

## **New forms of bridging theory to practice (and the other way around) in internship**

Prof. Jan Vermunt, Utrecht University, The Netherlands

Abstract for the Praxistagung, University of Salzburg, 28-30 Nov. 2007

Vocational education is more and more organized in dual learning programs in which two types of learning environments are combined: studying at the educational institute and learning from practice at the workplace. The crucial question in such types of training programs is how the different kinds of knowledge students acquire can be brought together into an integrated knowledge base. Students have at least three important sources to learn from: their own practical experiences, the practical knowledge of the mentor and other employees at the workplace, and the 'theory' offered and discussed at the educational institute. More often than not, these different sources result in different knowledge bases in the learner that are hardly interconnected. Working in practice is then only regulated by the knowledge acquired from practical experiences and mentors, and what is learned at school has hardly any influence on working practices. From many perspectives, this is an undesirable situation.

Recently, several variants of these dual learning programs have been developed aiming at bridging the gap between theory and practice in vocational education. Main learning models in this respect include case-based learning, concern-based learning, competency-based learning, learning communities, scholarship learning, informal workplace learning, research-based learning, and educating in partnership. Main features of these new learning models will be highlighted, examples from practice will be given, and advantages and disadvantages will be discussed.

Research on how students learn in dual learning programs has been scarce. Only recently researchers have begun to study the way students learn in these programs and how they combine learning from practice with learning from theory. These studies have revealed, for example, different approaches to learning that students adopt when combining theory and practice, how students extract the practical knowledge from their mentors at the workplace, the nature and depth of the learning activities students employ when working on portfolios, and the ways students self-regulate their learning in the interface between theory and practice. Important findings from these scientific studies will be summarized.

What can we learn from these empirical studies on how students learn in dual learning programs for the design and improvement of these programs? In the final part of this keynote, the recent developments in dual learning programs and the recent research findings discussed so far will be confronted with one another, with the aim of bridging theory to practice, and the other way around, in vocational education.