

THEMATIC SESSION 4: Thursday, 26th March 2009, 11.00 – 12:30 (room 214)

Using ethnography to further understandings of quality and its assessment in VET

Chair: Ingrid de Saint-Georges, University of Geneva, Switzerland

Discussant: Stephen Billet, Griffith University, Australia

A range of approaches can be used to approach quality of teaching and learning in VET. In this symposium, we discuss one of them: the use of “ethnographies of learning”.

Ethnographic research prioritize the experience, perceptions and practices of actors in their specific contexts of action. It investigates them through a set of well-documented and precise procedures for data collection. While ethnography is being used in many disciplines (developmental psychology, sociology, anthropology, science studies, education, learning sciences, etc.) and there are leading international journals and publication in the domain of ethnography and education, application of ethnographic procedures to the VET field remains scarce. Ethnographic methods however provide complementary tools to more traditional approaches in the VET domain: by providing a multifaceted view of learning and a more comprehensive picture of the everyday practices in which educational actors are engaged, it is in a position to interrogate the effects of educational policies and practices for example, or to challenge or confirm results from experimental studies, thus providing a more robust picture of the realities of vocational education and training. The papers in this symposium have in common that they draw from actual samples of their own ethnographic research in various contexts of vocational training and education 1) to discuss methodological and theoretical issues arising when developing ethnographies concerned with the ways people learn; 2) to question what counts as efficiency in a VET program.