Editorial

Citation for published version (APA):

Baartman, L. K. J., & Braun, E. (2011). Editorial. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 36(4), 377-380. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2011.581858>

DOI:

[10.1080/02602938.2011.581858](https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2011.581858)

Document status and date:

Published: 01/01/2011

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of Record (includes final page, issue and volume numbers)

Please check the document version of this publication:

- A submitted manuscript is the version of the article upon submission and before peer-review. There can be important differences between the submitted version and the official published version of record. People interested in the research are advised to contact the author for the final version of the publication, or visit the DOI to the publisher's website.
- The final author version and the galley proof are versions of the publication after peer review.
- The final published version features the final layout of the paper including the volume, issue and page numbers.

[Link to publication](#)

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal.

If the publication is distributed under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license above, please follow below link for the End User Agreement:

www.tue.nl/taverne

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us at:

openaccess@tue.nl

providing details and we will investigate your claim.

Editorial

The articles in this special section originate in three symposia on the assessment of vocational competence, that were organised at the 2007 and 2009 conferences of the European Association for Research on Learning and Instruction (EARLI) and the 2008 International Congress of Psychology. This special section aims to bring together different views on vocational competence and the assessment of competence in different European countries. Contributors are from Germany, Switzerland, Belgium and the Netherlands, countries that are all striving towards competence-based education but define and operationalise this in different ways. Therefore, we asked all contributors to explicitly specify the definition of competence used in their study. This special section enables us to compare different definitions of vocational competence and different ways of assessing vocational competence throughout four different countries in Europe – even if the definition of competences might differ between several authors within each country. Furthermore, the papers present projects in their countries which are the direct or indirect consequence of the ongoing higher education reform in Europe: the Bologna Process.

Bologna Process

The Bologna Process started in 1999 as a non-binding European agreement between 29 countries (the 1999 Bologna Declaration). Today, 46 countries participate in the Bologna Process, the last newcomer being Montenegro. The scope of the Bologna Process is going beyond the European Commission, for example Turkey and Russia are joining the reform. There are just two European countries which are not participating: Monaco and San Marino. Furthermore, some countries would be interested in getting involved, but were rejected for geographical reasons.

The Bologna Process intends to create a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) that promotes international mobility and is internationally competitive. It does so by creating greater comparability and compatibility between the diverse higher education systems and institutes across Europe and by enhancing their quality. Degrees should become comparable across different countries and easy to understand. As a result of the Bologna Process, higher education in all countries was structured along three cycles: Bachelor, Master and PhD. Countries are currently defining learning outcomes (competences) for each of the three cycles, using the European Qualifications Framework as a common reference point (Cedefop 2009).

Next to this, standards of quality assurance were set up, which concentrate on the ‘outcome’ of higher education (Adam 2004; Kennedy, Hyland, and Ryan 2009). The quality of higher education is determined by the extent to which students have acquired key competences related to their intended careers (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education 2005). The new degrees intend to be vocationally oriented, and especially the first cycle (Bachelor degree) should prepare

students for entry into the labour market. All contributions in this special section can be seen as fuelled by the Bologna Process. For example, Braun and colleagues describe how German higher education institutes are using student surveys to measure vocational competence as the intended outcome of higher education. For the Netherlands, Baartman and Ruijs compare self-ratings of competence and assessments carried out by the higher education institute. Focusing on the quality of assessment in higher education and specifically teacher education, Bieri and Schuler describe new assessment approaches for teacher competence in Switzerland. Struyf, Adriaenssens and Meynen use teachers' competences described in Belgium as the starting point for the development of an assessment instrument.

Definitions of competence in different countries

All countries involved in the Bologna Process are defining competences as the goals of their different degrees. Here, many differences between countries can be observed, which also become apparent in the contributions to this special section. Some authors have raised concerns about the possibility of establishing equivalence of qualifications across countries, as this relies on a common understanding of the competence concept (Brockmann, Clarke, and Winch 2008). For example, a comparison between France and England shows that England uses a functionalist view of competence, which refers to the performance of fragmented and narrowly defined tasks with minimally underpinning knowledge. In France, on the other hand, competence is multi-dimensional and relies on the integration of practical and theoretical knowledge, as well as personal and social qualities within a broadly defined occupational field (Brockmann et al. 2008). The countries represented in this special section – Germany, Switzerland, Belgium and the Netherlands – seem more comparable to France in this respect. Other authors question the significance and usability of the competence concept in general, stating that competence does not include anything 'extra' beyond knowledge, skills and attitudes as separate measures (Westera 2001). With regard to assessment and the validity of assessment methods, a clear definition of competence as the construct to be measured is clearly necessary. We feel that although the definitions of competence throughout this special section differ, it also shows discrete, valuable and valid assessment methods. It is important, however, for all researchers and practitioners to clearly specify what they mean by competence if they pursue to measure it in education. The commentary to this special section further discusses and compares the different definitions of competence presented in this special section.

Assessment of vocational competence

Along with the developments towards competence-based education sketched here, assessment methods have changed to comply with the new requirements posed by these changes. Many authors agree that the assessment of competence requires the development and use of new assessment methods (e.g. Baartman et al. 2007; Birenbaum et al. 2006; Dochy and McDowell 1997). As competence involves more than isolated knowledge and skills, pure knowledge tests or skills observations seem no longer sufficient, although opinions differ in this regard (see for example Braun and Leidner 2009; Hambleton and Murphy 1992). The contributions to this special section present a number of these new assessment methods such as self-assessment, the assessment of products made by students, video assignments and an assessment centre constituting different

elements. One contribution also explicitly shows an example of an assessment programme, a combination of different assessment methods (Bieri and Schuler). Recently, researchers have argued for the use of assessment programmes to assess vocational competence, in which assessment methods such as knowledge tests are combined with new assessments such as performance assessments, self-assessments or observations in the workplace (Dijkstra, van der Vleuten, and Schuwirth 2009; van der Vleuten and Schuwirth 2005). Finally, the shift towards vocational competence as the outcome of education and the development of new assessment methods has led to reconsiderations about the quality criteria that are needed to evaluate these assessments (e.g. Baartman et al. 2007; Dierick and Dochy 2001; Linn, Baker, and Dunbar 1991). This topic is discussed and studied in this special section as well, and especially in the contribution by Bieri and Schuler.

Papers in the special section

Liesbeth Baartman and Lotte Ruijs used the concept of self-efficacy as a possible measure of the self-rating of competence. This operationalisation of competence, including more than just knowledge and skills, is compared to student performance in a final-year assessment carried out by the higher education institute. Comparing students during a four-year Bachelor programme of social work, the results show an increase in self-efficacy. Also, the accuracy of student judgements increases: in the beginning of the course, students tend to overestimate their competence, while they underestimate this at the end of the course.

Christine Bieri and Patricia Schuler focus on the reform of teacher education as a consequence of the Bologna Process. Freshmen of a Swiss higher education institute have to undergo a demanding assessment centre in order to be accepted at a Bachelor programme of school teaching. The article illustrates a theory-based development of an assessment centre, which focuses on the assessment of cross-curricular competences of future teachers. The assessment centre includes different tasks such as group discussions and problem-solving scenarios, self-ratings and observations by assessors. In their longitudinal investigation, the authors demonstrate the predictive validity of the assessment centre. Similar to Baartman and Ruijs, Bieri and Schuler find an increase in students' ability to judge themselves.

Edith Braun, Hammad Sheikh and Bettina Hannover investigated the predictive validity of self-rating surveys as a way of assessing vocational competence. They used a longitudinal survey of graduates, which are used throughout Germany to verify the quality of higher education and dispositions of alumni. The authors look at the relation between self-rated competences and vocational success five years later, thereby connecting measures inside vocational education with measures in working life. The results show that self-ratings of vocational competences explain substantial proportions of the variance in different measures of vocational success, indicating that self-ratings could be validly used as measures of vocational competence.

Finally, Elke Struyf, Stefanie Adriaenssens and Karen Meynen describe the difference between basic skills a beginning teacher needs and the level of professionalism that can be expected of an experienced teacher. This description – given by the Flemish government – is used as the starting point for the development of an assessment instrument to measure teachers' competences by means of three different aspects: behaviour, capability and beliefs. The article describes the validation of the instrument and the use in teacher training institutes and schools.

In this special section, we hope the reader gets some impression of actual ongoing European higher education reforms, as well as of the increasing use and meaning of competences and its assessment in higher education.

References

- Adam, S. 2004. *Using learning outcomes: A consideration of the nature, role, application and implications for European education of employing 'learning outcomes' at the local, national and international levels*. Edinburgh: UK Bologna Seminar. http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/EN/Bol_sem/Seminars/040701-02Edinburgh/040620LEARNING_OUTCOMES-Adams.pdf.
- Baartman, L.K.J., T.J. Bastiaens, P.A. Kirschner, and C.P.M. van der Vleuten. 2007. Evaluating assessment quality in competence-based education: A qualitative comparison of two frameworks. *Educational Research Review* 2: 114–29.
- Birenbaum, M., K. Breuer, E. Cascallar, F. Dochy, Y. Dori, J. Ridgway, and R. Wiesemes. 2006. EARLI position paper: A learning integrated assessment system. *Educational Research Review* 1: 61–7.
- Braun, E., and B. Leidner. 2009. Academic course evaluation: Theoretical and empirical distinctions between self-rated gain in competences and satisfaction with teaching behavior. *European Psychologist* 14: 297–306.
- Brockmann, M., L. Clarke, P. Méhaut, and C. Winch. 2008. Competence-based vocational education and training (VET): The cases of England and France in a European perspective. *Vocations and Learning* 1: 227–44.
- Brockmann, M., L. Clarke, and C. Winch. 2008. Knowledge, skills, competence: European divergences in vocational education and training (VET) – The English, German and Dutch cases. *Oxford Review of Education* 34: 547–67.
- Cedefop. 2009, September. *The development of national qualifications frameworks in Europe*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/etv/Upload/Information_resources/Bookshop/562/6104_en.pdf.
- Dierick, S., and F.J.R.C. Dochy. 2001. New lines in edumetrics: New forms of assessment lead to new assessment criteria. *Studies in Educational Evaluation* 27: 307–29.
- Dijkstra, J., C.P.M. van der Vleuten, and L.W.T. Schuwirth. 2009. A new framework for designing programmes of assessment. *Advances in Health Sciences Education* 15: 379–93. doi: 10.1007/s10459-009-9205-z.
- Dochy, F.J.R.C., and L. McDowell. 1997. Introduction: Assessment as a tool for learning. *Studies in Educational Evaluation* 23: 279–98.
- European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. 2005. Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European higher education area. http://www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/documents/e4/050221_ENQA_report.pdf
- Hambleton, R.K., and E. Murphy. 1992. A psychometric perspective on authentic measurement. *Applied Measurement in Education* 5: 1–16.
- Kennedy, D., A. Hyland, and N. Ryan. 2009. Learning outcomes and competences. In *EUA Bologna handbook – Making Bologna work*, ed. E. Froment, J. Kohler, L. Purser, L. Wilson, H. Davies, and G. Schurings. Stuttgart: Raabe.
- Linn, R.L., J. Baker, and S.B. Dunbar. 1991. Complex, performance-based assessment: Expectations and validation criteria. *Educational Researcher* 20: 15–21.
- van der Vleuten, C.P.M., and L.T.W. Schuwirth. 2005. Assessing professional competence: From methods to programmes. *Medical Education* 39: 309–17.
- Westera, W. 2001. Competences in education: A confusion of tongues. *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 33: 75–88.

Liesbeth Baartman

*Eindhoven School of Education, Eindhoven University of Technology,
The Netherlands*

Edith Braun

Schul- und Unterrichtsforschung, Freie Universität Berlin, Germany