COMPETENCE BASED LEARNING

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Society requires skilled people and therefore education plays a key role in society. The content of education depends on the demand of society. First of all, the national government defines the requirements for education and the national government is responsible for monitoring the system to assess if schools and universities meet the demands and requirements. Secondly, Higher (tertiary) education will have preliminary requirements to enrol students of secondary education. Finally, the labour market has its wishes for all levels of vocational or professional education: it needs competent employees for all levels. Because of the worldwide dynamic development, education should continuously consider the content and methodology of its courses. Teachers become entrepreneurs and mediators in information and achievement of competencies. The learner is the centre of the teaching and coaching activities.

Stoas Professional University developed a new and unique approach based on the Stoas tradition of learner centred education, integration of Practice &Theory and the integration of ‘head’, ‘heart’ and ‘hands’. The new approach is called ‘Competence Based Learning.

Last year we did a project at your University about project-approached learning. A step forwards to competence based learning. Using practical experience for students to create a challenging study situation.

Both developments are interesting to mention. That is the content of my lecture.

Steps to develop a curriculum for Competence Based Learning at Stoas University.

To develop the competence-based curriculum to facilitate the learner to achieve the required competencies to be successful in his/her future profession some steps can be distinguished.

1. Identification of relevant skills, knowledge and attitudes of graduates from the point of view of the labour market.
2. Definition of competencies.
3. Definition of Professional Situations. To work successfully in these Professional Situations requires the defined competencies. Roles and anecdotes are described to clarify the situations and the competencies.
4. Definition of criteria to assess the achievement of competencies. A protocol for behaviour to perform the competency is developed.
5. Development of assessments.
6. Development of a clear system with description of requirements, opportunities for students.
7. Development of an intake methodology and system to recognise earlier achieved competencies.
8. Development of further co-operation with stakeholders to create ‘on the job learning situations’ for the learners.
9. Commitment and training of staff. Although this step is mentioned as number 9, the process of refreshing and training of staff is a continuous process.

**ORGANISATION**

The content of the curriculum is based on three pillars
1. Supportive education and training. Learners are trained inside school to get skills, attitudes and knowledge necessary for the achievement of competencies. For Stoas it is more or less the traditional way of teaching based on integration of practical training and theoretical training inside university and SRL (Self Responsible Learning).
2. On the job learning. Because of the definition of competencies¹, the best place to learn is in the reality of the profession and society. Nevertheless, the strength of inside school training is efficiency, a specialisation of the trainer. During the process, a strong discussion developed whether Internal “on-the-job-learning” could be considered as a real professional situation or not. It is a contradiction in terms. Nevertheless, it is possible that the inside school situation can be considered as a professional situation, because of the selection of limited but relevant conditions that reflect the real situation. In this overview we present both situations:
   a. Internal on-the-job-learning: Simulation situations (like role plays / micro lessons focused on special skills); school farm and school labs (practical instructions); case study
   b. External Internal on-the-job-learning: The reality of the job is the situation in which the learner learns. Example: Vocational schools, enterprises, NGO’s etc
3. Study career guidance: The learner needs to be guided in the process of learning, in the selection of professional situations, in answering the question how and were to achieve the required competencies, in awareness of personal strengths and weaknesses and in self reflection.

**CURRICULUM**

The new curriculum is based on Professional Situations (PS). In the context of each situation the employee needs several competencies to be successful in the formulated situation. Within the professional situation (PS) the learner can achieve this competency. For several situations could be useful to train the learner ‘outside’ the real professional situation in a ‘safe’ and “semi-real” environment. Therefore, supportive education is part of the curriculum.

1. Development professional expertise
2. Practical instruction
3. Activating didactics
4. Self responsible learning (SRL)
5. Counselling and coaching learners
6. Research, advice and extension services in the ‘Green sector’
7. Co-operation and organisation

¹ Mix of skills, attitudes and knowledge that makes the employee or graduate successful in society and his/her profession (Klarus, 2003)
8. Life long learning in the ‘Green sector’
9. Development and design of teaching or training materials
10. Use and improvement of personal qualifications
11. Assessment, monitoring and evaluation
12. Learning and behavioural difficulties
13. In-house training (Human resource management)
14. Marketing and Public Relations
15. Policy and governance in the ‘Green sector’
16. Quality control and chain-management
17. Management in the ‘Green sector’ on company level.
18. Professional coaching on a therapeutic basis
19. Arts and design
20. Study guidance and counselling

CONCLUSION

The last 4 years Stoas has developed a new curriculum based on the requirements of the labour market, aiming to offer efficient training and to graduate competent employees. The innovation is based on a long lasting tradition of integration of skills, attitudes and knowledge. Also the strong Dutch co-operation between education, companies, government and extension-services forms an important foundation for the new development. The new curriculum needs expertises from both staff and students respectively to guide the students and to follow the study paths responsibly. The electronic learning environment (BlackBoard) offers useful tools to communicate in case the learner and coach / teachers are not on the same location. The implementation of the new approach is going on and will be monitored and assessed carefully. Staff and students are involved. Last but not least, the competence-based approach is an excellent answer to the Bologna agreements aiming to create a transparent and transferable system of higher education. The system of definition of professional situations, with necessary competencies, and the criteria for assessment is an adequate and relevant answer to meet the European aims for higher education to develop a transparent and transferable system.

AN EXPERIENCE…

A project study about milk in Cluj.

Students are involved when the real situation is in scope. Last year we had the opportunity to work with a group of students of the University of Cluj. The subject of the project study was: “Milk, from cow to consumer”. During some days we did some research in the field and after that some analyse was done at the University. The project ended with the awareness that milk quality and the different handling steps are very important for producer and consumer. In this chain many factors can influence the results of milk quality and milk price.

Students were very enthusiastic!