VINTAGE VET integrated language learning
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Guidelines for designing VET integrated learning pathways (1.0)

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Guidelines for designing VET integrated learning pathways

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FOR WHOM ARE THE GUIDELINES?

If you are a teacher of professional subjects in the context of an apprenticeship, with adults or people out of high school, it certainly already happened to you to face people who are not native speakers and have different levels of language competences. Even if you are a language teacher for non-native adults, you certainly had to face the request of learning a specific lingo linked to the professional context of your students.

The goal of these guidelines is to supply practical directions and possible pathways to integrate professional training, its specific pedagogic solutions, and language learning.

In the first part we present the frame if the presented model that we propose, together with some directions about how to manage the analysis of contexts and students' needs, the planning and didactical programming, and the definition of an integrated training plan of learning. In the second part we present the instruments to manage the learning sessions, and finally a few suggestions about how to evaluate both the learning results and the process in its entirety.

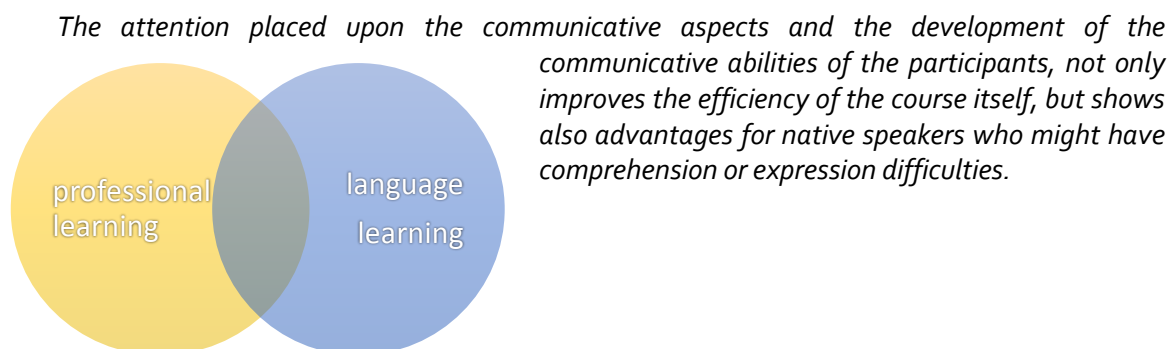*In this text there is a reference to the Vintage Resource Centre, available for more in depth materials and techniques at the following address:* http://www.vintage-language.eu/resource-centre *.*

WHICH PRINCIPLES ARE THE BASE OF THE VINTAGE MODEL?

it is possible to develop language and professional competences at the same time

The model that we propose within the VINTAGE project is based upon the assumption that fluency in the local language is an essential factor for migrant workers, students at universities or doing an internship abroad, so to improve their abilities and competences. It is possible to develop this linguistic competence *during* a professionalising pathway.

The integration of language learning and professional contents does not need a certain level of linguistic competence as a pre-requisite, and has a few advantages:

- it considers the class reality of today, in which we find a great complexity and variety of levels and differentiated abilities;
- it considers the time factor: migrants need to start and develop a job as soon as they enter a county, or often they cannot work and take a language class at the same time; also the students abroad stay in a certain country for a given about of time;
- it fully takes advantage of the opportunities available in the places of work, and within the professional training, to learn and improve a language
- it keeps into consideration previous experiences that are often a rich source of informal learning, both from a linguistic and a professional point of view.

The attention placed upon the communicative aspects and the development of the communicative abilities of the participants, not only improves the efficiency of the course itself, but shows also advantages for native speakers who might have comprehension or expression difficulties.

What does it mean to *integrate* language and contents?

It means to plan and lead courses that help all of the participants in following the course in an efficient way:

- by eliminating the aspects linked to the language that are unnecessary and that create obstacles
- by helping the participants in acquiring the communicative competences necessary to follow the course.

TAKE INTO ACCOUNT MULTIDIMENSIONAL PATTERNS OF LEARNING

All learning includes two different processes: an interactive process between the individual and the environment, and internal mental acquisition and processing through which impulses from the interaction are integrated with the results of prior learning (…) that acquisition always includes content and incentive, thus producing the three dimensions of learning: content, incentive and interaction.

The content dimension typically concerns knowledge, understanding and skills. Through this we generally seek to create meaning and mastery, thus strengthening our functionality (…) The incentive dimension comprises motivation, emotion and volition. Through this we generally seek to maintain mental and bodily balance while at the same time developing our sensitivity.
The interaction dimension includes action, communication and cooperation. Through this we generally seek to achieve social and societal integration that we find acceptable, while, at the same time, developing our sociability.

As a teacher or trainer you should always bear in mind that learning processes are multidimensional, occur in different contexts and different ways, depend on the characteristics of the individuals, simultaneously considering cognitive, emotional (affective) and relational learning drivers.

These dimensions are present both in vocational training and in language learning. They characterize:
- *cumulative* and *assimilative* learning processes, e.g. when we prepare ourselves to host new knowledge, assimilating it in our mental schemes, as it normally occurs in step by step professionalization pathways
- *accommodative* learning processes which enable individuals to overcome constraints deriving from inadequacy of our mental frame in regard to new challenges deriving from social and environmental interactions
- *transformative* learning which takes place when changes and the need to cope with diversity are challenging our understanding and our capability to mobilize existing knowledge and skills to manage actual living or working situations.

While learning a new language, individuals often face *transformative* or at least *accommodative* challenges, whose complexity largely depends on linguistic distance and cognitive asset of the learners. As far as languages are a component of an overarching cultural structure, language learning is a matter of coping with diversity, therefore a certain level of intercultural competence is required for facilitating learning processes.

Focusing on the cognitive dimension of learning, teachers and trainers should pay attention to the heterogeneity of any class. They should know their specific learners, in order to effectively choose teaching methods and help students learn. They must first know something about whom they are

expected to teach. They must realize that learners normally come from very different backgrounds and have various learning needs that are related to origin, gender, social status, previous learning, and educational attainments.

Devoting a peculiar attention to knowing the learners, and adopting a coherent strategy in the preliminary phase or at the beginning of a course, ensures to reach at least two essential objectives:

- **let the learners feel welcomed and taken into consideration**: learners, regardless of their gender or cultural background, feel discouraged when they see that teachers and trainers do not pay attention to them; to foster class participation and student success it is essential to provide a friendly and respectful classroom;

- **create the conditions for a good personalization of learning**: knowledge about who his/her students are, enables the teacher to refine lectures, class discussions, comments, illustrations, and activities so to create more effective learning experiences. References to student interests, backgrounds, knowledge, and even anxieties can make the class seem more personal and the material more accessible; by assessing learners' mastery levels of the subject, teachers and trainers can adapt their training strategy to fit the needs, by customizing the course.

The *incentive* dimension defines why we learn, what we expect from learning. It concerns the matters we usually speak about in terms of emotions, motivations and volition; they are key ingredients of a powerful learning process. Particular attention has to be paid to the incentive dimension in complex learning processes, implying a de-structuring and re-structuring of our mental schemes. Such learning is based, in fact, on cognitive divergences, and requires accommodations, in order to recreate "*relatively stable ways to feel and react*" (Illeris, 2007) in front of new situations, interacting with the environment. Learning a new language always implies the will of becoming familiar with a new framework, shifting from diverse mental schemes.

The *interactive* or *relational* dimension of learning is finally fundamental to language learning. As a communicative competence, the mastery of a language necessarily implies the relational dimension. Moreover learning is always a "situated" process, taking place in a well-defined situation, in a specific context or space, which determines possibilities and patterns of learning and at the same time, influences the nature of learning challenges. In addition learning has to be "situated" both considering the immediate context in which it takes place, and the underlying societal framework.

We can derive from these statements many important consequences suggesting to us how to design a learning process aimed at building up linguistic and communicative competences:
- we have to always bear in mind the importance of **recognizing and valuing the social, cultural and societal dimensions in which learners efforts are embedded**, and we have to find adequate stimuli and challenges there
- we have to **consider individuals, in their interactions with the environment, as protagonists of the learning process**, enabling them to construct an independent and active relationship with the world to which they belong (principle of participation)
- finally we have to **activate memories and experiences belonging to learners' biographies**, in order to facilitate an aware integration between individual and social dimensions of learning.

PROXIMITY, HOLISTIC APPROACH, PARTICIPATION

Adult learning principles, and a comprehensive vision of the learning process, encompassing the cognitive, emotional, and relational dimensions of learning, imply the respect of some basic assumptions in planning and managing training and facilitating learning.

Inspired by the work of Bertrand Schwartz, three key concepts should guide teachers and trainers:

- the concept of **proximity**, referred to contents of learning: the choice of learning challenges and objectives have to be made by exploring arguments, situations and glossaries as close as possible to concerns and communication needs of the learners, both at the workplace and in daily life, including access to further training and integration opportunities

- the concept of polyvalence or, in other words, the adoption of a **holistic approach** to learning, considering the person as a whole, integrating the upgrading of linguistic skills in a general framework of progression of each individual – as a person in society [1] - in societal and professional areas

- the concept of co-construction, or **participative design,** of the learning process, both considering outcomes and paths, according to a vision centred on the learner as the main protagonist of the learning process.

The simultaneous presence of multiple learning drivers as well as the balance between them, have to be considered as an indicator of potential effectiveness, to be better considered under the lens of assessment criteria.

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[1] See Jarvis P., *Towards a comprehensive Theory of Human Learning*, Routledge, London / New York, 2006 and
Jarvis P., Parker S., *Human Learning. An holistic approach*, Routledge, London, 2005.

USING A COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH

When teaching a foreign language, the concepts presented earlier find their practical use in the communicative approach. Having a communicative approach means to consider and **promote** not only the **learning** of the linguistic competence (the knowledge of the formal or lexical aspects of a language), but also of the **communicative competence** (the ability to use a specific language in a specific context).

In the reality of teaching this means:

- **to consider when, where, and who** takes part in the linguistic exchange
- to propose action based activities founded on **the fulfilment of given tasks in concrete situations** that are part of real life (change work shift, ask for a permit, and so on), learning by doing
- to include topics and information linked to the knowledge of the **cultural uses and practices** (e.g. speaking turns, courtesy forms, physical proximity and distance, mimic and its meaning)
- to consider the **interconnection between the course and the daily life** of the students
- to encourage **self-learning and self-evaluation** and the use of the language outside of the scholastic context.

In the training reality, the **profile of the participants** in a class is often **very uneven** as to their linguistic origin, and scholastic experiences (this includes the level of schooling, the type of scholastic habits and cultures, the type of learning, and the expectations for the type of lessons and the teacher's role).

Also the practical knowledge of the language is not homogenous, because it was learned in the daily life context and therefore presents gaps, fossilisations, and very different competence levels in speaking, listening, reading, and writing (for instance one might be able to understand what is being said, but not to speak or write).

By means of a communicative approach it is possible to share a training pathway that is not linked to a single level, through a module path that includes objectives on different levels for the different competences.
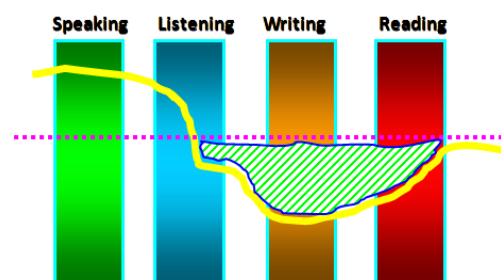
[resource centre: syllabus guidelines for migration context]

LEARNING THE LANGUAGE WHILE DEVELOPING ONE'S OWN PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCES: PLANNING AND MANAGING AN INTEGRATED PATHWAY

The ability to carry out a professional task, the learning of concepts and notions, and the ability to express with words or in writing said tasks and notions may vary a lot. Indeed, the fact that someone is not able to properly and correctly describe – from a syntactic point of view – does not necessarily mean that he/she did not learn it and is now able to use it in practice.

These guidelines are designed for both the language teacher of a course that is parallel to a professional training, and the professional trainer who will consider certain characteristic elements of the language when planning his/her scholastic path.

The integration of the development of the linguistic and professional competences happens on three levels:

1. **Reducing the** linguistic **barriers** that prevent a positive participation in the course
2. **Supporting the learning of the communicative competences linked to the** work **context**
3. **Supporting the learning of the communicative competences** necessary to successfully undertake a **professional training** pathway.

Developing communicative competences specific to the professional training

Following a professional training pathway requires few abilities that do not simply include being able to carry out a certain task, but it also involves the comprehension and abstraction of the concepts, and the ability to express said concepts.

Learning in a formal context, like the one of a professional course or an apprenticeship requires the ability to follow a lesson, understand and study given texts, and report in a more or less structured way what has been learned. The transfer of concepts and processes happens by referring to real work situations and processes.

To facilitate the learning process it is beneficial to focus the attention on the typical scenario of the professional training.

What are the typical settings of the professional training?
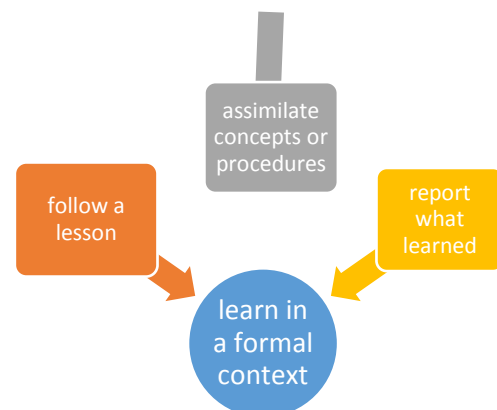
1. **Follow a lesson or instructions** (understand what has been said or written by the trainer or tutor, answer to stimuli and questions, ask for explanations when necessary)

2. **Take notes**

3. **Cooperate** with the others

4. **Learn by doing**

5. **Learn by studying** a text

6. **Report** what has been learned (synthetize and express concepts)

7. Take an **exam**

Some of these tasks are essential and integrated in the learning process; others depend on the educational culture of the different countries, on the training context, on the teaching style of the single teacher or trainer.

It is also good to remember that the same task can be carried out in an efficient way according to the different levels of language fluency.

Next we would like to offer our insight as to which path to follow to identify and develop the aspects that might make one's own pathway more efficient.

How can we plan an integrated pathway?

*First of all it is important to plan a **gradual pathway.***
In the *initial phase*, I – the teacher or trainer – must pay close attention to the linguistic aspects, making *the stimuli and the requirements more and more complex*, as

The CEFR[1] identified different levels of competence according to which **linguistic tasks** people are able to carry out.

Basic level:

A1 levels can *understand and use* familiar **everyday expressions** and *very basic phrases* aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. They can introduce themselves and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where they live, people they know and things they have. They can interact in a simple way *provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.*

A2 levels can *understand* **sentences and frequently-used expressions** related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). They can *communicate* in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. They can *describe* in simple terms aspects of their background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.

Intermediate level:

B1 levels can **understand the main points** of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. They can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken and can *produce a simple connected text* on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. They can *describe experiences and events*, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.

It is only in the following levels that the individual is able to understand complex texts on concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in their own field.

the linguistic competences of the students develop. Learning a language is, in fact, a process that happens in steps, and might happen in a non-homogeneous way through the different abilities (a student who excels in speaking might have difficulties reading and understanding a text or, even more probable, writing).

From the contents point of view, when it is possible, I use a ***modular approach***, starting the pathway with lessons and modules about more concrete and identifiable aspects, introducing the more abstract modules in a second phase.

Starting from my subject of studies, **for each topic or module of my course**, here are some passages and some questions:

1. ***Identify the key communicative competences.***
   Which communicative actions are necessary to carry out this task? What do I need to be able to say? What do I need to know how to write? How important is the use of a formally correct language in this context, for this task? (can do descriptors).

To identify these elements, and still be anchored to the work reality, a good strategy is to involve the participants themselves to bring out their previous knowledge through scenarios, role plays, and so on.

➡ *[in the resource centre one can find descriptions and examples of some methods to bring out previous knowledge of the students]*

➡ *[in the resource centre one can find examples of communicative situations linked to few professions]*

2. ***Identify which are the linguistic requirements of the course*** asking myself a few questions:
   - Which **language** do I use? Which **key words and concepts** do they have to know in order to understand me when I speak?
   - Which kind of **readings** do I propose to the students? Are they a lot? In which language? Are they long or short readings? Do they have a clear structure, figures, diagrams?
   - Which kind of **written tasks** do I ask of my students?
   - Which of these instruments and tasks are **essential** to transmit the concepts or carry out a given task?
3. ***Identify and keep into consideration the previous knowledge and experience of the participants***

   Knowing what the participants already know and what experience they have is a very efficient instrument both to **focus** the work on what is actually useful and necessary for the class (finding specific and shared objectives), and to **improve the motivation, involvement, and efficacy** necessary to successfully take the course. The consideration of previous knowledge happens on two levels:

A methodology that allows us to use the communicative approach, involving the students in the co-planning of the pathway is the one that uses scenarios.

The scenario is a specific communicative situation that concerns life events (for instance calling the doctor on the phone to make an appointment, or changing work shift).

Through the immersion in the scenario, students are faced with a language model, experiment, and, together with the teacher, build communication strategies to deal with the task according to their own linguistic level.

A good scenario presents a real situation that is easily recognisable by the students and requires some communicative and/or professional competences to be completed. The scenario must be limited in time and space, and reproduces a sequence of actions through different stages.
A lot of examples of scenarios and material to learn German, French, and Italian, can be found on the website www.fide.info.ch

- **in the initial phase**, the interview, discovering the personal history, the motivations for participating, and the future perspectives;

- **at the beginning of each session or module**. Initially, I introduce a topic in a global way, through a visualisation with photos, drawings, films, … allowing the student to identify himself/herself in the situation (I have already done that, or I know that I will do that). Then I recover the previous knowledge and I identify the missing elements that are necessary to successfully carry out the task through:

    i. open questions like: what happens now? and then?

    ii. role play (dialogue simulation only giving key words)

    iii. telling the story adding more and more details

    iv. pictures, photos, drawings, sequences of videos, and so on

- in this phase, on top of the stages, some **key words** emerge as does the first indication of the professional competences necessary to manage the situation

- in this phase, **sociocultural and intercultural elements** might also emerge, and they are important to better manage the situation

[in the resource centre one can find instruments and references to bring out the knowledge in both phases]

How can we manage the integrated pathway?

1. _**Use a variety of methods.**_
Adults have different ways of learning that are already consolidated and may vary within the same class. Using different methods can help every student to find the best strategy for himself/herself, and eliminate the barriers caused by a difficult understanding of the language.

In a pathway that integrates linguistic and professional contents, it might be very useful to **start from something concrete** (and from the experiences) **to reach the abstract**. This means planning the lesson on the presentation of an operative or problematic situation, using scenarios, case studies, or methodologies like the Problem Base Learning (PBL), or the Global Analysis Synthesis (GAS), and working in small groups.

[in the resource centre one can find various methodologies and their instruments]

2. _**To transfer the contents, use and also ask for strategies that are not based on reading and writing**_
   The key concepts, for instance, can be illustrated:
   - Using **visual methods**: photos and sequences of photos, mind maps, diagrams, drawings, videos. For example, I can introduce information about the respiratory system with this video in Italian https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qh2CbHBCuMI- or this one in English https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hc1YtXc_84A;
   - Resorting to **experimental methods**, like practical support at the work place, or simulating a work task from which to name the work processes
   - **Objectifying the abstract concepts** (for example bringing spaghetti to class to explain the concept of dot, line, plane)

3. _**Prepare a shared lexicon and its use.**_
   During a professional course, one of the objectives certainly is the acquisition of a specific terminology. On this aspect it is important to **engage the students**, referring directly to their knowledge, inviting them to bring photos, objects, or documents that they use at the work place because it is especially on the lexical level that the language is very different from the one used in books. In the daily life, an object might be called with a scientific name, but also with a common name, or a special lexicon specific of the firm or place of work, and it is important to understand all of these levels.
   Paying attention to the lexicon happens:
   - **Illustrating the new terms,** or devoting them a specific part of the lesson, or for instance **highlighting** the key words **on the board** and taking the time to look at them at a later time;
   - **Verifying the comprehension of what has been presented**. In particular when talking, it is good practice to stop after an important concept or term and briefly recapitulate what has been said, and check the comprehension.

SIMPLIFYING WRITTEN TEXTS

The texts used in training are normally quite complex and difficult to read because the use a language that is out of context, abstract, dense with concepts and articulated structures.

To simplify their **comprehension one must**:
- Select the information and chose the main **topic units**
- **Order** the information with a logical and chronological sense
- Use **short sentences** (maximum 20/25 words) with little information at a time
- Verify that the **terms** are of common use and understandable, use glossaries, and repeat key words.

Some details vary depending on the language. Concerning Italian:
- Mostly use the structure **subject + verb + complement** + possible expansions
- Repeat the **subject** at the beginning of each sentence, avoiding synonyms, and reducing pronouns to a minimum
- Use **coordinate sentences** (and then… and after… and so…)
- Use **simple verb tenses** (reduce to a minimum the passive and impersonal forms)
- Avoid personifications (*not "the senate" or "the hospital", but rather "the senators" or "the doctors",…*)

Also **graphics** can help understanding:
- Insert a clear title
- Start a new paragraph maximum every 100 words and highlight few words to retrace the structure
- Do not be afraid to use images, even with adults, especially to clarify key terms.

- Inviting the students to **create their own glossary**, which might be designed in the form that is most useful to the student (definition, synonym, translation in their native language, photos, …), and must be updated and implemented during the whole training, and may also include **chunks.**

- Creating **opportunities to use** what learned, through specific exercises, or proposing structured discussions in pairs or small groups.

Also a work on the lexicon begins from concrete objects and work instruments of the daily life, and continues in more specific settings (for example safety or the set of forms), until reaching the ability to read professional texts (manuals, and so on).

4. *Facilitate the reading of texts.*

In practice and in professional training, reading activities may concern the access and comprehension of "work instruments" like manuals, instructions, and so on, or may be a didactical instrument that aims at fixating and transferring concepts and information. In this second case, as previously explained, it is good practice to consider the possibility to also use other instruments. When this turns out to be more efficient, we can facilitate its comprehension through certain strategies:
- **Creating special texts** just for simple reading (see box),
- **Guiding the orientation of a given text**, through the identification of the structure and the concepts, by underlining or making side notes, and by providing glossaries and clarifications,

- **Introducing the reading**, illustrating the general content or the main goal, or asking the students to guess the content,
- **Providing questions** or tasks to do after the reading, that will serve as guidelines and direction for the reading itself

5. *Direct the writing*

For a non-native student, the production of written texts is one of the most difficult and stressful activities because, in many cases, it is the one that they are less used to, and the one in which the formal aspects are more prominent. For this reason, when we deem necessary to ask them to produce written texts, some strategies might simplify the task.

- Supply **examples** of written texts
- Supply **diagrams** to structure the contents (topics, reports,…) and filled models. A gradual path might start by simply asking to fill out some sections and insert few words, then complete sentences, and finally free writing.
- Facilitate **taking notes** underlining the main concepts and putting them in a diagram.

If we have to give a feedback or evaluate a piece of writing, it is good practice to remember to keep the distinction between content and form. If the use of the text is only internal for the course, and aims at reporting what has been learned, it is better to only focus on the content. If instead the text is a work model, the formal aspects (grammar, spelling, syntax) might become more important depending on its use in the work context (communicative efficiency).

HOW DO WE INTEGRATE LANGUAGE AND PROFESSIONAL CONTENTS IN THE EVALUATION?

The VINTAGE project produced **guidelines devoted to the in-depth analysis of the evaluation criteria** that integrate both language and content, underlining the importance of a global evaluation that is integrated with the learning process and the feedback culture (consistent with the philosophy of co-constructing the pathway). We refer you to this product for a further global and structured discussion on this topic.

In this context we just give few indications that might guide the choices of the teacher or the tutor on the type of requests they make the students when the communicative aspects are not an object of evaluation:

1. *Consider how much the linguistic aspects weigh on the execution of the work task or on the transfer of what learned.* What do I have to evaluate? What is the best form to understand what I have to evaluate? How much do the communicative aspects influence the task in terms of effort and complexity?
2. Consider which evaluation *modalities* help the student (oral, written, simulation, visual representation, …)
3. Consider the *form of feedback* requested. In the event of written tests it is better to prepare questions with a closed answer rather than open, or also multiple choices tests, checking the comprehension from a lexical point of view. In the event of oral tests, it is important to have previously worked on the construction of diagrams and presentation tracks, as well as on the terminology.
4. Consider the *use of images* also during a test (for example during a lesson on safety at work I ask the students to pick the image corresponding to the correct loading/unloading procedure, and I ask them to motivate their choice).

[in the resource centre one can find complete guidelines and examples of evaluation instruments]