

The Valuing Learning Manifesto: Integrating the Voice of the Learner in the Worlds of Learning and Working

Ruud Duvekot, Centre for Lifelong Learning Services, The Netherlands

“... the challenges humanity faces ... call for societies that understand themselves as learning societies and people who identify themselves as learners throughout their lives.”
UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2020

Society is changing due to technological, climatic, demographic, and globalizing developments. In addition, the many conflicts in the world result in migration flows that reinforce xenophobia and social unrest. The connectedness of people is increasingly characterized by a pseudo-connectivity that ranges from gratuitous appreciation or 'likes' to meaningless, negative evaluations or 'dislikes.' The globalizing, flexible, and social media-driven world is more led by the marketing and profiling of companies and influencers than by autonomous thinking people. All this has major consequences for the world in which people may flourish and manage their lives and careers. The empty shells of social media and the global business community with their grasping hands in the purses of national taxpayers strengthen the sense of insecurity and fears of change. This is at the expense of social cohesion in society and the inclusion of disadvantaged groups on the basis of equal rights and obligations. The gap between the haves and have-nots is only widening around the world. Meanwhile, the labor market becomes ever more flexible, and diplomas once obtained are no longer a guarantee for sustainable employability.

The worlds of learning and working face the challenge of providing and (self)employing qualified and skilled people who develop sustainably and adapt to the changing demands of social participation. However, the system partners in education, training, and Human Resources Management (HRM) are not responding effectively when it comes to personalizing and recalibrating the function of learning for the purpose of utilizing people's learning potential and increasing social cohesion and inclusion for all. Their main flaw is that they have no or insufficient eye for involving their most important partner in their adaptation to the learning society: the citizens/learners themselves.

Several proposals have already been made to tackle this blind spot. For example, Minouche Shafik (2021) calls for a new social contract to strengthen investment in human capital in the labor market. UNESCO (2021) also calls for a new social contract to enhance the function of education in supporting people in their lifelong development. With this Valuing Learning Manifesto, I propose to upscale these proposals by connecting them to a holistic learning culture in which "the voice of the learner" becomes truly central. The

focus on and mobilization of this 'voice' has so far been missing in the way forward, but this voice is critical for progress and needs support from education, training, and HRM facilities.

The key question is how to strengthen social cohesion and make society more inclusive by enabling people to articulate their true learning potential and mobilize their co-ownership of lifelong learning processes in the learning society. Answers are sought in better connecting the worlds of learning and working with their qualification and occupational standards, on the one hand, and embracing the learners themselves as partners in lifelong learning with their personal standards, on the other. The Valuing Learning Manifesto aims to empower learners to articulate their true learning potential and activate their co-ownership of lifelong learning processes in the learning society. This focus on learners requires a shift from the prevailing analytical learning paradigm to a more holistic one that integrates validating (prior) learning and enabling new (further) learning into a person-centered approach of valuing learning. So, let the *voice of the learner* be heard in the *learning society* in which "learning is important and valuable to all, people are encouraged to keep learning throughout their lives, and opportunities to learn are accessible to all" (Faure, et al, 1972).

Based on longitudinal research of learning cultures and case studies across the globe (Duvekot 2014, 2016; Duvekot *et al*, 2005, 2007, 2014a, 2014b, 2015, 2017, 2020), this paper first analyzes the preconditions and principles of a holistic learning culture in which the learner's voice can effectively be expressed and heard. Next, the Valuing Learning Manifesto provides the building blocks and a roadmap to realize a more holistic learning culture. The first-person pronoun is used throughout to emphasize the voice of the learner.

Valuing Learning in Three Standards

Since the 1970s, there have been numerous calls for making better use of people's non-formal and informal learning experiences (Faure, et al, 1972; EU, 1995; UNESCO, 1996; OECD, 2000; UIL, 2020). These calls basically mean that learning systems (education, training, HRD) must adequately facilitate *the learning individual* in shaping her lifelong learning process. And this is exactly what *Valuing Learning* aims to do.

Valuing Learning is a dynamic learning concept that values people for all developmental steps in their lives, and enables schools, universities, and organizations to be receptive to people's learning experiences and supportive of their further development (Duvekot, 2016). The concept is learner-steered and flows from reflecting on one's prior learning and developed competences (valuing) to adding new, desired learning outcomes (learning). Competences in this respect are general statements about a learner's ability to apply knowledge, skills, and behavioral aspects in an occupational context. Learning outcomes are specific statements in qualifications and occupational standards, integrating knowledge, skills, and behavioral aspects on which a learner reflects and is then assessed (bottom-up view) (Parry, 1996; Klarus, 1998; Cedefop, 2014).

Valuing Learning is a dualistic concept, which alternates between both words:

- *Valuing the learning* recognizes that anything can be learned however, wherever, and whenever, formally, informally, and non-formally. People's competences should be able to be valued learning-independently and linked to learning outcomes in

qualifications or to occupational requirements. Whether someone, for instance, has acquired the pedagogical skill of generating trust in pupils and creating a safe pedagogical climate as a student in teacher training or as a group leader in a scouting organization is irrelevant. Not *how* but *what* was learned is relevant.

- *Learning the valuing* relates to valuing what has already been learned and being able to base summative and formative statements on that. Learners can provide evidence of what they have learned, and assessors can assess the documentation of personal learning experiences and connect it to qualification or occupational standards, even cross-sectoral, by demonstrating, for example, to what extent the communication skills of a hotel receptionist and a nurse are transferable between these professional groups. Connecting what is learned with social value is paramount.

The concept of *valuing learning* is useful for learners to be: (1) aware that they are learning anytime and anywhere (self-efficacy), and (2) able to document and reflect on their learning experiences. Then assessors can value one's learning experiences and teachers, trainers, or HR staff can embed this valuation into a personalized learning path. *Valuing Learning* therewith embraces all learning activities that a person performs consciously and unconsciously, informally, formally, and non-formally, covering all kinds of learning, work, and life situations.

Valuing Learning involves assessing or evaluating one's learning experiences with three standards at play. Personal reference standards (Travers, Sheckley & Bell, 2002) are based on one's values, beliefs, professional products, and goals, while qualification and occupational standards can serve as frames of reference for those personal standards:

- The *Valuing* begins with self-examination and self-reflection for the purpose of recognizing one's learning results and articulating gaps and learning needs. Next, the assessment helps create a person-centered, further learning pathway. *Valuing* then has the meaning of assessment *of, for, or as learning*: there is both a chance of direct effects (cashing in on previous learning) and prospective effects or continuity of learning through further development in light of personal learning objectives (Bray and McClaskey, 2015).
- The *Learning* is "what one does to transmute incompetence into competence, ignorance into knowledge. By definition, learning starts in the zone of the unknown, and attempts, via a whole variety of activities, mental and physical, to discover comprehension and expertise" (Claxton, et al., 1996, p. 47). This definition supports a social constructivist interpretation of learning as an active process of continually constructing, acquiring, and sharing knowledge and expertise. Jarvis (2009) sees this as a lifelong activity in which people's ongoing learning experiences are actively used to realize various purposes for which that learning occurs.

The bottom-line in *Valuing Learning* is that "*it is the whole person who learns*" with a personal learning style, motivation, experiences, and ambition (Jarvis, 2006, p. 32). It's in the linkage with other standards where *Valuing Learning* makes a difference.

From Analytical to Holistic

Valuing Learning aims to solve the problem that the current social contract does not provide an adequate answer to society's need for lifelong learning, leaves too little room

for tailored learning processes, and above all, gives people hardly any say in the content and form of their learning, and thus their social employability. Providing space for people to raise their voices and (further) develop is, therefore, at stake.

The worlds of learning and working evolve gradually from a system-controlled contract of system partners *for* people to a more informal, person-steered contract *with* people and system partners such as schools, universities, and labor market organizations. This is a major challenge for system partners and learners. However, never before have there been so many opportunities to personalize learning processes in such a way that the learner's voice can be articulated and heard and learners may gain (co-)control over their own development. This is exactly what the concept of *the learning society* (Faure, et al, 1972) was calling for: the transition from an analytical, control-oriented learning paradigm with little room for personalized approaches, to a more holistic and trust-based paradigm with greater respect for learner autonomy. The new contract thus embraces the notion that it is *I who learn*, within the collective of *the learning society*, and that it is *I* who thereby make society stronger and more inclusive.

The analytic learning paradigm aligns with system-driven learning pathways: top-down, convergent, standardized, and monologically driven. Learning consists of standardized pathways, where maintenance of the established standard is a high priority. Assessment serves to determine whether all learning goals have been achieved and focuses primarily on ascertaining whether systemic norms have been met. It is about what the systemic partners say *I* need to learn!

In an analytic process, the red pencil is used: scoring all parts of the standard to be achieved in the way that best fits the standard. The learner thus works convergent step by step toward the totality of the qualification within a strong summative assessment framework. In this process, the professional is primarily the guardian of the qualification and responsible for teaching and achieving learning goals according to the standardized learning pathways. There is little attention to *my* voice because the standard is not such a good listener.

In contrast, the holistic¹ learning paradigm is rather process-driven: more bottom-up, contextualized, divergent, and dialogic. Learning is based both retrospectively and prospectively on organizing trust in the learner's ability to learn in any learning environment and time period and using learning methods and resources best suited to the learner. The emphasis is on dialogue with system partners about what "*I*" have learned and can still learn! Thus, in a holistic process, trust in each other (learner, teacher/trainer, HR professional, etc.) and the achievement of desired/required learning outcomes are vital.

In learning pathways, the *whole of the learner* is central to a divergent learning process: the learning pathway aligns with the learning strategy that best suits *me*. The *voice of the learner* is listened to with the green pencil by first appreciating what *I* have already learned and then flexibly meeting *my* remaining learning needs. Summative assessment and formative advising are central to assessments. Holistic learning thus enhances the potential for personalized learning pathways by starting from the learner's unique learning experiences and using them to achieve the whole qualification or standard. The role of the professional is thus aligned with organizing an appropriate, flexible learning pathway with *me*.

Finally, the shift from control to trust depends heavily on the role played by legitimizing bodies. In the analytical learning culture, control of the extent to which what is learned matches the content and learning objectives of the standard is central. Examination boards, sector councils, and other bodies check the standards and only look at the content of the dialogue between learner and professional in the case of demonstrable complaints or errors. In holistic learning, trust in the correct assessment of achieved learning outcomes is organized through the professionals' ability to use the 'green' pencil to appreciate a person's learning and provide feedback. Dialogue is central to the learning process both in the relation of learner and professional and in meeting the norms of the standard.

Table 1

Analytical versus holistic

Analytic learning paradigm (1990-2020)	Holistic Learning Paradigm (2020)
The process of valuing and learning is monological: the learner has to comply with the standard.	The process of valuing and learning is dialogical: the learner has a say in meeting the standard.
The 'red' pencil is used to assess learning results. Summative outcomes prevail.	The 'green' pencil is used for assessment. Formative feedback has the upper hand.
Convergent process: learners reflect on each part (course, task, etc.) of the standard. The standard is central, and the voice of the learner is subordinate.	Divergent process: the standard reflects on who the whole learner already is. The voice of the learner is central, and the standard adds value.
Self-diagnosis to captivate learners is lacking.	Self-diagnosis is available for any generic or specific field.
The assessor assesses each part of the standard (qualification), thus connecting the standard to the learner.	The assessor assesses the learner's portfolio as a whole and links personal learning experiences directly to the standard.
Assessment of single courses through preset criteria.	Review of and advice on the whole learner's portfolio.
The assessment is based on established requirements and rules for a negative/positive outcome.	Autonomous judgment of the assessor about the achievement of learning outcomes and on feedback for further learning.
The teacher is the guardian of the standard (qualification/functional standard).	The teacher acts autonomously as the facilitator of the learner's learning process.
Content and form of learning are defined in the standard (qualification) and managed by the teacher.	Content and form of learning take shape in different contexts and are focused on achieving learning outcomes flexibly.
Learning for fixed tasks with one correct solution.	Learning for tasks with different, contextualized solutions.

Source: author

Teaming up for Valuing Learning

In learning processes several partners in valuing and learning are active: the learner, organizations in and around the labor market, and education and training institutions. Together these partners discuss and organize the perspectives, forms, and content of lifelong learning strategies. The government and social partners stimulate this process at the macro level with legislation and funding. The interaction between these partners takes place in *the Triangle of Valuing Learning*.

Dialogues on appropriate learning strategies play an important role in connecting and activating the various partners on the basis of their own responsibility concerning the learning impact to be achieved. These dialogues are fueled by the three already listed standards:

- The *learner* with a personal reference standard in which personal learning experiences are documented and articulated: values, beliefs, professional products, ambition, motivation, and objectives.
- *Organizations* base their demand for workers' competencies on job-specific competency profiles or occupational standards in the HRM system.
- *Education and training institutions* formulate their learning opportunities in terms of occupational or qualification standards.

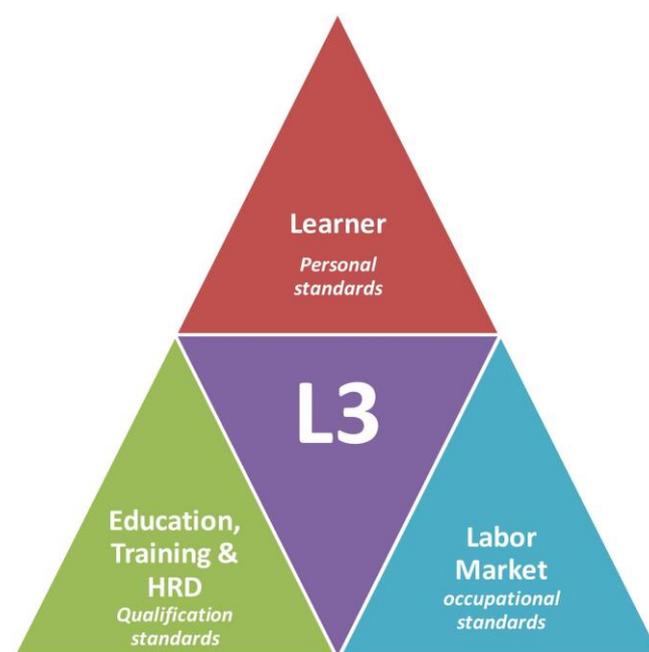


Figure 1 - The Triangle of Valuing Learning

Source: Duvekot, 2016.

Connecting the learner's learning needs with the learning opportunities within education, training, and/or work environments is based on validating prior learning experiences and using the validation-outcome as a starting point for organizing a learning trajectory in which new learning outcomes are achieved and anchored in one's portfolio. The dialogic nature of such a cycle is based on Freire's (1972) view that the dialogue between learner and teacher (or HR staff) should essentially be open and equal and relate to the desire or need to determine and shape the content of one's prior and further learning.

Such dialogues motivate and enable people to (self)reflect and articulate (new) learning needs. The holistic nature of the assessment methods applied focuses on the summative (assessment *of* learning), formative (assessment *for* learning) and reflective (assessment *as* learning) assessment of one's qualities with the intention to create and strengthen a personal career strategy.

The Valuing Learning Manifesto

As has been argued, I suggest connecting the proposals for a new social contract with a

holistic learning culture in which ‘the voice of the learner’ becomes truly central. To this end, the Manifesto focuses on adapting the learning systems in education, training, and human resources development (HRD) to the shifting learning paradigm with its call for more holistic and personalized learning pathways. It promotes an inclusive society in which everyone has the same rights and opportunities to develop and participate independently in all areas of life. This can only be meaningful if people are able to listen to each other’s voices and do not create barriers to participation and development.

The Manifesto aims to support the new social contract by activating the main stakeholders—the learners and the professionals in learning and working systems (teachers, trainers, assessors, guides/counselors, HR professionals)—as equal and autonomous partners in meaningful dialogues about the objectives, content, and forms of (lifelong) learning. To realize such dialogues, they should:

... *confirm* the trend towards a learning culture in which the learner is truly central, engaging in more flexible, contextualized, and personalized learning processes, a more bottom-up and process-driven nature of learning, and an increasing use of methods for assessing personal learning experiences and facilitating tailored learning.

... *understand* that this development represents a shift from the analytical, control-oriented learning paradigm to a more holistic, personalized, and trust-based learning paradigm. This changes the culture of learning from a focus on control over *what needs to be learned* to trust in *what has been learned and can be learned*. Learning then connects pre-existing learning experiences, gained in education, at work, and through informal learning, with new learning experiences in order to hear and value the learner’s voice (student, employee, volunteer, migrant, job seeker, self-employed, refugee, etc.).

... *outline* a roadmap for each partner in the learning process, starting with *outreach* to approach learners and help them identify and articulate their learning needs. Outreach leads to awareness of the value of personal learning experiences for the purpose of creating new development opportunities. Next, *assessment* values such learning experiences and provides feedback on further learning opportunities. Subsequent tailored *learning* involves personalized learning paths that correspond to the results of the assessment. *Validity* involves the formal completion of each pathway through certification, qualification, a concrete career step, or otherwise. This roadmap is repeatable and thus emphasizes the recurring nature of learning for maintenance, upgrade, update, or personal development.

... *achieve* meaningful and practical dialogues in a holistic learning culture through the following guiding principles:

1. *Adopting a common language for valuing and learning:* learning outcomes as a format for articulating and valuing the standards of learners (personal frames of reference), education and training (qualifications, certificates, badges), and HRD (occupational or job standards).
2. *Designing outreach as a social provision:* to strengthen learners' awareness that it is the learner who learns (formal, informal, and non-formal) and that learning systems can assist the learner to value and build upon those learning experiences.
3. *Sharing ownership with the learner.* The time is ripe for learning systems to learn to listen to “the learner's voice” by facilitating dialogues about learning according to the

formula: $P^{SR} + A^{PF} = L3$ (*Personal learning needs (based on Self- assessment & Reflection) + Assessment (of Prior learning for Future learning) = LifeLong Learning (L3)*).

This formula encourages dialogues across:

- a. The learner with a personal reference standard (beliefs, goals, professional products) as input.
 - b. The teacher (assessor, coach, supervisor & teacher) with qualification standards/certificates.
 - c. The HR professional (human resource development functions) with professional or job-specific standards.
4. *Utilizing assessment of, assessment for, and assessment as learning*: to value learning histories of learners in relation to qualification- and job-oriented standards in order to provide *truly* tailored and personalized learning.
 5. *Strengthening and trusting the autonomy of professionals* in education, training, and HRD in all their actions (assessment, teaching, training, coaching, supervision).
 6. *Preferring quality-care over quality-control*: organize and underpin trust in the capacity of the professionals in the triangle, especially those involved in assessing, guiding, and advising.
 7. *Affording lifelong learning*: provide legal, financial, educational, and social space for affording dialogues on valuing learning by, for, and with the learner.

Roadmap for The Valuing Learning Manifesto

If *Valuing Learning* is the connecting tool for the partners in *the learning triangle*, then it is important to identify its various functions and create a roadmap for a holistic, person-centered learning culture. In the roadmap, each partner can fill in their own roles and responsibilities. The roadmap is based on the *Upskilling Pathways approach* (Duvekot & Valdés-Cotera, 2019; web.ref. UP) that defines successive steps for skilling learners: outreach, assessment, tailored learning and working opportunities, and the validity of the output of a learning pathway. With this conceptual approach, the roadmap can be flexibly adapted to the demand for a holistic approach in learning and work processes within the new social contract.

The Upskilling Pathways concept begins with **outreach** activities, where target groups—especially those who are not fully aware of lifelong learning strategies—are approached and guided to identify their learning needs. The emphasis is first on making people aware of the value of their previous learning experiences for pursuing further/new learning and career opportunities. Second, guidance and counseling aim to strengthen peoples' voices and help them establish meaningful and positive dialogues about valuing and learning to enhance their participation in society. A prerequisite for this phase is that experts from learning and working systems are professionalized in holistic valuing and learning. The best way to do this for experts is by applying the concept of valuing learning to themselves and their colleagues; practice what you preach, so to speak. It involves creating a personal portfolio with reflection on one's own activities and behavior, (self-)valuing the portfolio and linking it to a standard(s) to start fulfilling the found perspective.

The next phase of **assessment** aims to establish the learning trajectory at the individual level in terms of content and form by building confidence in the value of one's previous learning experiences and aligning them with a personalized, further learning trajectory. This phase determines which components can already be considered completed and

which still need to be learned. The **tailored learning & working** phase means that the learning trajectory is carried out after the assessment in a tripartite managed process of learner, teacher, and HR-staff. The final phase of awarding **validity** rounds off the learning trajectory (certification) and puts the focus on lifelong learning for maintenance, upgrade, or otherwise of what has been learned and practiced. Validity both finalizes learning and emphasizes that learning is a recurring, lifelong process.

These pathways are ideally designed and implemented as an integrated approach. Each phase has a wide range of services that can be flexibly adapted to learners and their learning needs. Within each phase not all of the listed services will necessarily be used. Successive services are linked together so that the learner has a kind of *one-stop shop* for a personalized learning pathway. Figure 2 illustrates the step-by-step process of the *Upskilling Pathways concept* and highlights the linking function of assessment and the validity of one's realized development steps.

Figure 2

The Roadmap for Upskilling Pathways



Source: Duvekot & Valdés-Cotera, 2019.

Activating the Manifesto

Choosing the right approach to achieve meaningful and practical dialogues in the new social contract using the guiding principles of the Manifesto for Valuing Learning is important. Actions that can be put into motion are:

1. Formulating an **action plan** on the Upskilling Pathways concept. Components include:
 - a. Offering advice and funding for the development of a portfolio with which the voice of the learner can be articulated.
 - b. Providing procedures for valuing one's learning experiences.
 - c. Organizing guidance and support for articulating one's learning potential in local and regional counseling centers.
 - d. Designing an open badge system or valuing one's competencies and recognizing the equivalence of informal, non-formal, and formal learning experiences.
2. **Theory building** (proof of definition²) around the social, economic, and educational

dimensions of a transitional learning culture needs attention. There is much research and theorizing around the theme of lifelong development, but still little systematic analysis or theorizing to relate the development of the learning paradigm at social, economic, and educational levels.

3. **Action research** (proof of concept) focusing on multiple cases in which *valuing learning* in personalized learning paths is initiated, designed, tested, and evaluated in different contexts and partnerships and with different target groups. With x-number of case studies, an inventory and analysis can be made of how *valuing learning* works out best in the design of LLL-strategies, e.g., for the upgrade and/or update of employees, lateral entrants at sector level, valuing personal development within volunteer contexts.
4. **Professionalizing the professionals** (proof of value) in shifting from semi-autonomous experts in an analytic learning culture to autonomous professionals (teachers, guiders, assessors, HR managers) who, in dialogues with learners, act flexibly within the bandwidth of *learnability* and *validability* of learning outcomes. This is *the shift from control to trust*, from the analytical, mass learning, and control-oriented learning paradigm to a more holistic, personalized, tailored, and trust-based learning paradigm. The main difference between these two paradigms is the position of the learner. Is the learner mirrored in the content of the standard (holistic, divergent) as a “whole learning person” or is the standard mirrored in the content of the learner (analytic, convergent)?

In short, with more understanding of the holistic nature of person-centered learning processes, filling in the steppingstones of The Valuing Learning Manifesto will enhance and create meaningful dialogue between learners and professionals in learning and working systems. After all, this much is clear, lifelong learning offers challenges and opportunities for all partners, especially if *I* as a learner, am truly involved in shaping its content, form, and meaning. This provides added value both in preventing unnecessary learning and in successfully completing personal learning needs together.

The promise of lifelong learning for all is timely, given the call for a new social contract for working and for learning. It requires active participation by everyone, first and foremost *me* and *my* learning potential. The Valuing Learning Manifesto builds on this and connects every learner with development opportunities and social perspectives, preferably in a new social contract for the learning society. This contract is essentially informal and person-centered. Most importantly, being able and allowed to raise *my* voice emphasizes the ownership of my learning potential within the collective of *the learning society*. After all, it is *I* who learns, but always in dialogue with the professionals from the learning and working systems.

1 The Greek word *holos* (or *holè*, *holon*) means ‘whole’ or ‘complete’ [ὅλος-ὅλη-ὅλον].

2 *Proof of Definition* is the process of theorizing in order to place a particular phenomenon in a theoretical framework and be able to investigate it. *Proof of Concept* (or *Proof of Principle*) is the method of testing a concept, principle or theory for usefulness in a practical situation. *Proof of Value* is the enrichment of the expert’s expertise after a proof of concept demonstrated that a developed concept, principle or theory has added value in their professional practice.

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About the Author



Dr. Ruud Duvekot (1960) studied Economic and Social History at Utrecht University, the Netherlands. His thesis 'Leren Waarderen' [Valuing Learning] (2016) analyzed the impact of validating prior (formal, non-formal, and informal) learning experiences (VPL) on personalized learning, and the worlds of learning and working. At present his functions are: (1) director, Centre for Lifelong Learning Services (CL3S), (2) Professor, 'Validation and Work-based Learning, NCOI University of A.S., (3) Associate professor, Utrecht University of A.S., (4) UNESCO Research-Fellow, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, Hamburg, (5)

Chairperson, European Centre for Valuation of Prior Learning, (6) committee member, VPL Biennale (<https://vplbiennale.org>).