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https://foqus.h5mag.com/systemwide_analyses_cocreation/cover

Tine Aelter, Aina Callaert, Hilde Sels, Els Van de Walle – with thanks to Pieter Soete

Intro

In the Flemish Quality Assurance system the system-wide analyses is an initiative coordinated by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders to share good practices in the higher education community. A system-wide analysis is organised yearly about a certain topic. Last year it was co-creation with the professional field. The system-wide analyses leads to a publication in which the insights of the project group is shared with the wider community of interested. Cf. the NVAO website for more information on the System-wide analyses:

<https://www.nvao.net/en/procedures/flanders/system-wide-analysis> .

Last year 6 universities of applied sciences participated in the system-wide analyses about co-creation with the professional field:

- PXL (Tine Aelter)
- Antwerp Maritime Academy (Ilse Bogaert)
- Erasmushogeschool Brussel (Aina Callaert)
- Luca School of Arts (Hellen Van Berlo)
- Odisee (Els Van de Walle)
- Thomas More (Hilde Sels)

NVAO was the proces coordinator (Pieter Soete, now UGent).

The system-wide analysis resulted in this publication:

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For this Foqus magazine, we worked with three levels:

- An overview of theoretical frameworks, global insights, key take aways and practical tips
- Specific examples of co-creation with the professional field from the institutions that took part in this system-wide analyses
- Further explanation and elaboration of theoretical concepts



In this system-wide analyses, we focused on 4 main questions from a higher education perspective:

- What is co-creation with the professional field
- Why would you invest in co-creation with the professional field
- How do you realise co-creatio
- What does co-creation with the professional field look like in the context of higher education?

As a conclusion, we also formulated options for the future.

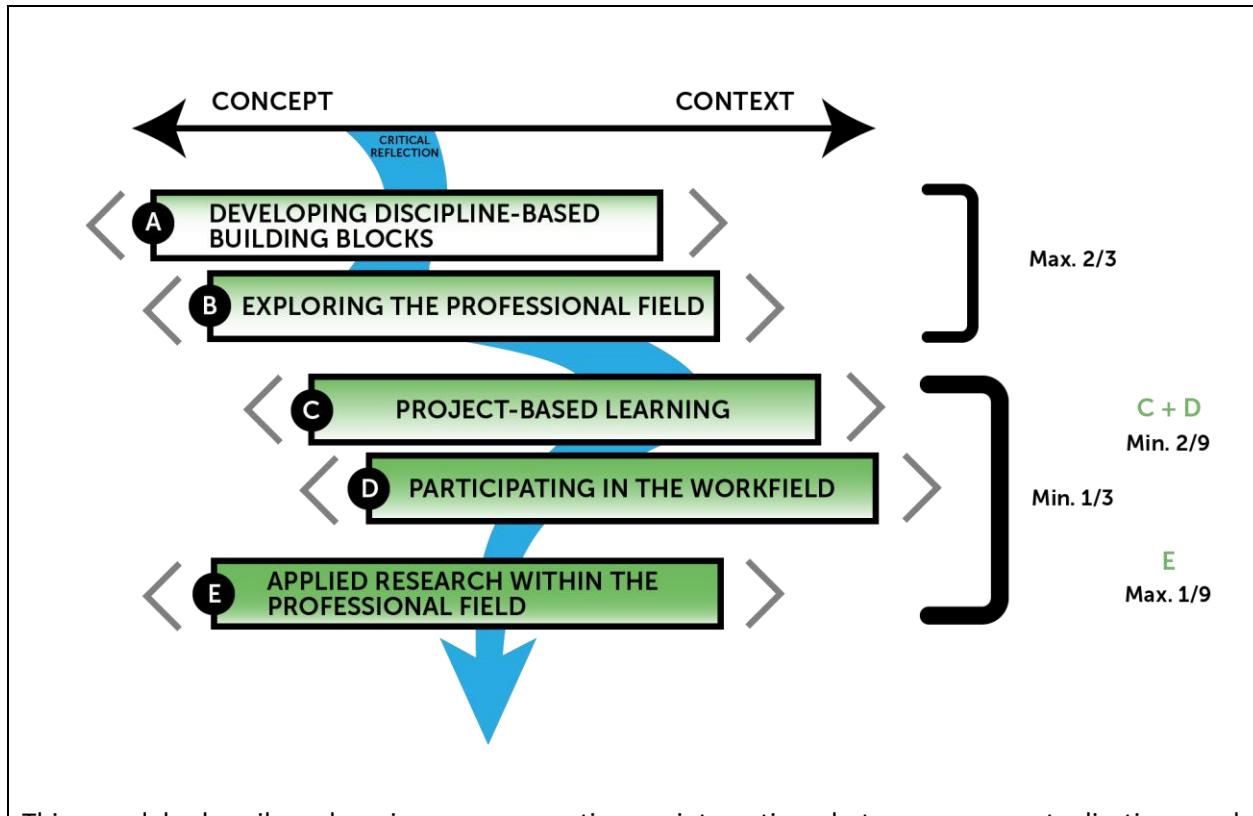
It is always possible to delve further into certain topics you find interesting. Inspiring examples are intertwined in the text.

We'll go to some lessons learned related to working with authentic learning environments and to partnerships.

An authentic learning environment to interrelate an associate degree programme and the professional field

When you want to create an authentic learning environment, it is important that also the contexts, assignments, and learning activities are authentic: this means that they have to be highly reliable, credible, and real for the future professional field and/or the professional activities.

In our brochure we describe the Authentic Teaching model, a model that can be used to design an authentic learning environment.



This model describes learning as a continues interaction between conceptualisation and contextualisation.

In our associate degree programmes we provide a continuous process of contextualisation, where students can practice the theoretical models, and frameworks that they are offered in class, and conceptualisation, where students learn to abstract and translate specific situations and experiences from the professional field to theoretical frameworks.

We have identified 5 clusters of authentic teaching and learning activities (Cluster A to E), all of the teaching and learning activities that take place in the associate degree programmes can be placed in one of the 5 clusters:

1. Developing discipline-based building blocks: all the learning activities that teach the elements of knowledge and basic skills of a discipline, in an interactive manner.
Within this cluster we relate the theory with reality, by using authentic examples, practises, make use of discussions, making analyse and make connections between the different compenence of the theory.
2. Exploring the professional field
During these learning activities, students get the chance to get a taste of the real, professional field by observing professionals and real processes in the professional field.
3. Project-based learning
Within this cluster a student, or group of students, carries out a project for an authentional problem that takes place in the professional field. These projects can be carried out together with partners from the professional field.
4. Participating in actual practice:

During these learning activities students get the chance to practice professional skills, professional knowledge and a professional attitude in an integrated manner, in an authentic professional context. The main goal is to learn from experience: hands-on learning.

5. Practice-oriented learning:

Within these learning activities, students get a chance to innovate within the existing professional practice, and create new conceptual frameworks.

Whitin every cluster learning takes place both at the professional field, and at the university college. We want to cross boundaries between education and the professional field, because we believe that boundary crossing increases the learning potential of our students.

Thanks to this model it is possible to make the authentic teaching within all of our associate degree programmes measurable, comparable and discussable.

In the brochure we mention some tips to keep in mind when creating an authentic learning environment:

- Before going to the professional field we need to prepare students consciously;
- Students should be supported in their professional growth and the critical reflection of their professional growth, so we have to pay attention to reflection and feedback for our students;
- Students should have the chance to experience diverse professional fields;
- Even if the learning environment is authentic, we have to keep in mind that students have to be able to make mistakes and learn from those mistakes;
- We have to support the mentor from the professional field, for example by offering them a training for mentors;
- It is important that we assure the quality of the professional field in the authentic learning environment.

Successful partnerships as a support for authentic learning environments

If you want to build a strong authentic learning environment, such as Tine described, you need a strong commitment from the professional field. And that certainly applies to the level 5 programmes in Flanders, because they are required by decree to include one-third of work-based learning in their curriculum.

Now, fortunately collaboration with university colleges is important to many companies, but on the other hand, it's usually not their number one priority. So how can you win their commitment? How can you build a successful partnership based on clear agreements? I'll discuss six tips from the brochure.

- First of all it is important to strive for **win-win**. I know this seems obvious, but during our discussion of cases from the different institutions, we discovered that we can still make progress here. We could, for example, question the companies more actively about their interests. When will the partnership be successful for them? The more we can provide added value as an institution, the more likely it is that a company will be strongly committed. We also discovered that sometimes we'll have to **broaden the scope of our partnerships** in order to realize this added value. For example, perhaps we can convince companies to cooperate strongly by providing a platform for them to stay in contact with the students and with the institution or by offering their employees opportunities for training.

- Secondly, a **common goal** can be a powerful engine that keeps cooperation and co-creation going. Suppose, for example, that an institution and its partners set a common goal of strengthening the soft skills of the students. Such a goal forms a foundation to which you can always refer, even if there are difficulties in the cooperation. In such a situation, you could say: “Hey, this is what we wanted to achieve together, isn't it? Let's overcome the challenges and see if we can get to this common ambition.”
- A third lesson learned is that we have to take enough time for a good **preparation of the collaboration**, and to **involve companies in curriculum development**. In that way, we can avoid having to clear up a lot of ambiguities along the way. Who takes on what role, and why? For example: who does what to ensure that the students are introduced to their future profession early on in the curriculum? Which competences can students acquire in companies, which are better acquired at school, and why?
In addition, we learnt that there is always a certain amount of tension and uncertainty involved in a partnership. It helps to accept this as something normal. If partners engage in **open communication**, if they express tensions and doubts to each other, conflicts can be dealt with constructively.
- Fourthly, one of our peers advised us to install a **formal feedback loop** in order to be able to adjust the co-creation process based on our partners' responses. Just as our students grow through regular reflection, a partnership can also grow stronger by acting as a learning partnership.
- Fifthly, it's important to realize that **students are our most important ambassadors**. In this respect, a peer advised us to start the alumni policy on Day 1 of the study programme, and to approach students like partners, since they are very well positioned to become liaisons in the field.
- And finally, a suggestion for those of you who are looking for more **challenging learning opportunities** for your students. In that case, it is useful to **ask companies what challenges they are facing**. These can be the starting point of projects in which companies and students co-create solutions. This may be too ambitious for some level 5 students, but interesting for those who want to take it a step further.