

EERA: Regional Ateliers from the Viewpoint of Educational Vocational Institutions

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02 SES 07 B, Improvement of Cooperation and Practice: Conditions and the Example "Regional Ateliers"

Paper Session

Time: 2011-09-14
16:45-18:15

Room: K 23/27

Chair: M'Hamed Dif

Contribution

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Recent developments in vocational education (i.e. competence-based education) make that learning in authentic learning environments becomes increasingly important. Learning in authentic learning environments prepares students better on their future role in the labour market and furthermore, students that start in their first job will experience less teething problems (Wesselink, 2010; Biemans et al., 2004; Biemans et al., 2009). And authentic learning environments are expected to increase the motivation of students to finish their study programmes (Wesselink, 2010; Biemans et al., 2004; Biemans et al., 2009). Authentic learning environments exist in many manifestations and these have increasingly found a prominent place in vocational education (Herrington and Herrington, 2006). In creating authentic learning environments it is tried to break away from traditional, teacher-centred approaches in vocational education, and the aim is to create learning environments where students are motivated to learn in rich, relevant and real-world contexts (Herrington and Herrington, 2006).

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In the Netherlands institutions for agricultural (vocational) education (pre-vocational, senior vocational, university for applied sciences and university level) are increasingly making use of a form of authentic learning environments which are called 'regional ateliers'. Regional ateliers try to enlarge the amount of authenticity in study programmes by means of letting both students and teachers participate in realistic assignments that are relevant for the region. The main aim of regional ateliers is to face complex geophysical and societal issues (e.g. reducing CO2 emission, social and economic decline) on a regional level. In the regional atelier a relevant group of stakeholders from government, private institutions, entrepreneurs, NGOs, inhabitants, research and education cooperate in real life authentic assignments to realize sustainability on regional level (Foorthuis, 2005). Regional ateliers are unique because students and teachers are cooperating with a variety of stakeholders in the region, the assignments that have to be done contribute to regional development and educational institutions from different levels of agricultural vocational education cooperate.

All institutions for agricultural vocational education in the Netherlands are participating to some extent in regional ateliers. Some educational institutions pretend they are participating in regional ateliers, while other institutions hesitate by making that claim while they are actually participating; it is not clear what is meant by participating in regional ateliers and this causes confusion. There is a need to distinguish between educational institutions that participate to a large extent and institutions that do to a lesser extent; especially to manage the mutual expectations (between the different stakeholders and the educational institutions and between the educational institutions). Therefore the main goal of this contribution is to distinguish between levels of participation of educational institutions in regional ateliers. First question therefore is: 1) what means participating in regional ateliers for educational institutions and 2) what are the consequences for educational institutions if they participate in regional ateliers?

Method

To get more clarity about what for educational institutions participating in regional ateliers means and what the consequences are of participating in regional ateliers an explorative research approach is chosen. In a series of focus group sessions experts, teachers and other stakeholders involved in regional ateliers are questioned for their opinion about regional ateliers. This combination of experienced people and experts (15 in total) met three times. The first time the character of the meeting was an open round; everybody was asked for their own opinion. Two researcher made a summary out of the ideas and sent this summary to the participants. In the second session the participants provided comments on the preliminary description. The researchers collected the comments and delivered a second version. Again they sent it to the participants and in a final meeting the participants agreed with the final description.

Expected Outcomes

The result of the focus group sessions is a conceptual framework in which from the viewpoint of an educational institution different levels of participating in regional ateliers is described. The conceptual framework consists of a matrix with on the vertical axis the consequences for educational institutions described on the following levels: regional level (compare it with the macro level), the meso/school level, micro/programme level and nano/student level. The horizontal axis describes the different forms of participating in regional ateliers; in the less extensive form of participating educational institutions make use of assignment located in the region and these assignments have one commissioner. The results of the assignments are useful for the commissioner but do not have direct influence on regional level. The most extensive form of participating is to let students do assignments in which several commissioners are involved and the results of these assignments contribute to the regional transition; transition to reach more

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sustainability e.g. Important question for discussion is to what extent students at the different levels in agricultural vocational education really experience the assignments in the most extensive form of participation as being authentic?

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