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Interview with Dick L. de Wolf, Director of the Utrecht Academy for Educational Innovation, Faculty of Education, HOLLAND

Question.- Which are the strategies implemented in Dutch universities in order to promote adaptation of educational methodologies in the European Higher Education Area framework? For example, incentives, training, encouragement etc. Which other strategies should be introduced in your country?

Answer.- There aren't any special strategies, because in Dutch education everybody expects the teachers or professors include innovation as part of their job. Innovation in methodology is therefore a key part of their role. You have to prepare students and pupils for the future. This cannot be done unless you think about the future and innovate shifts within a programme. If you continue to do what you always did, you will get what you always got. Therefore there won't be any change. Of course, there are always difficulties: not everyone has the capacity to become part of the change process. You have to teach them that 10% of the professor's time is spent on learning themselves, so that they have to think about and reflect on their own capabilities and design their own

programme. What this is changing is that now there is a paradigm shift: it is no longer so teacher-centred – it is becoming more pupil-centred. What we're trying to do is to get the students to take responsibility for their own studies. They have to reflect on their own capabilities and then ask themselves, "What do I need in order to become a good teacher".

Now of course –as with in every country– there is almost always not enough time or money. And it's logical that everyone is working hard. So if you have to introduce a new system, you have to make choices. That is one of the things that we're trying to do. You really cannot continue to do everything in the same way as you did: you have to make choices and say we'll stop this and start this, and later on we'll come back to the other issues. So you have to make choices: that is the first thing. And the second important part is cooperation. If every university tries to find their own way it takes a lot of time. If you work together –and not everybody wishes to say something about the proposed changes– you can significantly speed up the process. Therefore, what we're trying to do is to get the universities to work together. This means that you have to trust your colleagues. You have to recognise the capabilities of others, and this is very difficult in Holland because most of the people involved are professors. If there is any change proposed, they want to talk about it and if you really want to talk about all the changes, it takes more time and it's more difficult to implement the change.

Today I've heard a lot of good examples. Now if you take up these examples, you don't have to try to find a solution. If you work together with 53 universities in Spain, I think that you have a lot of knowledge in order to make those changes.

Q.- Which are the obstacles that teachers and students face regarding updating the methodology?

A.- Shifting responsibility more to the students makes it difficult for the teachers, because the teachers don't have the monopoly any more. They have to trust the students to do the right things. They have to become coaches and less of a teacher or professor. From the other perspective, it's easier for a student when a teacher says you have to do this or that. Now they have to think about how to do it themselves - they have to create their own studies. This takes time

and again is not easy. So everybody finds this paradigm shift very difficult, and of course, people don't like change.

In the education system that we are using now, people have thought about it for a long time. They have made decisions and choices related to it and many are satisfied with the system as it is now. However, they have to change their way of teaching and the way that they work together and that is very difficult, because most people prefer things to remain the same.

Change is a strange condition. You would think that a university is about change. Research is about change is finding new ways. However, as soon as it is within your own frame of work, people find this difficult. Therefore, the motivation has to be very clear. You have to talk about it: Why are we doing this? If professors would go back into education to the schools and to the pupils who are attending the schools now, they would find a totally different type of pupil than, for example, about twenty years ago.

Concentration is an issue, for example. What we had today was a good example. I think that 70% of the time is spent listening to people explaining things. Now if you try to do this for a pupil aged between 12 and 16, it won't work. You will lose them after 10 or 20 minutes. So you have to change the way you work. This is what people find very difficult. And of course, you have to invest, so it will take more time. You have to think about it. The incentive is that if it works, you get better results and pupils and students will enjoy going to school or university more than they did previously. That is one of the main incentives.

Q.- Which procedure should be used to measure the results obtained after implementing new educative methods?

A.- Well, let me talk about different levels. In Holland, with the introduction of the master structure, we organised what is called the "Dutch Accreditation Council". Once every five years, every department and every course will be assessed in terms of quality. There are about 26 points which are selected to be examined. If you don't pass this, you have to stop right away. You cannot continue, you have to stop the course and close down in order to make improvements. It is then reassessed by the Dutch Accreditation Council and if it is approved you may recommence. This is a huge problem if you fail, because

you have students and you cannot say to the students, “Ok we failed, so you have to go somewhere else”. This is therefore on the institutional level. We also use a lot more assessments, portfolio and 360 degree feedback. So if you do something, for example if a student goes to school to practice, he has to evaluate himself, he has to ask a colleague student to do the same, he has to ask the teacher to do the same and his professor will do the same. This is what we call 360 degree feedback. This has to be conducted each time a student has completed a project. So what you will get is not only a grade from the teacher or professor, but also a grade from the student themselves. So the student has to reflect on the things he has done and then has to think about the weaknesses and what needs to be done in order to become a better teacher or a better student.

It is therefore not only the outside world assessing the quality, but what we are trying to do is to make the students and pupils themselves look at quality issues. It's the same with the professors. They also have to complete 360 degree feedback. They therefore have to ask their students and colleagues, “What do you think of my performance?” They also have to ask themselves how they judge their own performance and their director also has to contribute. And again, you have a discussion: “If there is something wrong, what can I do about it?” We then have 10% learning time allocated for the professor which he has to invest. Now if he doesn't comply with this, the in the first instance there will be a discussion. The second time there will also be a discussion. On the third occasion there will be a formal order. The fourth time it occurs we have to say goodbye, so you cannot remain as a teacher or professor for the rest of your career.

Now in Holland, this is commencing. We are at the starting point, so the whole system isn't implemented as yet, but this is the direction in which we are working. The same system applies to directors.

Q.- What kind of didactical resources do you consider essential in order to adapt teaching methods in the European Higher Education Area framework? What role do information and communication technologies (ICT) play in this process?

A.- The most important didactic resource is the change to make the student responsible for their own studies. The internet and ICT components make this

process easier, because it reduces time. Let me give you an example. At this stage, all our students who are involved in research place their research results on the internet. This is free to access for everybody (teachers and students alike). There is also some quality assurance in this, because there is no student who wants to post something on the internet that does not have a certain standard of quality. Secondly, if a professor gives a lecture, this is taped and we put it on the internet. This makes it possible for a student who is teaching at a school and encounters a problem, to go to the internet and try to find an answer to that problem. At present, most students are dependent on the time in which a certain part of the programme is presented. Now if you record it and post it on the internet, students can make the decision when they need the information. We believe that you learn more, when there is the necessity to learn. So if you need the answer to a question and you get the answer at any moment –during the night if you should so wish– then it will stick in your mind and have a greater influence on your behaviour and the way in which you work.

For example, one of the first things that we are trying to do is that if a student goes to a classroom the whole lesson is computer-based. After the lesson, the student has to look back on his performance and he picks out the best and worst moments. He can then put this thread on the internet and ask other students, “What do you think? Did you have a situation like this as well?” Or he can ask for a professor to comment on the situation. And it’s not only about the things that went wrong, but it’s also about successful moments during lessons. Now these are put on the internet. If another student has an issue, he can go to the internet and look for a discussion thread topic similar to his own problem, and read the suggestions made. This will make things much faster and the investment of the teacher or professor is lessened, because he may access the information by himself and do so in the same instant that he experiences a problem. He doesn’t have to wait a fortnight or a week in order to speak to his professor. So these are a few examples which create a different setting.

Knowledge is not monopolised by the teacher or the professor any more. If you go onto the internet, you can find others who are currently online and put your question to others. So this will change the situation in education. And this will have an impact on the current position of teachers and professors.

Q.- In order to share and learn from experiences regarding “good practice” in educational methodology, could you please tell me if there are strategies related to this?

A.- A few months ago on the 1st April, we started a website. On this all the research is put down in a certain area and it can be accessed by anybody who wants to look at it. What we do is share those good practices through the internet and we invite not only our students and own professors to use it, but also remote teachers as well. So if a teacher is working somewhere in the Netherlands and he wants to know if any other teacher is experiencing the same problem or how to solve a certain problem, he can look this up on the internet. If there is something missing, he can ask an academic team to research this or to make a knowledge chain and to help him or her. Students can become involved in this way. This just started on the 1st April, so I can't gauge the effect this will have in the future, but I have high expectations and I hope that people will use it in order to improve their own practice.