

Preface

Many countries, national and international institutions, schools and colleges, professional associations, chambers of commerce, companies and consultancy organisations were, and still are, struggling in getting the implementation of competence-based education, competence modelling, competence-based professional development and competence assessment right, in the midst of heated debates about competence in theory, research and practice.

Although competence appeared to be a fuzzy concept, there are many practices attached to it. Key features, which are widely addressed in this volume, are the alignment of education and work, the assessment of prior learning, demand-driven educational planning, authentic learning, formative assessment, and new competence domains. All these practices vary country by country, institution by institution and program by program. That makes the world of competence-based vocational and professional education intriguing and fascinating.

Competence appeared to be a very resilient concept. In the 1970s, the competence-based teacher education (CBTE) movement started. CBTE was heavily criticised by humanistic scholars, who, in turn, advocated humanistic-based teacher education (HBTE). Being educated as a school teacher in the 1970s and having had 5 years of experience in teaching in and managing of an elementary school, I had the impression that a mix between these approaches would be fruitful for the development of teacher education. Attention to the democratic ideal of education, personal professional development and identity formation, mixed with attention to actual teaching behaviour, could in my opinion be a productive blend of ideology and practice. I saw with my own eyes that theory and practice needed to be in balance. Too much theory or ideology resulted in poor teaching, whereas too much practice resulted in shallow reflection on professional action.

There is a massive amount of publications on competence; this reflects that competence-based education is a global innovation, especially in vocational, higher and corporate education. Currently we can really speak about the existence of competence theory, competence research and competence practice. The literature on competence has grown so big that it takes a lot to get a good overview. This volume may help to get that overview and to further appreciate its diversity.

The preparation of this volume started in the Spring of 2013, during my stay at the Toulouse Business School in France. Together with Jonathan Winterton, an outline of the volume was drafted, which was submitted to publisher Bernadette Ohmer of Springer and series editor Professor Rupert Maclean, who was at the Hong Kong Institute of Education at that time. The outline and tentative table of content were discussed with the series editor in March 2014, and various suggestions were given for more authors and chapters. After this meeting, candidate authors were invited, and we received a very good response. Only a few did not have the time to contribute to the volume because of research assessments or other important duties. During the process of communication with the authors, we detected various gaps in the intended content of the volume, and we added chapter titles and invited more authors. We were very fortunate that the publisher did not have any objections against this. On the contrary, we felt encouraged to compose a volume which would cover the field of competence-based vocational and professional education as widely as possible.

Authors were given a fair amount of time to write their draft manuscripts, and when these came in, a long process of reviewing started, making revisions and doing second reviews and other revisions.

As time passed by, Jonathan Winterton made a significant career move by accepting the position as dean of the faculty of business and humanities at Curtin Business School of Sarawak in Malaysia. Because of this life-changing event, he had to disengage from the book project. I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the discussions we had regarding the outline of the volume, for the reviewing and editing we did together and for co-writing Chap. 1. I greatly enjoyed the time spent together in Toulouse and Amsterdam while working on the volume. It was also a privilege to have had the opportunity to speak about the book project at the International Conference ‘Skills for the future: Training, employment, occupations employability in turbulent times’, at the Toulouse Business School in September 2014.

A book project of this size takes time. From the start of the project in 2013, the year 2016 was anticipated as the publication year, which is achieved with the collective effort of all involved authors and colleagues from Springer.

This volume could not have been realised without the support of many people. I have already mentioned Jonathan Winterton. Had I known that I would have to complete this project alone, I might not have had the courage to start it in the first place. It is because of our initial cooperation that the book project took off. Thanks.

Many thanks also go to Bernadette Ohmer, who was the initial publisher of the volume. She was very responsive and positive about the idea of the volume. When she took notice of the ever-growing book project, it seemed as if her enthusiasm further increased with it. There were hardly any objections against our plans, even when they were adjusted over time.

Rupert Maclean, as said, series editor of the volume, has been very positive and encouraging, right from the beginning of the book project. He suggested a number of authors of which some have indeed contributed to the volume. His warm feedback on new ideas and the quality of the chapters and his patience to see the volume grow to full maturity are greatly appreciated.

Without the commitment and achievements of the many chapter authors of this volume, it would not have been realised. To all the authors, many thanks for your contributions.

Lawrence Liu, Education and Language editor at Springer, the final publisher of this volume, working with you was a pleasure. I am deeply impressed by the rigour of the publishing process of Springer. It greatly added to the quality and appearance of the volume.

My colleagues in ECS, the Education and Competence Studies Group, at one of the world's leading universities in the field of life and social sciences, Wageningen University, also deserve a big compliment. We have had numerous debates about competence theories, definitions, research and measurement and have published a large number of professional and scientific articles together, based on our research. The many interactions during the last 18 years we have been working together greatly contributed to deepening and widening my thinking on competence.

Colleagues in the vocational education and training, professional education, higher education, human resource development and human resource management communities have also contributed a lot to the knowledge about and insight in competence theory and research. During the many conferences at which research papers on competence development were presented and discussed, various, and sometimes fierce, debates were held about the competence construct, competence research and competence practice, which further sharpened the insights in this field of study. Thanks for these interactions.

Finally, also on behalf of the chapter authors, I hope this volume will help in further understanding the complex field of competence-based vocational and professional education and, ultimately, help to effectively bridge the worlds of work and education.

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