

# Thinking outside the box

## De-structuring continuing and higher education<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

While universities are strongly embedded in a history of disciplinary structures, both institutionally (faculties, institutes or schools) and scientifically (“septem artes liberales”, study programmes), Continuing Education and Training (CET) within higher education (HE) can break up this disciplinary view and open new perspectives between the academic and the professional world. In this article, we explore the structural, disciplinary and historical boundaries of HE and CET and how both can come to systematic, constructive relations. Subsequently, we adopt a more pedagogical perspective and focus on CET that is provided within the institutional structures of HE.

*Keywords:* higher education, continuing education, education system, pedagogy

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter draws on some ideas developed in the German article: Eugster/Weil (2015): “Grenzfall Weiterbildung: Forschungsorientierung in der Entstrukturierung.” In Peter Tremp (ed.), *Forschungsorientierung und Berufsbezug im Studium. Hochschulen als Orte der Wissensgenerierung und der Vorstrukturierung von Berufstätigkeit*. Bertelsmann Bielefeld, p. 63–82. The article is re-framed and revised regarding disciplinary struggles in the history of education.

## Introduction

Higher education (HE) is based on a history of disciplinary structures, both institutionally (e.g. with faculties, institutes or schools) and scientifically (e.g. 'septem artes liberales', study programmes) (de Ridder-Symoens, 2002, p. 85). In the context of Switzerland HE refers to formal learning, which leads to a qualification and to study programmes embedded in a disciplinary structure (see CRUS et al., 2011). In contrast, continuing education and training (CET) refers to non-formal and informal learning outside the formal education system but is nevertheless partly regulated, legally framed and systematically linked.

The rationales of CET can break up the disciplinary view on HE and open new perspectives on the relation to the academic and the professional worlds. CET irritates HE – institutionally by drawing on the professional world besides formal academic structures as well as scientifically by challenging generated knowledge and theories with professional practices. Under the institutional umbrella of HE, some non-formal CET programmes and courses are provided without being part of the formal study programmes. The topic of this article deals with a conceptual layout for the role of CET offered within HE in Switzerland. For the analysis we draw on concept and policy papers that are framing education. Referring to the Swiss context – with a focus on the German speaking part – cannot be more than an example highlighting a general problem in the institutional and systematic relations of CET and HE.

We use the term 'outside the box' in the sense of deconstructing a system approach towards HE to show the conceptual inconsistency within HE. 'Outside the box' means that the CET offered by universities belongs to the environment of the formal HE system and thereby forms its own self-referential system. The HE system and the system of CET in HE are connected in that they are each other's environment, but they persist as autonomous systems – both conceptually and in policy documents. We aim at an analytical and conceptual view by exploring the status and position of CET in HE in Switzerland and looking at possible consequences. Switzerland has found a way of adopting structures for CET from HE – still in a very vague sense regarding the contribution of CET to HE.

In the following sections, we start with the contextualisation of CET and HE in the Swiss education system. The progression rationale from a bachelor's (BA) to

a master's (MA) to a PhD degree has somehow been a role model for CET. Within HE we will focus on the field of universities, where some non-formal programmes and courses are provided as CET outside the initial study programmes and degrees. In other words, within the broad field of further education we will concentrate on the CET programmes offered by universities (including applied universities). We will address the overlapping areas of CET and HE by looking at the research orientation of universities.

As the core part, we draw on three propositions:

- (1) CET at universities is per se thinking outside the box in several aspects;
- (2) Research orientation is a claim of CET at universities;
- (3) The professional world and research orientation are a chance for de-structuring institutional and disciplinary boundaries.

These propositions have the function of a pre-hypothesis in order to outline questions that are relevant for the research but even more for policy and structuring educational systems. Educational systems have been formed as societal conventions that have institutionalised (see also Diogo, Carvalho & Amaral, 2015, p. 114f.).

Finally, we look at curricular, content-related and didactic consequences as well as opportunities and threats related to the integration of CET into the HE system.

## Contextualisation of CET and HE in Switzerland

CET and HE carry different functions, histories and institutional setups, which influence their relation to disciplines (see Wittpoth, 1997; Kuper & Kaufmann, 2009). From a system view CET at universities may be challenged from both sides: on one hand by the paradigms of HE – such as research orientation and relatedness to disciplines<sup>2</sup> – and on the other hand by the fact that CET in particular relates to the labour market and the professional world.

For HE in Switzerland we can distinguish different types of institutions:

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<sup>2</sup> The roles of researchers are in an ongoing change, classified by Teichler (2000, 19f) referring also to disciplinary structures as (1) disciplinary-department based, (2) continuous discipline-based, (3) institutional higher education research, (4) applied higher education based, (5)

- Universities, universities of teacher education (Pädagogische Hochschule) and universities of applied sciences (Fachhochschule) on the tertiary A (general) level.
- Professional education and training (PET) colleges as well as preparation for federal and advanced PET diploma examinations on the tertiary B (vocational) level (see also OECD, 2003, p. 43; CRUS et al., 2011; Swissuni, 2014).

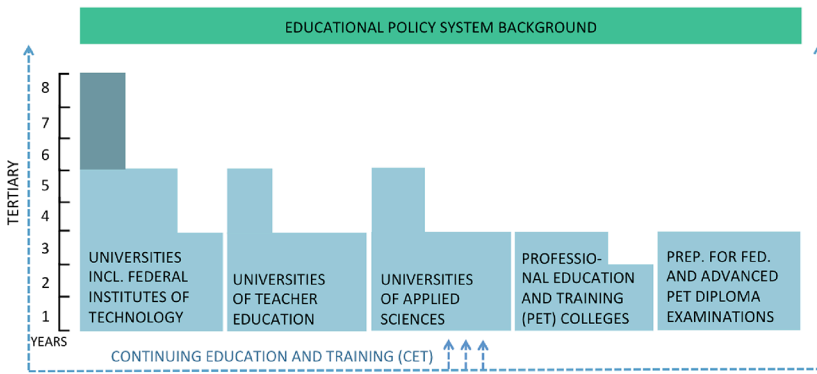


Figure 1. Tertiary level and CET within the Swiss education system (see Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft & EDK, 2016)

Only the tertiary A level (universities) is considered as HE (Hochschulen), while tertiary B (PET) is known as higher *vocational* education (höhere *Berufsbildung*). The strong role of tertiary B in Switzerland relates to the strong emphasis on vocational education on the previous levels of the Swiss education system. In the following consideration we will look only at the tertiary A level, when necessary distinguishing the three different types of universities in Switzerland.

In Figure 1 CET is located alongside the formal education system. Classified as non-formal and informal education, it has different relations and institutional

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consultative and (6) reflective practitioner. Teichler also states that the increasing impact of demand-based research might be a risk for research in higher education.

positions than formal structures but has strong relations especially to the tertiary B level of the educational system. Traditionally in tertiary B work experience and informal learning could even be a precondition for some of the qualifications. This position is also formulated for statistical and monitoring data (BfS 2010) and in legislative considerations (Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft, 2002; 2014).

As stated above, we relate to the specific Swiss setting, where HE institutions are providers of CET programmes of advanced studies (Certificate/Diploma/Master of Advanced Studies [CAS/DAS/MAS] as well as courses [see also CRUS et al., 2011]).

- CAS requires a minimum of 10 ECTS-Credits;
- DAS requires a minimum of 30 ECTS-Credits;
- MAS (also MBA, EMBA, MPH, LLM)<sup>3</sup> requires a minimum of 60 ECTS-Credits.

CAS/DAS/MAS are not part of the initial study programmes (BA, MA, PhD) and therefore not of the HE system, neither are they compatible CET degrees in other countries or outside universities. CAS/DAS/MAS programmes were launched in Switzerland with the structural reforms, namely the Bologna Process, which has been introducing BA and MA degrees in the Swiss HE system. Using the structural dimension of BA–MA–PhD, the CET programmes also suggest a proceeding composition, although both degree systems are separated. An MAS degree (CET) is not a sufficient entry qualification for a PhD, and a BA degree (HE) does usually not count for a CAS (CET) and vice versa. Admission for CAS/DAS/MAS is based on a final degree from an HE institution plus work experience, thus there are exceptions in practice. Generally we can speak about two different systems with similar rationales for their formal/non-formal degree structures (Fischer, 2012).

The special position of these CET programmes, which are realised within universities but at the same time are not part of the HE system, allows a strong relation to research orientation (HE context) and professional orientation (CET context). So, CET within universities in some respects offers a chance to think outside the box, such as by actively relating scholarship and the professional world

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<sup>3</sup> Master of Business Administration (MBA), Executive Master of Business Administration (EMBA), Master of Public Health (MPH), Legum Magister (LL.M.)

to HE as well as by deconstructing the institutional and disciplinary boundaries of universities. In this setting, the ‘disciplinary struggles’ of both CET and HE derive from different routes, which we can approach from a historicising perspective. In terms of disciplinary reference points, in particular curricular, content-based and didactic consequences seem to be important for giving further education at universities a specific profile.

## Research orientation in HE

In the Swiss context HE differentiates into four functions: teaching, research, further education and service – all of these in relation to the university itself (endo-perspective) and to the professional field and labour market (exo-perspective) (see also Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft, 2011). Regarding teaching and learning in HE, research has a special significance. Research makes the difference between universities and other educational institutions because universities are institutions of knowledge transfer and of the criticism and the revised construction of knowledge (Eugster & Tresp, 2018). The correct use of scientific research methods might be a necessary but not sufficient condition for the reflective function of research (see BAK, 1979, p. 14f.). In this sense research is more than an additive to teaching; it is the fundament of teaching and learning in HE (see Stichweh, 1994).

In contrast, CET is relatively free in terms of design and function, especially non-formal and informal learning do not follow a specified standard other than classification by learning activities (see also Molzberger, 2007), documentation of processes or recognised competences and very often a strong relation to the professional field or practices. When CET is realised within HE institutions, both the research function and the relation to the professional field are potentially distinctive to other forms of CET.

We focus on the question of how CET within the context of HE can be constituted. We are using the characteristics of HE institutions to define ‘the box’ (system immanent, endo-perspective) and the following three propositions show what this institutional setting might mean for CET when realised within this particular institutional context.

The propositions are informed by a triple-founded theoretical background. Firstly, there are findings of system theory that accentuate the importance of differentiating systems and their environments by identifying different functions (see e.g. Luhmann, 1995). Secondly, we refer to the history of universities as cultural institutions (see e.g. Stichweh, 1994; Baecker, 2010). In this perspective the relation between research and teaching respectively between research and research-founded vocational fields remains a challenge for theoretical reflection. Thirdly, the coexistence of HE BA, MA and PhD-programmes on one hand and CET within HE on the other leads to the question of whether we need specific didactics for CET that differ from the general didactics (see e.g. Weil, 2018):

- (1) *CET at universities is per se thinking outside the box in several aspects.*

This first proposition relates to the positioning of CET in the education system in Switzerland. So, further education carries aspects that are outside the institutional approach of universities, but they also open up the institutional setting because of their relation to different functions and processes outside universities.

- (2) *Research orientation is a claim of CET at universities.*

The second proposition addresses a normative level: it is to be discussed how research-oriented CET offered by universities should be realised. Research orientation allows claims by CET, such as regarding self-reflection of one's own action or the integration of science into offers of further education.

- (3) *The professional world and research orientation are a chance for de-structuring institutional and disciplinary boundaries.*

The third proposition aims at designing CET by addressing the heterogeneity of participant groups, of expectations about relevance for practice, etc. The relations and transitions of science, the generation of knowledge and professional fields seem to challenge institutional and disciplinary borders.

In the following sections we will discuss these propositions conceptually in more detail.

## Discussion of the propositions

HE functions are an integrated part of society and, at the same time, deliver an external view on the processes within society (research perspective). Therefore, it remains a permanent challenge for HE to play an active role in shaping society by insisting on an independent position of reflection and judgement about the reality. CET in universities reflects this field of tension and has to bring together conflicting claims in order to demonstrate that universities produce and spread knowledge that is authoritative and fruitful for society at the same time.

### (1) CET at universities is *per se* thinking outside the box in several aspects.

As stated above, HE belongs to the tertiary A level of the Swiss education system. Universities follow certain conditions that might also be relevant for thinking about positioning CET.

Firstly, HE follows the logic of the scientific disciplines within specific fields of knowledge and methodological repertoires. The affiliation to a discipline and its scientific community is defined by a successful socialisation into the discipline, which is regulated by degrees and certifications.

Secondly, HE is placed 'higher' than the other levels of education. For the Swiss context, but also internationally (see UIS, 2012), this leads to a hierarchy of qualification levels of professional fields as professions relating to secondary education (such as nursing, administration, carpentry) with additional options on the tertiary B level and professions relating to HE degrees (such as architecture, medicine, law).

Thirdly, in Switzerland BA and MA degrees are exclusively provided by HE institutions. A PhD degree is solely reserved for universities and cannot be given by universities of applied sciences or universities of teacher education (see Figure 1). The tradition of 'habilitation'<sup>4</sup> as one of the tracks for becoming a professor is also absolutely linked to universities. We refer to this HE structure as 'the box',

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<sup>4</sup> Historically the habilitation in the modern meaning was established in the context of the modern German university development during the 19th century. It marks the special role of teaching by awarding a postdoctoral teaching qualification and by this the habilitation stresses the unity of research and teaching as the outstanding characteristic of the modern university



which is rather a closed system and a precondition for academic careers exclusively within HE.

For CET at universities, it is not surprising that it follows the logic of academic levels. The rather strong hierarchy of degrees and institutions in Switzerland might be a reason for the ‘invention’ of the CAS–DAS–MAS-structure. CAS–DAS–MAS closely relate to the logic of BA–MA–PhD, while at the same time they mark a difference by using ‘advanced studies’. ‘Advanced’, with its polyvalent meanings, also refers to ‘more than higher education’, and this positions in the professional field and the relation to practice as resources for CET.

In this sense, these CET degrees are outside the academic degree box. They are a bridge between the academic disciplinary order of knowledge and the practice of professional life. Two positions within the education system demonstrate why further education cannot be located definitely. Since the 1970s in the Swiss context, CET has been discussed as the ‘fourth pillar’ of the education system (quarternary education), relating to primary, secondary and tertiary education. The main reference document for this attempt to position further education is the Structural Plan for the German Education System, where further education is defined as a continuation or re-starting of organised learning after finishing a differently realised first phase of education (Deutscher Bildungsrat, 1972, p. 197). CET is positioned here as a continuation of initial degrees and as a part of the education system for the first time.

Alternatively, also during the 1970s, CET was strongly related to the concepts of lifelong learning (see Kraus, 2001). By this, CET was positioned as accompanying the education system on all levels and degrees. This second approach is currently leading the rationales, e.g. by the Federal Department of Statistics, and puts CET in the position of offering non-formal or informal education only (see BFS, 2010; Weil, 2011, p. 46). Alongside, CET is assigned to the general idea of lifelong learning and does not often result in generally recognised degrees and certificates (Egger, 2012; Kraus, 2001).

With this analysis, CET at universities is per se thinking outside the box because even when using a structural hierarchisation of degrees, it does not follow the functions of HE, nor is it necessarily linked to its structures. Of course, themes and staff can be similar in CET and HE, but regarding the participants, CET relates more to the experience in the professional field, and it cannot fulfil

the same function for research and knowledge as HE does. This brings the chance of reflecting on the HE structures and generated theories by structurally bringing in the aspects of the professional world.

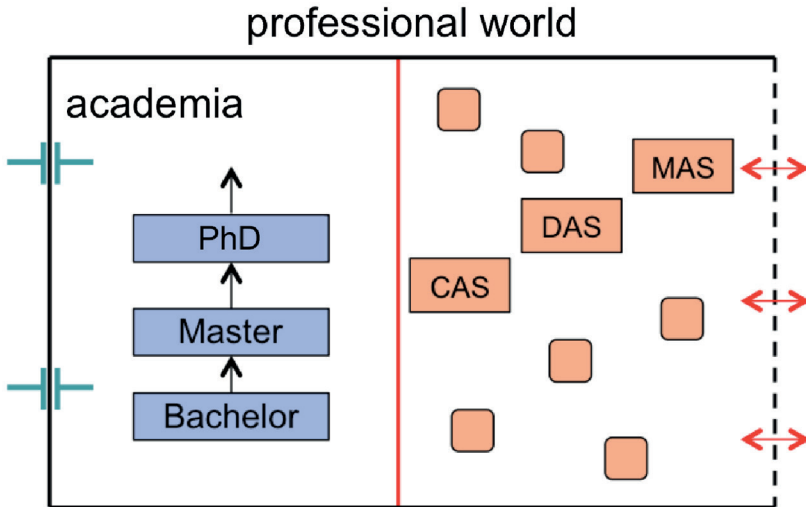


Figure 2. Positioning of further education within HE (Eugster & Weil, 2015)

## (2) Research orientation is a claim of CET at universities.

Universities are research institutions; they are defined by research and teaching, plus, as mentioned above, further education and service. Without research no scientific knowledge could be taught and learned, neither in initial nor in further education settings or services. Without research, scientific knowledge would stagnate.

One main objective of HE teaching is to enable the students to do research by themselves and to contribute to the development of knowledge. Research is a broad concept and can also be located at different institutions outside a university, but it can only claim to validate the knowledge generated by referring to the scientific community. In this sense, science requires specific organisational forms

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to assure scientific knowledge and to define the specific research methods that can be classified as such (see also Tremp, 2005).

In contrast, for CET at universities it is not the primary objective to produce research findings. CET might be targeted on a research-based discussion of themes that gain relevance for science-based occupational fields. In this sense, CET offered within an HE setting offers a viewpoint from outside the box of university research (see Figure 2). It can enable a discourse that takes place at the edge of organisational and disciplinary borders by bringing scientists (from inside the box) together with qualified professionals (from outside the box) in order to reflect the relevance of research results for applied fields of science. Furthermore, CET at universities can help to deepen the knowledge of scientists in specific fields outside their main domain. This can have effects on the proceedings within the system by irritations that are triggered by the discussions just outside the system.

CET at universities does not have the function to produce new knowledge, but, by being offered closely to HE, it takes research results, methods and processes into account. For the created learning environments in CET this means a critical reflection about applicability, validity and relevance of research results. It can offer a look at research from the border of the box – still close enough to understand its principles and already close enough to the professional world to bring in questions of practical relevance and application.

This position of CET brings in a reflective potential for HE by applying or questioning knowledge. Alternatively, the role of CET could easily be used for service only, without drawing on the reflective function for HE. A market logic of customer orientation and profit could overlap academic principles even stronger than in initial HE because, by being outside the box, CET is not necessarily committed to the scientific community or the academic standards. An additional critical point could be the imitation of formal aspects by CET programmes, which might diminish the opportunities of existing outside the box.

### **(3) The professional world and research orientation are a chance for de-structuring institutional and disciplinary boundaries**

Offering CET brings a benefit to HE institutions because this adds a perspective of recurrent education to initial study programmes, which provides educational perspectives beyond the academic degrees (see also Schiefner, 2011). However, the logic of CET is atypical for HE. Rather than merging both fields or treating them separately, research and teaching need links between the rationale of HE and CET. Especially the transdisciplinary generation of knowledge within a non-hierarchical organisation, as stated by Gibbons (1994), shows a need for translation support, which is close to 'the box' but not part of it. CET in HE could fulfil that function. CET can use new and creative forms outside the initial HE degree structures. It is less influenced by the institutional settings of universities than initial study programmes, or at least it could use that position. Additionally, the relation to the labour market can be used steadily as further education has strong links to the professional field. The range of possible learning environments widens and does not necessarily have to follow strong institutional rules (see Figure 3).

Therefore, a de-structured CET offers new perspectives outside the box for HE. It enables new questions, which might not be possible within the institutional setting of initial study programmes. In addition, there is less pressure for innovative research results in CET, both for the programme and for the participants. The professional world becomes an explicit reference point for the reflection of science and academia rather than a translation from theory to practice (see Figure 3).

Participants from the professional world can use their position 'outside the box' to look at science and academia and ask questions that are not primarily research focused. They can be integrated into research in certain structural and pedagogical conditions. Therefore, research orientation means more than the rhetoric of 'research-based teaching and learning'. It also seems crucial that the reflection of the knowledge-construction, which is situated in the setting of HE by the means of practice, is the character of CET in HE. The participants of CET in HE enable a self-reflection about the knowledge-construction of the scientists, which is possible only within the specific discourse of CET in HE. The authority of this reflection belongs to the participants who irritate and challenge the logic of the science system. This irritation is caused by a displacement of

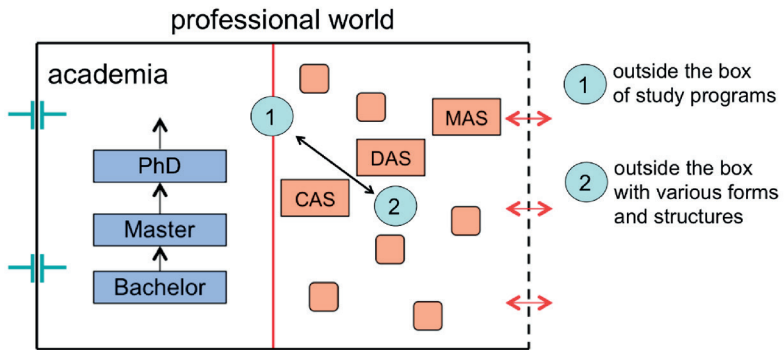


Figure 3. De-structuring potential of further education within higher education (Eugster & Weil, 2015)

the perspective on the discourse. The main point here is not to strengthen the usability of knowledge but to use the change of perspectives for an irritation of the discourse. Scientific findings can be discussed critically within CET settings, which consist of participants socialised in the scientific field. What is interesting from the perspective of science is the reformulation of knowledge. This is the great challenge for science: it succeeds in generating knowledge but makes hardly any attempt to put it into a different perspective other than the disciplinary logic, and therefore there might be a rather low transferability to different contexts.

The chance of CET within HE is to enable this transferability, but it also is a fragile balance as CET should not shift into the role of becoming increasingly more like initial HE programmes.

### *Consequences 'outside the box'*

As a conclusion, we gather the findings from the three propositions regarding consequences for continuing higher education (CHE) and possible impacts that might relate back to the initial system of HE. We consider a circular understanding, in which CET is a resource for shaping the setting of research-based teaching in a disciplinary-ordered institution. Therefore the term CHE

signals the informal structure within the HE system. By focusing on genuine pedagogical consequences and less on economical or societal consequences, curricular, academic content-related and didactic areas arise as three main aspects for reflection (see Lindenstein Walshok, 2012).

### *Curricular consequences*

CHE is not only about the reception of research results classified in disciplinary structures: as stated above, CHE has the potential to irritate research and bring in an 'outside the box' perspective beyond disciplinary and institutional structures. In this respect generating questions, testing applicability, overcoming disciplinary borders or enquiring into research can be an important function of CHE. It offers possibilities to practice reflections on research results. CHE operates with a potentially privileged connection to the professional world. At the same time this could lead to a functionalist approach towards HE, with risks of functionalising or threatening HE functions of academic freedom, objectivity or the validity of teaching and research.

If CHE can clearly take the role of changing perspective 'outside the box', we can also draw new questions for the initial study programmes because beside the genuine research there is often an important relation to the professional field. Regarding curriculum this could mean a clearer focus on the function of particular curricular elements, such as on practical studies, internships or site visits. They can gather learning and reflect on opportunities for the academic settings as learning sites. The curriculum as the set of relations between the different elements of learning units is more than the sum of these learning units. There is a need for reciprocal effects between practical studies and the teaching of the scientific basics in. Both the temporary exposure to academia and to the professional world can relate to each other in a constructive way due to clear positioning in the curricula of study programmes.

### *Content-related consequences*

Research orientation as a characteristic of HE also transfers to CHE settings in terms of content-related issues. Although research results might be the content

of CHE, the function of generating knowledge is not on issue for these settings as they are only partly based within academia and the scientific community. Nevertheless, CHE can reflect on research content and the processes, or on how content has been generated, validated and distributed. The reflection on research processes and products related to the perspectives of the professional field can create possibilities to mirror academic research. CHE offers the research function of HE a way to gain a look at the blind spots of scientific self-reflection. For HE, CET in general and CHE in specific gives the possibility to reflect on generated content within or in relation to the complexity of meanings for the professional field.

From an iterative or recurrent perspective, further education settings could already be anticipated in the content (and its generation) in HE research and teaching. Additionally, feedback functions could lead to making use of the critical reflections for research as well as for teaching and learning settings. By the practice of CHE, a special and unique sort of discourse arises that irritates the internal logic of the box in a constructive manner. Even if generating knowledge (content) in HE is bound to disciplinary traditions and discourses, CHE can overcome these boundaries by also referring to the logic of the professional field.

### *Didactic consequences*

These assumptions also lead to a didactic dimension by means of creating teaching and learning settings that have a relation to the professional world and enable reflecting on and challenging research. CHE can draw on both the professional world and the world of academia as reference points regarding teaching conceptions and practices. A didactic of CHE uses the 'outside the box' position as a possibility for critical reflection on research processes and knowledge and uses this as a possibility for testing the applicability of knowledge. As a didactical consequence, CHE settings need to provide the necessary background knowledge and create opportunities for contrasting and reflecting on knowledge and its applications. In order to reach such didactical goals, CHE has to pick the fluidity of scientific knowledge out as a central theme. Students in CHE programmes will be exposed to the inconsistencies of knowledge transfer and knowledge production. Only by

debating such questions can the involved lecturers bring the professional field into an intercommunication with science that is prolific for both sides.

The didactic of HE benefits from the developments in CHE as it opens a much more diverse range for teaching and learning settings. It can link to liberal, vocational and/or political further education and make use of concepts from informal and non-formal learning, e.g. the methods used for learning while working. This might give learning how to become an academic a new perspective by practicing research and using this as learning opportunities more systematically.

## Concluding reflections

Overall, there is a potential in thinking outside the box for HE if CHE is not only used as a cash cow on the educational market. A clear positioning and quality claim for CHE could carefully draw together curricular, content-related and didactic aspects in order to critically reflect upon the content, methods and structure of HE. Nevertheless, opening the box could also bring with it the risk that the professional world also carries along unintended effects such as market orientation or utilitarianism. This might already be a reality of universities not only by the means of CHE. Academia could critically reflect on that relation and take this as a further research perspective. While the clear positioning of CET functions and the use of reference points different than those of HE, we could also question whether CHE is well positioned so close to HE or if it generally should be positioned independently outside the institutional umbrella of HE. In this regard, the three propositions allocate and substantiate the functions of CHE as preconditions for a critical and independent role for HE.

All in all, CHE might be a challenge for disciplinary boundaries by the defined relations to the professional world. Naming and defining ‘the box’ of HE (endo-perspective) can provide perspectives ‘outside the box’ (exo-perspective), but this dichotomy could also be challenged. Nevertheless, the disciplinary and historical boundaries of CET and HE can come to constructive relations when the primary approach is not merging all functions and blending the purposes and advantages of research and the professional world but rather using their advantages for shaping clearer perspectives and relations.



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