

Quality Assurance in Vocational Orientation through Entrepreneurship Education

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Abstract

The following article deals with the question of how the quality of vocational orientation in schools can be assured. From the perspective of entrepreneurship education requirements are formulated towards vocational orientation which should be considered in quality assurance of vocational orientation. Then, the German certificate "School with exemplary Vocational Orientation" is presented as an example of an elaboration of these requirements, including the opportunities offered by this approach.

Introduction

Young people, who have successfully completed their school history, are confronted with a significant change within their biography: They have to find their place in a society with a large variety of professional perspectives. But how is it possible to manage that young people in transition between school and profession are able to develop perspectives for themselves, which are suitable for their concept of life as well? Moreover, how is it possible to manage the successful transition into an apprenticeship? Since the middle of the 1960s, these questions are being answered in Germany by the approach of professional orientation.

In the present article the role and tasks of vocational orientation in Germany are described first. Thereafter, entrepreneurship education is discussed and a German example of a national-wide network in this area is described with regard to quality assurance in vocational education.

1 Vocational Orientation in Germany

At first, tasks, targets and contents of vocational orientation in Germany are introduced. Based on this, the importance of vocational orientation as a task of transition management is elaborated in order to optimize the transition from school to work. Finally, quality assurance within vocational orientation is emphasized.

1.1 Tasks, Targets, Contents

Brüggemann and Rahn (2013) are describing the step of choosing a profession as a development task, which has to be undertaken by the school leavers. This is also understood as a learning task within the life course which has to be managed individually based on physical or social demands. According to this, the target of vocational orientation is to achieve a matching between specific demands within the professional world and individual abilities and competences. The school leavers are self-responsible for the successful management of this development task. According to Butz (2008) vocational orientation is a lifelong process of approximation and adaption between interests, wishes, knowledge and skills on one side, and possibilities, needs and demands of work environment and professional world of work at the other side. Both sides, and with that the process of vocational orientation as well, are being affected by social values, standards and demands, which are subject to change, as well are affected by technological and social developments within the economy and employment system.

It is obvious that vocational orientation is not only limited to the transition between school and

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apprenticeship, especially considering that flexible respectively precarious ways of employment and discontinued professional biographies are increasing more and more. Focus of this article is the vocational orientation as part of the general school system, without losing sight of other transitions and their specific management, and not denying their significance for the professional life course.

Those developments within the economy and employment mentioned by Butz (2008) belong to the factors which decisively characterize the discussion regarding the situation of school leavers when applying for apprenticeships as they are presenting a (catalogue of) requirements from employers' perspective for young applicants, who have to orientate themselves professionally. Due to the high complexity of the professional possibilities, vocational orientation is no longer regarded as an approach to promote disadvantaged groups, but is regarded as a necessity for all general schools (Brüggemann & Rahn 2013).

In the 14th German Child and Youth Report (2013) (Deutsches Jugendinstitut (DJI) Christe, Enggruber and Reisch (2013) emphasize the strong preventative character of vocational orientation. They expound significant problems for pre-vocational education and vocational orientation: Firstly, young people are aiming for more and higher graduations and therefore some are starting their apprenticeship or academic studies very late. Secondly, for school leavers, mainly those with migration background, it is difficult to get access to the apprenticeship system. This situation is even more complicated for applicants without graduation (Christe et al. 2013).

Vocational preparation and orientation have to pick up and to consider these developments in order to prevent unfavorable individual developments of vocational biographies. According to Brüggemann and Rahn (2013), this is the case in 11 – 15% of school leavers, who do not get access to an apprenticeship. This may certainly have different reasons. It is especially difficult for the small number of young people, who are being threatened by social stigmatization, because they do not get access to an apprenticeship and therefore remain in the transition system.

According to Brüggemann and Rahn (2013), the pedagogical task of vocational orientation is to support students in their orientation. The probability of a suitable choice as well as the success of transition in promising educational paths shall increase. At a didactic level, this concerns the following elements:

- self-exploration
- professional possibilities
- specification of career aspiration and alternatives as well as
- subsequent planning and search for an apprenticeship.

This task is based upon two main perspectives: Firstly, vocational orientation is understood as a cross sectional task, which has to be conducted at all school subjects and levels of education (Schudy 2013). Secondly, regional cooperation between various institutions shall support the vocational orientation of students by gathering work experience. Thirdly, there exist various concepts of vocational orientation besides school approaches and the approaches of the employment agency. These are mentoring concepts (Stein & Stummbaum 2013), or coaching approaches (Birgmeier 2013). These measurements and activities are embedded in the so-called transition system, which is managed by all institutions involved such as potential training companies, vocational and general schools, employment agencies or private agencies for vocational preparation. The networks may differ greatly on regional level, depending on participating institutions.

1.1 Vocational orientation as a task of transition management

In Germany, vocational orientation is part of the preparation for apprenticeships and is established in the German Vocational Training Act (“Berufsbildungsgesetz”, BBiG). The crucial factor for the explicit use of the definition “vocational orientation” is a resolution of the Kultusministerkonferenz (KMK) (Standing Conference of the Federal State Ministers of Education) in 1997, recommending to include and to systematically promote vocational orientation and preparation for career choice for all students as part of the educational mission of the general school system (KMK 1997). Therefore, general schools are counting as institutions of vocational orientation. Because of their legal obligation, the employment administration, namely the employment agency (Bundesagentur für Arbeit) has to be mentioned at first. In the past, this agency had the task to help school leavers to find their way to reasonable professional orientation. In the meantime the agencies have got possibilities to finance vocationally oriented measures by further institutions. This led to an abundance of educational institutions which are now acting in the German transition system. These are educational provider, foundations and associations as well as private institutions (Brüggemann & Rahn 2013).

There are complex possibilities to support school leavers in the transition from school to apprenticeship. Successful vocational orientation therefore implies management of the various offers in a double aspect: Firstly, a general supporting programme shall be organized, and secondly, individual encouragement has to take place. This is especially ambitious because students of the same age group may have obtained different developmental stages within vocational orientation (ibid.). Therefore, firstly, a systematic gathering of all regional programmes has to take place, and secondly, each institutional respectively individual programme has to be adapted with regard to the target group or person. In this respect, sustainability could be ensured by building regional networks.

1.2 Quality of vocational orientation

Looking at the great variety of supporting programmes for vocational orientation in Germany, questions about the quality of the programmes are coming up:

- Are they reaching the desired goal of vocational orientation?
- Are these long term measures?
- Who are the target subjects and will the target group be reached?
- Which competences are at the center of promotion and does the choice in each case make sense?
- Do the methods match the approach?

There exist various approaches to ensure the quality in vocational orientation which will probably be considered more intensely in the near future. These approaches are in Germany among others: “Guidelines for Vocational Orientation” by Bertelsmann Stiftung or the “Quality Standards” by Deutscher Verband für Bildungs- und Berufsberatung (dvb). In the following a concrete example is presented to show how nationwide quality standards can be conducted on regional level particularizing the example vocational orientation regarding entrepreneurship education. The certificate for quality “School with exemplary Vocational Orientation” is an example of how networking and management of transitions can be realized as a cross-sectional task under consideration of contextual targets and ensuring the quality in vocational orientation. First of all, the meaning of entrepreneurship education in this article is described in detail.

2 Entrepreneurship Education

The increasing relevance of entrepreneurship education for vocational orientation is emphasized in the following. Not only does entrepreneurship education promote entrepreneurial thinking and action, but also

increases the ability to perform. After a definition of entrepreneurship education its objectives are presented.

2.1 Definition and relevance

As part of economic and socio-political demands for skilled workers in the employment system entrepreneurship education is gaining more and more relevance. In this respect, qualification of skilled workers is demanded mostly by the institutions which are bringing young people into the world of employment. These institutions are schools, company run training institutions and universities which should increasingly encourage their graduates regarding the acquisition of action competence in order to prepare them for the world of employment with its complex requirements. Action competence is understood as a synthesis of professional, personnel and social skills (Menning 2003). The demand results from (1) changing working structures, which are amongst others affected by an increasingly faster change of working tasks. This requires more and more flexible, personally responsible and problem-oriented acting employees and (2) this results as well from an increasing political interest in business formation (entrepreneurship) and from economic innovation. The aim is to promote (school) graduates through vocational education by fostering entrepreneurial thinking and action as well as putting the transition from invention to innovation in the center (Hekmann & Lindner 2009).

There has been a discourse regarding entrepreneurship education within Europe¹ in numerous debates, programmes and strategies since the early 1980s years (European Commission 2007/2009; OECD 2012; BMWi 2010). Despite a continuous boom of this topic, there is a broad variance of the conceptual definition. Arising from the literature, it becomes apparent that the definition and discussion regarding entrepreneurship education is opening up from economic to pedagogic questions.

A crucial moment may lie in the fact that genuine-economical conceptual definitions of entrepreneurship are mostly contemplating external factors only (e.g. business formation) and are less responding to internal factors like skills, competences and impartation (e.g. development of an entrepreneurial personality)². This reflects the long lasting idea that entrepreneurship is an innate talent and in this regard, only basic factual knowledge is learnable. This debate is largely deemed to be obsolete (Henry et al. 2005; Weber & Starke 2011) and moreover, there is to notice a German-wide as well as an international debate which goes beyond the internal economic entrepreneurship-discussion. This debate includes relevant pedagogical perspectives (Weber 2013). Entrepreneurship is no longer considered as an innate attribute, but skills of an entrepreneur are regarded as learnable (Fretschner & Weber 2013; Henry et al. 2005; Weber & Starke 2011; Johansen & Schanke 2012).

2.2 Objectives of entrepreneurship education

To date especially universities and universities of applied sciences are offering a variety of various offers regarding entrepreneurship education. General schools and vocational education follow as well. Thereby most approaches regarding entrepreneurship education are no longer exclusively concentrating on a pure transfer of professional knowledge regarding incorporation theory, but in addition to the development of professional knowledge to strengthen the individual by helping to identify its own skills and capabilities

¹ There is a longer tradition regarding entrepreneurship education in the United States where it has been playing an important role within economic education since the 1940s.

² An example is the definition of Joseph Schumpeter, to which many authors are conforming with. This definition describes "Entrepreneurship as the process of developing an enterprise, from the identification of an opportunity / idea to the organization of work and setting up the new enterprise" (Schumpeter 1934; citation in Johansen & Schanke 2013, p.359).

and interests, in order to cope with these in terms of an “entrepreneur of himself/herself” (Hekman & Lindner 2009). This means in practice that (school) graduates should holistically be enabled, e.g. to solve customer-oriented problems on different competence standards, to work in teams, to take over responsibility as well as both as employees (intrapreneurship) or entrepreneurs (entrepreneurship) to be able to think and handle in an entrepreneurial way. At best, in addition a development of sense of responsibility and a moral sense should take place in order to strengthen the graduates in their social judgment (Weber 2013). Another option is the more and more central aspect of entrepreneurship education to recognize and to encourage self-employment as a possible alternative for conventional employment (Hekman & Lindner 2009).

However, there is no mutual consent within the variety of entrepreneurship education concepts of what and how it should be taught (e.g. no coherent pedagogic material, missing “best practice” examples and case studies). This is referring to the various educational levels (university, vocational education as well as general schools and vocational schools) and to didactics and methodology as well³. Although entrepreneurship education is “organized as a separate subject, as a topic in other subjects, or is integrated in subjects through projects” (Johansen & Schanke 2013, p.357) there is no broad and uniform curricular anchoring or structural systematic within different institutions and levels of education. At present, it is rather lying in the responsibility of the different institutions to include entrepreneurship education in their curriculum and to take care of the didactical implementation.

Consequently, it appears to be important not to neglect the efforts regarding an appropriate quality assurance and evaluation of entrepreneurship education approaches, its processes and components. Thereby, assessment criteria concerning quality and effectiveness have to be made suitable to the different educational levels and activities (Volkman 2011). Besides the evaluation of the approaches, teachers and their teaching have to be included into the quality assurance process (Müller & Diensberg 2011).

In the following, a concrete example for the promotion of entrepreneurship education in German schools is presented, which aims at putting the above mentioned requirements into practice.

3 An Example of Excellent Vocational Orientation

From a business perspective, good vocational orientation is one of the core tasks of school. But what is good vocational orientation?

In 2004, the Bertelsmann Foundation in cooperation with several German regions found a network for a career choice (Netzwerk Berufswahl-SIEGEL) with the aim to develop quality criteria and to set common standards in vocational orientation. The network is supported by a broad coalition of policy, schools, universities, businesses and society, and has been certifying “Schools with exemplary Vocational Orientation” since 10 years. The implementation of the certification is carried out by various regional representatives. These have come together in a German-wide community for excellent career guidance in schools (Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft SCHULEWIRTSCHAFT 2012).

The network’s community has set itself the task of making excellent vocational orientation visible to the outside and to systematically improve it. The quality standards of the certificate “School with exemplary Vocational Orientation“ are continuously further developed. In the medium term the certificate shall be

³ There are more and more examples of “best practice” on the level of universities and universities of applied sciences where also research activities are noticed (Volkman 2011); whereas there are large gaps with regard to general schools and vocational schools.

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present in all parts of Germany. Therefore, the representatives cooperate closely with ministries and make an important contribution to securing skilled labor. They stand together in close exchange regarding professional topics, take joint decisions and support each other.

Since 2010 the network is coordinated by a federal working group (Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft SCHULEWIRTSCHAFT) that stands for the successful cooperation and mutual support between schools and companies. It allows teachers and students practical experiences in the work environment, promotes economic education, and gives companies insights into methods and possibilities of the schools.

The network is funded by two well-known German companies: Deutscher Sparkassen- und Giroverband and Siemens AG.

3.1 The Certificate

In 14 of 16 federal states in Germany, the certificate "School with exemplary Vocational Orientation" is given to schools with excellent vocational orientation. In each region, this honor is awarded by joint initiatives involving education authority, chambers, associations and companies. The communities of each region are members of the nationwide network for a career choice. Its goal is to give students information and to provide assistance with the entry into professional life at an early stage.

To receive the certificate, the schools have to go through a comprehensive procedure. The application includes a written representation of the concept of the school's vocational orientation and its implementation, and school administrators, teaching staff, parents and students have to answer questions from external judges. Schools with excellent vocational orientation have to convince the jury that they are very passionate to prepare their students with different measures on the transition from school to work or studies. The jury includes representatives from industry, commerce, trade, university, education department, schools, and parent representatives (Handelskammer Bremen 2014).

So far, more than 1.200 mostly volunteer jury members accompany the quality management process of the certification. The German-wide representatives come from the school sector (31%), from associations, chambers of commerce, institutions and foundations (29%), business (30%, of which 1/3 in management positions), parents (2%), and from other institutions (8%) such as universities, educational agencies or job centers (June 2013).

The certificate represents sustainability and long-term quality assurance in vocational orientation in schools. Therefore, the certificate should not only stand for a snapshot, but should also initiate an ongoing process in which the schools evolve and improve continuously. Consequently, it is expected that the existing standards cannot only be maintained over time; rather the school should evolve in their activities and measures. After a period of two to four years (depending on the region) a "re-certification" is necessary in order to keep the certificate. After that, every four to six years another "re-certification" is due (Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft SCHULEWIRTSCHAFT 2013).

3.2 Goals and Vision

With the certification of schools the following goals and visions are pursued (Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft SCHULEWIRTSCHAFT 2013).

Goals

- Create opportunities for young people, preparation for starting a job
- Offer orientation for companies (Where do the students come from?)

- Give recognition and appreciation
- Implementation of a good career and study guidance in schools
- Systematically improve career and study guidance
- Make excellent vocational orientation visible to the outside

Visions

- Common idea of good career/vocational and study orientation
- Optimal job opportunities for students
- Transfer to companies
- Introduce the certificate to all schools and all provinces/federal states of the country
- Maintain, develop and improve quality standards

3.3 Benefits for Schools

Schools do immensely benefit from the certificate as it is a showcase for outstanding career and study orientation, which also creates public awareness of the school. The awareness and the recognition of the school rise from the perspective of companies. Moreover, each school applying is given further impetus by a jury, combining external expertise in the field of career and study orientation from different perspectives (e.g. business, parents, state education authority). And as a consequence, schools holding the certificate “School with exemplary Vocational Orientation“ continuously have to review and develop their activities in the field of career and study orientation. Through the application for the certificate and the associated process, also crosslinking within the school can be strengthened, and furthermore, certified schools receive templates for a systematic documentation of their vocational orientation (Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft SCHULEWIRTSCHAFT 2013).

3.4 Procedure of Application & Quality Assurance

The school is applying for the certificate on a regional call for proposals. On the basis of a questionnaire the school has to record its career and study choice activities. When assessed positively, a jury visits the school to get an insight in the practical implementation of the concept of vocational orientation of the respective school. If the result is convincing, the school is given the certificate “School with exemplary Vocational Orientation“. If a school does not meet the requirements it will receive a feedback which is thus a good starting point to improve.

The certification is a long-term process for quality assurance. Its criteria are based on European recognized standards in quality management and are adapted to regional conditions. Every two to four years, certified schools must go through an evaluation procedure again in order to keep the certificate (Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft SCHULEWIRTSCHAFT 2012).

3.5 Topics and Criteria of the Certificate

"Exemplary vocational orientation" within the context of the certification has many facets. These are divided into six topics for the certification process (Landesinstitut für Lehrerbildung und Schulentwicklung 2012). By applying, a school starts surveying its own work which is often the starting point for the development of a more or less clearly described curriculum for vocational orientation.

Topic 1: Economic Education

What are the school's offers in order to enable the students to learn and understand aspects of the work environment? This implies national economic knowledge (e.g. economic models, globalization, location policy), business studies (e.g. production costs, expenditure planning, accounting) as well as financial

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literacy (e.g. "getting along with the income", consumption and needs). Another focus of this section is the question of the implementation: Are projects carried out? Is there a school enterprise? Does the school take part in competitions?

Topic 2: Clarification of Individual Interests and Strengths

A "school with exemplary vocational orientation" allows its students to clarify their interests and strengths both during the lessons and at certain occasions, and to integrate these aspects into the individual learning plan.

The school illustrates how the students are encouraged to develop, observe and reflect interests, skills and competencies. Of interest for the certification is furthermore: What are the procedures for competence assessment? How does feedback on the observed competence profiles take place? What activities are arranged between the school and the students to develop skills and to achieve goals?

Topic 3: Internships, Learning Opportunities and Probation Situations Outside School

Extracurricular learning sites are not per se a guarantee for successful vocational orientation. Therefore it is a particular challenge to link in-company learning with learning at school in a way that makes sense to the students. For this purpose, content, pedagogical and organizational aspects have to be clarified and developed within the school. Accordingly, the diversity and structure of extracurricular learning experiences initiated by the school are of importance for the application. These include special forms and contents of internships as well as aspects of the preparation, the implementation and the follow-up of practical experiences.

Topic 4: Vocational Exploration and Life Planning

Career choice is not a simple, especially not a linear process in which only one option is pursued. The aim is to introduce the students to a wide range of possible careers, and to correspond to their own life plans. According to this, "schools with exemplary vocational orientation" focus on didactical learning environments in which both the professional life and the life-world are explored: How and where is vocational/professional information collected? How do the students learn about different career fields? How do they get prepared for the application process?

Topic 5: Career Choice Process and Transition Planning

Process and planning are meant here in two ways. On one hand, it is about processes that are designed within the school. Regarding this, the school illustrates how the individual elements described above are put together in a comprehensive concept, how responsibilities are clarified, and standards for the implementation are formulated. On the other hand, it is about the transition management for the students: Which structures foster the students' process of career choice? What services are available for special situations of need and how is guidance on career choice (up to individual support) implemented in cooperation with other institutions?

Topic 6: Sustainability and Quality Assurance

"Schools with exemplary vocational orientation" do not only have a good concept for the implementation of vocational orientation. They also have a structure for securing the standards achieved and for the further development of the curriculum for career and study orientation. This theme examines aspects of quality management and asks for targets, validation criteria and planning structures. Here, aspects of quality management, targets, validation criteria, and planning structures are examined.

3.6 Example: Vocational orientation through school enterprises

In the city of Bremen, the certificate "School with exemplary Vocational Orientation" ("Bremer Siegel für vorbildliche Berufsorientierung") has been awarded since 2007. The members of the jury in Bremen include representatives from industry, trade, craft, university, education department of the regional government, schools and parent representatives (Handelskammer Bremen 2014). Currently, 28 schools are certified in Bremen. Some of these schools have been re-certified already, for which they have undergone another test procedure.

In order to offer good vocational orientation and to promote entrepreneurship education in schools, more and more school enterprises are getting implemented in Germany. One example is the "Roland zu Bremen Oberschule"⁴ which belongs to the first schools certified in Bremen as "School with exemplary vocational orientation" in March 2007. Until today, the school has successfully passed each re-certification. This is mainly because vocational orientation plays an important role in the educational program of the school. Already in year 5-8 the students get prepared for the future world of work through action-oriented learning and first contacts with working life. In the subsequent school years 9 and 10, the confrontation with the industrial and vocational orientation is intensified. In the afternoon, mandatory action-oriented courses and courses of vocational orientation take place in addition to usual classroom teaching and internships are carried out. At the core of the concept of career and vocational orientation at the "Roland zu Bremen Oberschule", however, is the work of students in school enterprises. The implementation of school enterprises is a special measure for vocational orientation in school year 10 where operational processes are carried out in a realistic way. This includes, for example, production of goods, provision of services, administration, advertising, sales and accounting. Currently four active school enterprises are running, in which the students work four hours a week. According to the school this promotes the skills of the students such as entrepreneurship, self-initiative, autonomy, responsibility, ability to work in a team and social behavior.

One of the school enterprises of the "Roland zu Bremen Oberschule" is called "H.O.L.Z." (W.O.O.D.). This company produces work materials made of wood for primary schools. The product range includes, for example, boxes for learning cards, reading slider and ball games. Mainly small series are produced in continuous production line. In addition, products are produced according to customer requirements. Within the school enterprise, the students are incorporated according to their abilities. Depending on the group situation almost all tasks (accounting, materials procurement, manufacturing, quality assurance, selling at fairs and online, shipping) are undertaken by the students. The revenues from the sale of the learning materials are used for the purchase of materials, the replacement of production means as well as for smaller new purchases. A "profit sharing" happens in the form of joint actions, for example, going out for a meal or going on an excursion.

Within its numerous activities regarding vocational orientation the "Roland zu Bremen Oberschule" has built a network of contacts and cooperation with companies and institutions in its district and beyond.

Conclusion

Against the background of a more and more complex world of employment the importance of a supporting vocational orientation in schools is getting more vital. Schools are increasingly obliged to give their students an overview of vocational opportunities, to work out an individual vocational positioning and to

⁴ <http://www.roland-oberschule.de> (24.09.2014) All information given here is referring to the website of the "Roland zu Bremen Oberschule".

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promote their students in the acquisition of necessary competences in this respect. At an early stage, young people are developing a perspective in order to judge and conduct their opportunities, wishes and targets regarding an occupation in a realistic and self-responsible way. Schools are in charge to actively combine their own structure with structures of the world of employment (and apprenticeship).

To ensure the transition from school to apprenticeship not only an enthusiastically engagement of students is of importance. Supporting structures have to be well conceived and steadily revised in order to be adapted to a constantly changing market. From this perspective, quality assurance within vocational orientation is essential both in general schools and in vocational schools. One of the core questions is: What is a high quality vocational orientation within our institution and how to embed it?

The integration of entrepreneurship education in vocational orientation is offering numerous advantages. The discussion with social as well as with economic aspects within the working context leads after a successful implementation to broad possibilities in the acquisition of competences. The relatively new approach of entrepreneurship education is intensely picking up on this. Besides the impartment of professional knowledge, emphasis is put on the promotion of action competence. The target is to strengthen skills, knowledge and attitudes of the students in order to conduct and manage occupational duties. Besides the acquisition of skills school graduates should be able to express their own will regarding the real world of employment.

The German certificate “School with exemplary Vocational Orientation“ is an example of how schools achieve good quality vocational orientation and how these receive process-oriented support on their way as well. Especially the direct connection to regional companies through working in networks offers broad opportunities to include vocational contents in teaching and to realistically work on these real problems from the economic sector. In this manner, various possibilities arise to offer students access to experience-based learning. This approach makes possible to learn by a high praxis-relevance where various competences may be acquired besides traditional teaching at school which is also a source for the development of learning motivation.

The timely limitation of the certification is thereby a stimulus for schools to continuously adapt to changes and to accept the challenges which are offered by the pluralistic world of employment.

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