



The municipality of Piteå, Sweden

The language support method

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How does it work?

A structured method both to ensure learning of the specific language of the profession and to give assurance of the trainee's execution of work tasks, the method also includes two distinct tools for measuring the trainee's development in both areas mentioned above. The objective is to prepare trainees to execute work tasks both *independently* and *with the highest quality consistent with the specific profession*.

In working with the language-support method, the starting point for the internship is the employer's perspective. This means that the professional role and the accompanying tasks are central to the internship. It also means that the trainee's interaction with the mentor, work group, and manager will be the same, which inherently means that we refer to the method from the individual's language learning to the language development of the workplace. In the past, the language-support function worked only with the participant, where the participant's learning of the Swedish language was the sole focus and largely served as 'Swedish for Immigrants 2'. This has naturally led to both obstacles and challenges in the internship, as the performance of tasks could not be linked to the necessary professional Swedish language.

The method takes a holistic approach to the internship and the workplace: the participant's need for learning of professional Swedish related to work tasks, the mentor's need for support in the mentorship process, the function of the work group as support to both participants and mentors, and the role of the manager as ultimately responsible for the workplace.

The methodology and accompanying tools have three main objectives:

- for them to be the 'common thread' for the trainee's development during the internship
- for them to be able to function regardless of the workplace, profession, or the trainee's language skills
- that the language-support function need not be physically in place for the method to be used

The goal for all internships is that the participant be taught to perform the tasks both independently and with guaranteed quality, as these are two basic factors in enabling future employment in the profession.

The tools that have been developed for internships are intended primarily for use by the trainee, with the support of mentors in work-related situations and of the language-support function in language-related situations. The tools (six in total) are explained below.

Schedule: Most of the trainees study Swedish for immigrants while taking part in the internship. It is therefore important that the trainee, the mentor, and the work group know well what days and



times the participant is expected to be present for the internship. In addition, one hour a day is designated for self-study and reflection for the trainee, all to clarify that this hour is part of the internship. A copy of the schedule should be clearly visible in an appropriate location for the work group.

Work tasks: The second tool is largely based on the student's learning style, which the mentor finds out. The mentor states (and possibly shows at the same time) what the task means, and the trainee writes down the various steps and shows this to the mentor. The participant should then tell the mentor about what the task includes. If necessary, the trainee may take a photo / draw, for instance, a machine's various settings. If the workplace has its own rules/procedures/policies related to the work task, they are printed out for the trainee for translation and understanding. For all tasks, the estimated time shall be indicated: both for a beginner and for when one knows the task.

Language situations: For the trainee to be included in the workplace, it is important to clarify all the various contexts of which he or she will be a part: the work group with its various functions, relatives/customers/suppliers, which tasks will require the trainee to speak/write/read/count, and so on. Defining these different language situations clarifies possible obstacles and challenges for the participant and thus allows support and actions to be put in place.

Words and expressions: On a daily basis, the trainee should write down unknown words and expressions used in the professional role. This is done both in a notebook that the trainee always carries in his or her pocket and in the 'Words and Expressions' tool used in the trainee's self-study. The goal is for the participant to build his or her own dictionary of necessary words and expressions.

Important personal qualities/characteristics: The next tool is based on the 14 main personal qualities that European employers, in various industries, consider desirable among their employees – for example, *collaboration skills*. The mentor defines what 'collaboration skills' means in that professional role and for that activity, doing the same with the remaining main characteristics. The trainee has time to translate all the main characteristics. These can be difficult to grasp for the first time; however, the characteristics are often used in job advertisements and in future employee conversations, so it's important to learn what they mean. The trainee performs a self-assessment, and the mentor makes an estimate three times during the internship: at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end. The estimate is on a range from '1: Not acceptable for the profession' to '5: Acceptable for the profession'. After self-assessment and estimation, both assessments are discussed and the mentors then fill in the final assessment. The reason for this is that it is the mentor who should be able to make the final judgement as to whether the trainee is suitable as a potential employee or not. Clear communication that the trainee needs to reach level 4–5 to become employable takes place among all parties involved in the internship. Thereby, the trainee never has to be made the problem, because the intention is to show what the professional role and the workplace require of all employees. The final assessment is entered on the internship certificate.

Language development: In the same way as the 14 main qualities, the participant's language development is measured; it is linked to how independently the participant can perform tasks involving reading/writing/speaking/counting. Here too, level 4–5 assessments are required for



becoming employable. The purpose is to find areas where the trainee has difficulties and find solutions such that the participant reaches a higher number in the assessment. The trainee's language development is also included on the internship certificate, and, in combination with both the main personal qualities/characteristics and language development, constitutes important proof for both the trainee and the employer that the trainee can perform the work tasks independently and with quality assured.

Internship follow-ups: Every two weeks, language support is provided in the workplace, and one hour is set aside for trainee and mentor together. A summary of previous weeks and planning for the next two weeks are prepared. The time of follow-up is determined together and always based on the activities – i.e., when it is best for language-support personnel to arrive. Between follow-ups, both mentors and trainees can contact the language-support function by e-mail and/or telephone, also scheduling a meeting if the need arises. The trainee sets aside one hour per day to work with the above tools and the mentor can check that it is correct. This also provides quality assurance for the organisation, as everything is written down and can be adjusted before the trainee starts to perform the tasks. The trainee's self-study creates a 'breathing space' too, both for the trainee and for the mentor, as things can become relatively intense during an internship. The trainees also always have access to their own material and can therefore avoid always having to ask questions.