



## Editorial

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## EDITORIAL

Dear reader,

It is a pleasure to write an editorial for this issue of the JAEE. I would like to share with you my experiences at the conference ‘Innovation of University Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources’, which took place in Lima, Peru, in the Universidad Nacional Agraria La Molina (UNALM), from 15–17 October 2013. I am sharing this as I perceive the conference to be an indication of the revived attention for the innovation and quality improvement of higher agricultural education. I see this growing attention worldwide, and believe that this is very promising. Higher agricultural education plays a pivotal role in developing responsible leadership for food security, poverty reduction, sustainable agri-food production and natural resource management.

The chair of the organizational committee and organizer of the conference was Professor Carlos Gómez. He and his team set up an interesting conference in which presentations were given by experts from Europe and the US, and by representatives of agricultural universities from Latin America. It was especially good to notice that various faculty members of agricultural universities had been investigating their own teaching practices. The emphasis of the presentations was on sharing innovation approaches and experiences, and less on exchanging research results about this. From this perspective the conference was a good beginning and absolutely valuable for colleagues in higher agricultural education. In general, there is very little room for structured exchanges of experiences of educational innovation in practice, but these moments are valued highly. Examples of good practice can be very inspirational for others; also, realizing quality innovation in higher education is difficult and implies hard work. The collective observation of that can be a relief for those who may sometimes think that their challenges, solutions and reactions are unique. In most cases they are not.

The purpose of the conference was to discuss innovation issues in higher education in agriculture and natural resources and to specifically investigate curriculum analysis and development, the development of powerful learning arrangements, the development of techniques for the measurement of educational achievement, accreditation of education programs and faculty development. An interesting program was set up, which was opened on the evening of 15 October with a keynote speech by John F. Preissing, representative of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in Peru; this session was moderated by Dr Javier Vásquez of the UNALM. The speech was about innovation in agriculture and rural development in Latin America. In his speech John Preissing spoke about the necessity of poverty reduction and food security, the related necessity for innovation in agriculture and rural development and the role of family farming in that process. Whereas the presentation contained important issues that the key international stakeholders have subscribed to for quite some time, the relationship with higher agricultural education was not very well established. When asked to further specify the programs and activities the FAO is undertaking in the field of agricultural education the presenter said that the

organization is not doing much in this respect. Personally I find this disappointing, as I find the education agenda to be extremely important in agriculture and rural development. On the other hand, the FAO is involved in extension strategy development and has strong opinions about that. As we know, via extension, various farmers can be directly supported in their development. However, to fundamentally raise the bar of global farmer competence, pre-service education is also essential, and, as I said, I find it incomprehensible that the FAO does not have a vision and strategy on that. Maybe there are agreements between the various international organizations like UNESCO, UNEVOC, the World Bank, OESO, ILO, and the FAO to divide responsibilities between themselves, in such a way that the FAO will not interfere in the international education agenda. However, especially for the field of agricultural and rural development, I see this as a lost chance.

The first keynote speaker the next morning was Dra Dênia Falcão de Bittencourt, director of Inova Prática Educacionais. She gave an interesting overview of information and communication technology (ICT) in education. I was next in line and gave a presentation about the competence needs in higher agricultural education. We at the Education and Competence Studies (ECS) Group of Wageningen University have done a series of studies on competence frameworks of professionals who are active in the agri-food system. Moderator of both presentations was Dr Gustavo Gutiérrez, also from UNALM.

After that there were various parallel sessions, on (again) ICT in education, curriculum development in higher agricultural education, international experiences in university education in agriculture and natural resources, experiences with accreditation processes, and various other themes such as pedagogies for stimulating learning, clarity of university teachers in the classroom, educational games, and so on. I attended the very interesting symposium about the development of curricula in higher agricultural education, in which curriculum approaches and experiences in Higher Agricultural Education (HAE) in the region were shared. Speakers were Dr Emilio García, from the University Mayor de San Andrés in Bolivia, Dr Jorge Castro of the University Nacional del Centro in Peru, Dr Juan Ignacio Domínguez from the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, and Dr Ernesto Olave from the, University Santo Tomas in Colombia. They shared approaches for curriculum development in their institutes from a governance and education management perspective. One of the paper presentations I attended was by Dr Gary Wingenbach of Texas A&M University, who was sharing his experiences with a project on the definition of teaching and research competencies of staff at UNALM. The effects of their project on teaching and research competencies were measured. A positive effect of the project was found, also on the motivation of staff for professional development.

Furthermore, I listened to the story of Dr Maria Wurzinger from BOKU, University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna, Austria. She was sharing experiences of a curriculum development project in animal sciences in Latin America. The purpose of the project was to improve quality, relevance and accessibility of higher agricultural education in Latin America. There were partners from Austria, Spain, Argentina, Bolivia, Mexico and Peru. The idea was to harmonize curricula, reform masters programs, design a new master program, to retrain staff, develop teaching methods, develop joint courses, and to upgrade and modernize equipment. Self-evaluations of each university and visiting teams of one European and one Latin American partner were used to cross-check results and carry out a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis.

External experts were invited as well to joint meetings and to give additional input. A labor market analysis was conducted, which appeared to be quite difficult, and a master program was designed, although the heterogeneity between the universities is very large. There is diversity in duration of programs, financing of programs, focus on research versus practice and the number of courses offered. The new master courses which were developed in the project started, and three didactic courses and two project management courses were offered. Internships were organized for information technology (IT) experts, administrative staff and teachers in Europe. An important lesson learnt in this project being that if cooperation in educational development is at stake, one should work together with different stakeholder groups in the universities and not rely on professors only. The development of joint courses appeared to be very difficult. Special measures were necessary to secure the sustainability of the project results. A further finding was that not much inter-university cooperation is going on between Latin America countries. Furthermore, universities here are more oriented toward the US than toward the EU. Missing funding schemes for student mobility were also a major constraint. The virtual campus as envisaged did not really take off.

The last day of the conference was opened with a solid plenary presentation by Emeritus Professor Erik de Corte from the Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium. His presentation was moderated by MSc. Tatiana Rojas from UNALM, about the acquisition of adaptive competence as the ultimate goal of learning and teaching in higher agricultural education. This requires a well-organized and flexibly accessible domain-specific knowledge base, heuristic methods, meta-cognition, auto-regulation and positive beliefs. He stressed the importance of four key characteristics of effective learning to this effect. Learning in his view should be constructive, self-regulated, situated and collaborative. When teaching, the prior knowledge and individual differences of students should be taken into account. This is easily said, and substantiated by massive amounts of research, but the implementation of this (also in massive classes) in higher education is not so easily implemented. Taken seriously, teachers have to change their teaching practices and re-think the way they teach in terms of supporting the learning process of the student. Furthermore, it requires adjustments in the definition of learning outcomes, educational organization and assessment strategy. The good thing about this presentation was that it made a strong connection between a core competence domain and the translation of that into the design of learning at the course and learning level.

Next there were parallel symposia and paper presentations on various topics like quality assurance, moderated by Dra Silvia Morales from UNALM, modeling as a teaching strategy, facilitated by Dr Charles F. Nicholson from Penn State University, and moderated by Dr Enrique Flores from UNALM, excellence in teaching, facilitated by Dr Michel Wattiaux (pronounced as Watt – Tea – Oh, as he indicates on his personal internet page) from the University of Wisconsin, and on entrepreneurship, rural youth, activating teaching strategies and experiential learning.

From this overview it can be seen that the themes discussed were of a very current nature, and that sharing the information at a deeper level would absolutely be very informative for a wide range of colleagues in higher agricultural education worldwide.

Finally, I would like to share good news with you about the impact factor of the JAEE. I get this question quite frequently. As in various countries, the impact factor of journals is an important issue. In some universities, like in India, university faculties are expected to write in journals with an impact factor, otherwise they do not count on their

performance assessments. The good news is that the JAEE made it to Q2 in the field of geography, planning and development. For those who are not in the field of bibliometrics (who can afford to still be ignorant about essential publication indicators?) I will give a short explanation of what this means. Thomson Reuters, a company in the US, maintains the Web of Knowledge. Within this, there are two rankings for journals, the Science Citation Index (SCI) and the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI). For the JAEE the SSCI is most relevant. Within the SSCI there are subject categories; examples of these categories are 'education and educational research' and 'planning and development'. In each subject category, there is a list of journals. For instance, in the field of education and educational research, there are over 200 journals in the SSCI. All journals in the list of a specific subject category are divided into four quartiles, the lowest being quartile four (or Q4), the highest being quartile one (Q1). There are various credit systems for rewarding publications in Q4 to Q1 publications. For instance, within Wageningen, papers in Q4, Q3 and Q2 journals get four credits, and papers in Q1 journals get six credits. Last year the JAEE made it to Q3 (just below the middle of the list) in education and educational research. So, the good news now is that the JAEE made it to Q2 in the category of planning and development. We will further look into this and if this is indeed correct and confirmed by the publisher, we will most likely submit the journal for review by Thomson Reuters for inclusion in the SSCI. Given the emphasis on publishing in SSCI-listed journals with high impact, although this practice is also contested by many scholars, including representatives from hard sciences, it is necessary for the development of the JAEE to pursue this inclusion. From then on, its status, and thereby its attractiveness to receive submission of more high-quality manuscripts will further increase. To help the JAEE to be included in the SSCI, kindly cite manuscripts, if appropriate, in your manuscripts which you (wish to) publish in existing SSCI-journals. This will directly influence the amount of citations to the JAEE in SSCI-journals, which is a key indicator by which the performance of the journal is being measured. Thanks for that.

I wish you lots of pleasure with reading this issue of the JAEE, and look forward to addressing you again in my next editorial.

MARTIN MULDER, Editor-in-chief