a local level the dialogue with the labor market is promoted by Chambers of Commerce in the framework of a regional agreement that USRV has signed with the regional authority, Unioncamere and Trade Unions.

The application of this innovative teaching method (mandatory from 2015/16) has been completed and implemented this year. So it will be very important to get a feedback on its effectiveness, problems encountered, good practices collected in order to improve its development and especially for future planning.

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