Coping with wickedness in collaboration with stakeholders: addressing complex authentic problems in higher education

Call for abstracts – Cloud 14 EAPRIL

Marieke E Veltman (Windesheim University of Applied Sciences)

The world of work is changing. Complex authentic problems such as the design of smart cities, diversity in education, sustainable development, and social inequality, increasingly require professionals to engage in collaborative, cross-disciplinary, and non-linear approaches in multiple-stakeholder contexts (Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004). In higher education, these shifts in the working world have led to a greater emphasis on the skills and dispositions needed to deal with ill-structured, societal problems with wicked features in educational practices (Neubert et al., 2017). Wickedness is defined here as the combination of complexity, uncertainty, and value divergence between the involved stakeholders (Head, 2008). These educational practices involve the collaboration with external stakeholders and draw on design-thinking, co-creation, change-management, living labs (Veltman, van Keulen & Voogt, 2019), or regional learning environments (Gulikers & Oonk, 2019). However, despite the growing consensus in higher education that more emphasis on the competences for adaptive, participatory and cross-disciplinary strategies is needed (Head & Alford, 2015; Head & Xiang, 2016), curriculum designers and teachers often find themselves entering uncharted waters. A better understanding of the features of wickedness in the problems, the problem-solving process, and the possible outcomes is needed, as well as a better understanding of the skills and dispositions needed to deal with complex authentic problems.

The challenge to align and integrate these problems in a coherent curriculum design itself also contains a high degree of wickedness and cut across different systems: school, professional fields, and society. Teachers, the involved external stakeholders, and students have diverging values and interests and use different (coping) strategies to guard their interests, to manage risks and reach their goals. Another significant challenge relates to framing of the aimed relation with the main stakeholders, and clarification of their roles, responsibilities and participation during the problem-solving process. This raises important questions about how the expectations and roles of teachers, students, and external stakeholders, being clients, commissioners, partners or otherwise, can be managed in order to foster participatory and adaptive approaches.

Submissions can for instance focus on:

- How can the relation with the main stakeholders of higher education be managed, to foster students’ learning in participatory and adaptive approaches?
- What do companies and organizations expect from higher education in order to foster students’ competences towards addressing wickedness?
- How can teachers balance and leverage the tensions that students experience when dealing with wickedness?
- How can a process be fostered that both yields value for the involved stakeholders, as well as for students’ learning?

References
doi:10.1016/j.landurbplan.2016.03.018.