



Being someone or doing something: How students in municipal adult education view their future vocation

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Abstract

Being an adult, deciding what to do with your life, and trying to understand the consequences of educational choices can be difficult. Vocational education and training (VET) programmes within the Swedish municipal adult education (MAE) offer an opportunity to learn a vocation, and last 6–18 months. This study aims to explore how adult VET students perceive desirable vocational habitus and is based on 18 interviews comparing students from two vocational MAE programmes in assistant nursing and floor laying. Semi-structured interviews were conducted at the beginning of the students' training and data were analysed using inductive thematic analysis. The results show that choosing a VET programme is a process of choosing what you want to do for work but also who you want to be. However, whether or not students see themselves as suitable is contrasted between how they perceive their future vocation and what the vocational community expects from them, which in turn affects their learning process and development of a vocational identity. Noticing the discrepancies between students' perceptions and vocational expectations can both reduce the risk of losing students during training and reduces the risk of reproducing unequal ideals.

Keywords: adult education, vocational education and training, vocational identity, municipal adult education



Introduction

Being an adult, choosing an educational path and at the same time knowing what you will do and who you will become, can be difficult. The municipal adult education (MAE) in Sweden offers multiple opportunities to learn a vocation, allowing participants to fully enter society and/or support a family. Then again, while MAE can offer a way out of unemployment, educational choices can be limited. Furthermore, even though adult students can potentially draw upon a wide array of life experiences and translate them into useful vocational skills (Somerville, 2006), there can still be great educational challenges for students based on their gender, class, or ethnicity (Nitzler & Frykholm, 1993). Additionally, learning a vocation is also about learning a new identity, a process where students' past experiences are in constant negotiation with their hopes for the future (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 2000).

Also, the choice of a vocational education and training (VET) programme can carry with it the hope of a future job. However, 'vocations have a personal meaning and purposes to which individuals have to assent' (Billett, 2011, p. 59) and that choice is sometimes made without fully knowing what you are getting yourself into, regarding educational, social, and vocational challenges. Furthermore, to be accepted into a vocational community requires more than 'simply' acquiring the necessary skills you need to be able to orient yourself and redirect your thinking in line with professional expectations; i.e. developing a vocational habitus (Colley et al., 2003). In this process, potential gaps between school (or workplace) expectations and the student's conditions and abilities run the risk of students perceiving themselves as unsuitable for vocational training (Rehn & Eliasson, 2015). Some of these gaps are present even from the very beginning of training, as students can be expected to already possess skills that they hope to learn through training (Lagercrantz All, 2017).

There is a wide array of research on VET, identity formation and vocational becoming (Colley et al., 2003; Colliander, 2018; Fjellström, 2017; Kristmansson, 2016), although research that focuses on adult students and their challenges is scarce (Assarsson & Sipos-Zackrisson, 2005; Lagercrantz All, 2017; Sandberg, 2016). Adult learners who are learning a vocation and developing a vocational identity face different challenges due to differing effects on their orientation processes, and due to different life situations and life experiences (Lagercrantz All, 2017). The aim of this study is therefore to explore how adult VET students perceive a desirable vocational habitus within their future vocation. To gain a broad picture of students' perceptions this was done by interviewing one group of assistant nurse students and one group of floor layer students at the start of their VET (1–2 months after their training began). The questions underlying the interviews were:

- How do students describe an ideal worker within their respective contexts?
- How do students perceive what it means to be a worker in their vocation?
- What similarities and differences are there between the assistant nurses' and the floor layer students' perceptions?

Context of the study

Lifelong learning is critical for adults to create opportunities for employment and equality as adult education can help individuals grow both professionally and personally (OECD, 2021). The demands for new skills in a global changing society has made policy-makers to increasingly view VET as a way to solve emerging skill imbalances (Cedefop, 2022). In Sweden, one of the largest organisers of adult education is MAE which has existed since 1968 and has a threefold function: a compensatory function, a civic and democratic function, and a labour-market function. Studying within MAE is free, entitling the student to study support, and many municipalities also offer MAE to those with previous education who want to study VET to change profession. Municipalities must offer MAE to anyone over the age of 20 who has not completed compulsory school, as well as to those who want to complete their upper secondary education or to improve their grades to become eligible for higher education (Swedish National Agency of Education [SNAE], 2017).

Since 2016, Swedish for immigrants (SFI) has been a part of MAE, which has meant that there is a larger number of students in MAE than in upper secondary school. As of 2021, MAE included 413,590 students (SNAE, 2022). Today, one-third of those who study in MAE at the upper secondary level, which includes vocational education, are foreign-born. In many cases, vocational MAE plays a significant role in integration and many students combine SFI studies with vocational education, which is expected to reduce the time needed to become established in the labour market (Andersson & Muhrman, 2019). The organisation of MAE also have difficulties since policy is decided on a national level where the individual needs of students are challenged by local practice, seeking to solve challenges regarding labour market and integration (Muhrman & Andersson, 2022).

MAE courses at the upper secondary level have the same syllabus as the courses taught in upper secondary school. VET in upper secondary school is usually organised into three-year programmes with 'classic school courses' (languages, maths, social sciences, etc.) mixed in with VET. MAE courses can, however, be organised as different course packages similar to programmes in upper secondary school, tailored to specific occupations though usually without 'classic school courses' and lasting roughly 6–18 months (SNAE, 2021). For the purpose

of simplification, MAE course packages will henceforth be referred to as ‘programmes’.

VET within MAE

To meet the shortage of assistant nurses (AN), almost all municipalities that conduct MAE in Sweden offer AN training. Because of this, eight of the ten MAE courses with the largest numbers of participants at the national level are courses that are included in different AN programmes. MAE students, as a group, are heterogeneous and many of those who start studying drop out before the end of the course. However, of the five most frequently-completed courses within MAE, all are included in programmes resulting in an AN degree (SNAE, 2018). Between 2008 and 2013, MAE accounted for about half of those who trained within the framework of care and nursing (Statistiska Centralbyrån, 2015). As with AN, floor laying (FL) training is described as an occupation with a shortage of workers and good job opportunities for those who complete the training, although fewer municipalities offer FL training.

Both programmes can be provided as ‘regular’ programmes where a large part of the training takes place in school, and a minor part is work-based learning (usually at least 15%). They can also be offered as apprenticeship programmes where a major part of their training (at least 70%) is in the form of work-based learning.

Developing a vocational identity: Analytical framework

Identity

In this article, the concept of identity plays a central role in students’ vocational development. Identity, in this context, is defined as *how and what individuals identify themselves with*, as well as what they *wish* to be identified with (Billett, 2010). For this, the student’s view of what a vocation entails and represents is paramount. Like Wenger (1998) points out, identity can be viewed as a ‘multi-membership’, which stresses that individuals belong to many different communities, being full members of some and more peripheral members of others. All these communities contribute to the construction of a person’s full identity in one way or another and when interacting with different practices students’ identities are in constant change. Though some individuals’ identity and their *preferred sense of self* may not be a key concern at all (Alvesson & Robertson, 2015), interaction with practices could take the form of developing knowledge, skills, language, etc., that are valued within different communities, which helps the person to move from peripheral to increasingly central participation. When participating in different communities, individuals reveal different parts of their identities, behave differently, and take on different perspectives as a way of coordinating their identity.

Moreover, even an ambivalent entry in an occupational practice through happen-chance can create strong vocational identities (Chan, 2019). Different parts of individuals' identities also affect each other and participating in different communities can also be seen as a process where one might exercise one's sense of self (or one's subjective disposition) within a practice (Billett & Pavlova, 2005); e.g., to assert a vocational identity as a rhetorical tool to increase credibility.

A vocational identity is in constant negotiation, in which the student's previous experiences and hopes for the future are set against one another (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 2010). This implies that learning is not only about acquiring new knowledge, but it can also be a process of developing vocational language and behaviours, which stands in contrast to the individual's history and how they saw themselves. It should be noted that even though identity can be analysed from an individual's almost spiritual or existential perspective, all identities are social identities since identification is, in one way or another, a matter of meaning and interaction (Jenkins, 2008).

Communities of practice and vocational habitus

Lave and Wenger (1991) write that an 'analysis of school learning as situated requires a multi-layered view of how knowing and learning are part of a social practice' (p. 40). The focus of Communities of Practice (CoP) is in itself more on informal learning rather than formal learning in education (Wenger, 2010). However, the CoP perspective fails to acknowledge what newcomers bring to a specific community, especially when the newcomers themselves are adults and might be considered 'old-timers' in another context (Fuller et al., 2005). Furthermore, individuals develop and modify their whole person by participating in a new CoP, something that neither Lave and Wenger (1991) nor Wenger (1998) recognised in a satisfactory way, according to Fuller et al. (2005). One such aspect is students' habitus, which influences both their image of their (possible) future vocation and their ability to complete their training.

By using the term 'vocational habitus' and placing the students' vocational views in relation to a wider social structure, their educational prerequisites are nuanced in a way that is otherwise more difficult for CoP, especially regarding different aspects of socioeconomic power and inequalities. The concept of habitus originates from Bourdieu and is admittedly geared towards social practices rather than vocations, but it is still well suited to studying vocations (Carlhed, 2011). Social structures in the form of principles generate and organise practices and can be adopted by individuals even without a conscious goal of adopting a habitus (Bourdieu, 1992). As a concept, habitus can be used to examine how collective experiences are embodied in individuals by, for example, analysing what individuals notice and what is appreciated (Bourdieu, 1984). Or, as Broady (1998) writes:

The individuals (or groups) bring with them a system of dispositions, a habitus, that allows them to generate, on the basis of a limited number of principles, their ways of acting, thinking, perceiving and valuing what is required in specific social contexts. Their actions, thoughts, perceptions and values are not direct imprints of external relations, but a result of the encounter between people's habitus and the social context in which they develop. (Broady, 1998, p. 18) [my translation]

In a strict Bourdieusian perspective, habitus is durable and difficult to change, in this article, the term vocational habitus is used similarly to Colley et al. (2003), who studied class, gender, and the role of vocational habitus in VET. They believe that students who aim to enter a vocational community will be transformed in accordance with the vocational or educational culture of their chosen profession. Rehn and Eliasson (2015), who studied health and social care teachers' conceptions of vocational knowledge, also use vocational habitus to illuminate 'health and social care teachers' conceptions of desirable vocational knowledge, not the actual habitus of individuals' (p. 564). When we add vocational habitus to the CoP perspective, students' past experiences are nuanced by capturing underlying structures. This is especially important to consider because this study focuses on adult individuals who have different life experiences at the beginning of their training.

The learning process that students face, however, is about more than learning new things to solve tasks and fit into a CoP. As Lensjø (2020), who studied plumbing apprentices, notes, becoming a craftsman has more to do with the 'individual's embodied perceptions of things' (p. 163) than imitation. The learning process is also an active process of restructuring one's thinking and more about adopting a, or orienting one's, vocational habitus to be in line with vocational requirements, than it is about developing a new habitus. Furthermore, the image of a desirable vocational habitus must be something that students think they can manage:

The vocational habitus must be a 'choosable' identity for the individual, one that falls within their 'horizons for action'. Students must have social and family backgrounds, individual preferences and life experiences that predispose them to orientate to the vocational habitus and become 'right for the job' [...] However, although such predisposition is *necessary*, it is not *sufficient*, and much identity-work still remains to be done. (Colley et al., 2003, p. 488)

Thus, having the right background is not everything. In addition, Hågerström (2004) describes how students' attitudes toward education are influenced by their class background, in combination with aspects such as gender and ethnicity. It is also not necessarily the case that there is *one* vocational habitus that applies to the entire vocation. Klope (2015), who studied the professional life of upper secondary vocational students as hairdressers exemplifies this by the fact that different hairdressing habitus is expected between an old hairdresser salon, a trendy inner-city salon, and the school itself.

Initially, the students' backgrounds and habitus may differ slightly, but they will either undergo a form of mental homogenisation during their training or risk being 'weeded out' (Nitzler & Frykholm, 1993). In school they may also find that teachers' demands on them extends to their attitudes, which is not always evident in the curricula (Hvitved, 2014). Becoming the right person for the job is also a process fraught with contradictions, and Colley et al. (2003) point out that a student will encounter two images of desirable habitus, an idealised (and unattainable) habitus and a realised habitus, and realise that there is a constant tug-of-war between them. They exemplify how an image of a realised habitus is constructed through the practice of care, where a certain amount of 'harshness' is needed, which is set against the idealised habitus of 'loving care' in caring professions. They believe that students must reconcile these two images and not choose one over the other, as an overly-idealised image can result in students not being able to do the job and an overly-realised one makes them appear harsh. This is also pointed out by Thunborg (1999), who, in a study about learning in occupational identities in healthcare and medical services, writes that the ideal images of vocational identities – which are constantly set against the demands and logic of everyday activities – are difficult to live up to.

Learning the right ideals

Orienting oneself toward a vocational habitus can be likened to learning a vocational identity or trying to comply with vocational ideals. However, what these ideals are, and their places of origin can be complicated. In VET, ideals also become closely linked to specific practices within vocations and can sometimes be difficult to pinpoint. Thunborg (1999) shows that vocational identities have different characteristics in different branches of healthcare. For example, at an anaesthesia clinic, readiness for action may be more prominent, while patience predominates at a health centre. The ideals that make up a vocational habitus can be fairly abstract attributes, such as respectability, which Huppertz (2010) highlights in a study about normality, morality, impression management, and esteem in nursing and social work. Or they could consist of more concrete traits like empathy, communication skills, and having a good attitude (Rehn & Eliasson, 2015). As Carter (2014), who studied altruism in nursing, pointed out, desirable ideals can also be linked to motives, such as being motivated by altruistic reasons.

The perception of what counts as important knowledge, what ideals should be achieved or what is 'right' are influenced by aspects such as gender, class, and ethnicity (Carter, 2014; Huppertz, 2010; Rehn & Eliasson, 2015). For example, Huppertz (2010) stresses that respectability is both feminised and classed. In addition, Huppertz and Goodwin (2013), who studied gender capital and masculinised and feminised jobs, show that both men and women contribute to feminising and masculinising vocations because femininity and masculinity can be perceived as necessary resources in different vocations. This also means that both

men and women continue to reproduce societal structures, even though they are unequal. This can be compared to the work of Skeggs (1997), who studied formations of class and gender and suggests that those who define the ideal image, such as 'old-timers' in a CoP context, also become objects of their own classification, which in turn creates a self-replicating culture within the vocation. The fact that professionals themselves control their ideals can also result in the exploitation of those who aspire to a specific vocational ideal; for example, by being expected to do unpaid work in order to live up to said vocational ideals.

The right habitus

What the right habitus is and how someone learns it can be difficult to define even within a specific CoP. The students in Skeggs' (1997) study pursued a vocational ideal, the caring self, which was framed as 'a caring self is a practical, not an academic self' (Skeggs, 1997, p. 59). In other words, developing the *right* vocational habitus, according to these students, is something that happens in action, not by reading books. This can certainly be seen as a strategy to overcome past negative educational experiences (Skeggs, 1997). However, Somerville (2006) concluded that different types of learning take place within VET for workers in elderly care and that knowledge acquired within the educational context could come into conflict with that of experienced professionals within the vocational CoP. This is also noted by Klope (2015), who argues that the vocational expectations conveyed in school differ from those expected from professionals. Similar to this is Ferm (2021), who studies vocational students' thoughts about knowledge in relation to vocational identity formation and draws attention to a divide between theoretical and practical knowledge, or academic and vocational knowledge. According to Ferm (2021) students valued practical/vocational knowledge, and their identity formation was more inclined to align with norms within the workplace than school. Furthermore, as Lensjø (2020) notes, the theoretical/practical divide can lead to misunderstandings and a lack of coherent learning, although misunderstandings can be solved through practice (as in through performing in everyday work).

Regarding the potential gap between school and vocational expectations, teachers play an important role, and Rehn and Eliasson (2015) believe that there may be a problem with the ideals conveyed within VET. For example, many AN students are foreign-born with a working-class background, while their teachers (who are more likely to have a background as nurses) represent a feminine middle-class ideal. In addition, since AN's identities are oriented towards patients and nursing, while those of nurses turn towards multifunctionality and coordination (Thunborg, 1999), there is also a risk that the ideals conveyed consist of nurses' perception of the AN vocation, rather than those of teachers originating from AN as a vocation (Rehn & Eliasson, 2015).

The teachers in Rehn and Eliasson's (2015) study highlight empathy, communication, and a pleasant attitude as important knowledge, and some even highlight that the *right* vocational habitus is something you carry with you rather than something you can learn. Lagercrantz All (2017), who studied adult learners' experiences of health and social care education in MAE, also mentions that personal competencies, such as empathy and social agility, are crucial for determining whether or not students complete their studies. The students' perception of the *right* vocational habitus is also positioned in relation to the image they have of themselves. Rehn and Eliasson (2015) note that too big a step between a student's habitus and the expected vocational habitus can make the student perceive it as unsuitable, or see themselves as unsuitable. This is also noted by Wenger (2010), who argues that when learning is at its best, the distance between students' experiences and new skills must not be perceived as either too great or too small. However, since orienting personal habitus toward vocational habitus is a process, it is also important to note how these ideals are conveyed; in particular, whether the process of vocational socialisation is prioritised over skills development (Nitzler & Frykholm, 1993). In addition, within VET that focuses on skills acquisition, Chan (2014), who studied bakers' apprenticeships, noted the importance of including students' attainment of a sense of craftsmanship within VET and that a craftsmanship ideal can be conceptualised when students engage in vocational activities or meet teachers.

When starting VET, some students face greater challenges than others regarding their vocational development, based on their individual habitus. As Lagercrantz All (2017) points out, skills that students expect to learn may be things that they are expected to already possess. On the other hand, Assarsson and Sipos-Zackrisson (2005), who studied how identities are created in adult education, point out that different identities are related to both individuals' life situations and their studies and that students demonstrate different social repertoires in relation to their studies, such as making a living, learning, earning credits, and self-realisation. This means that adults, compared to students in upper secondary education, generally have access to other repertoires that can be useful in a VET context. Being older also generally comes with more experience, both positive and negative. On this point, Somerville (2006) argues that trainees understand their life experiences in terms of skills that are in line with care work, which means that even seemingly negative life experiences can have positive uses.

Through combining CoP and vocational habitus, this study's contribution springs from shedding light on adult students' perceptions of their future vocation at the beginning of their training. Since they face a shorter period of time to develop a vocational identity compared to students in upper secondary school (1.5–2 years shorter), this study broadens the understanding of how adult stu-

dents' perceived desirable vocational habitus affects their vocational identity development. The aim of this study is to explore how adult VET students perceive a desirable vocational habitus within their future vocation. As shown, previous research on formal VET often focuses on upper secondary school which means that adult learning experiences and adults' prerequisites (such as having different experiences, life situations, and thoughts about the future than, for example, upper secondary school students) could have been missed, which this study draws attention to. The concept of habitus also allows for a more nuanced focus on learning a vocational identity within the CoP perspective. It can draw attention to potential challenges in 'learning a new vocational identity' that can be seen as a process of realigning one's own identity. In addition, learning skills can also be discussed in relation to learning different ideals in different vocational contexts.

Method

The aim of this study is to explore how adult VET students perceive a desirable vocational habitus and the data is based on qualitative interviews with adult AN and FL students (from two different schools) at the beginning of their education within the MAE. The students in this study are a mixed group in terms of vocational, educational, and life experiences and the two schools were selected based mainly on accessibility. To get a broad perspective on VET within MAE the programmes were chosen based on pedagogical structures and whether the programme was female- or male-dominated, assistant nursing being female-dominated, and floor laying being largely dominated by men. Structurally, AN training is relatively theoretical in character, spanning 1.5 years and students spend a lot of time in traditional classrooms (though with some work-based learning spread across the three semesters of the programme). The FL training lasts a little over one year and is structured more like an apprenticeship with a lot of school-based activities occurring in a workshop and students crossing over to work-based learning when the teacher deems them ready.

Interviews were conducted at the beginning of the training programmes; in spring 2019 for AN students and autumn 2019 for FL students. A total of 18 initial interviews were conducted, ten from a group of AN students that were interested in participating in the study (eight women, two men); and eight students from the FL programme (all men), which comprised the entire class. All interviews were conducted with students at their respective schools. The interviews were semi-structured, with relatively open questions that offered informants a chance to develop their answers during the interview and varied between 20 and 50 minutes in length. The interview guide consisted of 14 questions distributed between five themes, covering questions about the informant, routes into MAE, educational goals, vocational competence, and vocational identity.

Written approval from all informants was collected, and informants received both written and oral information about the purpose of the study, confirming that all data would be confidential and that they had the right to end their participation in the study at any time. Interviews were recorded using a dictaphone, anonymised, and transferred to a joint storage server, in accordance with guidelines for information security at Linköping University.

Interviews were transcribed in their entirety and then analysed independently using inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2016; Clarke & Braun, 2017). Each interview was given equal attention and the coding process sought to identify how adult VET students perceive desirable vocational habitus within their future vocation. Empirical data were processed and subsequently categorised and then rearranged in order to elicit distinct themes and visualise different phenomena regarding how students perceive their future vocations. These themes were interpreted and described in text supported by quotations and compilations from the interviews. A CoP perspective and a vocational habitus perspective were afterwards used together with previous research in order to discuss and analyse the results in the discussion section.

Results

In this section I will discuss the results under the following themes. The first theme is *who are you supposed to be*, where students' responses have been interpreted in relation to a sense of belonging and whether their vocation is perceived as something 'that you are' or if it is something that 'you do'. *Students' image of society's perception of their vocation* is a theme focused on how students experience how society views their vocation. The third theme is *what you are supposed to do*, where I explore students' views on general tasks and knowledge that they have perceived are important for their chosen vocation. These results do not claim to show that all AN or FL students think the same way. To this end, individuals' statements are not necessarily represented in all themes, nor is it the case that all themes can be attributed to all students.

Who are you supposed to be?

Students have an idea of the expectations that will be placed on them, in that they have an image of what (or who) they will become. This includes notions as to how they should think and act, as is the case for Amir, who perceives the AN vocation as something for healthy people. Amir explains:

- Interviewer: Then I wonder, do you feel like an assistant nurse?
Amir: No, not right now. First you have to stop smoking. The other thing is, like, you kind of have to be healthy, that's not me.

Students from both programmes describe the images of their vocation in terms of who to be and what to do; however, certain differences emerge. The image of AN is broad and multifaceted, and is described in terms of social, moral, and almost virtuous ideals. This is in stark contrast to the more instrumental image of FL which is narrower and collected into a production-oriented and aesthetic focus. However, what applies to both student groups is that there are students who identify with the vocation from the start of the course and that they already have a sense of vocational belonging; especially those AN students with prior work experience as ANs. But the feeling of belonging can also be seen among FL students. As Filip puts it:

Well, when I put my pants on, maybe I feel like a floor layer, otherwise not quite so much... I probably wouldn't be so cocky that I go and ask someone if I should lay their floor, but more and more I feel like a floor layer.

The assistant nurse: Something you are

According to the students' image of the AN vocation, the AN should be nice, want to help people, be caring, attentive, sympathetic, responsible, helpful, kind and honest. The AN's work is based on emotions, they should be able to help people with everyday chores and must be resistant to stress, because there is a lot to be done in a short time. The AN cannot say 'that's not my job' and must be able to assume responsibility and perform basic medical examinations in order to report to doctors or nurses. The AN helps people with their lives and that means they should get a lot of respect, and where they work does not matter.

Anna stressed that being an AN means doing what is right, even if the rules are sometimes bent. She also mentioned that the AN vocation is tough, both physically and mentally, and that one should have an 'unpretentious' relationship with oneself and one's abilities. Abena also expressed the following:

Maybe they don't want help from me? Then, maybe, I have to change my perspective, or ask myself 'why don't they want help from me?' Is it because of my language skills, or how I approach them? I have to find out and if that's difficult, I will ask my colleagues if there's anyone better than me.

At a more down-to-earth level, there are other aspects that are expected of ANs and expressed in different forms of approaches, attitudes, or patterns of action. Students pointed out different kinds of expectations in the form of rules; e.g., that an AN is expected to greet people, speak with kindness, and not use their phone at work (to show you are socially present). The AN must also be socially engaged, with all that this entails; it is not a task that can be carried out mechanically. Amir says that 'to become a good nurse, AN, or doctor, one must listen to the patient. Not because it's your job but because you want to help others.' The students pointed out that you can learn social attitudes, rules, behaviours, or communicative methods, but if you lack an interest in the social context, it will be difficult.

The floor layer: Something you do

Students stressed that the main thing with FL is that a FL should primarily be knowledgeable about what they do, that is, lay floors. In general, the ideal FL was described in two major categories; being a good floor layer and a good colleague; and being able to do your job in a careful way. In addition to this, floor laying is established in relation to the larger vocational group of craftsmen. Being an FL is about laying floors, but 'a good craftsman' follows a more aesthetic ideal and performs careful work. Florim also stresses:

A good craftsman is someone who can do a proper job, it doesn't have to be someone who needs to be quick, perhaps, the fastest is not always the best job, but it must always be correct, there are those who take time but still do an excellent job.

Another aspect that was pointed out was that a good colleague should not be too 'serious' about being late, which can be contrasted with other students' opinions on the importance of arriving on time. As a good colleague, the ideal FL should be able to cooperate because they usually work together with someone else; a FL should be good company, easy-going and fun, and smile readily. In relation to characteristics, a good colleague should offer help to those who need it without feeling uneasy or stressed, but one should not be so proud that help is rejected when offered. The students also pointed out that they want to be able to stand on their own two feet in their professional role; they want to be able to be independent and not be a burden in the workplace. They have to be competent enough to be able to work without help and also to be able to work together with someone else. To achieve this, one should have a humble relationship with one's own and one's colleagues' shortcomings. As Fatos expressed it:

Help the others if they need help, if they say 'no I don't have to', then you're not being annoying. If someone says to me 'you can't do that or that', if that person wants to help, just tell him. Don't be mean to the other one or say, as I've heard in this group, 'you're not my teacher, get out of here, you can't help me' or something. If you do, you're not a good colleague.

In addition, there were many students who cited the teacher as an example when describing what the FL vocation requires. As Freidoon explained 'you listen to the teacher and come [to school] every day and try to do it yourself.' Florim also describes what characterises good knowledge:

Well, it's knowing what you're talking about, like, knowing the different things. You notice that with the teacher, he knows what he's talking about. It's not like he's only saying that he knows, he can do it as well, it's not just theoretical, you know, everything he talked about, he did in practice.

The teacher is thus in a unique position and, according to the students, it is the teacher who guides students along the path towards both knowledge and the CoP.

Students' image of society's perception of their vocation

When asked how they think people in general view their future vocation, students' responses differed considerably. All the AN students had an idea of what the AN vocation entails before they applied for vocational training, and some had prior experience in health and social care. The FL vocation, on the other hand, is a relatively isolated vocation and most students had encountered it for the first time at a local MAE fair.

How AN students perceived the public's view of their profession can be divided into two broad categories, a positive image or a negative image; i.e., that people in general view AN as a vocation with either high or low status. Amanda mentions:

I think people see it as very lame, it's very low [status], there's nurses and doctors and there's a lot above... I know for myself, before I wanted to be an AN, I thought AN was a very... lame profession, that's, like, not much more than, ah, wiping the elderly.

Amanda, as well as other students, was aware of the hierarchy in healthcare and that the AN is a long way down the proverbial ladder. However, some argued that the AN profession is viewed with high regard since an AN is knowledgeable, helpful, kind, and nice. On the other hand, wiping poop was a recurring theme; it should also be added that Fatos chose FL instead of AN because he did not want work that entailed 'wiping poop'.

Since FL was something new to students, most of their images of society's perception of the vocation were close to what their own image had been a few months earlier. Filip pointed out that since he had had no direct idea of what FL was, it is probably the same for people in general. Regarding status, Firash thought that FL has just the right amount of status; not too high and not too low, and he compared FL to high-level jobs:

I called my mother and told her I wanted to be a floor layer, and she said, 'no you have to study, you have to become a doctor' and stuff. But in Sweden, it's not like that, in Sweden you can do anything you want. Parents just want you to get a university degree, those who [do] make good money.

In the eyes of the students, FL seems to have an intermediate societal position. On the one hand, there are those who look down on floor layers because of their 'dirty clothes', but on the other hand there are those who see FL as an important vocation because they must undergo training. There are also aspects of unclear boundaries between FL and other vocations within building and construction; for example, Florim, who believes that the reason people do not have any particular ideas regarding FL is because they are generally lumped together with carpenters or 'people who work in building and construction'.

What you are supposed to do

In relation to their future working life, students had an idea of what tasks are performed and what knowledge is expected. Students from both programmes described 'practical tasks'; in the sense of working with their hands or with people and not, for example, sitting at a computer. However, FL students had a clearer position, stating that they had chosen a practical programme, not a theoretical one, while AN students had chosen a vocation in which they would help people. In addition, among students (of both groups) who were not raised in Sweden, language was highlighted as one of the most important skills to learn in school, in relation to both their vocation and their education. Being able to communicate well in Swedish was also related to social contexts in both school and working life and in their social life in general.

What the AN vocation entails is exemplified in a quote from Abena, who says that ANs should 'help others who can't take care of themselves'. Many students just pointed out 'helping with everyday chores', which could be described at a more general level, but it was difficult for students to pinpoint exactly what this meant. Abas summed this up by saying 'it's a difficult question... to do everything right', but also that not everyone does everything right. Furthermore, when students described how to perform different tasks, various aspects of 'helping the elderly' emerged, connected to personal attributes like *being kind* or the importance of language and communication. However, when describing what was most important about their education, they aligned more closely with the content of the courses they were studying than with AN tasks. When asked about what they thought of the teacher's opinion as important knowledge, Abas said:

When we have medicine class, we talk about the body and how it works, what organs we have and their tasks. In psychology, we talk about the psyche and nerves, that you learn so you don't get scared. In health and social care, it's about how you work, what you do, when to change clothes, when to change gloves, when you shower, when you wash your hands.

The FL students described the FL vocation as an easy and fun type of job. They emphasised that anyone can become a floor layer because FL is 'practical work' where 'practical knowledge' is important and the main focus is on coping with tasks, framed by preparatory work and the end product of floor laying; i.e., sealing, grinding, gluing, attaching, welding, etc. Practical knowledge was described as working with the body, which was set against sitting still and reading books, as Florim puts it: 'It's a craftsmanship vocation, so it's like any other craftsmanship vocation, a bit more practical, not so much of just sitting around'. Being able to work with your hands and being able to move around when working was strongly linked to what these students considered a fun job. But it is also fun to learn new skills, a sentiment expressed by Filip:

It's been fun, educational and fun. On Sundays, in some weird way I almost can't wait for Monday. It's a kind of feeling I've never felt before, really! At least not at my last job and not at school either, but now I'm going to think like this, 'damn it's going to be fun to come here tomorrow and spackle or polish'; basically, I've learned, it's been fun, and I've learned to do a lot more than I could before I arrived.

Along the same lines, Firash argued that anyone can become a floor layer and also argued that it is an easy job because you do not have to 'read and write a lot of things'. The students do not, however, mention whether FL work is fun because it is easy or whether FL work is easy because it is fun. However, activities are divided in such a way that practice is fun, and theory is something that is harder to cope with. Firash mentions:

We don't have a lot of theory and I don't have to read a book; I'm tired of reading books, I did four years of language introduction and every day we needed to write short stories and stuff; I can't take it anymore, writing.

However, theoretical knowledge, as derived from foundational subjects within upper secondary education (such as mathematics and Swedish), are attributed valuable because they have vocational importance. Florim even described mathematics as the most valuable knowledge he gained during his FL training.

Discussion

The aim of this study is to explore how adult VET students perceive desirable vocational habitus. Through a thematic analysis of how adult students describe their vocational expectations, desirable knowledge, and what relevant tasks are performed, a discussion about vocational habitus can be brought into relationship with students' habitus. Within the MAE context, students' perceptions of their vocation become particularly interesting because adult individuals have a myriad of life experiences and identity belongings, or 'multi-memberships' in different CoPs (Wenger, 1998). One key result shows that students' development of vocational identities was in transition, even though they were only at the beginning of their training. Because they are adults, they have life experiences that can help them in their vocational becoming in ways that upper secondary school students do not. However, they also face educational or vocational expectations that can prove difficult. Unlike previous studies with a focus on upper secondary VET (e.g., Ferm, 2021; Klope, 2015), this study contributes a focus on adults in adult education. The results show that the process of vocational identity formation among adults is affected by factors other than what young people are affected by, such as the breadth of various life situations, life experiences, and work experience.

Again, students are at the beginning of their training, and they exist in the periphery rather than being fully situated in the vocational CoP (Lave & Wenger,

1991; Wenger, 1998). The fact that students were at the beginning of their programme would argue against the idea that they had already been shaped by their training. On the other hand, since habitus can be seen as embodied collective experiences within individuals (Bourdieu, 1992), what students define as right and proper for their vocation are examples of how social structures in the field have been reproduced (Carlhed, 2011). In addition, different identity belongings affect each other (Billett & Pavlova, 2005) and as the results show, students' lives and previous professional experiences had already given them an idea of the ideals they were expected to achieve. In this article, within the framework of AN training, this is discussed in relation to a 'caring' ideal, and concerning FL training, it is discussed in relation to a 'craftsmanship' ideal; or in terms of learning ideals as creating a caring/craftsman subject.

Another noticeable difference in the results is that the AN vocation is more about being, while FL is more about doing. AN students in this study described the image of the ideal AN as someone who should both be and act in the right way. For example, you should not have to reason your way to the conclusion that you should act morally; you should be moral and moral actions should come naturally. AN students also related to vocational expectations in the form of social engagement, interest, and being kind. FL students instead described FL work in terms of doing, you should do things in a certain way and your relationship to the doing of things is less important. This is in line with how previous research has described a feminised gendered subject; the idealised, altruistic version of the self-sacrificing caring woman who is 'fit' for care work (Carter, 2014; Rehn & Eliasson, 2015; Somerville, 2006). However, these ideals arrive at different levels of abstraction, which run the risk of reproducing ideals that allow for exploitation; often in the form of being expected to do unpaid work in order to live up to them (Hvitved, 2014; Skeggs, 1997; Thunborg, 1999). In the form of abstract ideals, vocational expectations can also be seen among the FL students, but here in terms of 'being a good colleague.' The ideals connected to 'being a good colleague' are, however, described more in the form of action patterns than instinctive approaches, which shifts the focus towards more masculine-gendered subjectivities.

Orient yourself or be filtered out

That students in this study have varied backgrounds regarding vocational, educational, and life experiences is advantageous, as adult learners' life experiences can be translated into useful vocational skills (Somerville, 2006). There is, however, a risk that students will fail to orient themselves towards desirable vocational habitus (Nitzler & Frykholm, 1993). Especially since there can be vocational skills that students are expected to already possess when they start training (Lagercrantz All, 2017). The results show that both AN and FL students are not

blank sheets, ready to be filled with knowledge in a straight trajectory from training through permanent employment. Instead, they already have an idea of what their vocation entails from their first day, even if the scope differs between AN and FL students. Regarding this, Colley et al. (2003) argue that a vocational habitus must be a 'choosable' identity, based on the student's circumstances; and the students in this study have, to some degree, already chosen a vocational identity, in the sense that they have chosen a VET programme associated with that identity. However, the process of developing a vocational identity is in constant negotiation (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 2000) where past experiences stand in relation to future expectations. Furthermore, even though having the 'right' background and individual preferences creates the conditions for students to begin their orientations towards vocational habitus, it will not be enough to develop a full vocational identity (Colley et al., 2003). As Wenger (2010) argues, the best type of learning occurs when the distance between the students' previous experiences and their perception of what is to be learned is just right. Therefore, due to the risk of exclusion, the students' image of a desirable vocational habitus plays a particularly important role in pedagogical activities.

The results have identified different aspects of how students perceive what it means to be a member of their vocation. In terms of idealised and realised images, AN students in this study seem to have an idealised starting view of their vocation, based on the moral aspects of perceived desirable vocational habitus. In this, a potential gap may arise between their idealised image and the logic of vocational everyday activities. There also seems to be a potential risk in FL students' images, albeit one that takes a different form. As FL students describe a narrow and production-orientated image, their image seems to be more focused on the realised work of laying floors and is less focused on more idealised aspects. Besides this gap becoming a potential pedagogical problem in itself, there is also the importance of the students finding a balance between the two ideals in order to neither fail to do what is necessary nor to appear 'harsh' in the future exercise of their vocation (Colley et al., 2003).

Skills that kill

Both student groups define their vocation as a practical subject, not an academic one, as Skeggs (1997) identified. There is also a divide between theoretical and practical knowledge similar to the one identified by Ferm (2021), even though this divide may not be as noticeable in MAE VET as in upper secondary VET (since MAE VET mostly includes VET courses). This in turn allows for the development of a more practically-oriented repertoire (Assarsson & Sipos-Zackrisson, 2005). However, this is more evident among FL students, who emphasise the practical self and distance themselves from an academic self.

Among those born and raised outside Sweden, language is mentioned as one of the most important skills they have learned during their training, regarding

both their training, future vocation, and social life. Concerning the management of working life, language impairments in themselves may not be the problem, as they can instead be based more on racism or xenophobia than on language difficulties.

Both student groups stated that skills acquisition and socialisation are important for vocational development, although AN students found a balance between the two while FL students placed a predominant focus on skills acquisition. However, becoming a part of their vocational CoP implies that students move from a periphery to an increasingly central role (Wenger, 1998) and regarding this process, both groups face potential future challenges. AN students described a caring ideal from a distinctly idealised perspective and will need to nuance this with a realistic image if they intend to manage their working lives (Colley et al., 2003). On the other hand, although the FL students' teacher seemed to conceptualise a craftsmanship ideal, their straightforward idea of skills acquisition may pose a problem if they fail to grasp the social aspects of the vocation, or if they fail to develop a clear craftsmanship ideal (Chan, 2014).

Conclusion

This study shows that students can have well-developed and complex images of their future vocation at the beginning of their training. Students can thus have an idea of who they will be from their first day of training; however, these perceptions can function both as hindrances and as advantages in the development of their vocational identities. An awareness of vocational habitus in the VET programmes could open up a pedagogical discussion between VET teachers about how students' perceptions of vocational requirements and actual vocational demands can be balanced. By extension, this can also be of importance for supervisors in workplace-based learning and in a wider sense regarding how the labour market treats 'adult newcomers'. A key aspect of this is that they are adults, adults with experiences that should neither be overestimated nor underestimated. A good balance between students' expectations and the requirements of education/vocation could help create better opportunities for learning (Wenger, 2010), reduce the risk of 'weeding out' students (Nitzler & Frykholm, 1993) or of reproducing unequal ideals (Chan, 2014).

Regarding the limitations of the study, it should be emphasised that one can never make gross generalisations about qualitative research. In addition, critical reflection can be directed toward the study, in that interviews do not necessarily capture students' thinking, but rather how students choose to present their thoughts and ideas. The process of developing a vocational identity consists of countless smaller steps of change and transition, and using the concept of vocational habitus in combination with CoP allows for a more nuanced focus on the process itself. This study shows that how adult VET students perceive desirable

vocational habitus also says something about the identity they perceive themselves to be forming and developing. The image they have of their vocation can impact how they learn their vocation. By using vocational habitus this study broadens the CoP perspective and places students' images of the vocation in a larger context than their own personal history and future. Furthermore, the aspect of 'learning' in a CoP context can also be expanded as a learning process that can be seen as a process of realigning oneself in relation to a perceived ideal; a process that may be easier or more difficult depending on students' background. This can be particularly useful for studies of adults, as their backgrounds are more diverse. To enhance and expand pedagogical discussions regarding adult students' vocational identity formation, further research regarding vocational habitus and how it is developed in an educational CoP, could be useful; perhaps especially research regarding potential tensions between educational and vocational CoPs.

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