

„Learning field concept“ (Lernfeldkonzept) as a new way of structuring vocational education on the field of agriculture in Germany

Manfred Bräuer

Humboldt-University of Berlin, Faculty of Agriculture and Horticulture, Division of Agricultural and Horticultural Didactics

Since a lot of years German teachers at vocational schools think about the best ways to develop vocational competence of trainees. Based of the “Action oriented” concept there were a lot of ideas to develop necessary vocational competences. In the past time these ideas were to realize inside of a curriculum, structured in many independent subjects. Because this principle of structuring the training did not produce expected results, there was changed paradigm of structuring: from principle of subjects to principle of “Learning field concept” (Lernfeldkonzept). By using this new principle vocational competence can be developed better. Now it was decided in Germany that education at vocational schools follows the “Learning field concept”. All new developed curriculums have to follow the new concept of structuring vocational education.

1. Main ideas and advantages of “Learning field concept “(Lernfeldkonzept)

The “Learning field concept” offers best possibilities to realize principle of action oriented vocational education. It is a concept of structuring the curricula at vocational schools and gives orientation for the didactical and organizing planning of lessons. Typical for the “Learning field concept” is that content of lessons is related to typical professional actions and working situations. The professional work process is the starting point for the construction of “Learning fields” (Lernfelder). Central theme of “Learning field concept” is development of vocational competence in unity of professional competence, social competence and methodical competence. Because “Learning fields” are related to typical working situations, the learning process of trainees follows the logic of professional action, when skilled worker realizes a professional assignment. We call it complete action, which is following a sequence of events:

1. look for information
2. plan
3. decide
4. realize
5. control
6. assessment

Trainees get in lessons learning assignments, which require to go all steps of a complete action independently. On this way trainees are able to realize the professional reality very complex and it becomes more easy to transfer competences, developed at vocational school, into practice. The realization of these learning assignments makes necessary learning actions, which develop the formulated competences.

“Learning fields” are described in curriculum as thematic unities with competence oriented formulation of objectives, contents and time allowed. In the new German curricula for vocational education you will find 12-15 “Learning fields” for each profession. These are big unities with 40 to 80 hours. These big unities are divided for the educational process at school

each into 3-5 Learning situations. So you will find three connected terms within of the “Learning field concept”:

Professional action fields (Handlungsfelder)

Learning fields (Lernfelder)

Learning situations (Lernsituationen)

BADER (2003, p. 213), shows the connection between these terms as you can see in the following figure 1.

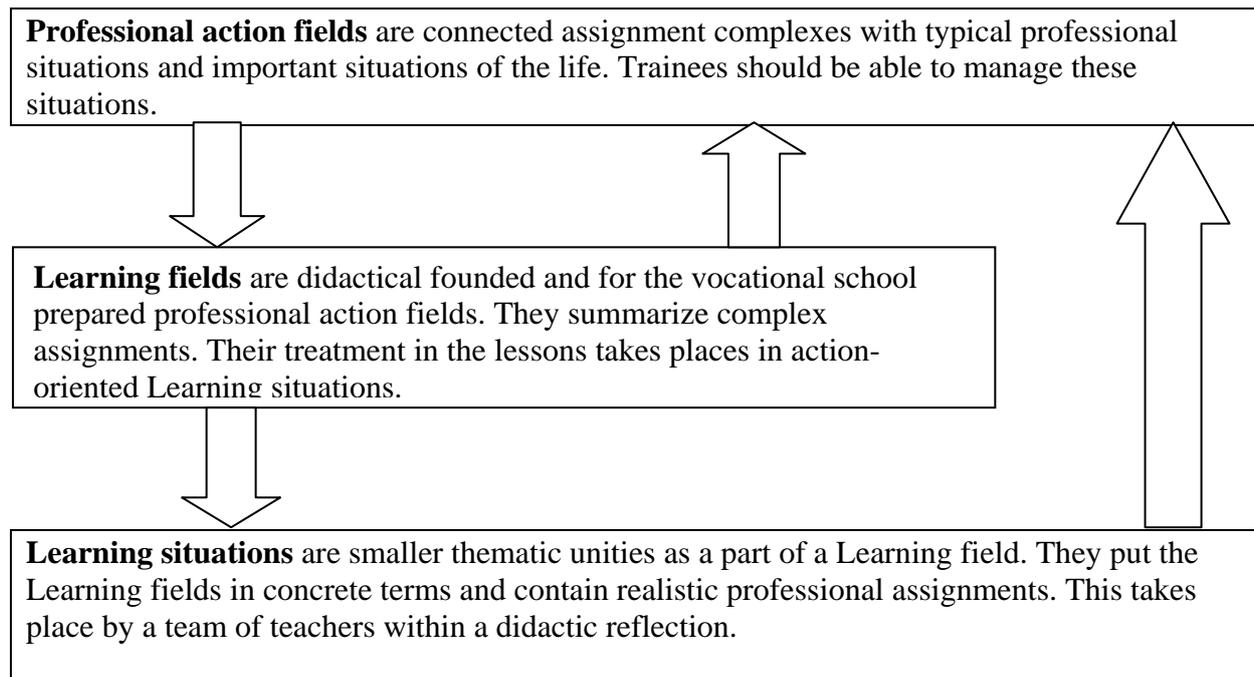


Figure 1: Connection between Professional action fields, Learning fields and Learning situations

2. The role of Learning situations within the didactical process

Central point to realize the “Learning field concept” is for teachers to develop Learning situations. In curriculum for a profession teachers find Learning fields. For each of these Learning fields they have to develop 3-5 Learning situations as typical part of the whole learning field. They have to think about the objectives, which competences trainees need to be able to fulfill demands in realization of a professional assignment. Then they have to decide which learning actions are necessary to develop these competences. After this in the didactical point of view realistic learning assignments are to formulate as complete action. Also teachers have to point out content as essential terms and main areas.

Development of Learning situations is for the realization of the “Learning field concept” the most difficult job for teachers and they very often have problems to do it successful. This was the reason, why at the Humboldt-University of Berlin, Division of Agricultural and Horticultural Didactics, a research project for teacher training students was established in 2006 with the aim, on the one hand to draw up a methodical guidance to develop Learning situations and on the other hand to develop examples for Learning situations and to test them at vocational school. Students first described the way from Learning field to Learning

situation, because it is the key position. In this description the didactical steps are explained (BRÄUER et al, 2007) as you can see in figure 2.

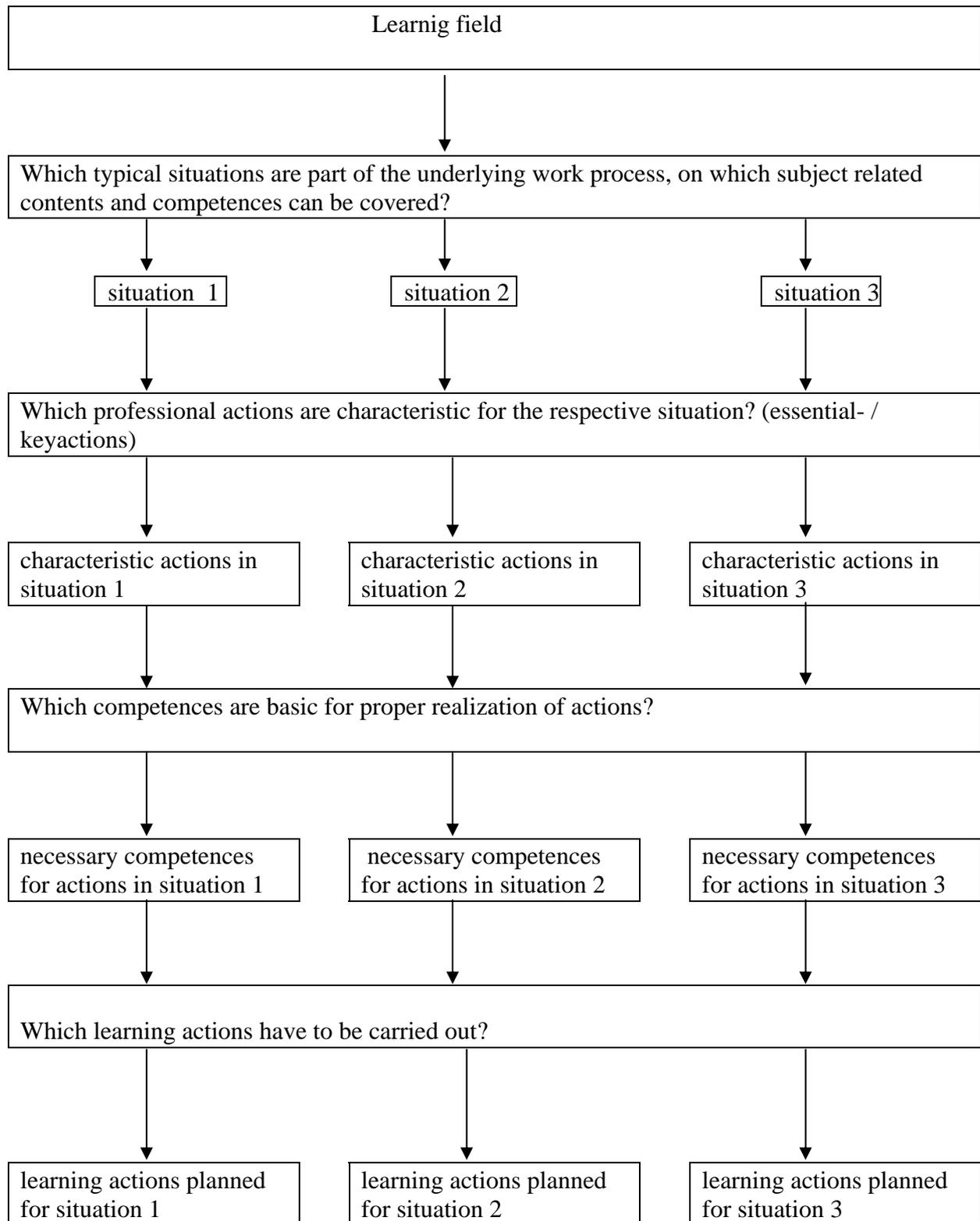


Figure 2: Steps to develop Learning situations

Based on this described steps it is very important to know how to represent a Learning situation from the point of didactic view. As result of the mentioned project was shown a proposal how to represent (BRÄUER, et al, p. 161) a Learning situation. You can see it in figure 3:

<p>Learning situation:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. naming / name2. formulation of aims /planned competences3. sort into year of education4. time allowed5. description of situation6. formulation of assignments to act (learning assignments as complete action)7. content as central terms and key main areas8. way of examination the learning results
--

Figure 3: Systematic description of a Learning situation

Based on this prepared and represented information a learning arrangement for the lessons can be developed under consideration of necessary conditions.

In the mentioned research project students developed 10 Learning situations by using the Methodical guidance as a didactical help and tested them in vocational lessons at vocational schools: Oberstufenzentrum Agrarwirtschaft Berlin-Zehlendorf and Werder. An example of the described Learning situation “Planning and realization of interior planting” is shown in BRÄUER et al. (2003, p. 162).

3. Results and conclusions

Results of research project were discussed with teachers at vocational school. It was said that Methodical guidance and also developed and tested Learning situations were helpful examples to realize the “Learning field concept”. Teachers said that Methodical guidance helps them to develop Learning situations as a strategy to plan and to realize lessons and to fulfill didactic aspects in using the “Learning field concept”. The dominant opinion of teachers concerning using the “Learning field concept” was:

- it brings better possibilities to develop professional competence of trainees, because they realize complete professional action (independent planning, realization, control and assessment) as it has to be done in real working processes
- transfer of competences, developed at vocational school, into practice, into demands of professional work process, of professional assignments becomes more easy
- trainees motivation to develop competences becomes better
- there are new content based possibilities to realize cooperation between vocational school and training farm.

The following consequences are necessary when “Learning field concept” will be used:

- teachers at vocational school discussed didactical aspects and consequences of “Learning field concept” and involved trainees in this discussion
- process of planning and realization of Learning situations takes place in teamwork
- learning and teaching process at vocational school takes place en bloc as one week courses
- teachers are able and willing to realize cooperation between vocational school and training farm.

“Learning field concept” at the moment is a relevant point of didactical research and discussion of vocational schools in Germany. More and more teachers accept the new concept of structuring vocational education of the field of agriculture.

References:

BADER, R.: Lernfelder konstruieren – Lernsituationen entwickeln. In: Die berufsbildende Schule 55 (2003) 7/8, S. 213

BRÄUER, M.; STEINHAUF, E., WIEST, M.: Umsetzung des Lernfeldkonzeptes im agraren Fachunterricht. In: B & B Agrar – Die Zeitschrift für Bildung und Beratung 60 (2007) 5, S. 161