



## Editorial: Spring 2026

Per Andersson\*, Song-ee Ahn\*,  
Hedvig Skonhoft Johannesen\*\*,  
Johanna Köpsén\* & Arnt Louw\*\*\*

\* Linköping University, Sweden  
(per.andersson@liu.se, song.ee.ahn@liu.se, johanna.kopsen@liu.se)

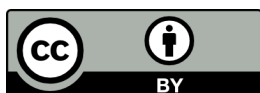
\*\* OsloMet – Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway (hjohanne@oslomet.no)

\*\*\* Aalborg University, Denmark (avl@ikl.aau.dk)

This is the first issue of the 16th volume of the *Nordic Journal of Vocational Education and Training*! Our journal is a forum for research on vocational education and training (VET) in the Nordic countries and beyond. Here, we are presenting research from four Nordic countries – Norway, Finland, Sweden, and Denmark – and from South Africa. In addition to this, the Finnish study also has a co-author from Estonia. The articles cover a broad spectrum of topics: dialogue, democratisation, and repoliticisation of VET; person-centred group counselling; VET teachers' agency in teaching migrant students; students' perspectives on absence from work-based learning; and finally, a scoping review of research on social and health care education. We hope that these articles will provide new insights in these different aspects of VET!

### Five new research articles

The first article, *Beyond academisation: Freirean praxis and the repoliticisation of VET in South Africa*, is a contribution by **Ezekiel Majola**, **Deidre Geduld**, and **Phumelele Jabulisile Majozi**. Academisation and academic drift of VET was the focus of a special issue we published last year (Volume 15, Issue 1), and this article from South Africa provides new insights on this topic. The article draws



on Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy to show opportunities of and argue for democratisation and 'repoliticisation' rather than 'elitist academisation' of South African VET. This should be understood in the specific post-apartheid context with a VET system characterised by inequality and low status. Here, it is shown how Freirean, dialogical pedagogy with 'Learning Cycle Groups' could contribute to the development of critical and political consciousness among VET students.

The second article, *Hvordan kan personsentrert gruppeveiledning bidra til å utvikle yrkesfaglig praksis?* [How do person-centred group counselling contribute to develop vocational practices?], is written by **Elin Markestad**, **Espen Braathen**, **Trygve Aase**, and **Ragnhild J. Tveit Sekse** from Norway. The article examines how experienced healthcare workers engage in reflective learning through person-centred group counselling. The study focuses on participants in further education in mental health care and explores their experiences with counselling grounded in person-centred, gestalt-based, and phenomenological approaches. The empirical material consists of focus group interviews and process evaluations from structured group sessions facilitated by counselling students. This setting offers insight into how guidance unfolds in a context where both facilitators and participants are learners.

Participants had limited prior experience with group counselling and initially found the format unfamiliar. Over time, however, the sessions were experienced as meaningful and supportive, contributing to a stronger sense of professional community. Through shared reflection, participants reported increased professional insight, confidence, and a greater willingness to articulate uncertainty. The article highlights the potential of person-centred group counselling to support both individual and collective learning, while also underscoring the importance of trust and relational safety. In a context marked by pressure and labour shortages in the health sector, the study points to the relevance of such practices for strengthening professional judgement, resilience, and belonging in working life.

The third article of this issue is *Exploring Finnish vocational teachers' agency in teaching migrant students* written by **Katarzyna Kärkkäinen**, **Mirja Tarnanen**, and **Meril Ümarik** from Finland and Estonia. They present results from a study that examines how vocational teachers perceive their agency as professionals when teaching adult migrants and what hinders these teachers' agency when approaching migrant students. They have interviewed 12 teachers and a director. The study revealed two ways of acting. One way is limiting one's own responsibilities to teaching contents, and another way is assuming a broader set of responsibilities in supporting the migrants. Teachers actively searched for new ways of supporting their students but were delimited by aspects restricting them. The authors conclude that VET teachers' in-service and on-the-job training must

be reshaped to meet changing conditions and to create possibilities for rethinking of their responsibilities and the redistribution of resources.

The fourth article, *Staying home as speaking out: Absence as a reflection on support in work-based learning*, by **My Olofsson**, is based in Sweden. In the Swedish context, work-based learning (WBL) is a compulsory component of vocational education and training (VET); nevertheless, student absence from workplace placements has received little research attention. Drawing on qualitative interviews with 26 VET students who experienced work-based learning as challenging, the article explores how students understand and interpret their absence from workplace placements.

The findings show that absences are explained by a range of reasons, most of which are emotionally and socially grounded. These include emotional exhaustion, insecurity, poor treatment in the workplace, and experiences of meaninglessness, all of which contribute to students perceiving workplace placement as a limited learning opportunity. Even in cases where students did not complete their placements for seemingly straightforward reasons, such as illness or geographical distance, Olofsson argues that these absences reflect structural weaknesses and fragilities in the organisation of workplace placements, as well as a lack of support experienced by students.

Drawing on the theory of communities of practice and Biesta's three domains of education, the article argues that absence cannot be reduced to administrative or behavioural terms. Rather, absence should be understood as a response to learning environments that fail to function as meaningful learning opportunities. Instead of interpreting absence as an individual characteristic, such as a lack of motivation, Olofsson conceptualises it as a communicative act – a signal from students that participation in this educational element is not possible for them.

The fifth and last article is *Hvad ved vi om social- og sundhedsuddannelserne i Danmark? Et scoping review* [What do we know about social and health care education in Denmark? A scoping review] by **Anne Görlich, Emma Søndergaard Thomsen, Helene Hoffmann Jensen, and Katrine Thea Pløger Nielsen** from Denmark. This article contributes a systematic literature review of research about Danish social and health education aiming to answer the research question about what is the focus of Danish research about social and health care education and what is lacking. The review has several phases and starts with research on school, school culture, teaching, and learning, juxtaposed to research on apprenticeship training and learning. The second phase of the review examines the coherence and interrelationships between school culture, student's learning and communities, and how these factors influence student's motivation, participation, and retention through education. The systematic review concludes with knowledge gaps found in the research and shows that more systematic scientific research is needed about the pedagogy, organizational, and professional education

dimensions in order to strengthen the social and health education's role and future in the Danish welfare state.

### What's next?

Our journal will of course continue publishing articles on different aspects of VET, both in open issues like this one, and in special issues on specific topics. Researchers who have a proposal of a special issue, and are willing to act as guest editors, are always welcome to contact the editorial group to discuss their ideas!

In June, the Nordic VET research community will meet in Jyväskylä, Finland, for the annual NordYrk Conference. Our journal is published on behalf of the NordYrk network, and we will of course be there both to present our own research and to represent the journal. We look forward to this event where we all will develop our networks and get new insights into vocational education and training. And, not the least, we as editor of this journal look forward to future contributions to the journal based on findings from research projects that are presented in the conference!