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Evaluation of the product in the EBBD project

Mika Saranpää, Education manager, Haaga-Helia School of Vocational Teacher Education

Maiju Kangasaho, Lecturer, Haaga-Helia School of Vocational Teacher Education

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1. Background of developmental evaluation in EBBD project

Evaluation always also serves the development of the respective object of analysis and investigation. Therefore Haaga-Helia's evaluation method always takes into account the perception of participants, those who are really involved in processes of working and evaluators try to work together with partners rather than act as external evaluators. It may be that this complicates the evaluation process but it also helps evaluators to understand processes better and helps to take the projects to a higher level.

The evaluation of the products created in this project is based on a document measuring the quality of competence statements/learning outcomes, which was drawn-up in the fall 2010 and presented in the Vienna meeting and read carefully and discussed during the Aalborg meeting. It also guided work shop sessions in Aalborg.

The reason for producing such a quality document was that when thinking on a national level and especially on a European level there seem to be different views on requirements, elements and wording of a competence based curriculum. Different definitions of the terms "competence" or following that, "competence based curriculum" are quite frequent in the relevant literature. Therefore it was necessary to reach a common view in the project which then would be shared by all partners. This document was designed as a tool for reflection in action (Schön 1983). To be helpful and useful within a certain project this document has to be brief and precise.

The Evaluator's view of competence statements is based on fundamentals about competence based curriculum outlined in the following statements. Views are defined finely by Dutch researchers (Haltia 2011, p. 60):

- 1) Define competences that are at the foundation of the curriculum,
- 2) Professional core problems are the basis of curriculum (incl. learning and assessment),
- 3) Development of competences is assessed before, during and after learning process,
- 4) Learning happens in different authentic situations,
- 5) Knowledge, skills and attitudes are combined in learning and assessment,
- 6) Students responsibility and self-reflection is encouraged,
- 7) Teachers (both in schools and work life) balance their roles as coaches and experts,
- 8) Grounds for lifelong learning is seeded in students.

Baartmann 2011 (p. 126) gives general definition of competence: integrated pieces of knowledge, skills and attitude. On that definition Saranpää, Haltia and Jaakkola (2011) include one important aspect: authentic work. Their definition says that competence can only show itself and can only be measured within authentic work. And this should be done already on and in learning process.

This is the background for the hypothesis written down as criteria for the quality of competence statements or even for the quality of a competence based curriculum. The following list was created for the EBBD project. It may not be exhaustive. The list enumerates basic elements that should be taken into account when developing a competence based curriculum.

2. Criteria used in evaluation of EBD curriculum

“THE QUALITY OF COMPETENCE STATEMENTS/LEARNING OUTCOMES: VIEWPOINTS AND QUESTIONS Draft October 2010, Petri Haltia & Mika Saranpää, HAAGA-HELIA School of Vocational Teacher Education

A. The point of view of working life

- Are they based on the demands of the labor market and competence requirements in the working places?
- Are different dimensions (e.g. knowledge, skills, attitudes) of competence taken cognizance of?
- Do they well enough fit the competence requirements of different work places?
- Are they forward looking, how soon can they be expected to become obsolete?

B. Technical viewpoint

- Are they concrete enough?
- Are they clear and understandable?
- Are they designed so that they can be easily rewritten in the future?
- Do they include unnecessary qualifiers or jargon?

C. The point of view of teaching, learning and assessment

- What kind of consequences do they have for teaching and learning?
- What kind of consequences do they have for assessment, are they capable of assessment?
- Is competence described so that the student can see it as relevant and significant?
- Is competence defined as an integrated whole, can the connection between theory and practice be seen?
- How do they affect appreciation of educational programs and qualifications?
- Is the competence described too trivial or unrealistically demanding?”

When these were written down and presented to the project partners some further questions were also raised by the evaluators. These questions were supposed to help the process of making a correct competence based curriculum. Partners answered questions during the process of developing the curriculum. There are some examples of answers given during the process involved in the text below:

“Some general questions for the Eurobac-project

What kind of concept of competence is the standard/curriculum based on, what dimensions or elements does it include, EQF definition?

[Answers given: Berlin, 5.10.2010: curriculum is based on EQF definition; Vienna, 29.-30.11.2011: some examples on how to write down competence sentences]

What kind of approach will be chosen for standard/curriculum of the programme, purely outcomes-based or also including input-orientation (see e.g. component 3, language competence)?

[Answers given: decision Berlin, 5.10.2010: The curricular drafts are generally based on output-orientated phrases. Minor divergence from this principle is considered to be reasonable for the sake of feasibility.]

Pedagogical and assessment methods can only be seriously considered after these questions are answered and when there are at least some outlines of the concrete competences.

Component 8 seems to refer to assessment and assessment methods, is it so?

[Answers given: current curriculum, February 2012 (pdf), page 33: technical requirement H, linked to competences and profile.]

Will there be grades given or just pass/fail?

[Answers given: Berlin, 5.10.2010: There will be no different grades: The result will either be “passed” or “failed”. It can still be considered whether a special grade like “passed with distinction” should be provided; Vienna, 29.-30.11.2010: After a short discussion the participants of the meeting agreed:

The certificate shall be awarded without differentiation. That means: Either the student receives the certificate or not.]

Is there already an idea on how and with whom (people, organisations ...) will the working groups start working on the standards/curricula?

[Answers given: Berlin, 5.10.2010: according to the responsibilities allocated within the Comenius-contract:

“The work packages will be dealt with by the respective partners (see various digital documents).”]

So, there some normal points of view are presented when thinking about a competence based curriculum. Also there are some questions which are meant to help to start to think about a competence based curriculum, especially EBBD.

In Aalborg meeting partners had a work shop on WP5-WP8. We had discussions about the competences which are important for EBBD. Also we had discussions on how they should be written down. The biggest problem seemed to be clearness and understandability of sentences. Writing a competence based curriculum is a challenge; using technical jargon which does not meet the quality criteria mentioned above has to be avoided.

During the work shop in Aalborg the group concentrated on eliminating redundant elements and phrases and tried to focus on aspects that were of high relevance (working life competences). This process was partly successful but also revealed the fact that the group had not yet completely reached a common understanding concerning the nature, phrasing and design of competence formulations.

At least during the Alborg meeting there also seemed to be some need for discussion about the idea of “diploma” and “curriculum”. Some participants – among these Haaga-Helia personnel – thought that EBBD should be a diploma based on some main competences that are required of students. Others seemed to think that we should write down a comprehensive curriculum covering a whole three years course. If one reads the curriculum now, there are still problems understanding the size and scale of the curriculum.

One important topic discussed during the partner meeting in Aalborg concerned the EQF-level which should serve as a basis for the formulation of competences in the EBBD curriculum. The differences of the education systems of European countries were analysed and consequences for the EBBD curriculum were discussed. The partners decided to use among other things the EQF classification to guide the development of competences. Some project partners argued in favour of EQF level five (5), while others pledged for level four (4). In the end a consensus was reached that the curriculum was to be based on the EBBD profile described which may lead to competences between EQF level five (5) and level four (4) depending on the requirements of the profile.

After the partner meeting in Aalborg the partners developed specific competences mainly within their work packages. To reach a coherent and inherently consistent curriculum a representative of each work package met in June at the coordinator’s premises in Bielefeld. This group of editors initiated a process which in the end lead to a first draft of a common curriculum. This draft was refined during the next months. To ensure the quality of the curriculum and to tackle accreditation and implementation problems the coordinator met with the work package responsible for these aspects with Haaga Helia personnel in Helsinki in December 2011. The curriculum at hand was analysed and necessary amendments were identified. These modifications were then carried out and a restructured curriculum was created.

That last version then was the basis for the evaluation by Haaga-Helia. We produced a statement on the quality of the curriculum. Our main assessment was that the curriculum had reached such a level that it could be implemented to practice. It is needless to mention that nevertheless modifications to the curriculum in the future may be possible and even necessary. These required changes will become evident and can be identified after the implementation process.

This implementation phase opens up a view to evaluation. Evaluation has to be an ongoing process within implementation. The most difficult part on making competence based curriculum is to take the users points of view into account and to incorporate users thoughts whilst creating the curriculum. One big problem for making a competence based curriculum is that we still seem to focus on the perspective of teachers, not on that of students or working life. This can also be seen when analysing the EBBD curriculum at some points. Implementation will lead to users speaking up.

3. Evaluation report and statement on that

This part is mainly based on the evaluation of the curriculum in January 2012. The curriculum has been modified after the suggestions.

“Quality of curriculum, case EBBD (17.1.2012).

Mika Saranpää and Maiju Kangasaho, HAAGA-HELIA University of applied sciences, School of Vocational teacher education

1. The starting point of our evaluation is the criteria that were given in the beginning of the project (5.10.2010 & 7.4.2011): “The quality of competence statements”. (cf. p. 3 and 4) These criteria open the view for the quality of a competence based curriculum.

The basis of the criteria are three elements:

- a. **point of view of working life,**
- b. **technical viewpoint,**
- c. **the point of view of teaching, learning and assessment.**

We will concentrate on those views that are possible to evaluate at this moment of the EBBD process. This is because there has not been enough implementation of the curriculum at the level of schools yet. There is no real practical evidence whether the EBBD curriculum works or not in the accreditation of schools or especially in assessment process of students. There has been **some piloting on evaluating curriculums of different schools**, but not any comments from working life or students so far. Practice will show whether there is some unnecessary jargon or not (criteria B).

2. The EBBD curriculum focuses on three points of views: working, studying and living in Europe. If one is making a competence based curriculum the curriculum should be limited to working in Europe (criteria A).
One should concentrate on describing demands of labour market and competence requirements of working places. Concerning a hierarchy of competences one could think that if you are able to work in Europe, you are also able to live and study there. Work life competences also support developing lifelong learning attitudes.
3. Working life perspective of EBBD curriculum is forward looking (Criteria A). It emphasizes European labour markets. It also has possibilities of improving European intercourse. It helps to recognize competences which are produced in European labour markets.

We would like to draw the attention to the fact that the writers of the curriculum followed our advice concerning the point of view of the described competences. The statements incorporate a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes. The connection between theory and practice is pointed out. Knowledge may be over represented, but this statement could also be due to an evaluator’s misinterpretation (Criteria A & C).

4. Curriculum also draws attention to soft skills or meta qualifications. They are presented as a separate list on page 29. On page 11 we find the recommendation to assess soft skills

within the context of business competences. This is a reasonable way of assessment of meta qualifications (Criteria A).

5. One of the technical requirements is described as “work placement abroad”. If one is making a competence based curriculum, assessment of competences should be made in authentic work environments. Competence – as understood in this evaluation – is linkage of knowledge, skills and attitudes in real work contexts and situations. (Criteria C)

It is very good that in this curriculum this is one requirement. Whether a duration of 4 weeks is sufficient should be discussed. It might be wise to say that this is a minimum requirement. (*Remark coordinator: this is the case, cf. below*).

[That aspect was discussed several times during the process (see different minutes). It then became obvious that the frame conditions within the countries differ extremely (e.g.: enterprises in NL and FI prefer longer period; companies in DK usually are not willing to take students for more than three weeks). Therefore the following compromise was found (see curriculum February 2012 (pdf, page 32): “Duration: Generally four weeks (or longer, but not less than 3 weeks! If divided into sections, each section must take at least one week.”]

It is included in the curriculum anyhow, which gives the curriculum reliability and it gives tools for students, teachers and work places to think about practical consequences of this competence based curriculum. This also leads to some trouble for those who assess student’s competences. How easy is it for people from work places to use this curriculum or at least its criteria? (Criteria A, B & C)

Our last question is also technical: If we calculate competences, for example from the pages 12, 14 and 16, on all tables there are 15 different points of view. Is it possible to identify and use those which are important for different assessment environments? Or should all be assessed in the same situations? This is something that should be discussed further. (Criteria B)

Descriptions of competence areas A and B are good. They can be read as a connection of theory and practice. (Criterion C) They seem to be on EQF level 4. The description is practical enough, compared to many other curricula; descriptions are short and it has good possibilities of usability. This is of course something that should be researched via implementation and in practice. Also practice will show the possibilities of guiding the development of competencies in different learning and assessment environments. (Criteria C)

On every area of competence (A-D) there is table which is easily readable. This is a possible student assessment tool, even for self-evaluation. Teachers and trainers can use it as a guidance tool. Also teachers can have this as a negotiation tool when discussing with work places about competences. We will see on implementation, if it works in practice. There may be some trouble, as we mentioned in point 5, but these troubles are only speculation at this point of the EBBD process.

6. There is also a description of accreditation of schools (p. 34-37, how to become an EBBD school). There are some questions which rise here: Who is involved in accreditation? How is accreditation financed? [Decisions in this regard were taken in Helsinki, 1.12.2011 and Eger 19.-20.4.2012]

If one thinks of the curriculum as a whole, it may give good possibilities for schools to understand a European way to see business competences. The Curriculum as such should be sufficient for assessment of students.

“All European accreditation organization” may be little over estimated here. There are national standards – at least in Finland - for qualifications and to compare this with some diploma should be done at a national level. Maybe this diploma should be understood as one possibility that exists for some students who are suited for this kind of excellence qualification. EBBD curriculum cannot guide national curriculum process or even surpass it. (This also connects with the question of seizing the EBBD diploma.)

[current curriculum says (February 2012 pdf, page 1):

“European Business Baccalaureate Diploma – EBBD provides students having achieved or aiming at a general university entrance qualification to reach a high competence level in the fields of “economy”, “Europe” and “mobility”. These competences form a homogenous standard across Europe and will be accredited as “European Business Baccalaureate Diploma” – EBBD, thus being a label of excellence which is based on but goes beyond the respective national / regional curricula. The curriculum defines a graduate profile which all participating institutions agree on. *This profile can be developed in different manners in different national systems.*”]

This statement may lead to a little trouble for the accreditation process. This refers especially to the last sentence: which amount of developed differences still make it possible to say that this is the same diploma? **It is sure that it is difficult to develop a curriculum that can be properly fitted into the national systems and still be something outside those systems within those systems. Concerning the EBBD good work has been done and it is still under construction.**

Also there is something quite controversial if one thinks about a competence based curriculum. The accreditation process is discussed on page 36; here the curriculum gives advice on the amount of lessons. In a competence based curriculum the only thing that matters is competence. You can have numerous ways to gain it. Now this curriculum on page 36 seems to be written for teachers. Here this curriculum is not student or learning oriented. This may be something that should be corrected.

After this evaluation dated 17 Jan 2012 a statement on the evaluation was requested. Mika Saranpää and Maiju Kangasaho in Haaga-Helia wrote:

“Statement on the quality of the EBBD curriculum

Mika Saranpää and Maiju Kangasaho from Haaga-Helia University of applied sciences, School of vocational Teacher Education evaluated the curriculum on 17 January 2012. Small changes have been made after that. Those changes are all reasonable and have shifted the curriculum again to the right direction.

As we mentioned in our evaluation report, we seem to have varieties on our views to competence based curriculum. We accept those differences. From our point of view, as we said in the evaluation, “If one is making a competence based curriculum, point should be only working in Europe”. Anyway, there are other aspects in the EBBD curriculum, but we can accept those aspects because in this context they are quite well argued and seem to be reasonable.

Now it is important to move forward. It is necessary to test the curriculum in practice. It must be tested whether it is possible to assess competences of students with the help of this curriculum. It is also important to test, if it is possible to rearrange teaching (if necessary) with the help of this curriculum. So, no more writing at this point, but implementation. After that it is possible to evaluate, if the curriculum really works or not.

The curriculum has now reached its peak. Next someone has to jump to practice with that curriculum and to see how it works. This is the only way to get little bit wiser words and ideas for the next developmental stage of EBBD curriculum – if they are needed.

Education manager Mika Saranpää and Lecturer Maiju Kangasaho,
Haaga-Helia School of Vocational Teacher Education”

The product is now at such a level that it should be taken into practice. This is said very clearly and many times in our papers. It is not possible to evaluate it anymore purely on a theoretical level. It is even unnecessary, because the curriculum is a working paper, not just a document. How it works will show its value and its targets of development.

4. Further developments in EBBD, proposal for discussions

Next step is also to think about the assessment of competences. After we have reached a consensus of the curriculum and also consensus on how we should define competences, we might try to have a consensus on assessment, methods and processes. It is important because EBBD is an instrument that approves a certificate of competences.

Concerning such a certificate there should be common ground of assessment for those who assess, whether targets of assessment are schools which want their curriculum to be evaluated (accreditation) or students who want their competences to be assessed.

To gain a consensus on assessment of competences is not the easiest thing to do. There is still quite a lot of cultural variety on ideas about competences or competence based curricula, there is also cultural variety on ideas about assessment.

Following Baartman et al (2006, Haltia 2011, s. 66) we have tried to write down some principles on competence based assessment. To help gaining consensus on these matters, we have also translated our principles that we have used in Finland to develop better competence based assessment. Lists can never be comprehensive but here are again some main points that should be taken into account if one is considering and realising a competence based assessment.

These are principles which have to be taken into account when considering such a project (Saranpää et al 2011, translation from Finnish to English Saranpää 2012). Of course there may be some others too:

1. Processes and methods of assessment are evaluated constantly and are under development. The research of quality of assessment is one part of quality system of schools.
2. One part of assuring the quality of assessment is to assure the participation of work life in assessment. Curriculum, criteria of assessment and assessment methods are produced together with work life. [This point should be taken more into account concerning EBB, especially in implementation if this could not be taken into account when writing the curriculum.]
3. Assessment of competences leads to possibility of feedback for students, personnel of school and work life so that they can all develop their competences. Assessment creates and strengthens positive learning experiences.
4. Assessment is executed with cost efficiency. All the benefits are in a reasonable relation to the results used.
5. All the processes of assessment, all the learning outcomes and all the criteria of assessment are defined. They are clear, understandable and public. Competence is defined as authentic work.
6. Assessment is a relevant part of planning of studies. It is not something you can include afterwards. All parts of studies are planned so that all learning outcomes can be assessed. Also, they can be assessed regardless of how competences are gained.
7. Criteria of assessment should be written at such competence level that it is possible to reach such a level of studies. Development continues after studies.
8. Targets of assessment are meaningful and at the right level relative to authentic work.
9. Criteria define for students the type of competencies required for the assessment. Situation of assessment is based on criteria.
10. Situation of assessment makes it possible for a student to get feedback of his/her competences and professional development. Assessment is actively guiding, it gives information which helps students to recognize their strengths and weaknesses.

11. Methods of assessment are such that they fit into learning outcomes and assessment contexts. Methods should be such that you can assess what you are supposed to be assessing.
12. Assessment methods and processes are reliable and systematic. They guarantee equity for students and independence of the ones who are assessing.
13. Assessment is flexible and it takes into account differences of students. It makes possible different ways of showing competences. Assessment of competences does not favour or discriminate.
14. On the assessment of students' competences complex materials are used which are collected from many sources.
15. Assessment decisions are based on criteria of competences. Assessment does not include any hidden agenda or goals which are not defined in the curriculum. Decisions are documented. There is a process of complaint for those not satisfied in the assessment.
16. As said before, this list is not comprehensive. Some points may be missing and some points redundant. Anyhow, methods, standards and means of assessment of students should be discussed in the EBBD project. Do we still want competence based assessment or not? Is this right way to see competence based assessment at all?

5. Literature

(In references there is some literature in Finnish, but when necessary there is also a translation in the text)

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