Erasmus+

Project

„Proactivity in vocational education and training (VET)"

Recommendations for VET teachers and instructors, how to recognize proactive attitudes and develop proactive competencies among VET students

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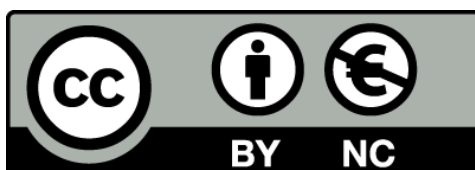
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1. Introduction

The Erasmus+ project implemented as part of the KA2 Partnership action on a small scale by PIB - Privat-Institut fuer Europaeische Bildung und Consulting UG from Germany and TOP   -Projekt AKADEMIA was a response to the growing interest in improving proactive competencies of young people and future employees.

Proactive behavior is desirable both for young people who are just entering a difficult economic reality, and for older people who find it increasingly difficult to live in such unstable times. According to Jacek Santorski and Grzegorz Turniak, "there are several percent of people who think about their own career in a creative, conscious and proactive way."

There is even talk of "learned helplessness"[1] among young people, not only in Poland, but throughout the European Union. The prevailing attitude among them is that someone should take care of a given person, tell them what to do and give them a job, and if they don't have one, the state should provide care. After all, everyone is responsible for themselves, and therefore for their career. It is therefore justified to consider, in the context of education supporting career planning and development, issues related to proactivity as a way of behaving people in relation to their own life goals, which plays a significant role in preparing a person to live in conditions that are difficult to predict, and these are the conditions of modern labor market. Therefore, proactivity can and should be created among young people at every stage of education. It is very important that this also happens during vocational education and training.

Moreover, research results[2] shows that employers are increasingly looking for proactive job candidates and offer employment in a proactive group. Proactive people cope better in situations that most people consider difficult (2011)[3].

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[1] J. Santorski, G. Turniak, *Alchemia Kariery*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Momentum 2005.

[2] A. Rogozińska-Pawełczyk, A. Matuszewska – Kubicz, *Postawy wspierające podejmowanie zachowań proaktywnych przez pracowników przedsiębiorstw sektora BSS,* Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego w Krakowie 1 (991) 2021, Kraków 2021.

[3] K. Ślebarska, *Droga do pracy. Proaktywne radzenie sobie a poszukiwanie zatrudnienia i adaptacja do nowego miejsca pracy,* Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2017.

New/young employees cope faster with the adaptation process in the work team. Proactive students recognize their role in the team faster, learn their responsibilities, rights, etc. They show greater initiative and take up challenges, and are not afraid of difficulties. Thanks to their proactivity, they can adapt and enter the vocational training process more efficiently. Other studies have shown that when employing young people, employers pay attention to a wide range of skills (interpersonal, analytical) and personality traits associated with proactivity.

These recommendations were created as a result of the work of the German-Polish team of experts. They are intended to be used by teachers, vocational instructors and trainers to identify and develop proactive features in young people learning a profession in order to develop soft competencies that influence proactiveness. The recommendation includes the following elements:

1. Definition of proactivity
2. Proactivity attributes defined by project experts
3. Competencies/ features related to a given proactive attribute
4. How to identify the features of proactivity in young people
5. Recommendations – how to support competencies and proactive features.

II. What is proactivity and its attributes

It is worth noting that proactivity is a relatively young and interdisciplinary concept. This makes it possible to talk about the multi-aspect nature of the concept and its multiplicity of definitions. According to A. Bańek, "proactivity in the general sense consists in intentional action by an individual in real time, but at the same time without any specific intention to achieve a specific goal here and now"[4]. In turn, other authors claim that "the key aspect of proactivity is taking conscious, well-thought-out and planned actions, while anticipating their impact on the situation in the future. Proactivity includes three basic features, such as: own initiative, readiness for changes and orientation towards the future"[5] For the purposes of this project, the following definition was adopted:

Proactivity is a human attitude of anticipating, acting in advance and causing changes in the environment in order to minimize the effects of unforeseen difficulties.

The Expert Team defined the following attributes of proactivity:

I.   Searching for opportunities to change on your own initiative.

II.   Setting goals for change.

III.   Anticipate problems and take protective measures.

IV.   Performing different tasks or carrying out tasks in a different way than before.

V.   Life attitude of intense activity.

VI.   Stubbornness, unchanging plans.

VII.   Achieving goals and demonstrating real success.

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[4] A. Bańka, *Intencjonalne konstruowanie przyszłości I wyprzedzające realizowanie celów: walidacja Skali Proaktywności Ogólnej*. Czasopismo Psychologiczne - Psychological Journal, 21, 2015.

[5] Parker S.K., Bindl U.K., Strauss K. (2010), *Making Things Happen: A Model of Pro-active Motivation*, „Journal of Management", vol. 36, nr 4, https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206310363732.

III. Recommendations on recognizing proactive features and how to support them in order to develop proactive competencies

III.1 Attribute: Seeking opportunities for change on one's own initiative.

Definition: Proactive people take actions leading to change, and if they do not have such resources, they try to transform situations to achieve the intended goal.

III.1.1 Competencies/ characteristics of a person who, on his own initiative, seeks opportunities to change:

- cognitive curiosity
- flexibility
- inquisitiveness
- courage
- creativity
- analytical thinking
- recognizing the need for change
- openness to change
- imagination
- contextual thinking
- brilliance
- sharpness

III.1.2 Identification/ recognition of the characteristics of a person who, on their own initiative, seeks opportunities to change:

- asks about possible actions
- proposes solutions
- breaks patterns of action
- proposes new, unconventional solutions to the task
- is ready for a different, unconventional path of action
- accepts various solutions.

III.1.3 Recommendations on how to support the development of proactive competencies in a person who, on his own initiative, seeks opportunities to change:

- proposals for change should be discussed;
- consent should be given to students taking action, even unconventional ones;
- establish rules for action and for proactive students to report the need for change;
- agree to various forms of reporting changes;
- propose specific changes to proactive students;
- use creative tools and work methods, such as brainstorming, escape room, add problem-solving and activating methods,
- motivate/encourage people to look for other solutions.

III.2 Attribute: Setting goals for change

Definition: Proactive people do not stop at achieving difficult tasks, but focus more on changes that affect other people's perspectives. Greater commitment is manifested not by a large amount of work, but rather by its quality (going beyond stereotypes, definitions, orders and prohibitions).

III.2.1 Competencies/ characteristics of a person who sets change-oriented goals:

- ability to set goals and priorities
- identifying own and environmental resources
- change management
- determination in achieving goals
- creativity
- risk awareness
- ability to adapt
- looking far into the future
- visionary
- knowledge of goal formulation
- goal oriented plan

- rebelliousness
- reflectivity
- curiosity
- perceptiveness and contextual thinking
- strategic thinking.

III.2.2 Identification/ recognition of the characteristics of a person who sets goals for change:

- often considers more alternative and non-stereotypical solutions than others
- imposes more goals on itself
- shows frustration, anger, aggression when goals are not achieved
- is active
- applies the principles of small goals
- asks additional and critical questions
- challenges previously adopted patterns and solutions
- a person who likes to discover new things, ask questions and seek knowledge.

III.2.3 Recommendations on how to support the development of proactive competencies in a person who sets change-oriented goals:

- do help formulate goals (your own and the group's)
- control the number of proposed changes
- focus ideas and proposals for changes
- provide arguments for the team - justify changes
- be careful that the proactive person does not become alienated in the group
- communicate the need for change in the group
- If possible, organize trips or integration events
- build acceptance in the group, integrate with the group.

III.3 Attribute: Anticipating problems and taking protective measures

Definition: Proactive individuals analyze their own successes, evaluate the actions taken and their effects, estimate the possibility of a threat occurring and synchronously try to avert this threat, also by modeling the actions of other people.

III.3.1 Competencies/ characteristics of a person who anticipates problems and makes protective efforts:

- ability to work under time pressure
- stress resistance
- risk prediction
- courage to take risks
- analytical skills (SWOT)
- communication
- ability to work on solving problems
- self-confidence and decisiveness
- inspiring trust
- ability to convey information
- ability to analyze situations and solve problems
- decisiveness
- diplomacy
- empathy.

II.3.2 Identification/ recognition of the characteristics of the person who anticipates problems and makes protective efforts:

- can draw from own experiences
- identifies problems and threats in the entire process of achieving the goal
- talks about his success in an analytical way
- evaluates his actions
- proposes solutions
- influences people
- takes part in the discussion
- can communicate properly
- uses forms of active communication
- can negotiate
- can resolve conflicts
- can point out the strengths and weaknesses of a situation
- does not avoid making decisions
- can resolve conflicts and negotiate in a delicate and tactful manner
- can empathize with the feelings and emotions of others and understand their point of view.

III.3.3 Recommendations on how to support the development of proactive competencies in a person who anticipates problems and makes protective efforts:

- involve proactive students in preparing a plan to achieve goals;
- enable proactive students to have their say at every stage of work;
- equip proactive students with analytical tools (e.g. using SWOT analysis, risk analysis, critical situations);
- provide negotiation techniques and tools;
- allow proactive students to make decisions (decisions are not made by the teacher);
- use interactive teaching methods.

Examples of interactive teaching methods for proactive students are described in Chapter IV.

III.4 Attribute: Performing various tasks or carrying out tasks in a different way than before

Definition: Proactive people, when looking for conditions to achieve a goal, do not pay attention to the limitations of tradition, but rather arrange new patterns of behavior. Their behavior is assessed by others as something creative, innovative, original and includes participation, voluntary and selfless involvement, coming up with proposals, initiating activities and their intensive implementation.

III.4.1 Competencies/ characteristics of a person who performs various tasks or implements them in a different way than before:

- multitasking
- creativity
- searching for new solutions
- breaking patterns
- courage
- brilliance

- risk taking
- independence
- curiosity
- inquisitiveness
- flexibility

III.4.2 Identification/ recognition of the characteristics of a person who performs various tasks or implements them in a different way than before:

- has numerous ideas
- is able to plan a schedule of tasks
- understands what the action process is
- looks for own solutions
- can combine several issues together
- is able to use his knowledge, skills and experience
- likes to discover new things, ask questions and seek knowledge
- asks questions, researches and analyzes to understand the world and people
- can adapt to changing circumstances, easily accepts new situations.

III.4.3 Recommendations on how to support the development of proactive competencies in a person who performs various tasks or implements them in a different way than before:

- allow proactive students to solve tasks in their own ways;
- allow them to make mistakes;
- constructively criticize independently implemented tasks and failures;
- teach proactive people to build schedules for each task;
- motivate proactive students to be creative;
- stimulate self-motivation.

III.5 Attribute: Life attitude of intense activity

Definition: Proactive people are characterized by constant trying, also with a risk and responsibility perspective. The search for new solutions does not end with a concept, an idea or when resistance appears.

III.5.1 Competencies/ characteristics of a person who adopts an intensely active life attitude:

- kindness and positive attitude towards people and the world
- active in activities
- social activities
- accepting attitude of the world
- tolerance towards diversity
- own strong value system
- efficiency
- expressiveness.

III.5.2 Identification/ recognition of the characteristics of a person who adopts an intensely active life attitude:

- participates in various interest groups
- asks questions
- can understand other people's position and reasoning
- can support colleagues
- tolerating and respecting others despite differences
- can achieve its goals quickly and effectively, using its resources wisely
- expresses his feelings and emotions in an open and spontaneous way.

III.5.3 Recommendations on how to support the development of proactive competencies in a person who adopts an intensely active life attitude:

- entrust proactive students with the role of leader/mentor in the project team (chairman in the local government);
- entrust them with organizing class events;
- use their ideas and promote them in the group.

III.6 Attribute: Stubbornness, unchanging plans

Definition: Proactive people do not act with blinders on, they are not obsessed with one way to achieve the goal, they are able to change their course of action

if they see that it is failing or when circumstances require it. At the same time, they are persistent in pursuing their goals.

III.6.1 Competencies/ characteristics of a person who stubbornly does not change his plans:

- perseverance
- patience
- consistency and determination in pursuing the goal
- ability to convince others
- ambition
- assertiveness
- understanding.

III.6.2 Identification/ recognition of the characteristics of a person who stubbornly does not change his plans:

- can indicate goals
- is able to look for solutions to achieve goals
- does not get discouraged when difficulties arise
- indicates alternative ways of solving the task
- strives to achieve goals with determination and hard work
- does not give up in the face of adversity, stubborn in striving to achieve the goal
- can demonstrate understanding and calmness in difficult situations
- stubbornness in one's beliefs with a tendency to see things in black and white categories
- expressing your thoughts and feelings clearly, respecting others.

III.6.3 Recommendations on how to support the development of proactive competencies in a person who stubbornly does not change his plans:

- teach proactive students planning tools;
- when starting educational tasks, set goals for them, for example, based on the SMART sheet/principle;
- set short- and long-term goals for proactive students and discuss progress in achieving them;
- direct proactive students towards tasks that bring results, progress in achieving goals;

- if possible, establish and discuss more than one scenario for achieving the set goal.

III.7 Attribute: Achieving goals and demonstrating real success

Definition: Proactive people dynamically initiate changes by emanating their active attitude to others, other processes or organizations.

III.7.1 Competencies/ characteristics of a person who achieves his goals and demonstrates real success:

- communicating with others in the group
- leading the group
- leadership
- ease of establishing contacts
- orientation to the resources surrounding them
- self-presentation skills
- dealing with interpersonal relationships
- courage
- enthusiasm and infecting others with this enthusiasm
- consistency
- ability to conduct discourse.

III.7.2 Identification/ recognition of the characteristics of a person who achieves his goals and demonstrates real success:

- shows courage and bravery, does not run away from challenges and difficulties
- acts decisively to achieve its goals
- takes responsibility for himself and the group
- is able to establish and maintain relationships
- has the ability to present one's arguments and convince others to one's own position.

III.7.3 Recommendations on how to support the development of proactive competencies in a person who achieves his goals and demonstrates real success:

- assign proactive students to perform tasks by preparing and implementing a project;

- assign students roles that allow them to develop leadership qualities, such as responsibility, leadership, risk-taking, consistency;

- introduce elements of classes related to communication - for example, analysis and consequences of spoken sentences, their understanding by the recipients of the message;

- introduce elements of rhetoric in teaching classes.

IV. Examples of interactive, activating teaching methods with proactive students

A separate chapter is devoted to a detailed description of some activation methods that are most appropriate for working with proactive students.

IV.1 Characteristics of Generation Z in relation to the selection of proactive teaching methods

The students you will be dealing with are the so-called Generation Z. Knowledge of the characteristics of this generation is important from the point of view of selecting proactive teaching methods.

Generation "Z" are people born from the mid or late 1990s to today. This generation is one of two parts created by dividing the so-called Millennials generation into the "Y" and "Z" generations. Another term for this generation is Generation "C", derived from the English words: *connected, communicating, content-centric, computerial, community-oriented, always clicking (still clicking).*

Generation "Z" lives in the world of technology, telephones, computers and the Internet. They are characterized by easy and free use of modern technologies and the ability to function simultaneously in the real and virtual world. Constant access to and use of technology means that representatives of Generation Z have problems with verbal communication and establishing personal contacts in the real world, although the results of numerous studies show that face-to-face meetings are still the most important and desired method of interacting with peers. For them, social networks are an extension of these connections.

The widespread presence of technology from the first years of life of Generation Z means that they are characterized by a kind of multitasking. "Z" people can do several things at the same time, although they have trouble focusing on just one thing.

Growing up in the world of the Internet means that "Z" checks every doubt on the Internet, to which he usually has constant access. He can search, he knows how to navigate, he has no problems with virtual communication. "Z" can also filter information

perfectly. Growing up in a world of countless information and choice options, Generation Z children had to develop the ability to quickly sort and categorize what is valuable and interesting from all the rest.

The ability to quickly search and filter information is of great importance for using new technologies due to data overload. Not only can "Z" find their way in the information chaos better than previous generations, but they also consciously use top-lists, rankings and content curators, i.e. people or websites that segregate and search for the best, most valuable information and package it.

Representatives of Generation Z can concentrate extremely well when they are very interested in something. In such situations, they are able to deeply expand their knowledge by reading internet forums, thematic websites, searching for video materials, or joining global communities focused on a given topic.

Generation Z is taught optimal time management from an early age. Overloaded curricula and participation in many extra-curricular activities make students feel under time pressure, hence the need for quick access to technology and information.

Z is a demanding generation, demanding a lot from the world around them. They demand quick and constant feedback in order to develop.

To sum up, the positive features of the Z/C Generation are:
- ➢ realistic and materialistic attitude
- ➢ liberal, progressive in the political and cultural sphere
- ➢ "digital natives" - always connected and clicking - Generation C means: connected, communicating, computerized, community-oriented, clicking
- ➢ they have a set of their own digital devices that they use about 6 hours a day
- ➢ they are looking for creative work
- ➢ have problems understanding long and complicated texts
- ➢ prefer image-sound communication
- ➢ process a lot of information in parallel
- ➢ prefer short-term learning, experimentation, multitasking, quick results
- ➢ they invent new applications of device functions - they treat new technologies creatively

> ➤ They treat mobile devices as very personal items.

In order to enable Generation Z to function in society and develop optimally, the following competences, defined as **competences of the future,** should be supported and developed:

> ➤ self-management
> ➤ creativity
> ➤ critical thinking
> ➤ communication
> ➤ cooperation
> ➤ ability to organize your work
> ➤ learning ability.

A teacher working with Generation Z is required to:

> ➤ clear definition of work requirements and rules
> ➤ compliance with established deadlines and work rules
> ➤ quick response and availability
> ➤ individual contacts with the student and constant readiness to care and help
> ➤ motivating skills
> ➤ flexibility, readiness to compromise, openness to suggestions
> ➤ empathy, understanding, kindness, patience, friendly attitude towards students.

For Generation Z, a teacher should be:

> ➤ designer of the educational process
> ➤ organizer
> ➤ educator
> ➤ tutor
> ➤ activator.

IV.2 What determines the choice of activation methods and techniques?

To choose the most effective activation method, we should take into account the following factors:

➢ the goal we want to achieve
➢ stage of group development
➢ level of openness and security in the group
➢ the level of complexity of the content that students are expected to master
➢ specificity of the subject taught
➢ intellectual and psychophysical level of students, their age and maturity
➢ teacher's experience and level of digital competences
➢ students' current knowledge and skills, including the level of their digital competences
➢ the time we have
➢ teaching base, including equipment and software
➢ teaching material.

IV.3 Examples of activation methods

a) **Flipped classroom:**
➢ the teacher defines the topic or names the problem
➢ the teacher creates his own teaching materials or uses available ones
➢ students become familiar with the materials - they prepare for classes
➢ during classes, there is a discussion based on the materials learned, and then a specific problem is solved.

b) **WebQuest**
➢ WebQuest involves students solving a task based on instructions posted on the website
➢ students work mainly based on materials recommended or prepared by the teacher
➢ WebQuest structure:
 - introduction
 - task

- process
- sources
- evaluation
- conclusion.

c) Anticipatory teaching

➢ the teacher defines the topic and informs what the students' work will involve

➢ students look for materials on their own - individually or in groups (they can, for example, conduct interviews, query sources)

➢ thanks to searching, students solve the problem set by the teacher

➢ at the end of the work, students present their results on the forum.

d) Student project

➢ the teacher determines the general scope of the problem

➢ students choose a specific topic and formulate a problem

➢ students look for materials on their own - individually or in groups (they can conduct interviews, query sources)

➢ students solve the problem they set by searching

➢ the teacher plays the role of coordinator.

Work on a student project can be divided into 4 phases:

Introductory phase
- defining the problem
- division into teams
- substantive analysis - collecting information on a topic related to the project.

Planning phase
- resource analysis
- analysis of the strengths of group members
- developing a schedule.

Implementation phase
- implementation of individual tasks
- recording results
- collecting conclusions - preparing a report.

Summary phase
- presentation of results
- evaluation
- reflection, discussion on the results.

e) Discussion

The aim of this method is to develop the ability to listen to each other, formulate arguments, put forward a thesis, present and defend one's position, and draw conclusions.

Discussion techniques:
- ➢ **"for and against" debate**
- ➢ **panel debate**
- ➢ **Oxford debate**
- ➢ **scored discussion**
- ➢ **metaplan**

It is a method of graphically presenting the course of a discussion, during which students analyze a given issue and look for a common, optimal solution before making a decision. This method promotes the development of the ability to analyze and evaluate facts, judgments, and proposed solutions by the opposing party. This method prepares you to present your own point of view, argue and defend it. Working with the metaplan proceeds in this way: the teacher presents the problem, divides the class into groups of 4-5 people, who, after a group discussion, prepare a poster illustrating this discussion.

f) Analyzing and solving problems:

➢ Decision tree

It is a graphical decision-making method. Thanks to it, we can consider: what are the possibilities of solving a given problem, what may be the consequences of adopting a specific variant, what are the values recognized by the person making the decision.

This method teaches how to make choices in order to become aware of their consequences, which should be consistent with accepted values.

At the beginning, the teacher prepares a tree diagram and gives a problem to solve. Students enter various possible solutions into the diagram, completing subsequent levels of the tree, and then summarize the results on the forum under the supervision of the teacher.

➢ Brainstorming

This method is also called the "idea exchange" and the "dream factory". It involves creating as many different ideas as possible in a relatively short period of time, leading to solving a problem. Ideas can be unusual, surprising and bizarre. All submitted ideas are written down on a large cardboard, then they are checked, evaluated and those that are realistic to be implemented are selected. The discussion ends with a joint summary and drawing conclusions.

➢ Case study

A case study involves analyzing specific individual problems in order to learn more and better understand certain processes. We can use a case study, for example, during a lesson on road safety, to evaluate historical figures or to analyze educational problems. This method allows, on the one hand, to look at a given problem from the point of view of an individual person, and on the other hand, it allows to generalize the conclusions drawn from individual experience to the entire topic discussed.

➢ SWOT analysis

This is a method that helps you assess the situation and make the right decision. Its name comes from the first letters of English words meaning: Strengths - strengths; Weaknesses - weaknesses; Opportunities - chances; Threats.

In this method, the teacher prepares a SWOT diagram on a sheet of paper and then provides the issue that will be the subject of analysis. The class is divided into 4 groups, each of them considers a different issue:

- strengths of the problem

- weaknesses of the problem

- benefits

- possible threats.

The results of the groups' work are analyzed together and documented according to a scheme.

➢ **Mind map**

A mind map is also called a "brain map" or "memory map". It is a graphical way of recording information that organizes messages and helps find connections between them. When developing the concept, you can use drawings, symbols, clippings, short phrases and slogans. Thanks to this method, we can obtain information about existing ideas and knowledge on a given topic, check acquired knowledge and skills, solve problems, plan actions, and define concepts. Collecting thoughts is done by noting down associations.