



Editorial: New insights into VET

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This issue of the *Nordic Journal of Vocational Education and Training* is presenting a broad range of research on vocational education and training in a Nordic perspective. Our editorial group is pleased to present six peer-reviewed research articles, two from Norway, one from Finland and three from Sweden. The topics of the articles range from the relevance of the first year of VET, transitions from working in skilled occupations to becoming a vocational teacher, dropout prevention in Finnish VET, relational pedagogy, the meaning of social capital in Swedish VET in a historical perspective, and the craft and vocational knowledge of waiters. The issue also includes two magazine articles and one book review, which are presented later in this editorial.

The first research article concerns the relevance of VET. In *Relevant opplæring i yrkesopplæringens første år: Elevers erfaringer med yrkesrelevant opplæring* (Relevant training in the first year of vocational training: Pupils' experience with vocational training) by **Åse Nedrebø Bruvik** and **Grete Haaland** they analyse experiences of the first year of initial VET in Norway. Here, the initial VET programmes start with a broad basic year, which is intended to provide a relevant introduction to all vocations that each of the eight programmes prepare for. The findings show that the basic year is experienced as not very relevant for the students, who in most cases already have chosen their future vocation. Furthermore, the students experience limited opportunities to influence neither learning tasks nor educational contents. Thus, the relevance of this part of VET could be questioned.

The second article is also from Norway, but it puts focus on challenges in vocational teacher education. *Som å ta av seg verktøybeltet: Kontraster og metaforer i overgangen fra fagarbeid til yrkesfaglærerutdanning* (Leaving the tool belt behind:



Contrasts and metaphors in the transition from vocational work to vocational teacher education) is a study by **Nora Kolkkin Sarastuen**. She explores the transitions from occupational work to teacher education from the perspective of vocational teachers-to-be. The findings show how the vocational teacher students use metaphors and contrasts that are connecting to their experiences from occupational work to describe and give meaning to the new experiences in teacher education, such as 'leaving the tool belt behind'.

The third article is from Finland. This study is about dropout from vocational education, and particularly analyses a large-scale programme for dropout prevention. **Ville Vehkasalo's** article *Dropout prevention in vocational education: Evidence from Finnish register data* suggests that the programme in question was not effective when it came to increasing study completion or reducing dropouts – even if the completion rates actually were improved. However, the higher level of completion of vocational education could rather be explained by macroeconomic fluctuations and changes in legislation for unemployment benefits.

The next two articles are from Sweden. The fourth article: *Relational pedagogy in a vocational programme in upper secondary school: A way to make more students graduate* is written by **Ulrika Gidlund**. The article focuses on reasons for students dropping out of vocational upper secondary school in Sweden. The article aims to understand teachers' and students' experiences and perceptions of relational pedagogy and shows that both groups find that the relational pedagogical approach provides a safe and secure learning atmosphere, and that it promotes students' participation, engagement and motivation in school. The study provides knowledge on how relational pedagogy can work as a retention tool, but also points to the need to find out more about how teachers' relational competence is acquired.

The second article from Sweden, *Constructing vocational education capital: An analysis of symbolic values in the Swedish VET system of 1918*, is written by **Åsa Broberg**. The topic of this article is the creation of educational capital in a historical perspective from the institutionalisation of vocational education in Sweden in the early 20th century. The theoretical and analytical perspective is a Bourdieusian framework using the cultural capital theory. The data consist of historical documents from archives, journals and school memorial books. The findings show that the creation of vocational cultural capital is done through borrowing, cross-over and reinventions of cultural capital from two different learning traditions: Apprenticeships in guilds, and higher education in academia, which were materialised in titles, artefacts and rituals.

The sixth and last research article in this issue is a study of the work as a waiter. In *Waiters' craft-related actions studied from the perspective of time-geography*, **Lars Eriksson, Inger M. Jonsson** and **Åsa Öström** analyse the vocational knowledge of a waiter, including work tasks such as to perform table-setting and serving. The time-geographical perspective and research tools make it possible to

visualise and develop a deeper understanding of the waiter's actions and underlying knowledge, for example in a serving procedure.

This issue of NJVET also features one book review of *Youth on the move: Tendencies and tensions in youth policies and practices* edited by **Kristiina Brunila** and **Lisbeth Lundahl**. The book is reviewed by **Arnt Louw**. The book consists of an introduction, two main parts and an epilog. The two main parts are: Part 1 – *Young people's trajectories and identities*, which consists of chapters 1–5 and addresses young people's own perspectives, and Part 2 – *Young people's transitions: Policies and new forms of governing*, which consists of chapters 6–8 and addresses policies and official practices. The book addresses one of the most urgent social problems of today, namely young adults' extended and uncertain transitions from school to work and higher education, and how these transitions shape the interests of young adults, including those outside work and education. The book contributes with a variety of solid and critical examinations of how policies to combat youth unemployment and poverty ('the transition machinery') play out in mainly the Nordic welfare countries but also in Iceland and the UK. A central argument in the book is that when young adults' unemployment and poverty are treated as individual deficiencies on the part of the young adult, measures also become individualistic and place responsibility and agency on the young adult rather than on social and formal structures and conditions for young adults' lives and transitions.

There are also two magazine articles in this issue. The first magazine article is written by **Maarten Matheus van Houten**, from Scotland and The Netherlands, who uses the education system of the latter country as an example of more general trends in vocational education. The article *Individual development in a neoliberal context: Climbing to a 'glass ceiling'? A plea for liberal pedagogy in upper secondary vocational education* discusses consequences of a focus on for example employability and marketable skills in vocational education. Such a focus might result in limited space for the development of critical thinking and analytical skills, which in turn causes problems when it comes to admittance to and success in higher education. Thus, van Houten argues that a liberal pedagogy is necessary in upper secondary VET to avoid limiting future opportunities for VET students beyond their present vocational focus.

The second magazine article, *Svensk yrkeslärarutbildning efter reformen 2011: Lärarstudenters uppfattningar om antagning, VFU och läraranställning* (Swedish vocational teacher education after the reform 2011: Teacher students' perceptions of admission, practicum internship and teacher appointment) is written by **Hamid Asghari** and **Ingrid Berglund**. Based on a survey distributed to former vocational teacher students at two universities in Sweden, they discuss the admission process, how students did their practicum period, their perception of the supervising they received during the period, and their employment as well. The study points out that there are differences between programmes relating to

supervision during the practicum period and that the possibilities of competence development vary.

Thus, this issue presents a broad range of research, and gives us new insights into vocational education and training. The third and last issue of our tenth volume will be a special issue with a number of interesting contributions on assessment in Nordic VET.

Unfortunately, this anniversary year has not become what we expected. Due to the pandemic situation, the Nordyrk conference in Copenhagen 2020 was cancelled. But looking forward, we now know that there will be a Nordyrk conference in 2021. If possible, we will meet in June at Linköping University in Sweden to discuss current VET studies and issues. Alternatively, if this is not possible, the conference will go online and provide an opportunity to meet at a distance.

We also have good news concerning our journal. We are happy to announce that NJVET has received recurring financial support from The Swedish Research Council. Therefore, we now have external funding for three more years, which provides good conditions for further development of this journal.