

Professional and Practice-based Learning

Volume 18

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Professional and practice-based learning brings together international research on the individual development of professionals and the organisation of professional life and educational experiences. It complements the Springer journal *Vocations and Learning: Studies in vocational and professional education*.

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- understanding how learning experiences and educational processes might best be aligned or integrated to support professional learning.

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Editors

Enhancing Teaching and Learning in the Dutch Vocational Education System

Reforms Enacted

 Springer

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Series Editors' Foreword

Dutch Vocational Education and Training Book

One of the ambitions for this book series is to understand how the development of occupational professional capacities can be best secured. Whilst much of the focus of contributions to this series is upon particular kinds of experiences to realise that development, such as those in work settings and/or educational institutions, it is also important to understand how educational systems are organised and enacted to achieve those outcomes. That understanding needs to account for the range of factors that shapes the manifestation of those educational systems in different countries and how they are transformed over time as their purposes, the institutional arrangements and the imperatives ordering and organising them change. In this volume, the development, and transformation, of the Dutch vocational education system is subjected to such an analysis and from a range of perspectives. Like many others, that system has been subject to waves of reforms in the last three decades. These reforms have led to a particular form of and approach to vocational education premised upon national sentiments, institutions and preferences. Hence, it is quite differentiated from other systems. So, what constitutes the vocational education system in the Netherlands is quite distinct from that over the border in Germany, for instance. Also, the kinds and sets of arrangements which might be found in France, another nearby country, are also quite distinct from those in the Netherlands. So, the detailed examination within this edited volume provides accounts of the particular circumstances in which the vocational education system was initially founded and how it has progressed through government and private sector influences and is also shaped by nationally distinct sentiments such as 'freedom of education' and the strong emphasis on regional or local governance. It is also a system that needs to be able to respond to what is afforded through other education systems and social institutions.

Necessarily, the first contributions set out the context of and form of the provision of vocational education in the Netherlands as it is currently manifested. Given

its country-specific and unique form, much of which is founded on providing pathways through different kinds of education provisions, it is helpful that this system is explained and elaborated first up. Like many others, this system is not always easy to understand from the perspective of the outsiders who may use their own systems for reference points. Then, across a section associated with structural factors associated with organisations and policies and then one focused on the educational programmes and approaches to teaching and the provision of educational experiences, the particular qualities of this vocational education system are elaborated. As befits the project of this book, the contributions reflect the range of factors that influence the form and enactment of this vocational education system and also how it has been reformed and transformed in recent times. These contributions capture something of the diversity of those factors. They extend from changing models of governance in the quest to respond to emerging requirements of the workforce to addressing the needs of the diversity of students that engage in this system with a strong emphasis on pathways to higher forms of vocational education and also higher education. So, as consistent with many other vocational education systems, heterogeneity of student body, diversity of disciplines to be taught, a range of levels of educational achievement and expectations and outcomes are evident in what is discussed. Yet, here there are particular emphases on pathways, localised contributions, engagements with workplaces and other educational systems that make this system quite country specific.

In this way, the contributions to this edited monograph make important additions to our understanding of the way that vocational and professional education is enacted and provide an account of a national system which is complex and nationally and situationally responsive yet is distinct from models that are more frequently the subject of examination and elaboration. All of this is helpful because whilst models from some countries are seen as being the ideal and need to be adopted elsewhere, here, alternatives are offered and an elaboration of why it is not possible, helpful or realistic to impose a model of vocational education taken from somewhere else and impose it upon a nation, workforce and communities that have may have quite distinct premises from those which that model might have been derived. It is these issues of understanding this nation's vocational education system and its particular structures, approach and modes of governance that, beyond the description of the Dutch vocational education system, permit this book to make its important contributions.

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Preface

Dutch Vocational Education System and Reform

In the last three decades, the Dutch vocational education system has undergone significant waves of reform driven by global imperatives, national concerns and governmental policy goals. Together, and like elsewhere, the focuses for these successive periods of reform can be seen as being directed to generating a more industry-responsive,¹ locally accountable² and competence-based vocational education system. However, each wave of reforms has had particular emphases and directed to achieve particular policy outcomes. Moreover, these reforms were and are currently not merely versions of what had occurred or is occurring elsewhere. They were also shaped by specific national imperatives, sentiments and localised concerns arising from the particular institutional arrangements and specific community needs. For instance, the concept of ‘freedom of education’ is almost unique to the Netherlands, and its implications are that government sets the goals and localised responses are required to address these goals in ways that meet a broad range of interests. Yet, given the extent of these reforms and the demands they have made and changes they have brought about, it is timely to carefully appraise their enactment and outcomes, as they represent a particular set of policy directives that are advanced through a national vocational education system with elements that are common to other such systems, yet also are quite unique. Either way, they represent important and illustrative cases of vocational educational system reform, which are worthy of greater understanding and also from which lessons for considerations by vocational education systems and vocational educators and administrators might well arise.

The reforms of the Netherlands vocational education system in the late 1980s and those across the 1990s largely focussed on structural and institutional

¹ Here industry refers to both the production of goods and provisions of services, in both the public and private sectors.

² Locally accountable refers to meeting the needs of employers in particular locations.

arrangements. This included the introduction of qualification frameworks and competency-based training and assessment, which set this sector of education apart from others. These reforms were far-reaching and disruptive to existing practices within Dutch vocational education institutions and for the practices of those who work and teach in them. Earlier reforms were the subject of critical review in the edited monograph *Unravelling Policy, Power, Process and Performance* (Nijhof & Van Esch, 2004). This volume brought a range of perspectives to the appraisal of such reforms, as the title suggests.

However, the reforms over the last two decades have been of a quite different kind. They have focussed more primarily on the enactment of these earlier reforms at the local level, where they are being implemented, and extend to those focussed on refining and even revising some of the earlier initiatives. For instance, there has been a greater emphasis on the quality of learning and teaching, particularly as they are directed towards securing vocational competence (i.e. vakmanschap). Yet, the qualification structures, as they relate to vocational courses, were revised and refined in the first decade of the new century with the aim of making them more grounded in and aligned with conception of competence as a more holistic account of what purposes vocational education should be directed (i.e. instead of rows of isolated facts, skills).

The focus of the enactment of these reforms over the last two decades was at the local or regional level, including generating the goals and processes at the individual vocational education institute, and course levels. Moreover, these reforms have extended the reach of teaching and learning processes into Dutch workplaces, and the engagement of a provision of work-supported or work-based learning (WBL) vocational education, which is not just a version of the German dual system. Instead, it retains a principal focus of experiences in the school whilst reaching into and providing students with experiences in workplaces. For instance, there is a concern about how to provide authentic occupational experiences in vocational education schools. Then, there has also come fresh imperatives associated with Dutch language and mathematics competence in young people arising from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). All of these imperatives have placed particular emphases on the qualities of teachers in vocational schools and supervisors in workplaces. These focuses are not only quite distinct, from earlier waves of reforms, but are also quite different and even contrary to reforms occurring in some other countries.

Yet, and importantly, what has occurred in the Dutch vocational education system stands as a significant case of reform, resistance, accommodation and transformation that has national, regional, local and personal dimensions, but also offers lessons for vocational educational systems elsewhere. Consequently, understanding the intentions behind these reforms (i.e. what problems were they seeking to address, the ways they were enacted, how they have been experienced and embraced and implemented by teachers and experienced by students and the degree by which the intentions for these reforms have been realised) provides a timely and potentially unique premises for all of these elements to be explored and understood further. So,

although the kind of imperatives referred to above have common resonance across a range of countries and are influencing vocational education systems globally, how all of this plays out is still premised upon the particular initiatives, histories, institutions and practices within each nation state and as manifested locally.

Rather than being merely instances of different stages of development, what is emphasised within the contributions to this edited volume is that there are particular forms of vocational education that arise from particular societal needs, sentiments, institutions and moments. So, although global agencies and even European processes are urging uniformity, such moves stand to comprise vocational education systems that are best fitted to the needs of particular nation states and those who live and work and study within them.

This monograph is directed to accounting for and illuminating the processes, outcomes and dimensions that have comprised the enactment of reforms in Dutch vocational education. Moreover, it seeks to utilise the significant body of research that has been undertaken in the Netherlands over the last two decades in the field of vocational education. This body of work is well placed to provide informed and rich insights that can illuminate these issues and outcomes. This monograph is also founded on some key premises.

Principally, vocational education is held to be an important and worthwhile project for developing the capacities required for meeting societal needs and wants (e.g. social and economic goals) and assisting individuals identify with, become competent in and sustain occupational competence across lengthening working lives (Billett, 2011). Hence, the scope of vocational education extends from guiding individuals to identify to what occupations they are suited and assisting them develop their capacities to effectively practice that occupation, as Dewey (1916) proposed, through to the need to sustain employability across lengthening working lives. In this way, vocational education is concerned with learning about, for and across working lives for all. It follows that national, institutional and personal investments for this project warrant effective practices and policies. Yet, generally, as an education sector, it can suffer from low status, particularly in programmes at the lower qualification levels, negative societal sentiments and often unhelpful regulation and is inadequately supported by appropriate educational practices. However, because of the broad nature of vocational education provisions in the Netherlands (i.e. low status profile courses as well as professional studies that are part of intermediate and higher education), there is a range of esteem measures directed associated with this tertiary education sector that might be absent from some other systems.

In elaborating these issues, this edited monograph offers two major sections with five and six contributions each that address the key theses outlined above and that need to be responsive to the premises outlined above. Part II is on policies and organisations, whereas Part III is on programmes and curricula. The book commences with an overview chapter by the editors that sets the scene, describing the characteristics and participation, the roots and history and the fundamental tensions of the Dutch vocational education system.

The chapters in Part II – Policies and Organisations – highlight the structures and frameworks that have directed vocational education in the Netherlands since the

1990s. Onstenk and Duvekot (Chap. 2) illustrate the role of vocational education at the secondary and higher levels of adult education and lifelong learning (LLL) in the Netherlands. They elaborate policies and traditions and hold that whilst traditionally the emphasis was on what is referred to as formal and non-formal learning in organised settings (adult education), currently there is growing awareness of the importance of learning in the workplace. In their chapter on public-private partnerships, van der Meer, van den Toren and Lie (Chap. 3) focus on how representatives of business and labour traditionally play a role in the definition of qualifications and the access to workplace learning in the Netherlands. They claim that innovation and labour markets differ widely across regions and sectors and present examples of how national policies and local schools need to cope with this diversity. Westerhuis and van der Meer (Chap. 4) elaborate on the developments and practices of cooperation at the local level. In analysing this crucial characteristic of Dutch vocational education, they emphasise its enactment. In their Chap. 5, van de Venne, Honingh and van Genugten discuss issues of governance of schools and colleges in relation to educational quality. In doing so, they also refer to the major transformations in school governance and the increased autonomy of schools and school boards in the Netherlands during the past decades. In the final chapter in Part II (Chap. 6), van der Klink and Streumer discuss the professional development of teachers in vocational education. They state that, thus far, human resource policies have been acknowledged as important for safeguarding teachers' employability and professional growth, but institutional policy plans have not been implemented fully in practice.

Part III – Educational Programmes: Teaching and Learning– discusses the enactment of vocational education at meso- and micro-levels in programmes and curricula. It commences with Chap. 7 that focuses on identity and career learning as aspect of vocational education. Meijers, Kuijpers, Lengelle and Winters state that a strong career-learning environment is absent in most schools for vocational education in the Netherlands and suggest directions for change. In the next Chap. 8, De Bruijn and Bakker address the positioning of occupational knowledge contents from the perspective of the curriculum in vocational education. In overview, they observe a pendulum movement of attention to knowledge in the form of school subject knowledge to an approach in which skills and attitudes received more attention. Chapter 9 engages with competence-based vocational curricula at the school-work boundary. Westerhuis and Zitter elaborate on curriculum development issues in Dutch vocational education with respect to practices of interlinking various learning environments to develop full vocational competence. In Chap. 10, Harms, Hoeve and Den Boer discuss the pedagogical strategies being used in contemporary Dutch vocational education. In doing so, they also show the crucial position of teachers and the different strains put upon them. Chapter 11 analyses the developments and issues with regard to the integration of workplace learning in Dutch vocational education. In this chapter, Onstenk shows how workplace learning has become a considerable part of the curriculum in most vocational programmes, whereas at the same time, the value and quality of workplace learning remain topics of great debate and much experimentation. The final Chap. 12 of Part III addresses issues of assessment. Baartman and Gulikers review the developments in assessment

practices in Dutch vocational education in the past 15 years trying to describe how schools and colleges (re)developed their assessment practices to address the various changes, through a combination of addressing changing policy and scientific research.

As an end piece, Billett (Chap. 13) concludes with a chapter that analyses the features and developments of the Dutch vocational education system from the perspective of a general framework to understand vocational education systems.

In these ways, the book aims to give an overview of developments in the practice of vocational education in the Netherlands since the beginning of this century. It opens up Dutch vocational education as a case study to an international audience. Developments in Dutch vocational education may be recognisable for vocational education in other countries. This is particularly true, whereas the casuistry is accessible on the basis of research conducted. The editors, therefore, hope that the book provides a rich source for learning.

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 25th September 2016

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Glossary

AD (associate degree)	two-year vocational education programmes in particular for MBO graduates at Level 4 (or sometimes Level 3).
BBL	a work-based (i.e. apprenticeship) pathway within MBO.
BOL	a school-based pathway within MBO.
Compulsory Education	full-time education is compulsory between the ages of 5 and 16 years. That is, all minors are obliged to participate in full-time education for 12 full-time school years. For young people aged between 16 and 18 years, education is also compulsory, until they obtain a starting qualification. Young adults between 18 and 23 years old without a starting qualification are assisted in securing one. For young adults aged up to 27 years and who do not have a starting qualification and/or who apply for social welfare, schooling is also compulsory, until they acquire a starting qualification.
HAVO	general secondary education, a five-year programme; pupils enter at age 12, comprising a lower stage (years 1–3) and an upper stage (years 4–5). Graduates with a HAVO diploma are allowed to enter HBO or year 5 of VWO.
HBO	vocational education as part of higher education (professional bachelor studies), in which students enter after completing HAVO or MBO, Level 4; positioned at ISCED Level 5.

Hogescholen	universities of applied sciences: offering HBO (professional bachelor, professional master, AD); also having research departments.
KBB (Knowledge Organisations for Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market)	sectoral organisations, which until 2015 were responsible for making qualification profiles and registering learning companies.
Law on Secondary Education (“Mammoetwet”)	it was passed in the 1960s and regulates secondary education with three general programmes at subsequent levels and three (full-time) vocational programmes at subsequent levels.
MBO	vocational education at intermediate level; students enter at age 16, with programmes at four levels, Level 1 and entrance and qualification Levels 2–4; positioned at ISCED Level 3 and 4.
OCW	the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.
Qualification Profiles	the attainment targets for vocational education are formulated in terms of competencies related to occupational practice. For MBO qualification profiles for all programmes are arranged in a qualification structure for occupations. For HBO qualification profiles are formulated for each programme (professional bachelor or master).
ROCs	multi-sectoral regional vocational colleges.
SBB	(Cooperation Organisation for Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market) the national organisation that since 2015 has been responsible for making qualification profiles and registering learning companies.
Starting Qualification	a diploma of a programme in secondary education that is by law defined to be the minimum diploma for youngsters to leave the education system. This can be either a diploma HAVO/VWO or MBO-Level 2 (or higher).
VMBO	lower secondary education; pupils enter at age 12, with 4 year programmes, of which the first 2 years focus on general education topics and the third and fourth years are either general or pre-vocational, depending on the students’ pathway. Graduates with a VMBO diploma are allowed to enter MBO. Graduates from the general VMBO programme are allowed to

	enter the upper stage (that is year 4) of HAVO if they have high marks.
VWO	pre-university education, comprising a six-year programme that pupils enter at age 12, comprising a lower stage (years 1–3) and an upper stage (years 4–6).
WEB	the legislation on vocational education and adult education was enacted in 1996 and regulates all vocational education at intermediate level and adult education.
WO	academic education (bachelor- and master-level studies) provided by academic universities; positioned at ISCED Level 6.

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