

'Research-Ability' as Curriculum Goals in Vocational Bachelor Programmes

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'Research-Ability' as Curriculum Goals in Vocational Bachelor Programmes

Paper Proposal

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With professional practice becoming increasingly knowledge-based, complex, and accountable to society (e.g. American Nursing Association, 2010; Payne, 2014), universities of applied sciences are searching for educational methods to better learn high-order skills, such as critical thinking, reasoning, or handling complex knowledge.

In the current 'supercomplex' world, having a substantial level of high-order and generic skills is important to all professional practice (Barnett, 2000). The quality of the answers vocational professionals provide to current day professional problems rely on these type of skills developed. With the answers defining the quality of the work of professionals, learning high-order skills is essential for the quality of professional work in the current societies of Western European countries (Brew, 2007).

So far the question remains as to what particular goals are aimed for in higher vocational educational programmes. Many educational programmes strive to better connect research and teaching (or implement research into teaching) (Griffioen, Boerma, Engelbert, & Van der Linden, 2013). However, there is no broad perspective or knowledge on the actual choices made, especially in the built up from the first to last year of bachelor curricula. One recent empirical study considered the learning-goals of single educational courses in Belgian higher education (Verburgh, Schouteden, & Elen, 2012), but did not consider the curriculum perspective. The curriculum perspective has been considered in more conceptual models, such as the Research Skill Development Framework (Willison & O'Regan, 2007), which considers five cumulative levels of research competence. Or the Research Development Model (Evans, 2012), which considers the researcher development through the development of attitude, behaviour and intellect.

The current study considers the development of so called 'research-ability' in curricula for future professionals from the context of Dutch Universities of Applied Sciences, which train future professionals into becoming 'research-able professionals'. 'Research-ability' is defined as 'the competence to systematic answer questions that lead to knowledge relevant for the professional field'. Research-ability is considered to consist of three related competences: research disposition, the application of existing knowledge from research and practice, and research ability (Expertgroep Protocol, 2014). Previous research has shown how the connection of research and education differs between disciplines (Neumann, 1992; Noser, Manakyan, & Tanner, 1996). The focus is on the learning-goals of individual modules, the cumulation throughout the curricula, and disciplinary differences.

Method

Research Questions

What are the learning-goals related to 'research-ability' in vocational bachelor programmes?
What are disciplinary differences in learning-goals?

Sample

The written curricula of all modules of 70 bachelor programmes of 7 faculties of the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences (AUAS) were included. Written curricula mostly

include the learning-goals achieved, their underpinning, as well as the order and didactical methods applied (Glatthorn, Bosschee, Whitehead, & Bosschee, 2016).

Analysis

The written study guides are analysed applying the taxonomy and method by Verburgh et al. (2012). The taxonomy consists of six research-related goals, which were grounded developed. The six research-related goals are:

1. Acquiring knowledge from results of research;
2. Gaining insight into methodological and theoretical underpinnings of research;
3. Development of particular practical research skills;
4. Development of the competence to become a researcher;
5. Development of a critical attitude towards information, knowledge and knowledge construction;
6. Development of a curiosity towards evolutions in the discipline.

In the first phase the existing taxonomy will be evaluated against the definition of 'research-ability' as aforementioned, and adapted when needed.

In the second phase a small selection of study guide texts will be half-open coded with the coding structure of Verburgh et al. (2012). When new research-related goals are found, the taxonomy will be adjusted accordingly (Charmaz, 2006).

In the third phase the finalized taxonomy will be applied to all study guide texts. The coding structure in all phases consist of 0: no indication of presence, 1: some indication of presence, and 2: clear indication of presence of research-related goal.

After coding, and to answer the research questions, the codes per educational programme (question 1), the codes per study year (question 2), and the codes per discipline (question 3) will be added. The weight of each individual module in relation to the weight of the full 4 year programme will be accounted for. All results will be visualized into spider webs consisting of six axes, one for each research goal.

Preliminary Results

All programmes of the AUAS pay attention to the development of research ability. Interdisciplinary differences are more prominent compared to intradisciplinary differences and in some disciplines the intradisciplinary differences are more prominent than in others. Curiosity (learninggoal 6) is not present maybe because it is difficult to draw measurable learning objectives concerning Curiosity.

This empirical insight will infuse the debate on what to aim for concerning 'research-ability' in future professionals. Furthermore, this qualitative study will yield results which can be later on quantified in order to test against measures as student satisfaction, study success, and thesis grades.

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