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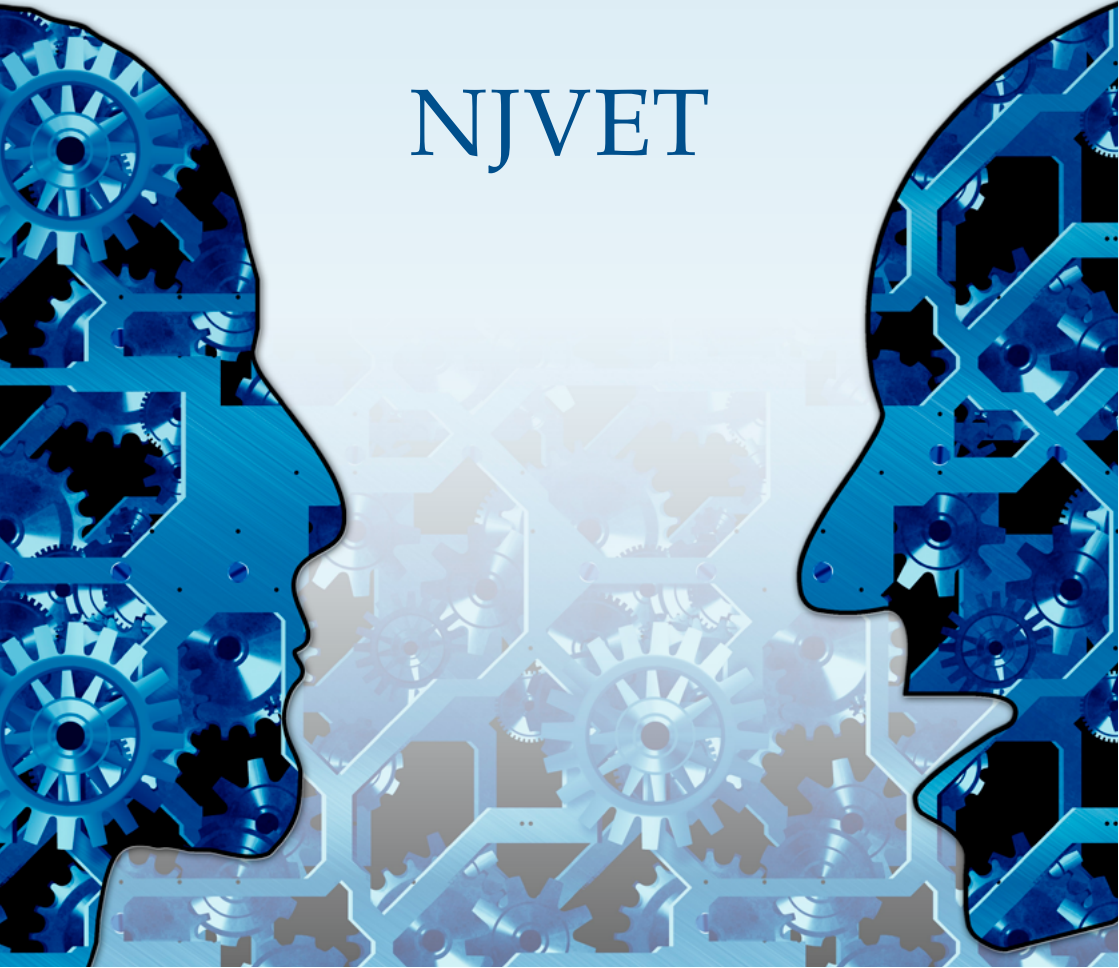




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Editorial: Spring 2026

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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!



Beyond academisation: Freirean praxis and the repoliticisation of VET in South Africa

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Abstract

This article explores the tension between the academisation of vocational education and training (VET) and efforts to reclaim its transformative potential. Drawing on Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, it argues for the repoliticisation of VET in South Africa, where the post-apartheid VET system remains shaped by inequality, outdated curricula, and low social status. Rather than viewing VET merely as preparation for employment, repoliticisation foregrounds student agency, dialogical praxis, and the pursuit of epistemic justice. Centred on the experiences of 15 students who participated in Learning Cycle Group (LCG) meetings – structured, dialogical spaces informed by Freirean pedagogy – the study draws on participatory data to examine how students resisted being positioned as passive recipients of training. Instead, they articulated aspirations rooted in social justice, critical reflection, and collective transformation. The findings reveal that when students engage as co-investigators of their realities, VET can become a site of critical consciousness and political becoming. Integrating Freirean ideas into VET is thus presented not as elitist academisation but as a counter-hegemonic move that reclaims the humanising and political dimensions of education, positioning VET as a democratic space of dignity and dialogue.

Keywords: vocational education and training (VET), academisation, repoliticisation, Paulo Freire, critical pedagogy, humanising education, South Africa



Introduction

In many parts of the world, vocational education and training (VET) systems are undergoing reform to respond to shifting labour market demands, technological change, and the need for youth employment. In South Africa, however, these reforms are unfolding within a post-apartheid terrain marked by deep structural inequality, the historical marginalisation of vocational knowledge, and enduring perceptions of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges as second-class institutions. The South African TVET sector is organised around two main qualification pathways: the National Certificate (Vocational) [NC(V)] and the National Accredited Technical Education Diploma (NATED) N1-N6 programmes, offered across 50 public colleges.

Despite policy reforms such as the White Paper on Post-School Education and Training (Department of Higher Education and Training in South Africa [DHET], 2013), the TVET system remains underfunded and suffers from outdated curricula, weak lecturer development, and poor articulation into universities. Many students – largely from working-class and rural communities – face systemic barriers such as inadequate teaching facilities, irrelevant subject matter, and limited progression opportunities. The consequence is a system that often reproduces social hierarchies and limits, rather than expands, the life chances of its students (McGrath & Ramsarup, 2024; Spreen & Vally, 2010; Vally & Motala, 2022). While government policy has sought to professionalise and reposition VET through qualifications frameworks and curriculum reform, many of these efforts have prioritised occupational alignment and productivity over student agency, critical engagement, or transformative pedagogy (Allais, 2019; Allais & Marock, 2024; Wedekind et al., 2024).

It is within this context that the concept of the academisation of VET has gained attention. Broadly, this refers to the increasing incorporation of theoretical, disciplinary, or academic knowledge into vocational education – often at the expense of its practical, hands-on character (Gonon & Bonoli, 2025; Haasler, 2020; Kaiser, 2021). Some scholars have critiqued this trend as an attempt to elevate the status of VET by making it resemble university education, thus reinforcing the academic-vocational divide rather than challenging it (Gamble, 2006; Gjelstad, 2025; Wheelahan, 2007). Others have noted that this shift risks alienating working-class learners who enter VET institutions seeking practical skills rather than abstract knowledge (Majola et al., 2024; Sabela & Masuku, 2020). However, the binary between ‘academic’ and ‘vocational’ knowledge risks obscuring what is most at stake: how different forms of knowledge – practical, academic, and critical – might be combined in ways that affirm student dignity and agency.

This binary can also obscure more radical, political questions about what kinds of knowledge count, who gets to speak, and what the purposes of education

should be. In response to these tensions, this article draws on the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire to argue not for the academisation, but for the repoliticisation of VET. Freire's concepts of dialogue, praxis, and conscientisation enable a move beyond the binary, reframing the debate on academisation not as a technical question of curriculum reform, but as a political question of whose knowledge matters. This approach demonstrates that Freire's bottom-up pedagogy can productively intervene in systemic debates on academic drift by re-centring student voice and lived experience. Rather than turning VET into a mimicry of academic education, the task is to reclaim it as a space of dialogue, critical reflection, and political formation – a space where students are not merely trained for the world of work, but empowered to question and transform it (Freire, 1970, 1998; Vally & Motala, 2017).

This position is grounded in a participatory action research project that engaged 15 TVET students in Learning Cycle Group (LCG) meetings – structured dialogues modelled on Freirean pedagogical principles. The LCGs were designed not to deliver content, but to cultivate collective inquiry, voice, and critical consciousness among students whose experiences are often marginalised in educational discourse. Through these group meetings, students reflected on their lives, their college experiences, and the socio-economic conditions they navigate. Their narratives provide rich insights into how VET can be reimaged – not through technocratic reforms, but through pedagogies of humanisation and conscientisation (Freire, 1998; Moll, 2023; Vally & Spreen, 2006). Although the study was conducted on a modest scale, it signals the potential for such dialogical spaces to be institutionalised more broadly within the TVET sector, thereby moving from isolated practice towards systemic transformation.

What emerges from these student voices is a deep yearning for recognition, transformation, and justice. Far from being passive recipients of training, the students articulated critiques of their educational experiences and aspirations for more meaningful, inclusive learning. They expressed frustration with curricula that felt detached from their realities and with lecturers who treated them as empty vessels to be filled (Buthelezi, 2018). Yet, they also voiced hope, solidarity, and a desire to become agents of change in their communities. In this way, their testimonies represent acts of repoliticisation – efforts to reclaim education as a site of struggle and possibility (Gonon et al., 2025; Spreen & Vally, 2010).

By bringing these student narratives into conversation with Freirean theory, the article challenges dominant interpretations of what counts as quality or effective VET. It argues that repoliticisation rejects neither academic nor vocational knowledge, but instead seeks to connect both with critical, dialogical forms of knowing that emerge from students' lived realities. In doing so, it contributes to broader efforts to rethink vocational education not merely as a tool for economic development, but as a terrain of cultural resistance, epistemic

justice, and political becoming (Allais & Ngcwangu, 2025; McGrath & Ramsarup, 2024).

The article proceeds as follows. It begins with a theoretical framing that situates Freire's pedagogy in relation to the academic-vocational binary and debates around VET reform. It then outlines the participatory methodology and structure of the Learning Cycle Groups. The core of the article presents four themes drawn from student narratives, highlighting how they reframe VET as a space of critique, voice, and hope. The discussion then reflects on the implications of these findings for VET pedagogy and policy, arguing for a repoliticised approach that resists both technicism and elitist academisation. The conclusion calls for deeper engagement with student voice and critical pedagogy as tools for reimagining the future of vocational education in South Africa.

Theoretical framing: Freire and the politics of knowledge in VET

The critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire offers a transformative lens for interrogating and reimagining VET, particularly in contexts marked by structural inequality, such as South Africa. Freire's concepts of conscientisation, praxis, dialogue, and humanisation form the bedrock of his pedagogical approach, which seeks not merely to reform education but to repurpose it as a liberatory and democratic project (Freire, 1970, 1974; Freire & Horton, 1990). Within systems where VET is often reduced to job preparation and technical instruction, Freire's pedagogy demands a deeper engagement with the social purposes of education, asking: education for what, for whom, and by whom?

Freirean pedagogy and the reclamation of voice

Central to Freire's pedagogy is conscientization – the process of developing a critical awareness of one's social reality through reflection and action. This form of consciousness enables learners to perceive the structures of domination that shape their lives and to recognise their capacity to act against them (Freire, 1974). This process is actualised through praxis, the dialectical interplay between critical reflection and transformative action. Freire insists that education must be rooted in learners' lived experiences and must aim not simply at the transfer of information, but at awakening a sense of agency.

This also necessitates dialogue. Freire rejects the 'banking model' of education – in which knowledge is deposited into passive students – in favour of dialogical engagement between students and educators as co-investigators (Freire & Shor, 1987). Through dialogue, students not only learn content but develop the ability to question, reflect, and propose alternatives. Humanisation, then, is both the goal and the method of Freirean education: it is about recognising the learner as a full human being, capable of naming and changing the world (Freire, 1998).

Although these concepts are widely discussed in broader educational theory, they are rarely integrated into the practices and discourses of vocational education. This is striking, given that vocational education itself is built around forms of practical and experiential knowledge. Freire's approach allows us to ask how such vocational knowledge might be reconnected to theory in ways that are meaningful to students' lived realities – rather than reduced to technicism or displaced by abstract academic content. In a VET context, where education is framed in terms of productivity, employment outcomes, and economic alignment, Freire's pedagogy introduces a vital and counter-hegemonic discourse that centres learner agency, critique, and social transformation (Hyslop-Margison & Dale, 2010; Porres, 2018).

Instrumentalism and the technicist drift in VET

VET in South Africa, and elsewhere, has long been dominated by a narrow, instrumentalist logic in which education is seen primarily as a means of preparing workers for industry. The language of skills development, employer engagement, and competency-based training has shaped curricula, pedagogy, and assessment frameworks in ways that marginalise broader educational aims (Allais, 2019; Hodgkinson, 1998). The influence of human capital theory – often promoted by global institutions such as the World Bank – has led to a decontextualised and depoliticised model of vocational learning (Ngcwangu, 2015). Scholars such as Wheelahan (2007) and Gamble (2006) have critiqued this model for denying vocational students access to theoretical and conceptual knowledge, thereby reinforcing social subordination. Instead of enabling students to understand the structures and relations that shape their work and lives, instrumentalist VET trains them for compliance.

In the South African context, Allais and Ngcwangu (2025) argue that employer-centred skills planning often results in superficial curriculum adjustments that fail to address systemic inequality or prepare students for meaningful participation in society. The technicist framing of quality in VET compounds the problem. As Wedekind et al. (2024) observe, dominant conceptions of lecturer quality are overly focused on administrative efficiency and compliance, rather than on relational, critical, or student-centred pedagogies. This view sidelines the intellectual and ethical dimensions of vocational teaching, reducing lecturers to implementers rather than educators capable of engaging in transformative praxis.

This technicist drift also narrows the meaning of vocational knowledge, reducing it to fragmented tasks and competencies rather than holistic forms of practice that integrate technical, conceptual, and ethical dimensions. As a result, vocational students are denied opportunities to engage with vocational know-

ledge critically – both as a resource for work and as a means of understanding and reshaping their social conditions.

Academisation vs repoliticisation: A necessary distinction

In response to the marginalisation of vocational learners, some reformers have advocated for the academisation of VET – introducing more theoretical or disciplinary knowledge into curricula to raise its academic prestige and overcome the ‘low status’ of vocational pathways (Gamble, 2006; Gonon & Bonoli, 2025). While this strategy may appear progressive, it risks reproducing the binary between vocational and academic knowledge rather than disrupting it. Moreover, the academisation of VET can lead to the imposition of abstract, disconnected theory that fails to engage students’ lived realities or foster critical agency.

Sabela and Masuku (2020) warn that this approach may alienate working-class students, especially when theoretical content is delivered without context or reflection. In contrast, Freirean praxis begins not with abstract theory, but with problem-posing education grounded in students’ experiences and directed towards collective inquiry (Freire, 1970). While academisation is typically analysed as a systemic drift towards academic forms of knowledge, Freire provides a bottom-up perspective that reframes this debate from the standpoint of learners’ experiences. Placing Freire and academisation in dialogue is thus not a categorical mistake but a deliberate attempt to show how global debates on academic drift can be rethought through the voices and agency of vocational students in South Africa.

This article therefore advocates for repoliticisation, not academisation. Repoliticisation involves returning to the foundational questions of education: What is its purpose? Who defines the curriculum? Whose knowledge is valued? As Porres et al. (2014, 2020) argue, repoliticising VET means creating spaces for learners to speak as subjects, not objects – to engage with educational content critically and collectively, rather than passively. In this way, repoliticisation affirms the intellectual and political capacity of vocational learners. It does not merely insert academic knowledge into vocational spaces but transforms the nature of educational relationships and practices. It asserts, as Rancière does, that all learners are equally intelligent and that education must be based on the presumption of equality (Porres, 2017). Through this lens, VET becomes not only a site of preparation for work, but a space for ethical becoming and democratic participation.

Repoliticisation in the South African context

Repoliticising VET is especially pressing in South Africa, where vocational education remains shaped by apartheid legacies, market reforms, and policy

contradictions. Although the White Paper on Post-School Education and Training (DHET, 2013) promised a more inclusive, coherent, and developmental post-school system, its implementation has been uneven and often captured by managerial and neoliberal imperatives (Akoojee, 2016; Vally & Motala, 2017, 2022). The continued fragmentation between VET and higher education, the limited articulation pathways, and the neglect of student voice all undermine the possibility of transformative education.

In this context, repoliticisation means more than critique – it means action. It requires creating dialogical spaces where students can engage in critical reflection on their social conditions and on the role of education in their lives. Balwanz and Hlatshwayo (2016) demonstrate that when students are invited into spaces of collective inquiry, they produce knowledge that is both critical and hopeful. Similarly, Majola et al. (2024) foreground how TVET graduates make sense of their educational struggles and reimagine their futures through Freirean dialogue. Repoliticisation also requires a shift in the role of TVET lecturers and researchers. As Terblanche and Bitzer (2018) argue, curriculum change in TVET must be led by educators who understand the needs of their students and communities, not imposed from above. Repoliticisation places educators in partnership with learners, fostering what Freire (1990) calls co-intentional education – where teacher and student learn together in the process of naming and transforming the world.

The Freirean call to reclaim education as a practice of freedom remains deeply relevant to vocational education today. In resisting both technicism and elitist academisation, repoliticisation offers a critical and emancipatory alternative. It challenges the assumption that vocational learners are incapable of theory or critique and insists that, like all learners, they are intellectuals in their own right. By grounding education in dialogue, contextual relevance, and collective inquiry, repoliticisation provides a way to revitalise TVET in South Africa and beyond. It is not a return to theory for theory's sake, but a move towards humanising, participatory, and socially just education – an education that does not simply prepare people for work, but prepares them to shape the world.

The South African TVET sector exemplifies these contradictions. NC(V) programmes, for example, combine vocational subjects with general education but are often delivered through outdated syllabi and under-resourced facilities, leaving students alienated from both academic and practical knowledge. NATED courses remain narrowly occupational, with little space for critical reflection or progression into higher education (Allais & Ngcwangu, 2025).

In this fragmented context, repoliticisation requires not only the creation of dialogical spaces such as Learning Cycle Groups, but also a rethinking of how curricula and pedagogy position vocational knowledge itself – as something to be critically engaged with, not merely consumed or discarded. Repoliticisation

therefore insists that vocational knowledge be valued not only as a set of skills for employability, but as a terrain of critical engagement in its own right. This requires building bridges between vocational, academic, and critical knowledge – enabling learners to move beyond the binary and to situate their learning within broader struggles for justice, dignity, and democratic participation.

Methodology: Dialogical research and participatory praxis

This study was conducted in the Eastern Cape, South Africa – a province characterised by entrenched poverty, high unemployment, and limited post-school opportunities (Majola, 2024). These socio-economic conditions significantly shape vocational learners' experiences and highlight the need for research that is both contextually grounded and ethically responsive. To address this complexity, the study employed a qualitative Participatory Action Research (PAR) design, framed by Paulo Freire's pedagogical principles of dialogue, conscientisation, and praxis. PAR was selected not only for its methodological relevance but also for its political orientation. Rooted in Freire's pedagogy, PAR rejects hierarchical relationships between researcher and participant, positioning both as co-investigators engaged in a shared process of inquiry and transformation (Freire & Horton, 1990; Herr & Anderson, 2016). This approach allowed the study to disrupt traditional research logics and align with critical calls for a more humanising and relational form of educational research – particularly within the VET context, where student voice is frequently marginalised (Powell, 2012; Powell & McGrath, 2019).

Freirean praxis in research design

Freire's concept of praxis – the dynamic interplay between critical reflection and action – shaped both the design and the intention of this study (Freire, 1970). Rather than treating participants as data sources, the research aimed to create dialogical spaces in which participants could reflect on their experiences, name systemic barriers, and collectively imagine alternatives. In this sense, data generation became a pedagogical act: a space of conscientisation where participants developed awareness of the socio-political forces shaping their lives and education (Freire, 1974). This approach also responded to dominant policy and institutional discourses that tend to position TVET learners as passive recipients of employability-focused training rather than as capable agents with the right to participate in shaping their education (Majola et al., 2024). Informed by this critique, the research process was intentionally collaborative, affirming Freire's belief that educational practice must begin with people's lived realities and strive towards transformation.

Research participants and context

Fifteen former National Certificate (Vocational) [NC(V)] students from public TVET colleges in the Eastern Cape participated in the study. All had completed the Level 4 qualification and came from rural or peri-urban communities. Participants were purposively selected to reflect diversity in age, gender, educational pathways, and employment status. The NC(V) pathway was chosen because it illustrates the dual pressures of vocational and academic knowledge integration within the South African TVET system: while designed to provide both practical and theoretical knowledge, it is often experienced by students as outdated, irrelevant, and poorly resourced. Most participants were navigating complex challenges related to joblessness, educational exclusion, and familial responsibilities. Research activities were conducted in community venues and participants' homes, with careful attention to accessibility and comfort. The use of familiar and culturally affirming spaces formed part of a broader commitment to humanising research practice – reducing power imbalances and honouring participants' agency.

Data generation methods

Two primary methods were used to generate data: life narrative interviews and Learning Cycle Group (LCG) meetings. These approaches supported the study's commitment to dialogical, participatory, and critically reflective research. Interview prompts and LCG dialogues extended beyond personal struggles, inviting participants to reflect on curriculum design, teaching methods, assessment practices, and the forms of vocational and academic knowledge encountered during their studies. Life narrative interviews provided space for participants to share their personal and educational journeys in their own voices and languages. All names used in reporting the findings are pseudonyms to protect participants' identities. Rather than extracting fixed data points, the interviews enabled participants to make sense of their experiences with systemic marginalisation, including unsafe transport, financial insecurity, and feelings of exclusion within the education system (Majola, 2024; Russell, 2022). These narratives were not only expressions of struggle but also of meaning-making. In line with Freire's emphasis on lived experience as a source of knowledge, the interviews became acts of self-reflection and political awakening – spaces where participants could critically engage with their own stories and locate themselves within broader social and educational structures (Freire & Horton, 1990).

LCG meetings functioned as collective spaces of dialogue and reflection. Grounded in Kolb's (1979) experiential learning cycle and adapted within a Freirean pedagogical framework, the LCGs were designed to promote collaborative sense-making, problem-posing, and critical discussion. Each session was structured to guide participants through cycles of experience sharing, reflection,

conceptualisation, and action planning. Sessions were conducted in isiXhosa, the participants' home language, to promote linguistic inclusion and counter the dominance of English in education and research. This was particularly significant since language itself is a key mediator of knowledge: using isiXhosa enabled participants to articulate experiences of vocational learning in ways that connected directly to their lives, including the relevance – or irrelevance – of curricular content. This linguistic choice reflected a broader commitment to cultural responsiveness and epistemic justice – principles that resonate strongly with Freire's call for education that affirms learners' identities and knowledges (Majola, 2024; Rangana, 2023). LCG meetings went beyond traditional focus groups by fostering a dialogical ethos in which participants not only shared perspectives but also challenged one another, drew connections between personal and structural issues, and articulated collective aspirations for educational transformation. In this sense, the LCG methodology not only generated data but also piloted a model of dialogical pedagogy that could be replicated across TVET colleges as a tool for systemic repoliticisation.

Ethical commitments and research constraints

The research was shaped by an ethic of care and accountability. In addition to securing institutional ethics clearance, the study implemented practical measures to reduce participation barriers. Transport allowances were provided, and flexible scheduling accommodated participants' daily responsibilities, including childcare, informal work, and community commitments. Despite these efforts, structural constraints persisted. Some participants faced food insecurity, emotional stress, and limited access to data and connectivity – factors that influenced their engagement. These realities reinforced the importance of designing research methodologies that are sensitive to the socio-economic conditions of participants and that do not assume uninterrupted access to time, resources, or stability (Ezomo & Prinsloo, 2024; Wood et al., 2023). Rather than treating these constraints as disruptions, the study recognised them as part of the research terrain. They were discussed openly in LCG sessions, becoming opportunities for collective reflection on the structural violence embedded in the South African post-school landscape. In this way, even the limitations of the research process contributed to its critical and dialogical character.

Study findings: Reclaiming voice and agency in TVET through dialogical praxis

This section presents four interrelated themes that emerged from the LCG meetings with 15 former NC(V) students. These themes illuminate how participants – when engaged in intentionally dialogical and participatory spaces – were

able to reflect critically on their educational journeys, articulate systemic injustices, and begin to reimagine the role of vocational education in their lives. Far from being sites of passive data extraction, the LCGs functioned as dynamic, relational spaces grounded in Freirean pedagogy. In the spirit of what Freire (2005) describes as the culture circle, the meetings enabled participants to engage in collective meaning-making, problem-posing, and the naming of oppressive realities (Freire & Horton, 1990; Freire & Shor, 1987).

Within these dialogical encounters, students transitioned from being perceived – and often perceiving themselves – as passive recipients of narrowly framed, market-driven training, to becoming active subjects in the co-construction of knowledge. This process was not merely cognitive, but also affective and political, offering participants opportunities to reclaim their voices, affirm their lived experiences, and challenge the dehumanising dimensions of technicist TVET provision (Allais & Ngcwangu, 2025; Hodkinson, 1998). This shift aligns with broader critiques of South African VET policy, which has historically marginalised student perspectives in favour of labour-market alignment and employer-defined competence models (Powell, 2012; Vally & Motala, 2022).

In this way, the LCGs operated as pedagogical interventions that disrupted the dominant logic of VET, fostering a sense of belonging, agency, and critical hope. As Porres et al. (2014) suggest, such spaces hold emancipatory potential when they allow learners to engage not only with the curriculum, but with their own conditions and futures as political subjects. The themes that follow offer insight into how repoliticisation becomes possible when students are invited to participate as knowers, not merely as learners, and when education is approached as a dialogical, humanising, and transformative act (Majola et al., 2024).

Theme 1: From silence to speech: Breaking the culture of passive reception

Many students described their experiences in the college as marked by voicelessness and disengagement. Lectures were often delivered in a rigid, top-down manner, with little space for interaction, questioning, or personal reflection. Content was frequently presented as fixed and unchallengeable, reinforcing a sense of exclusion. One student reflected:

We are always told what to do. They just come in, give us notes, and expect us to understand. There's no asking us what we think or how we feel about what we are learning like we're just there to listen and pass. But we have thoughts, we have experiences from home, from the township, from our lives, that also matter. (LCG Meeting, 2021)

The LCG meetings disrupted this dynamic by creating dialogical and inclusive spaces where students were encouraged to speak, listen, and reflect together. In these moments, participants began to express frustrations they had long

internalised. For many, it was the first time their perspectives were affirmed as valid and meaningful. As another participant explained:

For the first time, I felt like my voice mattered. Even if I was nervous, I knew this was a space where we listen to each other no one's voice is above another. At college, you keep quiet because if you ask too many questions, you're seen as difficult. But here, we could talk about our real struggles from taxi issues to not understanding the work and no one judged us. (Participant VM, 2021)

This theme reflects Freire's (1970) critique of the banking model of education, where students are treated as empty vessels to be filled with pre-packaged knowledge. The LCGs, by contrast, promoted a shift from silence to speech a shift that marked the beginning of conscientisation, as students began to recognise their capacity to think, question, and contribute meaningfully to educational dialogue. In these spaces, education moved from a one-way transfer of information to a mutual, participatory process of becoming.

Theme 2: We are not just workers: Reclaiming identity and dignity

What emerges here is not a rejection of vocational knowledge itself but a call to broaden it: students valued practical competence but wanted it integrated with critical thinking, entrepreneurial capacity, and leadership development. They articulated visions of a VET system that prepares them not just as compliant workers but as innovators, community builders, and active citizens. In this sense, they redefined what vocational knowledge could mean beyond narrow skill sets toward a holistic form of learning that bridges technical, academic, and critical domains. Students expressed growing discomfort with an education system that seemed to prepare them solely for low-status, repetitive, and externally defined forms of labour. Many felt boxed into narrow occupational roles, with little room to explore their identities, passions, or social contributions. One participant remarked:

Everything they teach us is about working for someone else following instructions, doing the same thing every day. It's like the system sees us as just future employees for big companies or factories. But what about me? What about my ideas, my dreams? What if I want to start something of my own or give back to my community? (LCG Meeting, 2021)

This rejection of narrow occupational preparation was a recurring theme throughout the LCGs. Students did not question the value of practical skills, but they challenged the instrumental framing that reduced them to labour market outputs. Many expressed frustration at the lack of focus on broader personal and intellectual development, particularly in areas like critical thinking, leadership, and entrepreneurship capacities they saw as essential for community upliftment and long-term resilience. Another student shared:

I want to be more than just employable. I don't want to wait for someone to hire me all the time. I want to be useful in my community, even start something that helps others. I want to lead, not just follow instructions my whole life. But this kind of thinking isn't encouraged in college it's all about getting any job, not about growing as a person. You can't have access to admitted to university with this NC(V) qualification, expect coming back to TVET college to do NATED courses, like most of us did, so we are trapped, maybe I can say we are just meant to be workers in this system. (Participant W2Y, 2021)

These reflections challenge the dominant labour-market framing of VET and assert the desire for an education that recognises students as full human beings not just as units of labour. Freire's concept of humanisation is powerfully evident here. Participants articulated a need for education that nurtures not only technical competence but also self-worth, agency, and a sense of purpose. In their voices, we hear a demand for a different kind of VET one that affirms dignity and identity alongside employability.

Theme 3: The curriculum is not about us: Alienation from content and context

Several participants explicitly connected this alienation to the outdated NC(V) curriculum, which they felt had little resonance with contemporary technologies or local livelihoods. Their critiques carried implicit proposals: they wanted curricula that address urgent community challenges (such as unemployment, crime, and health), that integrate local knowledge with modern technical skills, and that open pathways to further study. These are not abstract desires but concrete curricular visions grounded in their daily struggles. A recurring critique from participants was the perceived irrelevance of the curriculum to their lives and contexts. Many felt alienated from the content, describing it as disconnected from their communities, lived realities, and post-college challenges. One participant expressed this sense of dislocation bluntly:

We learn things that have no meaning in our daily lives. It's like the textbooks and topics are out of touch with the reality of the township, making matters worse we are in 2021 but some of the subjects taught at the college are using the syllabus written in 1995, what is that? Is it relevant in this day and age, they don't understand where we come from or what we're dealing with outside of class. (LCG Meeting, 2021)

Others described the curriculum as abstract, rigid, and lacking in everyday applicability. The dominant teaching approaches often highly formal and content-heavy left students disinterested and demotivated, particularly when they could not see how learning connected to their present or future. Another student reflected:

Sometimes I sat in class and ask myself, what's the point of all this? Why are we learning things that the teacher is not sure of himself, definitely things that are not applicable to change our lives. Learning about typing speed and typewrite with that

help me to increase my chances of getting a job that I help me support my family or deal with poverty that is written all over at home and my community? (LCG Meeting, 2021)

These reflections point to what Freire refers to as the failure of education to engage with generative themes the issues, struggles, and hopes that emerge from learners' social contexts (Freire, 1970). Instead of empowering transformation, the curriculum becomes another site of alienation. For these students, meaningful education would begin not in abstraction, but in connection with lived realities, local knowledge, and the urgent issues that shape their daily lives.

Theme 4: Education as hope and collective struggle

Alongside hope, students offered practical suggestions for systemic change: more dialogical spaces like LCGs embedded into college life, lecturers trained to facilitate critical discussion, updated workshops and facilities that reflect current labour market realities, and clearer articulation routes into higher education. These ideas demonstrate that students are not only critics of the system but also active visionaries, proposing pathways to reimagine VET from below. Despite their critiques, students did not reject the idea of education. On the contrary, they articulated a profound belief in its transformative potential if reimaged on more humanising, inclusive, and contextually relevant terms. Education, for many, remained a space of aspiration and emotional investment. As one participant described:

We don't just come here TVET college for a qualification which does not get to a job. We come with pain, with dreams, with questions. Some of us are dealing with poverty, loss, and trauma. We need a place that helps us heal and grow, to end poverty and transform our lives and that of our families, we carried hopes of our families driven by aspiration to change in our black community. (LCG Meeting, 2021)

Another participant further highlight:

Do you know where I live? Some of us walk long distances to go to college because we want this education to improve our lives. Yes, I might be hungry when I get to school. Yes, you don't know what might happen on the road with all the criminal activities, but we come because we want to change our lives and those of our families. Poverty is real in the township, but we stand up with hope that education can help us improve. (LCG meeting, 2021)

This notion of education as healing and restoration reveals the emotional and psychosocial dimensions of vocational learning that are often overlooked in policy and curriculum design. The LCG meetings, in contrast, provided a rare space for students to speak openly, reflect deeply, and begin to imagine alternatives. As another student shared:

If we could have more spaces like this, where we really talk and listen to each other, maybe we could change this place our college, even our communities. We've got ideas, we just need people to believe in us. Maybe we can be the ones to make things better for others. (LCG Meeting, 2021)

Another participant observed:

When we share our experiences together, I have realised that I am not alone in these challenges. It makes us stronger and helps us think of solutions, somewhere of being there to support each other as TVET graduates, since the college seemingly does not care what happened after you graduate. (Participant K, 2021)

These voices reflect not only critical engagement, but also a form of praxis the merging of reflection and action directed at transformation (Freire, 1970). Students were not merely critiquing a broken system; they were imagining and enacting a different kind of vocational education one rooted in solidarity, agency, and justice. Their words point to a desire for VET to become a space of possibility, not just productivity.

Cross-theme analysis and implications

Together, these four themes illuminate how students – when engaged through Freirean dialogue – can begin to reframe VET from below. Their reflections are not calls for more content, tighter discipline, or increased efficiency. Instead, they demand dignity, relevance, voice, and belonging. They envision an education that is not merely about preparing for precarious jobs, but about developing as full human beings in a world marked by inequality and struggle. What these narratives articulate is not a rejection of VET, but a repoliticisation of it – a demand that vocational education be reclaimed as a space of becoming, not merely of doing. Through the LCGs, students began to move from silence to speech, from alienation to critical engagement, and from passive training recipients to active participants in shaping their educational futures. Their reflections also signal possibilities for the wider TVET sector. They demonstrate that repoliticisation is not an abstract theory, but a lived, practical demand. The visions articulated in these dialogues – curricula that connect to lived realities, pedagogy that values student voice, and facilities that support dignity – point towards systemic reforms that could transform TVET across South Africa.

Discussion: Towards a repoliticised vision of VET in South Africa

This discussion revisits the central question of the article: does integrating Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy into the South African TVET context represent a drift towards elitist academisation, or does it offer a pathway for the repoliticisation of vocational education? Drawing on the narratives of 15 former NC(V) students, this section argues that Freirean praxis reclaims VET as a space of political,

ethical, and human development – far from the abstraction and exclusion feared in critiques of academisation.

Freire in VET: Reclaiming purpose, not elitising pedagogy

South African TVET continues to grapple with historical and policy-driven marginalisation (Akoojee, 2016; Wedekind et al., 2024). Within this contested terrain, critical pedagogical frameworks are often regarded as overly academic or detached from the hands-on ethos of vocational learning. However, the findings challenge this assumption. Students engaged through Freirean dialogue did not call for abstract theorising, but for education that reflects their lived realities and affirms their voice and dignity (Freire, 1970; Majola et al., 2024). In doing so, their reflections demonstrate that Freirean praxis is not an imposition of elitist academic content, but a means of grounding vocational knowledge in context. Students did not dismiss technical training; rather, they wanted it connected to critical thinking, entrepreneurship, and community relevance.

This illustrates how Freire helps to reframe the debate: instead of opposing academic and vocational knowledge, his pedagogy reveals how both can be integrated within dialogical, participatory practice. Their critiques of curriculum and pedagogy reflect deep structural inequalities and policy shortcomings (Vally & Motala, 2017, 2022). The desire for relevance, belonging, and self-determination is not elitist but deeply political – rooted in conditions of exclusion and economic precarity.

Freire's pedagogy, centred on *conscientização* and praxis, affirms that true learning integrates reflection and action, theory and lived experience (Freire & Horton, 1990; Hyslop-Margison & Dale, 2010). This is not a call to displace skills training, but to re-situate it within an educational vision that goes beyond workplace readiness. Freirean dialogue positions students as agents in knowledge production, challenging technicist framings that reduce learners to future employees – a logic long critiqued in South African VET policy (Allais, 2019; Ngcwangu, 2015).

Beyond academisation: The case for repoliticisation

The trend of academisation in global VET discourse typically involves the integration of higher-level theoretical or disciplinary knowledge into vocational programmes (Gonon & Bonoli, 2025; Kyvik, 2009). While such moves aim to raise the perceived status of VET, they often reproduce hierarchies of knowledge and exclude learners whose social and educational backgrounds differ from university norms (Gjelstad, 2025; Kaiser, 2021).

In South Africa, attempts to uplift VET through qualifications frameworks and standardised curricula have too often resulted in bureaucratisation and alienation, rather than transformation (Allais & Marock, 2024; Vally & Motala,

2022). Students in this study did not reject knowledge per se, but the way it is disconnected from their contexts. This reflects international critiques that warn against the decontextualisation that accompanies academisation when it fails to engage with local realities (Roos & Trasberg, 2025; Wolter, 2023).

Repoliticisation, by contrast, starts from the bottom up. It grounds knowledge in students' lived experiences, encourages problem-posing education, and restores the ethical and social dimensions of learning (Freire, 1974; Porres et al., 2014). The findings confirm this: students' proposals for updated curricula, improved facilities, and recognition of their aspirations are concrete expressions of repoliticisation in practice. They reposition vocational knowledge not as low-status training, but as a legitimate, evolving field that integrates theory, practice, and critical reflection simultaneously.

This bottom-up theorising demonstrates why bringing Freire into the academisation debate is so valuable: it highlights how systemic drifts towards abstract knowledge can be challenged and redirected through learners' own voices. As Gjelstad (2025) illustrates in the Norwegian context, repoliticisation can emerge through local, community-rooted collaboration – a lesson equally relevant to South Africa, where top-down policy initiatives have struggled to create genuinely participatory spaces.

Reimagining VET from below: Voice, praxis, and democratic knowledge

The findings of this study not only expose the limitations of the current TVET system in South Africa but also illuminate the possibilities for its renewal through student voice, dialogical praxis, and political participation. Through their engagement in the LCGs, students challenged the status quo and co-constructed alternative visions of what vocational education could and should be. These visions – rooted in experience, critique, and hope – offer a vital epistemological challenge to the top-down policy approaches that continue to dominate VET reform in South Africa (Ngcwangu, 2015; Vally & Motala, 2022).

Freire (1970, 1974) argued that the starting point of any liberatory pedagogy must be the lived realities and struggles of learners. This study echoes that position. Students did not simply critique curriculum irrelevance or classroom authoritarianism; they proposed VET as a platform for empowerment, leadership, and community transformation. Their testimonies reflect a form of situated theorising – knowledge generated from below that directly contests institutionalised silences and marginalisation (Porres, 2018, 2020; Spreen & Vally, 2006). Crucially, these testimonies contained visions for reform: curricula that address current labour-market technologies while also tackling community issues; lecturers who facilitate dialogue rather than dictation; facilities that reflect the dignity of students' aspirations; and systemic articulation routes into higher

education. These visions push the conversation beyond critique into concrete proposals for repoliticisation.

This reimagining is not only pedagogical but political. As Gjelstad (2025) and Gonon and Bonoli (2025) have shown in European contexts, resisting the encroachment of abstract academisation requires the development of context-sensitive, locally grounded alternatives. In the South African case, this means rejecting both technicist training models and elite academic mimicry, and instead cultivating democratic knowledge spaces where students become active participants in curriculum design and institutional critique. The LCGs in this study operated as such spaces, modelled on Freire's culture circles (Freire & Shor, 1987). They reveal what TVET could become if reoriented around the principles of humanisation, critical consciousness, and structural justice (Hodkinson, 1998; Walker & Loots, 2018). Beyond their immediate outcomes, the LCGs point to a replicable model of pedagogy that could be scaled across TVET colleges, embedding dialogical practices into everyday teaching and learning. This positions repoliticisation not as an isolated experiment, but as a viable systemic alternative to both technicism and academisation.

In South Africa, where educational inequality continues to be structured along lines of race, class, and geography, this reimagining is urgent. It requires more than curriculum tweaking or expanded assessment metrics – it demands a shift in power from policymakers and institutional managers to the students and communities most affected by vocational marginalisation (Vally & Motala, 2017; Wedekind et al., 2024). Ultimately, reimagining VET from below means understanding students not merely as recipients of knowledge or labour-market entrants, but as citizens, thinkers, and co-authors of educational purpose. This shift lies at the heart of repoliticisation. It is not about abandoning VET's practical focus; it is about redefining what counts as practical, and for whom.

Conclusion: Reclaiming the political in vocational education

This article has explored what it means to engage Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy within the South African TVET landscape, particularly amid concerns about the so-called academisation of vocational education. Drawing on the voices of 15 TVET students who participated in LCG meetings, the article has shown that a Freirean approach does not abstract vocational education from its practical purpose – it revitalises and repositions it as a site of social meaning, political agency, and ethical becoming.

In a system structured around NC(V) and NATED programmes that too often remain outdated, poorly resourced, and disconnected from further study, the need for such revitalisation is especially urgent. The students' narratives disrupt long-held binaries between theory and practice, between academic and

vocational, and between training and education. Their voices call not for university-style theorisation but for a form of learning that is critically reflective, contextually rooted, and socially transformative.

They proposed curricula that speak to local realities, lecturers trained to facilitate dialogue, modernised workshops and teaching spaces, and clearer articulation into higher education. These visions signal that students are not only critics of TVET but also active authors of its possible futures. In this sense, they affirm Freire's insistence that education is never neutral – it either serves to reproduce oppression or becomes a practice of freedom (Freire, 1970). The testimonies reflect a longing not simply for jobs, but for recognition, relevance, and the opportunity to lead lives of dignity.

Engaging Freire in TVET, then, is not an act of elitism – it is a process of repoliticisation, a reclaiming of education's capacity to build solidarity, challenge injustice, and affirm the full humanity of learners. This stands in stark contrast to dominant policy trends that treat vocational students as labour-market instruments and VET as a delivery mechanism for economic outputs (Allais & Ngcwangu, 2025; Vally & Motala, 2014, 2022).

Repoliticisation invites us to see vocational education not as a lower rung on a hierarchical system, but as a space for democratic dialogue and collective transformation. The LCGs in this study demonstrate how such repoliticisation can be practised in everyday institutional life and suggest a model that could be scaled across TVET colleges to embed student voice and dialogical pedagogy into the system itself.

The implications are far-reaching. Freirean pedagogy offers more than a method – it offers a philosophical and ethical foundation for reimagining the purpose of VET in post-apartheid South Africa. If taken seriously, this means shifting from education for the economy to education with and for people – especially those historically marginalised by colonial, capitalist, and neoliberal structures (Majola et al., 2024; Spreen & Vally, 2010).

This article does not advocate for VET to become abstract or academically remote. Rather, it calls for a radical centring of student voice, dignity, and possibility. It proposes a vocational education that is intellectually expansive, emotionally restorative, and politically alive. This is not about replacing practical skills with academic theory, but about integrating vocational, academic, and critical knowledge in ways that affirm dignity and possibility.

As Freire reminds us, 'education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system, or it becomes the practice of freedom' (Freire, 1970, p. 34). The students in this study have pointed us toward the latter – and it is our task, as educators, researchers, and policymakers, to listen. Repoliticisation, in this sense,

is not only a theoretical claim but a systemic necessity for the renewal of South African TVET.

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Hvordan kan personsentrert gruppeveiledning bidra til å utvikle yrkesfaglig praksis?

How do person-centred group counselling contribute to develop vocational practices?

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Abstract

This article presents a study of group counselling for experienced healthcare workers employed in health and care services. The study context involves part-time students in the final year of a two-year counselling education programme, who facilitated counselling in groups for healthcare workers undertaking further education in mental health care at a vocational college. The aim was to explore how participants experienced person-centred group counselling grounded in person-centred, gestalt-based, and phenomenological theory and practice.

Data were collected through focus group interviews and process evaluation forms. The evaluation forms included four questions and four open comment fields, generating 84 responses. Focus group interviews were conducted with 12 of the 31 participants who had taken part in three planned and structured group sessions.

Findings indicate that the format was experienced as surprising and as a 'gift,' strengthening the sense of professional community. Participants described gaining professional insight and personal confidence through sharing experiences and daring to be themselves. The mentors' status as students was not significant, provided participants felt supported. The article argues that person-centred counselling promotes reflection, supports practice, and fosters transformative learning in working life.

Keywords: person-centred counselling, vocational education, professional development, lifelong learning



Introduksjon

Yrkeskvalifisering foregår på forskjellige arenaer og på ulike måter gjennom livet og det er selvsagt flere ulike veier å gå for å utvikle en helhetlig profesjonell yrkeskompetanse. Når det gjelder kvalifisering og videreutvikling av kompetanse innenfor håndverks- og yrkesfagene, har Storting og regjering i Norge i flere år satset på å heve nivået, samt hatt en innsats rettet mot rekruttering til disse fagene. Det nasjonale kompetanseløftet rettet mot yrkesfag og fagarbeidere er en viktig nasjonal satsning med målsetning om å rekruttere flere yrkesfaglærere (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2015). Rapporten *Arbeidsmarkedet for sosial- og helsepersonell fram mot 2035* (Roksvaag & Texmon, 2012), viser at Norge kommer til å mangle over 90.000 fagarbeidere i 2035 dersom det ikke utdannes flere, og 18.000 av disse kan være helsefagarbeidere (Birkelund, 2019). Ferske søkertall til helse- og oppvekstfag viser dessuten en kraftig nedgang på hele 15 % siden 2020 (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2024). For helsesektoren er utviklingen alvorlig dersom det ikke rekrutteres flere lærlinger innenfor helsearbeiderfaget som fullfører sine fag-/svennebrev. I 2022 brukte regjeringen mer enn en milliard kroner på yrkesfag og kvalifisering (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2022). Eksempler på tiltak har vært tettere oppfølging av elever som tar yrkesfag i videregående opplæring, tettere oppfølging i lærebedrift og kompetanseutviklingstiltak for instruktører, yrkesfaglærere, faglig ledere og prøvenemder (Udir, 2018).

Yrkeskvalifisering handler om å bli kvalifisert for arbeid (Mausethagen & Smeby, 2017, s. 11), som kan foregå både individuelt og sammen med andre. Yrkesutøvere lærer hele livet, på ulike måter og med sine forskjellige forutsetninger, behov, ønsker og tilgjengelige ressurser. Livslang læring og kontinuerlig faglig utvikling er nødvendig for å være kvalifisert i yrke sitt (Caspersen et al., 2017, s. 118). Erfarne fagfolk og yrkesutøvere har behov for å utvikle seg videre i sin rolle og funksjon på arbeidsplassen blant annet for å unngå utbrentet i yrke sitt (Myra et al., 2022). Oppdatert, relevant kunnskap og tilpasset kompetanse er et forventet krav til alle yrkes- og profesjonsutøvere og det er en utfordring i alle yrkesgrener at utøveren møter nye arbeidsoppgaver, ny teknologi, nye prosedyrer, samt stadig krav til nye måter å organisere disse på (Caspersen et al., 2017, s. 118). Hvilke systemer som benyttes for å tilrettelegge for kontinuerlig kompetanseutvikling er ulikt fra yrke til yrke og arbeidsplass til arbeidsplass. Eksempler på systematiske tiltak for opplæring og faglig oppdatering i arbeidslivet kan være kurs, seminarer, videreutdanninger og veiledning (Caspersen et al., 2017, s. 126).

Å motta eller be om veiledning er en viktig del av å være en profesjonell yrkesutøver og burde også være et tilbud for alle yrkesutøvere i helse- og sosialfag. Innenfor skole og barnehage får alle nyutdannede lærere tilbud om veiledning de to første årene i arbeid (Markestad, 2019). Fokus i denne studien er gruppeveiledning til yrkesfagarbeider. Hensikten med artikkelen er å prøve ut

og utforske hvordan helsefagarbeidere i videreutdanning i psykisk helsearbeid erfarte veiledningen de mottok fra studenter i videreutdanning i veiledning. Problemstillingen som undersøkes er: Hvordan erfarer helsefagarbeidere, i videreutdanning i psykisk helse, personsentrert gruppeveiledning?

Teori

Det er åpenbare mangler i forskningen på gruppeveiledning i dag (Augestad Wikstøl, 2025; Nordhagen et al., 2010, 2013; Sletten & Juritsen, 2025) og særlig det vi kaller personsentrert gruppeveiledning. Snevres det inn til yrkesfagene så er det svært vanskelig å finne oppdatert forskning. Forskningslitteraturen har i overraskende liten grad vært opptatt av gruppeveiledning til helsefagarbeider og særlig dens betydning for yrkeskvalifisering. Vår undersøkelse er rettet inn mot veiledning som yrkeskvalifisering og er et bidrag hvor gruppeveiledning fremmes som en egnet pedagogisk tilgang for kvalifisering, sosialisering og subjektivering (Biesta, 2010, 2022).

Veiledning som kompetansefremmende virksomhet kan forstås på ulike måter. En retning, som helsefagarbeiderne møtte i sin gruppeveiledning, var en personsentrert, gestaltbasert veiledning (Rogers, 1951; Skottun & Kruger, 2017; Sonne & Tønnesvang, 2013). En retning som er fundert i en humanistisk-eksistensielle tradisjon (McLeod, 2019). Denne veiledningpraksisen er interessert i hvordan den som søker veiledning, kalt veisøker, tar kontakt med seg selv, sine medmennesker og omgivelser, og organiserer sin informasjon fra kropp, følelser og tanker i møte med veileder og medlemmer i gruppen sin. Gjennom dialogisk tilnærming inviteres veisøker til aktivt å undersøke mulighetene for egne valg samt å ta valg som kan få konsekvenser for egen arbeidshverdag og praksis.

Når veisøker kommer i kontakt med sin væren, sine muligheter og valg kan personen ta stilling til hvem hen vil være som person og hvordan leve et verdig, meningsfullt liv. Dette er nært knyttet til hvordan vi som mennesker svarer an til andre mennesker og våre omgivelser i møte med tilværelsen. Rogers (1951) fremmer i sin personsentrerte tilgang til livet, både som menneske og yrkesutøver, noen verdier eller holdninger som tydeliggjør hvordan vi blir en person. "I believe it is the presence of certain *attitudes* in the therapist, which are communicated to, and perceived by, his client, that effects success" (Rogers, 1951, s. 98). Han beskriver disse holdningene, eller værenskvalitetene, som *empati*, *kongruens* og *ubetinget positiv aksept*. Vi skal i det videre se på værenskvalitetene som ferdigheter, altså en type dyktighet som oppøves i trening og utvikles gjennom praksis.

Empati er en ferdighet som innebærer å kunne ta den andres perspektiv, å kunne leve seg inn og med den andre uten å miste sitt eget ståsted. Ferdigheten *ubetinget aksept* kan relateres til å møte den andre uten å dømme, en ikke-vitende

inngang preget av interesse og villighet til å legge sitt eget til side. *Kongruens* som ferdighet innebærer å være tydelig, til stede og at det vi sier stemmer med det vi gjør. Å være kongruent betyr en høy grad av samsvar mellom det vi kommuniserer på ulike nivåer (Jensen & Ulleberg, 2019). "Hel ved" som metaforen gir vitne om at prosesser i kropp, følelser og tanker gjenspeiler og uttrykkes i kroppsspråk og formuleringer som er samstemte og troverdige. Holdninger og atferd stemmer overens!

En personsentrert, gestaltbasert tilgang representerer en norm for samvær, kommunikasjon og samhandling innenfor helse- og sosialfaglig arbeid, miljøarbeid, veiledning og terapi. En slik tilgang tar inn værenskvalitetene i det personen tar kontakt med seg selv, andre og sine omgivelser gjennom sin *awareness* som skal forstås som den oppmerksomheten personen har i det øyeblikk øyeblikket utfolder seg (Sonne & Tønnesvang, 2013). Det gestaltbaserte handler om en nærværende og oppmerksom oppmerksomhet på egen kropp, sanseintrykk, følelser, tanker og handlinger. Det er likevel mer komplekst enn som så i det menneskene alltid går i møte med noe utenfor oss selv (Heidegger, 2007). Vår *awareness* er også rettet utover til den andre, hvordan vi fornemmer og tar inn den andre gjennom kroppen og sansene våre, og samtidig kan bli oppmerksom på hva som kommer i spill mellom oss og det som da skapes (Skottun & Kruger, 2017; Sonne & Tønnesvang, 2013). Veileder vil primært spørre hvordan veisøker opplever sin situasjon *nå* for så å undersøke de muligheter som veisøker har i møte med sine ulike utfordringer. Vi kan derfor være mer eller mindre *aware*, forstått som oppmerksom i øyeblikket, i en situasjon både med hensyn til egne behov, empati, aksept for den andre og våre normative vurderinger. Den personsentrerte, gestaltbaserte tilgangen har som intensjon at veisøker kan øke sin *awareness* i situasjoner hen står i og på den måte komme i kontakt med de muligheter vedkommende har (Skottun & Kruger, 2017; Sonne & Tønnesvang, 2013). Biesta (2022) formulerer dette annerledes, og samtidig sammenfallende med en slik tilgang, når han formidler at mennesker skal utvikle et selv, snarere enn seg selv. Dette er kjernen i hans forståelse av subjektivering som en verdensvendt prosess der mennesket blir et subjekt i egen rett. En prosess som løper parallelt med å bli kvalifisert som fagperson og bli del av et yrkesfelleskap.

Yrkesfaglig praksis som brukes i studiens tittel viser til hvordan et yrkes faglige praksis er fundert i kvalifisering. Det er fags kunnskapsbase og håndverk, og der yrkesfelleskapet konstitueres i kraft av historie og tradisjoner (Sennet, 2009).

I modellen som ligger til grunn for vår studie, er det nettopp hvordan veilederstudentene og helsefagarbeiderne tar kontakt med hverandre som fremmer *awarenessen* i den situasjonen som veisøker står i. I forberedelsene og inngangen til hver gruppeveiledning tok helsefagarbeiderne med seg et

veiledningsgrunnlag i form av en logg, med utgangspunkt i en situasjon eller hendelse på jobb som de ønsket å utforske. Loggen gav en kort beskrivelse av hvordan veisøker ble påvirket kroppslig, følelses- og tankemessig av situasjonen i nåtid og gav en inngang til å reflektere og gi mening til den situasjonen hen nå står i.

Metode

Gruppeveiledning: Intervensjonen

Målgruppen for studien var helsefagarbeidere som gjennomførte videreutdanning i psykisk helsearbeid ved en AOF-fagskole i sør-vest Norge. Om lag 90 studenter ble invitert til å delta i gruppeveiledning og av disse takket 31 studenter ja til tilbudet. Deltagerne ble fordelt i fem grupper hvor det ble tatt hensyn til arbeidssted og geografisk bosetting. En intensjon med inndelingen var at alle skulle komme sammen med en eller flere av sine medstudenter. Noen uker før veiledningene startet fikk helsefagarbeiderne som var invitert inn i gruppeveiledningene tilbud om å delta i et tretimers digitalt formøte. Dette ble ledet av lærerne ved veilederutdanningen og her deltok ikke veilederstudentene. De ble imidlertid informert om at helsefagarbeiderne hadde deltatt i et slikt formøte. Hensikten med formøtet var å gi en innføring i veiledning, konkretisert i hva det innebærer å være veisøker, og opplæring i bruk av logg, det vil si hvordan skrive et veiledningsgrunnlag. Helsefagarbeiderne fikk i tillegg skriftlig informasjon om forskningsstudien og skjema for samtykke. De ble gjort kjent med at to studenter fra videreutdanning i veiledning skulle veilede hver sin gruppe. De fem gruppene møttes over tre ganger på en digital plattform. Hver gruppeveiledning varte i 90 minutter.

Nettskjema og fokusgruppeintervju

På slutten av hver gruppeveiledning fikk helsefagarbeiderne avsatt tid, 5–10 minutter, for å svare på spørsmål om erfaringene de hadde gjort seg i veiledningen, før de i fellesskap avsluttet i det virtuelle veiledningsrommet. Spørsmålene ble svart på og samlet inn i via en digital lenke som helsefagarbeiderne fikk tilsendt, og bestod av fire spørsmål og åpne kommentarfelt. Nettskjema (UiO) er en selvbetjent og universelt utformet skjemaløsning for alle som har avtalt bruk og er en sikker løsning for datainnsamling via nett hvor sensitive data kan samles inn til TSD (Tjenester for sensitive data).

Etter at alle tre veiledningssesjonene var gjennomført i tidsrommet januar-mars 2022, ble helsefagarbeiderne invitert til fokusgruppeintervju for å videre utforske deres erfaringer med gruppeveiledningene. Fokusgruppeintervju er hensiktsmessig når personers opplevelser og erfaringer skal studeres, når målet

er å få fram forskningstema som har relevans for deltakerne, og når kunnskapsgrunnlaget er begrenset og nye problemstillinger skal utvikles (Malterud, 2012; Morgan 1997). I denne studien var det helsefagarbeidernes erfaringer med gruppeveiledningene som skulle belyses, og hvor veisøkernes erfaringer med veiledningen er grunnet i et førstepersonsperspektiv. Fokusgrupper ble derfor vurdert til å være en godt tilpasset forskningsmetode.

Det ble utarbeidet en åpen intervjuguide til fokusgruppene. Spørsmålene var tenkt som et utgangspunkt og en retning for samtalene, samtidig som deltakerne ble oppmuntret til å snakke fritt om sine erfaringer sammen med de andre deltakerne i gruppen. En relativt løs struktur gav rom for at helsefagarbeiderne selv kunne komme med sine erfaringer. Fokusgruppene ble ledet av en moderator og to co-moderatorer, alle lærere på videreutdanningen i veiledning. Moderator og co-moderatorer observerte gruppeinteraksjon, kom med oppfølgings- og tilleggsspørsmål, i tillegg til korte oppsummeringer underveis for å sjekke om informasjon fra informantene var forstått på rett vis. Moderator og co-moderatorer var opptatt av å lytte, være åpne, våkne og klar til å gripe fatt i utsagn eller signaler fra intervjupersonene underveis.

Eksempler på utsagn i nettskjema (1) og spørsmål i fokusgruppeintervjuene (2)

(1) I nettskjema: Hvordan opplevde du selve veiledningen? Ta stilling til følgende utsagn, på en skala fra 1 til 5, der 1 er helt uenig og 5 er helt enig:

1 helt uenig	2 delvis uenig	3 verken uenig eller enig	4 delvis enig	5 helt enig
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- Jeg oppdaget og lærte noe som jeg kan ta med meg i mitt arbeid...
- Jeg opplevde loggen som en nyttig inngang til veiledningen...
- Jeg opplevde at mine personlige grenser ble ivaretatt...
- Jeg opplevde gruppen som engasjert i veiledningens tema...
- Jeg opplevde å bli sett og ivaretatt av veileder...

(2) I nettskjemaets åpne kommentarfelt og som ble fulgt opp i Fokusgruppeintervjuene:

- Hva var viktig og betydningsfullt for deg? Vær konkret og beskriv gjerne en situasjon!
- Hva tar du med meg inn i ditt daglige arbeid? Vær konkret og beskriv gjerne en situasjon!
- Hvordan opplever du å bli veiledet av en student?

Datainnsamling og analyse

Til sammen 84 svar ble lagret i nettskjema og tre fokusgruppeintervju ble gjennomført med 3-5 deltakere i hver gruppe. Fokusgruppeintervjuene ble

transkribert. Data fra fokusgruppeintervjuene og nettskjemaets åpne kommentarfelt ble analysert med inspirasjon fra kvalitativ innholdsanalyse (Graneheim & Lundman, 2003), hvor hensikten var å systematisere innholdet slik at meningsbærende enheter kunne tre frem for å belyse hvilke erfaringer helsefagarbeiderne satt igjen med etter å ha mottatt personsentrert veiledning i gruppe.

De transkriberte intervjuene ble lest nøye igjennom flere ganger av alle fire forskerne for å få et åpent helhetsinntrykk av innholdet. Det ble gjennomført tre samlinger der forskerne diskuterte de transkriberte dataene. Intervjuene ble analysert samlet for å lete etter meningsbærende enheter og kategorier (tabell 1). Svarene på de åpne spørsmålene fra nettskjema ble nøye gjennomgått, og deretter satt inn i en tabell. Her ble meningsenhetene fortettet og samlet under passende kategorier (tabell 1). En meningsenhet kan være et ord, setning eller avsnitt som inneholder forhold knyttet til hverandre gjennom innhold og kontekst (Graneheim & Lundman, 2003, s. 106). Kategorier fra fokusgruppeintervjuene og nettskjema ble til slutt samlet under tre felles temaer.

Tabell 1. Eksempler fra analysen av dataene fra fokusgruppeintervjuene og spørsmålene i nettskjema. Til høyre studiens temaer.

Meningsenhet	Fortettet meningsenhet	Kategori	Tema
Tenkte at jeg skulle få råd og hjelp til oppgaven jeg skriver i forbindelse med studiet jeg tar, men etter første veiledning skjønte jeg at dette var noe helt annet enn jeg hadde tenkt i forkant.	Råd og hjelp til oppgaven stemte ikke.	Forventninger og praksis.	1. Overraskende gave.
Det var nyttig å høre andre snakke om situasjoner som er veldig lik min egen situasjon på jobb.	Dele og kjenne igjen situasjoner.	Yrkesfelleskap/ profesjonelle lærefelleskap.	2. Vårt yrkesfelleskap.
At jeg ikke må være så kritisk mot meg selv, men heller løfte meg selv opp. Og si til meg selv at jeg er god nok!	Ikke være så selvkritisk, jeg er god nok.	Selvinnsikt og egenverdi.	3. Våge å være meg.

Når det gjelder studiens troverdighet er kontekst, utvalg, datainnsamling og analyseprosess beskrevet, noe som er verdifullt for at studien skal være troverdig. I vår studie kan prosessen med valg av meningsenheter, koder og

temaer være vanskelig å reprodusere nøyaktig for andre forskere grunnet forskernes tolkning og forståelse (Graneheim & Lundman, 2003).

Etikk

Meldeskjema med prosjektplan, samtykkeskjema og intervjuguide ble godkjent av NSD, Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste (nr. 765854). Alle deltakerne fikk muntlig og skriftlig informasjon om studien i forkant, og informantene skrev under på informert samtykke før innhenting av data kunne begynne. Forskernes tilgang til data i nettskjema krevde feide-pålogging; dataene ble videre lagret på VID vitenskapelige høgskole sin forskningsserver der kun forskerne hadde tilgang. Her ble også de transkriberte fokusgruppeintervjuene lagret.

Presentasjon av funn

Analyse av fokusgruppeintervju og de åpne spørsmålene fra nettskjema ble skrevet frem som tre tema: *Overraskende gave, vårt yrkesfellesskap og våge å være meg.*

Overraskende gave

Mange av informantene fortalte om usikkerhet i forkant av og i første gruppeveiledning. De fortalte om manglende kjennskap til veiledningsmetoden som gjorde at de ikke forstod hvordan veiledningen skulle gjennomføres. Usikkerhet og det uventede preget deres første møte med gruppa og veilederne. En av dem sa:

Første veiledning var skummel, jeg visste jo ikke hva det gikk ut på.

I tilbakemeldingene fra helsefagarbeiderne hadde flere, før første gruppeveiledning, hatt tanker om at veiledningen ville handle om praksisperioden og oppgaveskrivingen de hadde på videreutdanningen i psykisk helsearbeid;

Jeg hadde sett for meg at veiledningen skulle være mer rettet mot praksisen vi har i forbindelse med studiet og at vi skulle få veiledning på oppgaven vi skal skrive og levere i løpet av dette semesteret. Men slik ble det ikke.

Deltagerne gav uttrykk for at de hadde forventet å få råd og at veiledningen i større grad skulle være rettet mot hvordan de kunne utføre arbeidsoppgavene sine på en bedre måte. Å vende oppmerksomheten mot tanke, følelse og kropp var overraskende for flere av deltagerne;

Jeg trodde det handlet om at jeg hadde gjort noe feil og trengte råd for å gjøre ting bedre neste gang. I stedet handlet det om å reflektere og kommunisere med de andre i gruppen. Det var nytt og uvant, men fint, å dele følelser og hva som skjer i kroppen.

Hva er det som beveger seg i kroppen min nå, hva er det som beveger seg i følelsene mine og hva tenker jeg om det.

Det var fint å dele situasjoner fra arbeid, og å bli møtt uten vurderinger og dømming. Deltakerne fortalte at det da ble lettere å dele tanker, følelser og kroppslige reaksjoner relatert til noe de hadde opplevd i forbindelse med arbeidet. Flere var opptatt av at gruppeveiledningen måtte erfares for å forstå hva det var de var med på.

De fleste av helsefagarbeiderne oppgav at de ikke hadde erfaring med personsentrert veiledning fra tidligere. De opplevde dette som en ny og annerledes måte å være sammen på. Å bli veiledet med oppmerksomhet på *det som er*, for så å kunne dele sine erfaringer var noe helsefagarbeiderne vektla som nyttig;

I starten var det veldig skummelt å være åpen overfor de andre i gruppen. Selv om jeg har reflektert en del sammen med min nåværende leder, var det nytt for meg å være så åpen. Men jeg ble etter hvert oppmerksom på hvor nyttig det er for meg å bruke møtet mitt for å dele og reflektere sammen med de andre i gruppen.

Det krevde personlig mot å tre fram for de andre i gruppen og helsefagarbeiderne tilegnet seg etter hvert forståelse for metoden som ble brukt i gruppeveiledningene. Helsefagarbeideren var forbauset over hvordan veiledningen gav en retning;

Jeg hadde ikke peiling på hva jeg hadde meldt meg på, og tenkte i begynnelsen ... hva i alle dager er dette? men det ble rett og slett en gave og jeg hadde nytte og utbytte av det jeg var med på.

Gruppeveiledningene var annerledes enn forventet, men ingen av helsefagarbeiderne uttrykte anger på egen deltagelse i etterkant av gruppeveiledningene. En av de sa det slik:

Jeg var skeptisk etter informasjonsmøte vi hadde i forkant, men når vi først kom i gang ble det veldig fint og interessant. Jeg angret ikke på at jeg meldte meg på og veilederstudentene var veldig flinke. Jeg glemte nesten at de var studenter.

Helsefagarbeiderne var usikre og avventende til hva veiledningen ville handle om og på hvilken måte den ville bli gjennomført. Usikkerheten og overraskelsen ble raskt vendt om til en positiv opplevelse når gruppen først kom i gang.

Vårt yrkesfellesskap

Deltakerne løftet frem betydningen av å være en del av et fellesskap med andre helsefagarbeidere som var i lignende arbeidssituasjon som dem selv. I dette fellesskapet var det rom for både å dele og ta imot andres erfaringer. Opplevelser fra arbeidshverdagen ble gjenkjent, støttet og reflektert rundt på ulikt vis av de andre i gruppen;

I veiledning fikk jeg dele mine erfaringer med stress i arbeidshverdagen min. Det var godt å høre at jeg ikke er alene om å føle meg stresset og det gjorde meg godt at vi kunne reflektere sammen om dette.

I gruppeveiledningene ble helsefagarbeiderne oppmerksomme på betydningen av å lytte til andres erfaringer. Det gav resonans til egne erfaringer, samtidig som det kunne gi støtte til de andres opplevelser og erfaringer. Å dele med hverandre gav en erfaring av å være mindre alene;

Det var godt å få støtte fra gruppen, det vil gjøre meg tryggere i ulike situasjoner fremover, og kan hende det kan hjelpe andre også. Vi er på en måte i samme båt.

Ved å lytte til hverandre ble det tydelig at helsefagarbeiderne opplevde ulike arbeidssituasjoner som svært like. Felles yrke som helse- og omsorgsarbeider ble gjenkjennelig og fant sin likhet i analogien å være i samme båt. Det ga en opplevelse av å bli akseptert og inkludert uavhengig av hvor de jobbet, hva de jobbet med eller hvor forskjellige de ellers var;

Det er godt å møte de andre i gruppen når vi kommuniserer slik at jeg føler meg som en del av gruppen. Vi påvirker og lærer av hverandre på en positiv måte selv om vi er forskjellige som mennesker.

Flere av helsefagarbeiderne fortalte at det var betydningsfullt å høre andre fortelle om krevende situasjoner som hadde oppstått på sin arbeidsplass. Det ble verdifullt å lytte og reflektere rundt de andres tilbakemeldinger og ulike synspunkter på temaer som var gjenkjennelige. Et fellesskap i kraft av opplevd arbeidssituasjon ble bygget;

Det er fint å høre andre fortelle om utfordrende situasjoner som har oppstått på jobb. Det kan relateres til utfordringer som jeg selv har opplevd.

Mange utfordrende og vanskelige situasjoner fra en erfart arbeidshverdagen ble delt med gruppen. Det ble satt ord på tanker om det som ikke alltid hadde vært like lett å dele. Det vanskelige eller sårbare ble benevnt og snakket om. Det var samtidig rom for å holde seg tilbake og det var helt legitimt å bare lytte til de andre i gruppeveiledningene. En av helsefagarbeiderne sa det slik:

Jeg tenker at alle kan ha det strevsomt av og til, men det er ikke alle som velger å dele det.

Å være i vanskelige situasjoner og å dele disse erfaringene i et fellesskap av likesinnede var i av stor betydning for det fellesskapet som ble skapt.

Våge å være meg

Gruppeveiledningene bidro til støtte og refleksjoner rundt helsefagarbeiderens erfaringer. Veiledningen støttet og styrket troen til den enkelte, både som menneske og som yrkesutøver. Det ga mot til å bli tydelig på eget faglig ståsted;

Hvordan personsentrert gruppeveiledning bidrar til å utvikle yrkesfaglig praksis?

Det er viktig å tro på seg selv. Jeg ønsker å se meg selv i speilet i enhver situasjon jeg møter og våge å si ifra hvis det skulle være noe.

Helsefagarbeiderne ble oppfordret til å løfte frem egne behov i gruppen og slik fikk de mulighet til å øve på å være modige og tro mot seg selv i møte med hverandre. Flere av helsefagarbeiderne benyttet muligheten til å øve på spesi-
fikke ferdigheter. En av dem sa det slik:

I veiledningen fikk jeg øve meg på å ta imot ros og si takk. Det trenger jeg for å stå stødig i jobb og være meg selv.

En av helsefagarbeiderne fortalte at veiledningene åpnet en mulighet for å reflektere rundt hvordan hen kunne bli tryggere som menneske og som fagperson. At arbeidet hen utførte i jobben sin var godt nok;

Jeg har innsett at jeg er veldig selvkritisk og har bestemt meg for å slutte å være så streng med meg selv på jobb. Jeg er god nok, tenker jeg.

Å bli tatt imot er et uttrykk som ble brukt av flere av intervjupersonene. Uttrykket ble utforsket i intervjuene og viste seg å handle om å motta støtte og våge å være seg selv;

Det var godt å oppleve ærlighet og åpenhet i veiledningen slik at jeg kan gjøre egne valg uten at det blir feil. Å tillate meg å stille "dumme" spørsmål ble en god erfaring for meg fordi jeg fikk støtte og ble tatt imot av de andre i gruppen.

I veiledningen ble helsefagarbeiderne invitert til å ta seg god tid og hente informasjon fra både kropp, tanke og følelse. Det åpnet opp for at deltakerne kunne komme tettere på behovene sine. Flere av dem formidlet at det var utfordrende i begynnelsen, som blant annet ble uttrykte slik:

Jeg er vant til å tenke over ting, men jeg er ikke vant til å bruke sansingen innover i kroppen for å forstå det helhetlige. Gå litt dypere og kjenne på det jeg føler i en bestemt situasjon. Bli klar over mine innerste behov.

Å ha mulighet til å utforske en situasjon og motta støtte, gi støtte og sette ord på følelsene sine kunne være både godt og utfordrende på samme tid;

Jeg opplevde at det var fint å ha en plass å "lufte meg", samtidig var det tøft å våge å gå ut av min egen komfortsone.

Bruk av loggen som veiledningsgrunnlag ble erfart som verdifullt. Loggen ble en måte å arbeide på som ga inngang til å gjenkjenne og sette ord på kroppslige reaksjoner og følelser;

Loggen ble en arbeidsmetode for å bringe situasjoner og hendelser som var der og da til en erfaring her og nå. Det gav meg tid til å tenke og kjenne godt etter hva som skjer med meg.

Flere av helsefagarbeiderne formidlet at de ville benytte loggen videre i jobb-sammenheng for å komme i kontakt med seg selv i fremtidige krevende og vanskelige situasjoner.

Når jeg kommer i en situasjon som jeg synes er vanskelig eller ubehagelig kan jeg bruke spørsmålene i loggen for å kjenne etter hvordan det er for meg å være meg nå. For det kan være vanskelig mange ganger.

Gjennom gruppeveiledningene ble helsefagarbeiderne oppmerksomme på hvordan informasjon fra kropp, tanker og følelser tydeliggjorde eget ståsted og egne behov.

Diskusjon

Studien viser at helsefagarbeiderne var usikre og overrasket på hva som ventet dem ved første gruppeveiledning. Dette uventede viste seg etter hvert å bli en betydningsfull erfaring som handlet om å bli kjent med seg selv og være del av et fellesskap av yrkesutøvere innenfor eget fagfelt. Veiledningen muliggjorde en arena der deltakerne kunne være autentiske i sitt samvær og samspill med hverandre. I denne delen av artikkelen vil vi drøfte funnene i lys av Rogers sin teori om værenskvalitetene; empati, kongruens og ubetinget positiv aksept, samt løfte det inn i Biesta (2010) sin forståelse av pedagogikk som kvalifisering, sosialisering og subjektivering. Særlig sistnevnte peker på det hele mennesket. Ikke som et spørsmål om identitet, hvem er jeg, men som et selv som er til stede i verden som et oppmerksomt, handlende subjekt som forholder seg til både sine omgivelser, medmennesker og seg selv.

Å bli et selv

Helsefagarbeiderne opplevde å bli overrasket i det den første gruppeveiledningen var noe nytt i forhold til deres forventninger. De var ikke forberedt på en veiledningsmetode som inviterte dem til å ha oppmerksomhet på seg selv og sine omgivelser gjennom å ta kontakt med kroppslig, følelsesmessig og tankemessig informasjon. Informasjonen ble horisontalisert, der informasjon fra kropp, følelser og tanker ble likestilt. Viktigheten av *awareness* som fenomen skapte forbauselse, det brakte inn noe nytt og var ulikt de erfaringer de hadde fra sine utdanninger og yrkespraksis. Helsefagarbeiderne hadde sett for seg at veiledningen skulle innebære å motta råd og korrigerende knyttet til konkrete arbeidsoppgaver, møter med pasienter, eller rettet mot den avsluttende skriftlige oppgaven på deres videreutdanning innen psykisk helsearbeid. Usikkerheten og det uventede de møtte skapte uro hos noen i begynnelsen. Etter hvert begynte deltakerne å se verdien av personsentrert veiledning i lys av de personlige og faglige utfordringene, dilemmaene og erfaringene som var vevet sammen med

deres rolle som yrkesutøvere (Rogers, 1951). Rogers er opptatt av hvordan mennesket blir en person og hvordan værenskvalitetene, både som verdier, holdninger og ferdigheter, er nødvendige og tilstrekkelige i samspillet med andre for å forstå hvordan personen kan lykkes i livets ulike roller og funksjoner. I et slikt samspill er det viktig at veisøker blir møtt av en veileder som praktiserer værenskvalitetene i veiledningsmøtet slik at veisøker våger å uttrykke egne meninger, følelser, opplevelser og perspektiver på en autentisk og egen måte slik at hen våger å være seg selv også når det ikke passer inn med andres syn. Ikke å "fornekter" sitt selv innebærer å stå opp og imot andres vurderinger og kategoriseringer (Rogers, 1962). Vår undersøkelse viser at trygghet ble etablert i gruppene gjennom bruk av ikke-vurderende tilbakemeldinger, anerkjennelse og gjensidig støtte.

Helsefagarbeiderne fikk anledning til å utforske seg selv sammen med andre ved å ta i bruk sin *awareness*; sin oppmerksomhet og tilstedeværelse her og nå i kropp, følelser og tanker (Sonne & Tønnesvang, 2013). Gjennom åpne, ikke-dømmende tilbakemeldinger ble hver enkelte invitert til å dele sine følelser, tanker og kroppslige fornemmelser. Biesta (2022) formidler at pedagogikkens oppgave går utover det å overføre kunnskap. Han er opptatt av hvordan personen dannes i møte med sine omgivelser. I hans teoretiske rammeverk; kvalifisering, sosialisering og subjektivering er alle tre dimensjonene av interesse og virksomme. Gjennom planlagt og systematisk veiledning som gruppeveiledningsprosjektet inviterte til, ble kunnskapen deltakerne hadde om faget sitt, brukerne sine og den praksis som var utviklet i den organisasjonen de arbeidet innenfor tatt på alvor. Kvalifiseringsdelen som peker på det profesjonelle mennesket var allerede noe helsefagarbeideren hadde med seg inn i prosjektet. De var erfarne yrkesutøvere og tok i bruk sine kunnskaper og anvendte ferdigheter som var godt innarbeidet i møter med sine brukere. Det de i tillegg fikk og som var vektlagt i prosjektet var prosesser knyttet til subjektivering. Biesta beskriver subjektivering som en motvekt til sosialisering, hvor målet er at det enkelte menneske skal bli i stand til å ta egne selvstendige valg og i overensstemmelse med egne behov og verdier (Biesta, 2010). For helsefagarbeiderne ble det av betydning å våge å være seg selv i møte med gruppen, sitt yrkesfelleskap, for å komme i kontakt med seg selv og sine egne behov. Dette var både uventet og uvant og gruppeveiledningen ga øvelse i å anvende informasjon fra kropp, følelser og tanker. Denne personlige kompetansen kaller på personens tilstedeværelse, nærvær, ro og oppmerksomhet i møte med andre mennesker, og er av særlig betydning i møte med brukere som er avhengig av hjelp i livene sine (Skau, 2024). Den trening og praksis helsefagarbeiderne ble kjent med når de anvendte sin *awareness* ble en gave. En grunnleggende og viktig kilde til innsikt og viten både om seg selv, den andre og relasjonen hen står i. Å være seg selv og samtidig bli en person gjennom

livets ulike faser, i forskjellige situasjoner og menneskemøter enten det er i arbeidslivet eller i andre kontekster ble tydeligere for helsefagarbeiderne når de samtale i gruppen og delte erfaringer med hverandre. Helsefagarbeiderne opplevde betydningen av å være til stede og oppmerksomme i ulike situasjoner, både med hensyn til egne behov og til andres ønsker og behov. Dette skapt engasjement og interesse for hverandre og ærlighet og åpenhet i veiledningsgruppene.

I den personsentrerte, gestaltbaserte tilnærmingen som gruppeveiledningen inviterte til var det en uttalt intensjonen å øke veisøkernes *awareness* i de situasjonene de befant seg i (Skottun & Kruger, 2017; Sonne & Tønnesvang, 2013). Studien viser at å gjenkjenne situasjoner som ble delt i gruppen gav god støtte til egne erfaringer. Å komme i kontakt med, og erkjenne egne behov bygger personlig kompetanse. En kompetanse som gjør yrkesutøveren var og oppmerksom på hva andre trenger for å klare å stå i sine liv. Det var viktig for helsefagarbeiderne å kunne dele det som utfordret deres vante måter å tenke og gjøre ting på. Hvordan de samarbeidet på arbeidsplassen var eksempler på det. Tillit og respekt for ulikheter ble styrket gjennom gruppeveiledningene, og det utviklet seg gradvis en praksis der helsefagarbeiderne våget å vise sårbarhet og samtale ærlig med hverandre. Biesta (2022) omtaler denne prosessen som subjektivering, der helsefagarbeiderne tørr stå fram med sitt, bli tydelige på egne behov samt sin vilje til å si ja eller nei, fremfor å bli en i mengden. En slik tydelighet ivaretar også behovet til andre gjennom det mangfold som skapes og den omsorg helsefagarbeiderne gir hverandre når det er trygt i gruppen.

Helsefagarbeiderne som deltok i gruppeveiledningene hadde begrenset, eller ingen tidligere erfaring med strukturert, planlagt gruppeveiledning på arbeidsplassen. Kontinuerlig kvalifisering gjennom kunnskapsdeling og utvikling av ferdigheter er vesentlig for å opprettholde profesjonalitet, enten man er ny eller erfaren i yrket (Caspersen et al., 2017, s. 118). Med tanke på veiledning rettet mot nyutdannede sykepleiere, viser forskning at overgangen fra studie til yrkespraksis som profesjonell er utfordrende. Overgangsperioden er ofte preget av lav handlingskompetanse knyttet til daglig ledelse, avdelingsorganisering og samarbeid med kolleger og andre fagprofesjoner (Blekken et al., 2013). Flere studier viser dessuten at sykepleiere ofte har begrenset tid til veiledning av studenter, og planlagte veiledningssamtaler blir ofte omprioritert (Aigeltinger & Haugen, 2009). Samtidig vet vi at nyutdannede som mottar veiledning på arbeidsplassen opplever større trivsel og motivasjon for å bli i yrket (Halmrast et al., 2021). Vår studie viser at støtten helsefagarbeiderne mottok i gruppeveiledningen gav økt trygghet i arbeidshverdagen.

Meg som yrkesutøver

Helsefagarbeiderne ble invitert inn i en måte å være sammen på som la vekt på empati og aksept, og hvor det å være transparent, ærlig og autentisk om opplevde situasjoner i møte med hverandre ble viktig. Rogers (1961) værenskvaliteter; aksept, empati og ekthet, gir mennesket nødvendig frihet til å dele sine egne opplevelser. Det er noe annet enn å dele det vi tenker at den andre ønsker å høre. Rogers la vekt på at det skal være samsvar mellom det jeg gjør og mitt autentiske meg. Det forutsetter samsvar mellom personens inntrykk, indre opplevelser, og hvordan personen uttrykker opplevelsene utad. Her er trygghet, i en gruppe eller i menneskemøtet, avgjørende for personens uttrykk. For helsefagarbeiderne kom tryggheten gradvis etter hvert som de ærlig og oppriktig begynte å dele med hverandre og fikk erfaringer med å bli møtt på en ikke-dømmende måte. Slik øket kongruensen i gruppen, som igjen påvirket fellesskapet og samholdet i gruppen på en positiv måte. Rogers (1961) fremhever kongruens som den viktigste, men også den mest komplekse faktoren for å oppnå suksess i veiledningsmøter. Ifølge han er kongruens et ideal der en person er autentisk og i kontakt med egne følelser, tanker og behov, og ikke skjuler disse for omgivelsene sine. I profesjonell kontekst kan det være lett å skjule seg bak en profesjonell fasade, noe også helsefagarbeiderne gjorde i begynnelsen. De var usikre, veiledning var noe nytt for mange og de ble overrasket over hva det innebar, men etter hvert som de gikk hverandre i møte og delte ærlig situasjoner fra sin arbeidshverdag med hverandre ble det enklere, så vel som trygt å fortsette å være ekte, ærlig og åpne i gruppen. Rogers (1961) legger vekt på at å være kongruent fører til en økt opplevelse av indre harmoni og helhet. Når det gjelder helsefagarbeiderne i vår studie vet vi at de opplevde det både befriende og godt å kunne dele indre tanker og personlige erfaringer med hverandre og samtidig bli møtt på en støttende måte. Analysen vår viste at helsefagarbeiderne syntes den første veiledningen var uventet og skummel, men yrkesfellesskapet tok form når deltakerne ble tryggere og tydeligere på hverandre.

Veiledning, uavhengig av dens form, er en etisk handling som tar sikte på å støtte og ivareta personens behov, ønsker og interesser (Aasland, 2008). Den personsentrerte, gestaltbaserte veiledningen i vår studie la til rette for en helhetlig tilnærming der helsefagarbeideren ble oppfordret til å utforske sammenhengen mellom arbeidsliv og sitt liv. Når en av helsefagarbeiderne formidler at hen ønsker å stå opp for seg selv i enhver situasjon fremover, er det lett å tenke at det ikke bare rommer arbeidsrelaterte situasjoner, men også situasjoner utenfor arbeidsplassen. Det bekrefter at livet er vevd sammen og at alt som skjer påvirker oss som mennesker.

Når studenter veileder studenter

I vår studie var både helsefagarbeiderne og veilederne studenter i videreutdanning, men de hadde ulike roller i veiledningsgruppene. Veilederne hadde kompetanse i veiledningsfaget og ledet derfor gruppeveiledningene. Dette skapte en asymmetrisk dynamikk i forholdet dem mellom. Et viktig kjennetegn ved denne asymmetrien er hvem som introduserer og opprettholder samtaleemnene (Bjørndal, 2008). Det er samtidig nødvendig å rette oppmerksomhet mot likeverdigheten. Å sikre likeverdighet, åpenhet og tydelighet i kommunikasjonen er av stor betydning for å skape trygghet og klarhet i veiledningsgrupper, for at veisøkerne ikke blir usikre eller forvirrede (Handal & Lauvås, 1999). Studien viser at helsefagarbeiderne opplevde veilederstudentene som flinke veiledere og det ble viet lite oppmerksomhet til at de ikke var ferdig med sin formelle veilederutdanning. Manglende faglige kunnskaper innenfor veisøkernes fagfelt og spesifikke arbeidssituasjoner kom ikke i veien for veiledningen. Vår undersøkelse viser at det er mulig for en veileder å være ny i feltet, og i en treningssituasjon, og likevel lykkes i å gjennomføre god og meningsfylt veiledning. Dette funnet støtter opp under Rogers sin grunnleggende antakelse om at personsentrert terapi og veiledning, basert på værenskvalitetene som ledende verdier, holdninger og ferdigheter i arbeidet i seg selv er tilstrekkelig og nødvendig for å oppnå god utvikling og fremgang i veiledningsprosessen (Rogers, 1961).

Avslutning

Studien viser at helsefagarbeiderne hadde lite erfaring med gruppeveiledning fra tidligere. Gruppeveiledningen var annerledes og uventet enn hva de hadde forestilt seg. Den ble en gave de kunne pakke ut sammen med sine kollegaer i fellesskap og høste erfaringer med både det de kunne gi og motta. Veiledningen bidro til å utvikle et yrkesfellesskap ved at den enkelte våget å dele sin usikkerhet og sine utfordringer fra arbeidshverdagen. Den personsentrerte, gestaltbaserte gruppeveiledningen ble kraftfull når helsefagarbeiderne støttet hverandre i å stå i ulike krevende arbeidssituasjoner. Det var i midlertidig nødvendig å bruke tid og bygge tillit og trygghet til denne veiledningsformen, da den var ukjent og kom overraskende på helsefagarbeiderne.

Å igangsette veiledningsgrupper som kan gi støtte, hjelp og utvikling til den enkelte arbeidstaker, både faglig og personlig, kan bidra til at helsepersonell kan møte krevende situasjoner i helsesektoren på en annerledes og godt fundert måte. Helsetjenesten går en utfordrende tid i møte når det gjelder mangel på arbeidskraft (SSB, 2022). Slik kan vår studie bidra til diskusjonen om hvordan statlige og kommunale virksomheter kan adressere og møte utfordringer i dagens og fremtidens arbeidsliv knyttet til mangel på helsefagarbeidere og andre

yrkesgrupper innenfor helse- og omsorgsfagene. Vi vet at det vil bli et underskudd av arbeidstakere i årene fremover (Roksvaag & Texmon, 2012). Ved å rette oppmerksomheten mot betydningen og viktigheten av veiledning som fag og praksis, og særlig gruppeveiledning i arbeidslivet, kan samfunnets og individets behov for kvalifisering og det å tilhøre et yrkesfelleskap bli imøtekommet. I vår tid, i en arbeidshverdag preget av høyt tempo, hastverk, stress og utfordringer slik helsefagarbeiderne i studien beskriver, anerkjenner studien gruppeveiledning forankret i en personsentrert, gestaltbasert og fenomenologisk tenkning og praksis.

Om forfatterne

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Exploring Finnish vocational teachers' agency in teaching migrant students

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Abstract

This study examines how vocational teachers perceive their agency as professionals teaching adult migrant students and what hinders these teachers' agency when approaching migrant students. Thematic analysis of interviews with 12 teachers and the director of the institute with experience in teaching adult migrant students revealed two ways of acting as teachers of migrant students by: (1) limiting own responsibilities to teaching contents of vocational subjects; (2) assuming a broader set of responsibilities in supporting migrant students. Independently of the undertaken position and depending on the situation, these teachers actively searched for new ways of supporting migrant students. The teachers' professional agency and ability to undertake new responsibilities were delimited by restricting assumptions on migrants, their skills, the role of VET as well as challenges with the distribution of resources, teachers' lack of knowledge in some areas and lack of professional development support. Thus, 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.

Keywords: vocational teachers, adult education, migrant students, teacher agency, professional agency, Finland



Introduction

The importance of vocational education and training (VET) for vulnerable groups, such as migrants and refugees, has been recognised in Finland and elsewhere because of its potential to unlock migrants' skills and promote their transition into employment (Bergseng et al., 2019; Moreno Herrera et al., 2022; Wedekind et al., 2018). Such potential and belief of VET being an easy educational path for second language learners stems above all from VET's practical character and its close relationship to working life (Henning-Loeb, 2020; Paul, 2023). However, it has also been acknowledged that theoretical components pose a significant challenge for migrant students (Paul, 2023). Thus, teachers' actions and practices have been identified as crucial factors in the successful completion of vocational studies (Kärkkäinen & Tarnanen, 2022; Blixen & Hellne-Halvorsen, 2022). Yet, while the complexity of vocational teachers' responsibilities is growing, their capacity to support vulnerable students, including migrant students, are decreasing (Tikkanen et al., 2024). Shortcomings in VET practices in addressing the needs of second-language students have been noted too (Henning-Loeb, 2020; Onsando & Billett, 2009; Paul, 2023). Therefore, understanding and supporting *teacher agency* in VET plays a crucial role in enhancing the learning experiences of vulnerable students and supporting their integration into work communities (Wedekind et al., 2018).

By teacher agency we understood a dynamic construct informed by teachers' beliefs (Biesta et al., 2015) where teachers actively make decisions, take actions, and leverage their capabilities within the framework of available resources, institutional norms, and policies (Lasky, 2005). As the context of VET increasingly involves more than vocational field-specific content delivery, with teachers being expected to act as reflective practitioners, change agents, collaborators, this study employs the concept of *professional agency* to capture various responsibilities that VET teachers must undertake in this changing educational landscape. VET teachers' professional agency encompasses how they adapt their practices, interact with diverse learners and other teachers and actors in a learning process (Lasky, 2005; Pantić et al., 2024). Both teachers' agency and professional agency refer to the capacity of individuals to act intentionally according to own beliefs, values and abilities, make choices in their professional context, and contribute to improving classroom climate and relationships between students (Schmid et al., 2021), as well as advancing broader goals like promoting social justice (Pantić, 2017). We acknowledge complementary aspects of agency relating to individual dimensions such as beliefs or conditions for intentional, professional acting related to the context and dynamic and relational aspects of agency highlighting agency being situation-bounded and constructed and dependent on a certain social, organisational, and institutional context.

A deeper understanding of the interplay between teacher agency, professional agency, new expectations in a given context, and teachers' beliefs about their work, others, VET education and their responsibilities when teaching migrants can provide valuable insights. These insights are essential for supporting teachers' professional learning and guiding educational and policy initiatives to better equip educators for the demands of diverse and dynamic classrooms and new professional responsibilities. Therefore, this study explores vocational teachers' agency by focusing on their perception on and beliefs about teaching migrant students, as well as their responses to circumstances arising from migration and presence of migrants in vocational education. The study addresses the following research questions:

- How do VET teachers perceive their agency when teaching adult migrant students and what beliefs it is based on?
- What hinders VET teachers to exercise their professional agency?

This article is structured as follows. We begin with a reflection on the responsibilities and required competences of VET teachers in teaching migrant students. Next, we discuss the concepts of teacher and professional agency especially in relation to teachers' beliefs, followed by an overview of the Finnish VET context. We then describe the sample, data collection, and analysis methods. The findings section focuses on two distinct ways in which teachers perceive their agency and related to it beliefs: (1) as delimiting, where responsibilities are easily narrowed to teaching VET content, and (2) as responsive, where teachers adopt a broader set of responsibilities in response to the emerging context. We also examine the factors that hinder teachers' agency in supporting migrant students. In the discussion, we summarise the key findings and explore how these insights illuminate the role of beliefs, also those related to contextual factors, in shaping VET teachers' agency when teaching migrant students.

Vocational teachers' work and responsibilities when teaching adult migrant students

The increased number of VET students with second language backgrounds is opening new dimensions, posing new challenges, and necessitating changes in teachers' work (Guo & Jamal, 2011; Henning-Loeb, 2020; Moreno Herrera et al., 2022; Wedekind et al., 2018). Teaching in these new circumstances requires a new and much broader set of professional competencies (Buyruk, 2014; Smith & Yasukawa, 2017). New duties add to the complexity of the already multi-dimensional nature of VET teachers' work (Antera, 2023; Keurulainen et al., 2014) and may further challenge teachers' work and their professional agency. Clearly, students in settings characterised by cultural and linguistic diversity cannot be approached and taught in the same way as students with a homogenous cultural

background (Paul, 2022) and speak the language of the school fluently (Blixen & Hellne-Halvorsen, 2022; Obondo, 2017). Instead, teachers are expected to create a learning environment that is engaging and accessible to this broader range of students and supporting them in successfully navigating their daily lives in the new society (Kärkkäinen, 2017; Villegas & Lucas, 2002) and be knowledgeable in teaching literacy (Blixen & Hellne-Halvorsen, 2022). Teaching in VET is characterised by both deep subject expertise and identification with one's own vocational field (Smith & Yasukava, 2017) and pedagogical know-how (Andersson & Köpsén, 2015). In addition, VET teachers are increasingly expected to be adaptable and multi-skilled (Cort, 2010; Ümarik & Rekkor, 2013) and this is highlighted even more when working with vulnerable students (Sirk et al., 2021). When teaching in these new circumstances, teachers are expected to consider language needs and collaborate with second-language teachers (Onsando & Billett, 2009; Paul, 2023) as well as other actors (Pantić et al., 2024), have cultural competence (Brinkley, 2015), take actions towards sustaining cultural and linguistic diversity (Smith & Yasukava, 2017; Wedekind et al., 2018), and adjust one's teaching styles and practices to second language learners (Kärkkäinen, 2017; Henning-Loeb, 2020). In addition, teachers are required to act as mentors and provide psychological support and guidance in navigating through the education system and the labour market (Wedekind et al., 2018), while acting at the same as language teacher, counsellor, social worker (Keurulainen et al., 2014; Tikkanen, 2024), or/and coach, helping students with their studies, life matters, and becoming a member of the vocational community (Köpsén, 2014). In a broader discussion on teachers' responsibilities it has been noted that teachers act as implementors of their school and state policies, and when doing that they can step up beyond what is expected from them or above it and act as an agent of change (Buchanan, 2015). It has been acknowledged that VET teachers adapt differently to societal and educational changes and can have different understandings of their work and professionalism mainly because of their personal predispositions, leadership, and work support (Ümarik, 2015; Vähäsantanen & Eteläpelto, 2011). The fact that VET teachers adapt differently to societal and educational changes shows that agency is not uniform. Some teachers may embrace change, while others may resist or struggle with it.

Teacher beliefs and agency

In this study we approach agency from the perspective of teachers' beliefs. We are driven by the recognition that agency has dynamic and temporal character and is informed by teachers' beliefs about the purpose of education and their professional responsibilities in a given context (Vähäsantanen, 2015). We understand teachers' beliefs as an affective type of narratives relying on some earlier notices of evaluative character (Nespor, 1987) that VET is about teaching VET

contents and preparation to a working life (Antera, 2023). In other words, teachers' beliefs are sets of explicit and implicit ideas, assumptions that teachers may hold, in this case about learning and teaching of migrant students, their responsibilities as teachers, and the purpose of vocational education in teaching migrants. The relationship between beliefs and undertaking professional responsibilities is reciprocal: undertaking new duties shapes teachers' beliefs and vice versa (Biesta et al., 2015). It has also been noticed that beliefs impact practices, but they are durable and difficult to change (Pajares, 1992). Transforming practices becomes particularly difficult when established professional knowledge, intentions, and beliefs conflict with newly expected responsibilities (Thornburg & Mungai, 2011), leading to expressing agency through resistance (Bonner et al., 2019).

It has been recognised that teachers' beliefs about their work and their professional responsibilities (Biesta et al., 2015), intertwined with existing assumptions and discourses present in a certain work context (Eteläpelto et al., 2015), shape their perceptions and judgments in decision-making and classroom actions in general (Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992), as well as when approaching migrant students (Pantić et al., 2024). This view on agency is in line with a sociocultural perspective on professional agency, understood as teachers' willingness and capacity to act according to professional values, beliefs, goals, and knowledge in the different contexts and situations that teachers encounter in their work (Eteläpelto et al., 2013; Weng et al., 2019). These different contexts and situations might be spaces for teachers' manifestation of their ability to act in new and creative ways or to resist norms and regulations that they consider unethical or unprofessional (Eteläpelto et al., 2013; Lasky, 2005; Toom et al., 2015).

Teachers' professional agency is shaped by complex interplays between individual (e.g., beliefs, values, attitudes) and contextual factors (Goodson & Ümarik, 2019; Vähäsantanen, 2015). According to the sociocultural approach to professional agency, social context and cultural tools (e.g., curriculum guidelines) have an essential role in shaping the development of human beliefs, values, and consequently ways of acting (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995). Also teachers' attitudes matter in teacher professional agency and teacher actions are mediated within available socio-material conditions (Eteläpelto, 2017), indicating that different contexts enable a greater or lesser degree of agency (Eteläpelto et al., 2013). Following ecological views on agency, agency is situated and context-bounded (Priestley et al., 2012); individuals act through their environment, and a teacher may be able to exercise agency in some situations but not in others (Biesta & Tedder, 2006).

Professional agency involves a teacher's understanding of their own professional responsibilities in relationship to their social surroundings and society, and of their potential to broaden their own professional boundaries

(Matikainen et al., 2018). Relationships between teachers and learners (evident in the teacher's ability to negotiate pedagogical practices or classroom management strategies) (Eteläpelto et al., 2015), teacher collaboration (Edwards, 2007), and multiprofessional collaboration (Pantić, 2017; Pantić et al., 2024) are integral parts and expressions of agency. However, when it comes to relationships and collaboration, teachers may hold certain perceptions and beliefs not only as individuals but also collectively (Eteläpelto et al., 2013). A disconnect between individual teachers' values and broader institutional narratives – alongside the absence of a clear, shared professional vision for education – suggests that fostering teacher agency depends not only on personal beliefs, but also on collective reflection and development (Biesta et al., 2015). Reflexivity, a capacity to reflect own perceptions, practices, and social context to make improvement, is an essential part of agency (Archer, 2000; Pantić & Florian, 2015). Thus, our basic assumption is that the actions of vocational teachers in teaching students with a migrant background are shaped by their beliefs that can either strengthen teachers' agency – encouraging them to seek flexible solutions and support students' individual needs – or limit it, especially if students are primarily seen as challenges or exceptions. Therefore, we focus on teacher beliefs to get a sense of the individual and collective discourses that inform teachers' perceptions, judgements, and decision-making that motivate and drive (or hinder) teachers' reflection and action.

VET teachers as agents: Supporting migrant students in Finnish VET

Teachers, including Finnish VET teachers, are usually considered active agents in the working community (Eteläpelto et al., 2013), and therefore their ideologies and perceptions of their work matter, and they might express these by creating and promoting (or not) more multilingual and multicultural learning spaces (Weng & Ataei, 2022). Although teachers at all levels in Finland seem to be well aware of the support that migrant students may need, in their teaching strategies, they do not necessarily have objectives concerning students with a migrant background or regarding multiculturalism, and they do not necessarily implement practices to support students with a migrant background (Pirinen, 2015). Several factors have been recognised as affecting teacher ability to implement inclusive practices including their professional and personal knowledge, teaching philosophy, and reflectivity (Weng & Ataei, 2022).

Finnish VET teachers' work and potential to support migrants in their learning and integration have been influenced by the sociodemographic and structural changes in the sector in recent years. In 2016, The Finnish Association for the Development of Vocational Education and Training [AMKE] (2016) has suggested reducing the language requirements for undergoing vocational training in Finland, and migrants have been reserved some slots. Consequently,

the number of nonnative speakers with varying level of Finnish, is growing (Education Statistics Finland, 2020). National agencies, for example the Finnish National Board of Education [FNBE] (2014), have encouraged VET providers to address migrant students' needs, and they often do so by offering such students language support (AMKE, 2016). All VET students are covered by the services of the student welfare group, a group of teachers and specialists responsible for responding to any problems that students face in their studies and everyday lives. This service was not yet available to adult students when the data for this study were gathered. Also more strict language demands were in place at that point. The adult institute, in which this study was conducted, preferred at that time to integrate migrants into programmes designed for Finns.

Important features of Finnish VET are flexibility, individualisation (i.e., personalisation of the study plan), strong links to working life, and teacher autonomy (FNBE, 2014). In Finland, VET is organised according to competence-based qualifications, which make it possible to recognise vocational skills independently of whether they were gained through work experience, formal teaching, on-the-job training, or other activities (FNBE, 2014). All these features of Finnish VET have been recognised as helpful in boosting the learning of students, including migrant students (Kärkkäinen, 2017), and set a frame for VET teacher work and their agency.

Methodology

Sample

Twelve VET teachers and the director of their institute, who had wide experience in teaching migrant students, volunteered to participate in this study. The institute is one of the biggest providers of VET in Finland. The director was interviewed to better understand the context in which the VET teachers worked.

The teachers were heterogeneous in that they taught different VET subjects and had different job responsibilities, ages, genders, and lengths of experience in teaching migrant students. They taught vocational subjects (i.e., social and health care [practical nursing], cleaning services, hotel and catering services, wood processing, audiovisual communication, business and commerce, safety and security, and construction); and some of them had special teaching responsibilities aside from being involved in study guidance. Their experience in teaching migrant students ranged from over 20 years (Teachers 2 and 11) to less than one year (Teacher 9). Some of them reported having living or work experience in multicultural contexts (Teachers 2 and 12) or having a multicultural family (Teacher 9). All of them could communicate in a language other than Finnish – commonly, English, Swedish, or German.

Data collection

Semi-structured interviews were used to ask teachers about their experiences with teaching adult migrant students and migrant students' learning, how adult migrant students learn best, and what is their, as VET teachers, role in adult migrant students' integration. The interview guide with pre-formulated questions was used flexibly, allowing the respondents to raise any topics they considered relevant.

Most of the interviews took place in the institute. One teacher preferred to be interviewed at university facilities. Before the teachers signed the informed consent forms, the main researcher further oriented them on this study and their rights as participants (i.e., confidentiality, voluntary participation, and right to withdraw). The interviews were conducted in Finnish, the main researcher's second language. Teachers offered explanations about the Finnish VET system when requested. At the same time, the interviewer was perceived as being affiliated with a Finnish institution and familiar with the Finnish context. The interviews lasted from 30 to 120 minutes and were audio recorded and transcribed.

Data analysis

We used thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify, describe, analyse, and interpret patterns in the interview data concerning the meaning that VET teachers ascribe to their responsibilities and capacities as teachers of migrant students. The analysis was data-driven, focusing on both explicit and latent meanings in relation to the research questions, providing the interpretation of patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2019). We utilised in a flexible way six steps of analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006): (1) immersion in the data and repetitive reading of transcripts; (2) generating initial codes (interpretation of individual data items) by coding of the data with the same meaning, related to VET teachers' responsibilities as educators of adult migrant students, into one unit; (3) interpretation of aggregated meaning across the dataset by grouping of the coded excerpts into themes and subthemes; (4) review of the themes in relation to the coded data items, the entire dataset, and the research questions; (5) defining and naming themes, ensuring that created themes provide a narrative consistent with the dataset and responding research questions, followed by choosing excerpts from data used when writing up the results; and (6) writing the analysis part of this article and relating the results in the discussion part to the literature on teachers' agency, professional agency, and beliefs. We conducted the analysis using the ATLAS.ti. Table 1 presents the themes that emerged during the analysis.

Table 1. Process and results of the thematic analysis.

Overarching theme	Main theme	Subtheme
Perspectives on own responsibilities in teaching migrant students	Delimiting own responsibilities to teaching VET subject contents	<p>Not recognising migrant students' needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No changes in teaching noticed - Not recognising one's own responsibilities in integration <p>Shifting responsibilities to other professionals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limiting integration to integration training - Integration as the responsibility of other professionals <p>Negotiation of own professional responsibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Delimiting own responsibilities to being a teacher of a VET subject - Setting boundaries to own professional responsibilities
	Assuming a broader set of responsibilities in teaching migrant students	<p>Mediating between contexts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recognising a new teaching context - The VET teacher as an immediate contact and support person - Acting as a Finnish role model - Mediator between contexts and different sets of experiences <p>Providing timely and sufficient support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Offering more study guidance, if needed - Guidance on everyday matters - Psychological support <p>Supporting linguistic and professional integration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Being concerned about their migrant students' professional integration - Supporting Finnish language learning (including vocational language)
Openness to new ways of supporting migrant students		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Being creative, flexible and open to new practices - Attempting to understand migrant students' 'world of experiences' - Engaging into multiprofessional collaboration - Satisfaction with taking actions
Barriers to undertaking a broader set of responsibilities		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of expertise and knowledge - Presumptions concerning integration, purpose of VET and migrant students' backgrounds - Lack of adequate guidelines - Contradictory views of key stakeholders - No experience in teaching migrant students - Lack of dialogue on evolving responsibilities - Individual choices and characteristics

Limitations of the study

This study had the following limitations. First, the data represent only one vocational institution. The professional agency of VET teachers working with diversity may differ in educational contexts and settings with a longer history of managing migration and diversity. All of the participants of this study taught in the programmes designed for adult learners. The results of the study can be applied to other contexts with the awareness that group dynamics and possibilities to support students may be different in programmes in which both young and adult students can participate. For example, student welfare services available for younger students and mixed groups were not available to participants of this study, which might have an impact on teacher work and experiences of teaching migrant students. Second, the participants were found through an institutional contact person, which could have led to the recruitment of a certain group of teachers. To minimise this possible impact the contact person was carefully informed about the criteria for participation and the key aspects of this study.

Results

The data analysis revealed two themes signifying teachers' beliefs about and perspectives on their responsibilities and agency as professionals working with adult migrant students. These two perspectives were expressed in 1) delimiting own responsibilities to teaching VET subject contents and assumption of them being above all VET teachers; and 2) assuming a broader set of responsibilities in supporting migrant students going beyond usual VET teachers' duties. The first perspective was clearly based on some teachers assuming that they are above all VET teachers, their main task is teaching VET contents and preparing migrants to enter working life as any other student. Consequently, these teachers delimited their actions in certain situations to supporting migrant students primarily in study-related matters. The second perspective revealed some teachers (or even the same teachers in different situations) as more responsive to a broader range of migrant student needs, including those beyond the school context. These teachers followed the assumption that it is rather impossible to avoid new professional responsibilities in teaching migrant students, and support of migrants in VET cannot be restricted to the study-related matters. Regardless of the perspective adopted, and despite various barriers to their agency identified such as lack of expertise, knowledge about migrant students' needs, or guidelines, these teachers often actively sought ways to support migrant students - whether in study matters (Perspective 1) or more holistically (Perspective 2). Figure 1 provides a brief summary of the results and the relationship between identified themes and sub-themes.

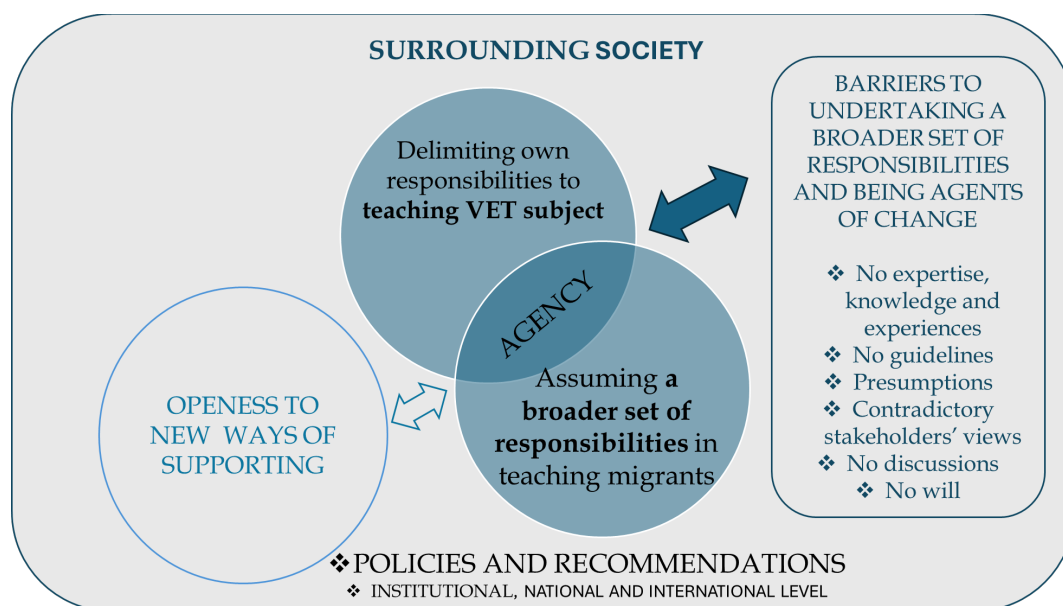


Figure 1. Summary of results.

VET teachers' perspectives on own responsibilities in teaching migrant students

Delimiting own responsibilities to teaching VET subject contents

Some of the interviewees, at least in some situations and circumstances, assumed that their job was no different from what it used to be without recognising migrant students' need for extra support and guidance and the changing context related to demand to work with multicultural groups. Such a view was based on these teachers' belief that their primary duty was to be a VET educator in a specific field teaching VET contents. For example, Teacher 4 said:

Well, a vocational subject teacher no longer really plays a role [in the integration]. We don't have any special role like in preparatory education. There's a plan, there's no particular mention of that [...]. So, yes, supporting the integration process is the responsibility of the Finnish language teachers.

A few other teachers seemed to be convinced that the responsibility for supporting migrant students in managing their lives in Finland lay with those working in integration training and with professionals outside VET, such as social workers. One interviewee, who was teaching business and commerce, even implied that migrant students, when entering VET programmes, already had their lives under control, had completed their integration and did not need further support in their everyday lives or extra support in study matters. Clearly,

in these cases, these teachers assumed that it is possible to delimit their own responsibilities in supporting migrants and delegate some of these responsibilities to other, better trained in this regard, professionals. This was at least obvious in the following reflection by Teacher 8:

At least, I don't want to be like, to be too much of, a mother. I just want to be like a mother as concerns study matters. I don't want to start solving other problems. I'd say then, we have a social worker who helps, if there are problems [...]. I'm just a teacher. There isn't enough time. And there's a study counsellor [...] student health care and so on, and they then know the other [professionals and services] if [migrant students] need help on the social side.

The reflection like this can be seen as an endeavour by teachers trying to understand and negotiate their own professional boundaries when engaging with increasingly multicultural groups and exercising their agency through resisting certain responsibilities. At the same time this teacher relates to the context, available resources (no time), existing structures (role of counsellor), and discourses and assumption on who is responsible for supporting migrants concerning managing their everyday lives, as base for legitimation of the belief and choice of being 'just a teacher'.

Similarly to Teacher 8 some other teachers also believed that their job is to ensure that their migrant students would complete their studies. Teacher 12 said, 'My role is to be like their counsellor, the same sort of study counsellor, whether it's a Finn or an immigrant.' Despite these teachers' good intentions, this belief raises the question of whether treating all students equally, independently of their background, contributes to equity in education and society at large. Moreover, this quote can be interpreted as an example of VET teachers neglecting specifics of teaching in multicultural contexts and migrant students' needs. On other occasions the same teachers (Teacher 8 and 12) gave examples of them being concerned about their students' working life, development of vocational language, and adjusting their practices to multilingual learners and giving a lot of encouragement, indicating these teachers' beliefs and agency being dynamic and situation-bounded.

Rather than a long-term perspective of supporting migrant students' integration to society at large, the reflection like this may be an expression of a short-term future orientation focusing on supporting students in completing their studies, as any other student. Some of the teachers started their interviews by declaring firmly that they were VET teachers and were rather surprised (and confused) that they were being asked about issues related to integration matters and migrants' learning and managing their lives outside the institute, indicating holding limiting assumptions on what the purpose of VET in supporting migrants was.

Some interviewees (including the director of the institute) shared the views expressed in the foregoing statement – they had not thought about this topic in the context of VET from this perspective, and consequently they did not see supporting students in managing their everyday lives in Finland as part of a VET teacher's job. Instead, these teachers, as expressed openly by some of them, followed the belief of VET being about preparing (as any other students) to working life and a teacher needed to act according to responsibilities specified in (ironically, non-existing in this case) guidelines and policies.

Such a hesitation to undertake new responsibilities was also evident in Teacher 4's reflection on unused (or previously unrealised) opportunities for supporting migrant students.

I've sometimes been invited to attend Thai celebrations of light [...]. I haven't attended, but I think now that this could have been a way of supporting [migrant students] by going along [with] and maybe participating in their free-time activities.

Such an invitation challenges the social boundary between the professional and private spheres, because official guidance or instructions have no reference to allocating time for activities of this kind. Similarly to Teacher 8, also Teacher 4 was able to exercise her agency through intentionally denying arising opportunities of supporting migrants.

Assuming a broader set of responsibilities in supporting migrant students

Some of the teachers, especially those who reported having broad experiences in teaching migrant students, acknowledged that they could not avoid their new responsibilities in teaching migrant students and in considering the multilingual and multicultural context of VET. The agency of these teachers was characterised by being flexible and responsive to an emerging context and unwritten duties. In the view of some of these teachers, guiding migrant students was seldom limited to guiding students in study-related matters. These teachers gave various examples of being receptive to students' requests for guidance on different matters related to their everyday lives (e.g., hobbies, translations, or funding of studies) and interacting with Finnish officials (e.g., in filling in different forms or applying for a passport). Two of the interviewees reflected on advising (according to their own knowledge and possibilities) some of their migrant students about whom they should contact to efficiently deal with some issues (e.g., negotiating their working time) while helping on their own as much as they could. Teacher 2 summarised the discussion as follows:

Educators, they're often like social workers, because then come all kinds of personal things that we try to thrash out and perhaps, above all, we advise our migrant students who next to turn to.

The actions of these teachers were addressed by the assumption that the VET teacher is a primary contact person to migrant students and often one of few Finns that some students know. For these teachers it was rather clear that they serve as role models and mediators between the students and the Finnish society, believing VET teachers need to be responsive to this emerging responsibility. For example, Teacher 10 noticed that when teaching migrant students, he constantly engaged in discussions about differences between different contexts. He and some of his colleagues also acknowledged the need to act sometimes as Finnish-language teachers being convinced that it was difficult, meantime impossible, to make a border between teaching and learning VET contents and Finnish language:

Well, it's rather interesting to teach them because there's always discussion about cultural differences and then, it's also [...] always teaching Finnish. Whatever is studied, that always involves teaching the language.

Following this belief that they had responsibility to address the multilingual context, these teachers strived to scaffold both content and language learning. Some teachers mentioned explaining new terms, paying attention to what and how something was said, making sure that everything had been understood, adjusting teaching materials and assessments to the level of language skills of their migrant students, and supporting the development of their vocational language. Believing, that it is possible to take some steps towards facilitating migrant students entering a working life, some teachers reported adjusting their teaching to correspond as closely as possible to the working environment that their migrant students would possibly need to manage. Through giving reassurance and encouraging students in a range of situations, these teachers actively took responsibility for building students' self-confidence in entering a Finnish job market. Teacher 8 commented:

I've [sometimes] said that I don't care if you don't know Finnish very well, but you still know how to clean well and you're professionals, and the fact is then that you're the employees people want.

Statements like this one can be seen as expression of some teachers recognising the disadvantaged position of the migrant students in the work context and being convinced about own responsibility in helping their students with gaining the trust of Finnish employers. Indeed, few teachers took further, concrete, steps in this regard and they told us about writing recommendation letters and giving advice on self-presentation to their migrant students. Teacher 4 even visited workplaces to mediate misunderstandings. The provided examples were manifestations of teachers going beyond 'usual' beliefs on VET teacher responsibilities attached to the identification with their own vocational field and study-related tasks. Instead, teachers in these situations used their capabilities

and available resources to support students more broadly, also in informal spaces (though this was not expected from them). Through helping with mediating interactions in workplaces and everyday life, giving encouragement and positive reinforcement, these teachers undertook a long-term orientation to supporting migrants, presuming that their actions matter for their migrant students in entering Finnish working life and society at large. They seemed to adopt a holistic approach to learning, aiming for broader and long-term impact. Notably, no teacher reported being directly discouraged from offering this kind of support, suggesting they had such an option and the autonomy to do so.

Openness to new ways of supporting migrant students

Even though sometimes limiting their own responsibilities to teaching VET subjects and assuming that this is what is formally expected from them as vocational teachers, many teachers recounted some occasions when they actively responded to the challenges and thus, acted as agents of change. The VET teachers acted in this situations as initiators (i.e., developers) of new practices and engaged in multiprofessional collaboration, within and outside the institute, going beyond pure implementation of the practices, something that was officially expected from them. This suggests their agency being situation-bounded and these teachers having autonomy to be creative and flexible in trying out new practices. Such a process of constant engaging in finding solutions to various challenges in organising migrant students' learning and studies was visible in discussion with Teacher 4:

Such a decision [no possibility to choose specialisation] was made just because we teachers, we didn't have the resources in our working time [...] to guide the students as much as is required from us in practice. But when the group was already inside [the programme] and was already studying, then, we just had to think, 'How will we now manage with such a problem [need for a lot of guidance and not enough resources]?' And [...] we've done a kind of guidance in small groups and so on, not everything one to one.

These flexible ways of arranging studying, including suggesting that migrants take Finnish language courses instead of English, reflect teachers' openness to searching for constructive solutions to daily problems and their agency. Some VET teachers, as part of their response to their challenges in teaching migrant students, as individuals or as an institution, had tried out different forms of guidance and had developed collectively and over years the concept of a learning studio, where students could get extra support. Few teachers reported also using the potential of learning by doing and use of all senses in designing the activities. Experimenting with scaffolding content and language learning, for example by co-teaching with language teachers, was also quite common. Gradually, the teachers also changed their practices related to supporting their migrant learners' agency by shifting from helping them to encouraging them to trust their skills

and act. There was also plenty of evidence that some teachers actively changed their assessment practices to offer flexible and creative ways of recognising migrant students' previous knowledge, skills and experience. Teacher 6 shared:

I have [...] allowed students who failed an exam to take that exam again with another group [...] or have given the students extra reading time [...] and then, in the re-exam, I allowed them to write the answer first and then complete it orally.

The given example indicates that oftentimes teachers were very courageous when undertaking different actions and they seemed to be allowed to and trusted when doing that. Many teachers experienced their efforts and outcomes of searching for new practices and ways of supporting migrant students as very rewarding. Some reported receiving a lot of positive feedback from their students and expressed satisfaction in seeing their students succeed – both in learning and navigating their everyday lives in Finland – which further motivated these teachers to seek new ways of offering support across a range of matters. The willingness to explore innovative ways to support migrant students was both a sign of their agency and something that helped to strengthen it. Clearly, these teachers used the freedom afforded to them leveraging creativity and adaptability, thereby exercising their agency.

Barriers to undertaking a broader set of responsibilities and being agents of change

When the teachers we interviewed were reflecting on their responsibilities in supporting migrant students and ways of doing that, they alluded to several obstacles including (1) their lack of expertise and knowledge about integration and migrant students' needs; (2) the lack of adequate guidelines; (3) contradictory views of key stakeholders on migrant integration and required skills; (4) lack of dialogue on evolving responsibilities; (5) lack of experiences in teaching migrant students; and (6) individual choices and characteristics.

As some of the teachers believed that they did not have enough knowledge and skills to address their migrant students' needs, they passed on these students to other professionals. This idea was also evident in the interview with the director of the institute:

Often, the integration training teachers [...] have a better understanding and knowledge of [cultural matters] [...]. It's [...] part of their professional expertise. It's their job [...]: training this person on the ways of [acting in] this society. [...] The vocational teachers don't know about this.

The statement like this may also indicate the existence of the belief that there can be set clear professional boundaries as regards which professional is responsible for what. This also suggests that it is widely accepted that VET teachers are not knowledgeable in this area, and may point to lack of managerial encouragement to address the issue or to provide space for engaging in discussion on these

matters. Some teachers, indeed, expressed the view of missing the discussions on these matters and generally about supporting migrants in VET, creating confusion about what the role of VET teacher in this emerging context is. For some of the teachers, the interview was the first time that they had an opportunity to reflect on these topics, as Teacher 12 stated:

I haven't actively thought that I'd have any role in this. I only think that I support them as students, so that they get to study, graduate and hopefully get what they need to enter working life. Or maybe that is supporting integration? I haven't thought before about my having some role in it.

Such confusions undoubtedly functioned as a barrier to undertaking a more extensive array of responsibilities. The aforementioned statement indicates absence of established guidelines on the role of VET education and VET teachers in supporting migrant students, which was also confirmed in some of the interviews. Consequently, some teachers wonder about responsibilities of different professionals in this area, and how much they, as educators of migrants, should know about issues related to migrant integration. The assumption that integration does not belong to vocational education was very harmful. Though some teachers recognised that it would be good and ethical to support migrant students in managing their everyday lives, it was oftentimes convenient to some teachers to follow assumed (non-existing) official responsibilities and not making effort in learning more about their migrant students' needs. A few teachers admitted that they did not know how their migrant students were integrated, how much they knew about living in Finland, or what their skills level in Finnish, educational background or 'world of experiences' were, seeing it as hindrance to efficient teaching of migrants. Teacher 3 commented on this matter as follows:

And then, if you think about it, when you don't know the human concept, the concept of learning that each person who comes here has [...] if you don't know the culture and educational environment that's already there, on which learning is built [...] this is the challenge.

The excerpt may also indicate that some pre-assumptions on migrant backgrounds as being very different may work as an obstacle to teachers being open to finding solutions. Instead, some migrants' backgrounds were seen as problematic and successful completion of the studies was seen as their own responsibility.

A few teachers also pointed to differences in the views of key stakeholders (i.e., VET teachers, language teachers, supervisors at work, and migrants themselves) on such issues as the required level of skills for different purposes (including the level of Finnish language proficiency) and how to support adult migrant students in an institute and outside of it. These teachers felt that such

differences in views on key matters created confusion and work as an obstacle for them taking action on responding to migrant students' needs.

The lack of adequate guidelines, limited knowledge about students' needs, anxiety about difference and insufficient discussion on these topics created significant uncertainty – particularly hindering the agency of novice teachers. According to the interviewed teachers, it was only with time and through gaining experience that they felt confident in taking an active role. This included developing their own effective practices for supporting migrant students and negotiating their professional responsibilities. Despite existing obstacles, this process often led to a broader understanding of their roles as educators.

Yet, a lot seemed to be related to individual teachers' choices and characteristics. Some teachers deliberately adopted a narrow interpretation of the purpose of VET in teaching migrants, focusing solely on preparing students for Finnish working life – just as any student. This limited perspective might have hindered their own agency and potentially affected students' broader integration into society. While such choices reflect these teachers' sense of agency, certain decisions, beliefs, and individual characteristics may also act as impediments to embracing a wider set of responsibilities.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore VET teachers' agency in teaching migrant students and the underlying beliefs, also those related to contextual features, which shaped these teachers' agency. The analysis revealed that teachers held varying perspectives regarding their evolving responsibilities in supporting migrant students. Some teachers, in specific situations, preferred to limit their duties to traditional teaching responsibilities, identifying with the vocational subject they taught. In these cases, their agency seemed to be shaped by a short-term and narrow view of migrant integration – focused solely on formal education and preparation for working life (Kärkkäinen & Tarnanen, 2022). These teachers believed that they did not have a specific role in supporting migrant students beyond teaching vocational content and offering study-related support. This belief – that teaching migrants could be confined to delivering vocational content – prevented them from acting in accordance with their broader capabilities and understanding of their students' needs. Setting clear boundaries to their own responsibilities in teaching migrants was an expression of these teachers' agency through resistance (Bonner et al., 2019). However, others – sometimes even the same teachers in different situations – recognised that they could not avoid new responsibilities associated with supporting migrant students in a more holistic manner. These teachers realised that setting strict boundaries and limiting support to the physical spaces and operating hours

of formal educational institutions was insufficient. Instead, they acknowledged the need to provide assistance with issues affecting students' lives beyond the classroom. In these situations, the teachers' agency was characterised by responsiveness to new circumstances and students' needs. Consistent with earlier research, societal changes – particularly the increasing number of migrant students in VET – forced teachers to reconsider their professional responsibilities (Matikainen et al., 2018). This aligns with studies highlighting the expanding responsibilities of VET teachers (Antera, 2023; Keurulainen et al., 2014; Tikkanen et al., 2024) and the growing need for adaptability and diverse skills in response to societal shifts (Cort, 2010; Guo & Jamal, 2011; Ümarik & Rekkor, 2013; Vähäsantanen, 2015). The changing student population challenged teachers' agency (Pappa et al., 2017), which, as also found in this study, was situation-bounded, dynamic, and temporal (Vähäsantanen, 2015).

This study showed that many teachers had room to act creatively and adapt their teaching, reflecting professional agency as described in earlier research (Eteläpelto et al., 2013; Lasky, 2005; Toom et al., 2015). The Finnish education system's and teacher education's emphasis on teacher trust and autonomy (Erss & Kalmus, 2018) likely supported this creativity and flexibility. Practices such as co-teaching and multiprofessional collaboration – encouraged across all education levels in Finland (Pantić et al., 2024) – appeared to further enable agency in supporting migrant students. Regardless of how teachers envisioned their responsibilities in this evolving context, they explored new ways to support migrant students, with those adopting broader responsibilities often going beyond standard VET content to support students' overall well-being. Their actions, reinforced by students' positive feedback, further strengthened their sense of agency.

The results suggest that actions of many teachers in this study were embedded in a context of certain institutional structures and existing discourses on integration, VET and its purpose, possibly affecting these teachers' beliefs about ways of responding to demographic changes in VET (see also Biesta et al., 2015; Pantić et al., 2024; Vongalis-Macriow, 2007). Most probably some VET teachers – perhaps unconsciously – accepted common misconceptions: that vocational education is an easier path for second-language learners due to its practical nature, and that migrant students complete their integration upon entering VET (Henning-Loeb, 2020; Paul, 2024). This perspective overlooks integration as a continuous, lifelong process across various spaces, ultimately limiting teachers' agency. Assumptions about the purpose of vocational education and where integration occurs seemed to shape teachers' actions – or inactions – and may have influenced student outcomes. Many teachers viewed their responsibilities in term of preparing all students, including migrants, for a specific vocation in Finland, likely reflecting the influence of the VET context and strong

identification with their own vocational field on their understanding of professional responsibilities (Matikainen et al., 2018). Yet, a lack of dialogue in the institute around VET teachers' evolving responsibilities in teaching migrant students might have further impeded undertaking new duties and outsourcing them to other, more knowledgeable, professionals.

The study also revealed tensions between official responsibilities and some teachers' moral or ethical considerations, which further constrained their agency. Teachers' responses were shaped by personal values and predispositions, aligning with earlier findings on the link between agency and individual beliefs (Biesta et al., 2015; Toom et al., 2015). Additionally, limited resources – such as time and access to relevant knowledge – further restricted revisiting their beliefs and ability to support migrant students' learning and life management.

In terms of practical implications, the findings highlight the need to revise teacher competence frameworks and in-service training in response to ongoing social change (Blixen & Hellne-Halvorsen, 2022). Consistent with earlier research, this study shows that novice teachers' agency is particularly fluid and challenged, underscoring the need for targeted support amid global, demographic, and structural shifts (Eteläpelto et al., 2015). For future research, more participatory approaches may be needed to deepen understanding of how to support VET teachers' professional agency. Methodological approaches such as co-creation and action research may help teachers to revisit their beliefs and make sense of both their official responsibilities and ethical dimensions of supporting migrant students.

In conclusion, clarifying the responsibilities of different stakeholders at the interface between vocational schools and workplaces may potentially enhance migrant students' learning experiences and strengthen teacher agency in supporting their educational and professional integration. This study also highlights the crucial role of leadership in creating opportunities for dialogue around evolving responsibilities in teaching adult migrants and in providing work-related support to vocational teachers.

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Staying home as speaking out: Absence as a reflection on support in work-based learning

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Abstract

Work-based learning is a central component of vocational education and training (VET), yet student absence from workplace placements is often understood in administrative or behavioural terms. This article examines how VET students interpret absence from work-based learning and what such withdrawal reveals about the relational, psychological, and organisational conditions shaping participation. Drawing on qualitative interviews with 26 upper-secondary vocational students in Sweden who experienced work-based learning as challenging, the study employs reflexive thematic analysis informed by the theory of communities of practice and Biesta's three domains of education. The findings show that absence from work-based learning emerges as a situated and meaningful response to learning environments perceived as lacking recognition, safety, or pedagogical purpose. Students described withdrawing in response to emotional exhaustion, relational insecurity and poor workplace treatment, experiences of meaninglessness linked to limited learning opportunities, as well as practical and structural barriers disrupting continuity. Rather than indicating a lack of motivation or commitment, absence functioned as a relational and communicative act through which students signalled that participation had become untenable. By reconceptualising absence as an educationally and ethically significant phenomenon, the article contributes by foregrounding absence as student voice and an indicator of inclusiveness and responsiveness in work-based learning arrangements.

Keywords: upper secondary vocational education, student absence, student voice, support, inclusion



Introduction

Work-based learning (WBL) constitutes a compulsory component of Swedish vocational education and training (VET), regulated by the Education Act (SFS 2010:800) and the Upper Secondary School Ordinance (SFS 2010:2039). All students enrolled in upper-secondary VET programmes are required to complete a minimum of fifteen weeks of WBL over the course of three years, while apprentices undertake at least half of their education in workplace settings (Cedefop, 2022). During these periods, students are not employed by the workplace. Rather, they retain their status as students, and WBL forms an integral part of formal schooling. This distinction is significant in an international context, where work placements may be linked to employment contracts, as it shapes how responsibility, attendance, and accountability are conceptualised. In the Swedish system, non-attendance during WBL is therefore categorised as school absence, despite occurring in a workplace environment.

In this article, absence is conceptualised broadly to include temporary, repeated, or prolonged non-attendance, as well as interrupted or discontinued placements in which students remain formally enrolled but are unable to participate. Although these forms of absence may differ administratively, they are treated here as manifestations of a shared educational situation in which participation in WBL becomes untenable. The study thus centres on how students themselves make sense of staying away from WBL, interpreting absence as a meaningful response to relational, psychological, or organisational breakdowns rather than as a purely individual or disciplinary issue.

WBL is intended to provide students with access to authentic vocational communities, support the development of occupational competence, and enable the integration of school-based knowledge with workplace practices (Skolverket, 2016, 2023). These ambitions presuppose that workplace environments offer organisational and relational conditions conducive to learning and legitimate participation. However, emerging research suggests that such conditions cannot be assumed. While policy frameworks often depict transitions between school and workplace as coherent and seamless, experiences frequently reveal a more fragmented and uneven reality (e.g., Mårtensson, 2020; Nielsen & Tanggaard, 2016). Examining these tensions is therefore essential for understanding how WBL may, for some students, become difficult to sustain.

Despite the central role of WBL within Swedish VET, absence from WBL has received limited scholarly attention. It is most often addressed through administrative procedures such as attendance monitoring, rather than explored through students' experiences of struggling to participate (e.g., Böhn & Deutscher, 2022; Lannegrund-Willems et al., 2011). For many students, particularly those with prior school difficulties or identified support needs, WBL entails managing multiple transitions simultaneously. These include entering

unfamiliar workplaces, interpreting tacit norms, and negotiating expectations from both workplace supervisors and school-based teachers. When such transitions are insufficiently supported, absence may function as a form of communication (cf. Forsell, 2020). A signal that conditions for learning, recognition, or psychological safety have broken down.

To interpret these breakdowns, the present study draws on Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of communities of practice and Biesta's (2022) three domains of education. From this perspective, absence is understood not merely as non-attendance, but as educational in which participation ceases to be meaningful and/or possible. This theoretical framing foregrounds the relational nature of vocational learning and positions absence as a lens through which the boundaries and vulnerabilities of WBL can be examined.

Against this backdrop, there is a need for research that foregrounds students' own accounts of absence specifically from WBL. While existing studies have explored dropout, motivation, and supervision within VET, less is known about how students themselves interpret staying away from workplace placements. Research has focused on withdrawal from entire programmes, offering limited insight into the psychological, relational, and organisational conditions that lead to temporary or repeated non-attendance in WBL. This article addresses this gap through interviews with VET students who, in different ways, experienced WBL as challenging or found aspects of their vocational studies difficult. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do VET students describe and interpret the psychological, relational, and organisational factors that lead to absence during WBL?
2. In what ways does absence from WBL reflect breakdowns or possibilities within the processes of support, belonging, and participation that underpin vocational learning?

By centring students' voices, this article positions absence as a barometer of how VET enables, or fails to enable, young people to appear, belong, and learn as recognised participants within the world of WBL.

Previous research

Research on VET consistently shows that students' participation, and continuity in WBL, are shaped by a complex interaction of individual, relational, and organisational factors. Rather than being reducible to personal shortcomings or lack of motivation, absence and dropout in VET appear as processes grounded in students' negotiations with their learning environments, institutional expectations, and social conditions. Research on VET spans different institutional models, which shape how participation, absence management, and support are

organised. In school-based systems, such as in Sweden, WBL typically consists of shorter placements embedded within formal schooling, where students retain their status as students and absence is treated as school absence. In contrast, dual or apprenticeship systems, common in countries such as Germany or Switzerland, are workplace-dominant, with longer periods of employment-based training where absence is more closely tied to labour market participation and contractual obligations. These differences have important implications for how absence is understood and managed. The studies reviewed below draw on both school-based and apprenticeship contexts and are interpreted with attention to how institutional arrangements shape students' participation in WBL.

A body of research emphasises individual and psychological dimensions of disengagement. Böhn and Deutscher's (2022) meta-synthesis demonstrates that dropout rarely stems from a single cause but emerges from an accumulation of fragile motivation, mental health difficulties, and unmet expectations, often exacerbated by limited support. Snell and Hart (2008) further show that dissatisfaction, unmet expectations, and experiences of poor treatment or exploitation contribute strongly to non-completion, especially in industries with uneven training quality. Vanneste et al. (2017) similarly show that sickness absence among Dutch VET students reflects psychological strain and relational tensions rather than purely medical causes, with students actively legitimising their absence as a coping strategy. In the Swedish context, Forsell's (2020) study of problematic school absenteeism offers a complementary perspective. Although focused on compulsory schooling, his ecological analysis demonstrates that prolonged non-attendance rarely stems from a single cause but emerges through interactions between individual, relational, and organisational factors over time. Forsell argues that improving attendance often requires changes in the learning environment rather than changes in individual disposition. This resonates with research in VET showing that students' participation in WBL is shaped not only by personal motivation or psychological strain but also by the responsiveness and structure of the environments in which learning takes place. Earlier school experiences of low recognition and distrust in teachers or institutions have also been found to undermine engagement in later vocational pathways (Beilmann & Espenberg, 2015; Nielsen & Tanggaard, 2015). Emotional processes further shape participation. Ryökkynen et al. (2021, 2022) demonstrate that among Finnish VET students receiving special educational support, feelings of pride and recognition promote engagement, while shame, often linked to comparison, failure, or marginalisation, leads to withdrawal, silence, and heightened vulnerability during WBL.

Research also demonstrates that participation in VET is relational. In school settings, Ingholt et al. (2015) show that supportive, predictable, and inclusive teacher-student relationships reduce disengagement and strengthen school

attachment. Similar dynamics are found in workplace contexts. High-quality supervision characterised by trust, dialogue, and availability fosters belonging and engagement (Schmid & Haukedal, 2022), while inconsistent or authoritarian supervision can generate insecurity and withdrawal. In line with this, Dagsland et al. (2015) show that apprentices in the hospitality industry often experience high expectations, stress, and at times disrespect or harassment, conditions that undermine motivation and contribute to withdrawal if recognition and support are lacking. Schmid et al. (2024) further highlight that students' perceptions of legitimacy and inclusion in workplace communities, through access to meaningful tasks and relational recognition, are central to distinguishing 'stayers' from 'leavers'. Feedback practices also matter. Wyszynska Johansson (2021) shows that feedback during WBL is often informal, affirmative, and non-instructional. While such feedback supports belonging, the lack of structured, developmental guidance can generate uncertainty and limit students' understanding of expectations, contributing to hesitancy or disengagement.

Power relations and social recognition further shape students' trajectories. Rönnlund and Rosvall (2021) demonstrate that workplace hierarchies influence VET students' opportunities for responsibility, voice, and civic agency during WBL. Students experiencing respect and agency strengthen their vocational identity, while those encountering marginalisation report reduced confidence and participation. Comparative research by Bruin et al. (2023) also indicates that young people across Europe frequently encounter restricted influence and insufficient recognition in VET, particularly those at risk of social exclusion. Krötz and Deutscher (2021) add that not only do organisational and relational conditions matter, but differences in how trainees and trainers perceive training quality play a crucial role in explaining dropout – misalignment in expectations and experiences increases withdrawal risks, especially when trainees feel misunderstood or unsupported.

Organisational and structural conditions surrounding VET play a role in attendance and persistence. Research shows that well-organised and meaningful workshop instruction fosters motivation (Nielsen, 2016), whereas disorganisation or low perceived relevance increases absenteeism (Lannegrand-Willems et al., 2011). At the workplace, Pfeifer (2020) finds that apprentices' absence is lower when participatory structures, such as works councils, enhance fairness and communication. Reegård (2020) demonstrates that informal workplace logics, prioritising efficiency and loyalty, may conflict with educational expectations, creating ambiguity that affects learning and participation. Harris et al. (2001) and Bosset et al. (2022) similarly show that retention is shaped by the alignment between students' interests, workplace culture, and the quality of training. Guest (2023) adds that when curricula are negotiated meaningfully

between employers and educators, students experience stronger engagement and professional identification.

Additional Nordic research highlights the importance of flexibility, and supportive relationships for students who struggle. Rokkones and Saur (2016) and Bunting et al. (2017) show that flexible, relationally oriented interventions can re-engage at-risk students. Tårnesvik and Schmid (2022) find that practice-oriented pathways enhance motivation and confidence through hands-on learning and recognition. However, research also shows that the success of such pathways depends on relational continuity and clear communication between school and workplace. Olofsson (2025) demonstrates that Swedish vocational teachers preparing students in need of support for WBL rely on individualised strategies, such as adapted tasks, enhanced communication with supervisors, and gradual exposure to workplace norms, but often lack institutional guidance or coordinated support. These gaps create vulnerability during WBL, particularly for students whose participation is already fragile.

Studies adopting student-centred perspectives illuminate how disengagement can express misalignment between learners and their environments. Tanggaard (2013) and Rodrigues (2017) show that students frequently cite lack of recognition, irrelevant teaching, or insufficient voice as drivers of dropout. Taylor (2008) and Sullivan (2021) highlight how structural inequalities, such as classed expectations in apprenticeship or rigid norms in professional placements, shape participation and exclusion, particularly for neurodivergent students. These findings challenge interpretations of VET and emphasise the need to understand absence as relational communication rather than individual deficit.

A number of common patterns can be identified. Absence and dropout in VET are best understood as relational and organisational phenomena rather than as individual failings. Students' participation is closely linked to the extent to which learning environments offer recognition, meaningful involvement, and coherent support across the boundary between school and work. When this are misaligned, the risk of disengagement increases, particularly for students with learning difficulties, psychosocial vulnerabilities, or prior negative educational experiences. Although existing research has generated knowledge about dropout, attendance, and supervision in VET, absence within WBL remains comparatively underexamined. International studies emphasise the significance of belonging, relational trust, and supervisory practices, yet provide limited insight into how students themselves interpret and navigate periods of non-attendance during WBL. Similarly, Nordic research on student voice and belonging has rarely conceptualised absence as relational response to the competing logics of education and production that structure WBL. There is therefore a limited understanding of how psychological strain, relational insecurity, and organisational barriers are experienced at the point where

participation becomes untenable. This study addresses this gap by foregrounding students' own accounts of absence and by analysing withdrawal from WBL as an educational and relational event, rather than as an administrative irregularity.

Theoretical framework

WBL is understood as a form of participation in socially and materially organised practices rather than simply the acquisition of discrete skills (cf. Lave & Wenger, 1991). Within *communities of practice* (CoP), learning occurs as newcomers gain access to the activities, relationships, and cultural meanings that constitute a community. Participation is legitimate yet initially peripheral, and movement towards fuller involvement depends on how responsibility, trust, and recognition are negotiated with more experienced members (Wenger, 1998). From this perspective, learning is inseparable from processes of belonging and identity formation. To learn is simultaneously to become recognised as someone who matters within that community.

However, participation in WBL varies considerably across workplaces. Fuller and Unwin's (2003, 2004) distinction between expansive and restrictive learning environments captures this variation by showing how opportunities for guidance and participation are shaped by workplace organisation and culture. Expansive environments provide structured support and access to a broad range of tasks, whereas restrictive settings confine learners to repetitive or marginal activities. Critical readings of CoP further underline that learning within workplace communities is never neutral but entangled with power relations and the organisation of labour (cf. Contu & Willmott, 2003; Cox, 2005). These perspectives highlight that WBL is always shaped, enabled, or constrained, by the social and structural conditions in which it unfolds.

To interpret the educational significance of these processes, Biesta's (2022) three domains of education offer a complementary lens. Biesta conceptualises education as oriented towards *qualification*, *socialisation* and *subjectification*. While qualification concerns the development of skills and knowledge, and socialisation concerns becoming part of existing traditions and practices, subjectification refers to the process through which individuals come into presence as unique subjects capable of responding to, and taking responsibility in relation to, others and the world. Within this framework, support in WBL can be understood as an educational relation that connects these dimensions, enabling students not only to develop vocational competence but also to appear as recognised and responsible participants within vocational life.

The notion of absence as a possible expression of subjectification draws attention to the ethical dimension of participation. Biesta (2022) suggests that

educational processes may at times involve moments of interruption or resistance – instances in which individuals respond to conditions they experience as limiting or unresponsive. While this offers a productive way of understanding students' withdrawal from WBL, it also risks overemphasising individual agency. The theory of CoP describes participation profoundly relational (Wenger, 1998) and that withdrawal may equally reflect the failure of the community to provide mutual engagement, shared meaning, and recognition. In this sense, absence can be read both as an ethical response to constraining conditions and as a relational signal that belonging has fractured.

Although these two perspectives already point to complementary aspects of participation, it is useful to clarify how the perspectives contribute to the present analysis. CoP provides a lens for understanding the social and organisational arrangements that shape students' possibilities for participation, while Biesta's framework helps to interpret the educational significance of moments where participation is interrupted or withdrawn. In the analysis, CoP informed the identification of patterns relating to access, legitimacy, and engagement, whereas Biesta supported the interpretation of how students' responses, including absence, can be understood in terms of subjectification. Combining the two perspectives thus offers a way of analysing absence as both structurally shaped and educationally meaningful. These theoretical perspectives position WBL as both a pedagogical and an ethical practice. Learning is not only a matter of acquiring skills but also of recognition and purpose. The frameworks of CoP and Biesta therefore provide a useful foundation for interpreting the psychological, relational, and organisational dynamics that shape students' participation, and absence, in WBL.

Method

The study employed a qualitative and interpretive design to explore how absence reflects experiences of support in WBL, and how students interpret the psychological, relational, and organisational conditions that make participation more or less sustainable.

Participants and recruitment

Participants were recruited through collaboration with vocational teachers, who initially identified students that met the criteria specified for the study. To minimise potential bias associated with teacher selection, the researcher subsequently visited classrooms to present the project directly, inviting voluntary participation from any student who recognised aspects of their own experience in the study description. The inclusion criteria were deliberately broad, encompassing students who demonstrated or experienced WBL or

vocational subjects as difficult or challenging. No formal documentation of special educational needs was required.

In total, 26 students participated, including 18 female and 8 male students, representing nine of Sweden's twelve national VET programmes. These programmes were: Handicraft (HC), Restaurant Management and Food (RF), Business and Administration (BA), Natural Resource Use (NR), Child and Recreation (CR), HVAC and Property Maintenance (HPM), Health and Social Care (HS), Vehicle and Transport (VT), and Hotel and Tourism (HT), across ten schools. The sample thus captured diversity in vocational fields and institutional settings while maintaining analytic depth.

Data collection and analysis

Data were generated through semi-structured interviews designed to elicit students' narratives about WBL. The interview guide consisted of broad, open-ended questions followed by prompts to encourage elaboration and reflection (e.g. Bryman, 2018). While participants were recruited based on experiencing WBL or vocational subjects as challenging, this was not intended to predefine the findings, but to explore conditions under which participation risks breaking down. The interview design did not assume uniformly negative experiences. Open-ended questions invited students to reflect on both supportive and challenging aspects of WBL, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of their experiences. While most interviews were conducted individually, four were held with students who preferred to sit together, resulting in 17 individual interviews, three paired interviews, and one with three participants. Each participant answered the questions individually, even when interviewed alongside peers. This format accommodated students' preferences and at times enabled them to elaborate on one another's reflections, while still generating distinct accounts. Students had received the interview questions in advance, yet those who took part in paired or small-group interviews still shared experiences that might be considered sensitive.

Interviews were conducted in Swedish and took place in quiet rooms at the participating schools, except for two interviews that were held online due to distance and scheduling constraints. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim and anonymised prior to analysis. The transcripts were then analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2022). In line with RTA, themes were understood not as objective categories but as interpretive constructions that express patterned meanings grounded in participants' accounts. The analytic process was non-linear and iterative, involving continuous movement between immersion in the transcripts and the gradual development of conceptual interpretations. Initial engagement with the dataset involved repeated reading and detailed memo-writing to

capture emerging insights and tensions. Coding was undertaken inductively across all transcripts at both semantic and latent levels, enabling attention to explicit descriptions of absence as well as to underlying assumptions. Codes were subsequently reviewed and compared to identify coherences and divergences. Contradictory examples were examined to disrupt early assumptions and strengthen interpretive rigour. Although coding began inductively, the development and refinement of themes followed an abductive logic in which empirical patterns were interpreted in dialogue with theoretical perspectives. This abductive movement ensured that concepts from Communities of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) and Biesta's (2022) three domains of education illuminated the significance of students' accounts. Theoretical engagement was therefore introduced only after preliminary themes had stabilised, allowing empirical meaning-making to remain the primary analytic driver. Throughout the process, professional familiarity with VET functioned as a resource for recognising pedagogical nuance, while at the same time requiring sustained reflexivity to avoid normalising the students' accounts of absence. Reflexive journaling, and revisiting of codes were used to enhance interpretive transparency and ethical attentiveness. In accordance with the principles of RTA, analytic adequacy was evaluated through the concept of information power (cf. Malterud et al., 2016), with the breadth and depth of the dataset assessed as sufficient for addressing the study's focus.

The final thematic structure emerged through an interpretive synthesis that connected participants' experiences with the broader relational and organisational dynamics of WBL. The four themes are conceptually distinct yet interrelated, capturing different layers of the conditions that shape students' participation. They represent analytically separable but interconnected dimensions, ranging from individual psychological strain to relational, pedagogical, and structural conditions, and are elaborated more in detail in the findings section. This thematic work enabled absence in WBL to be understood as a multi-layered relational and pedagogical phenomenon rather than as an individual behavioural deficit. In this way, the analysis represents a dialogic integration of data and theory, ensuring that students' voices remained the central part through which absence in WBL was interpreted as a relational, pedagogical, and ethical event. Quotations cited in this article were translated into English using a meaning-preserving approach.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was granted by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority (2022) in accordance with the Act concerning the Ethical Review of Research Involving Humans (SFS 2003:460). All procedures adhered to the ethical principles of the Swedish Research Council (2024). Participants received written and oral

information, provided informed consent, and were reminded that participation was voluntary and could be withdrawn at any stage without consequence. All data were anonymised and stored securely in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation.

Given that the study involved students who already experienced WBL and/or their vocational subjects as challenging, particular care was taken to ensure that participation did not exacerbate feelings of pressure or vulnerability. Interviews were conducted in a manner designed to support participants' comfort and autonomy, with open-ended questions allowing them to determine the extent to which they wished to share sensitive experiences. The topic was considered sensitive as it involved students reflecting on experiences of difficulty, vulnerability, and, in some cases, negative treatment during WBL. It could also involve aspects of students' personal circumstances, including references to mental health or other individual conditions that shaped their experiences. Additional attention was paid to the anonymisation of potentially identifiable details, including diagnoses and personal circumstances that, while occasionally relevant to students' accounts, were not necessary for the analytical aims of the study. These measures were implemented to safeguard participants' wellbeing while enabling their perspectives to contribute meaningfully to the understanding of WBL in contexts where learning trajectories may already be fragile.

Findings

In line with the research questions, four interrelated themes were developed through the reflexive thematic analysis. The first theme, *Psychological distress and emotional exhaustion*, addresses the individual psychological burden that influences students' ability to participate in WBL. The second theme, *Insecurity and poor treatment at placement*, concerns the relational and social conditions of the workplace, highlighting how experiences of safety and fair treatment shape students' sense of belonging. The third theme, *Low motivation and perceived meaninglessness*, reflects the pedagogical dimension of WBL, focusing on how students' engagement is affected when the learning experience is not perceived as meaningful. The fourth theme, *Practical and physical barriers*, captures the structural and organisational obstacles that hinder attendance and active participation. All themes illustrate how absence operates as a multidimensional signal and structure across both personal and institutional levels.

Psychological distress and emotional exhaustion

For many students, absence appeared not as a deliberate act of defiance but as a response to psychological overload. Across several interviews, students described living with depression, anxiety, or exhaustion that undermined their

ability to attend WBL. In these accounts, *not going* was experienced less as a choice and more as an involuntary withdrawal, a way of protecting oneself from environments that felt overwhelming. One student articulated this vividly. She explained that attending WBL had been difficult throughout her entire education:

It has been a problem throughout my whole WBL time that I've had difficulties going there. I've been diagnosed with [a mental health condition] and some other things, so it's mostly that. I just can't get up. It feels like waking up with a ton of bricks on my chest. (Emma, BA)

Her description shows emotional exhaustion as a bodily heaviness that makes it hard to act, not as rebellion or unwillingness. She contrasted this with her experience of school, where she felt expectations were more humane, 'It's much easier here at school, because they don't expect as much of me. Here I can come even when I feel bad.' This comparison illustrates how the emotional demands of WBL often exceed the support structures available in the school setting. While teachers may tolerate fluctuation in students' wellbeing, workplaces implicitly demand productivity and sociability – even on days when such performances feel impossible. A similar sense of fatigue appeared in another interview with Levi (RF), where he described how his 'body just shuts down,' adding that it was sometimes 'easier to accept not getting up than to fight through the day.' Levi framed absence as an act of surrender to physical and emotional exhaustion rather than a conscious avoidance of responsibility.

Several students also reflected critically on how the school responded to their difficulties and absence. Kira (HS) explained, 'I'm in school more than I am at my placement. I've wished that someone would ask how I'm doing when they saw I had a lot of absence. They only asked why I wasn't there.' Her account underscores a broader institutional tendency to treat attendance administratively rather than relationally. The formal question of *why* she was absent replaced a more human enquiry into *how* she was coping. As a result, the experience of absence deepened rather than alleviated her sense of isolation.

These narratives reveal absence as a form of silent communication, a bodily and emotional signal that something within the student's experience of WBL has become unmanageable. Rather than indicating a lack of discipline, absence in these cases reflects an effort to 'survive' within systems that are sometimes not equipped to accommodate vulnerability. The following theme elaborates how such withdrawal can also arise from relational insecurity and poor treatment in the workplace.

Insecurity and poor treatment at placement

Another recurring source of absence stemmed from students' experiences of discomfort or a lack of safety within the workplace. In these accounts, the act of

staying away from WBL emerged as a response to relational and emotional insecurity. Students' narratives suggest that when the workplace was perceived as unwelcoming or even threatening, absence became a form of self-protection. Alex (NR) described how an early placement had triggered intense discomfort, 'I went there once first. I couldn't handle it, so I went home at lunch. Then I just didn't go back for several days. I went again once but felt I couldn't be there, so I stopped completely.' Later in the same interview, Alex explained the underlying cause of this reaction, 'It was only men working there. That made me feel uncomfortable. So I just didn't go.' Her withdrawal represents an act of psychological preservation rather than disinterest. She did not refuse to learn but rejected an environment that made her feel unsafe. The same student noted that the school was aware of her absence but failed to follow up in any meaningful way, 'They saw that I wasn't going, but it was never really followed up. There were weeks when I was just at home doing nothing.' This lack of support from school staff transformed a disengagement into prolonged isolation.

A comparable pattern appeared in another interview, where Tess (HC) recounted terminating her WBL after feeling mistreated and unsupported by her supervisor, 'I had a placement in the beginning, but I quit because it wasn't good. My teacher said that as long as you don't feel safe you can stop and stay with me (at school) instead.' Tess explained that she and a classmate had shared the placement. Yet their supervisor was inattentive and dismissive, 'She wasn't engaged, she didn't even check our attendance app, she had no idea. There were also very unpleasant tones.' These remarks expose a dynamic in which poor communication and lack of care produced withdrawal rather than learning. In this context, the teacher's authorisation to leave, while protective, also signals a system that reacts to crises rather than preventing them.

These accounts show absence as a rational response to environments that fail to safeguard emotional or interpersonal wellbeing. Students' decisions to withdraw reflect an attempt to reclaim agency in situations where their role as learners has been replaced by that of unwelcome intruders or 'cheap labour'. The notion of 'poor treatment' thus extends beyond individual rudeness. It speaks to an asymmetry of power, in which students occupy a vulnerable position without adequate adult advocacy. These accounts also highlight the intersection between psychological safety and educational belonging. When WBL settings fail to provide safety, absence can signal that students feel unseen or unsupported.

Low motivation and perceived meaninglessness

Beyond experiences of psychological strain or insecurity, many students described their absence as rooted in a more subtle sense of pointlessness. In these narratives, WBL was not experienced as threatening, but as empty and lacking in learning value and relevance. A persistent theme across interviews was the

difficulty of sustaining motivation when WBL felt disconnected from the students' future goals or when they were positioned as 'unpaid helpers' rather than learners. Felix (HT) reflected candidly, 'I had a lot of absence at all placements. It's just hard to go there. When it feels pointless, when I get nothing out of it, it just feels like a waste of time.' His words capture emotional depletion tied not only to fatigue but to a lack of perceived learning. He elaborated that tasks often consisted of repetitive work, checking deliveries or cleaning, while feedback was minimal.

You can do a lot of things, but it's expected of you as a student. You never get any proper feedback. In school, if you work hard, you get a grade or some recognition. Here, it's just 'good job,' nothing more. (Felix, HT)

The result was gradual disengagement, not going became a silent critique of an educational structure that offered placement without acknowledgement. A similar experience was described by Leah (HS), 'I was at a day centre for elderly people. I didn't get to do anything, I just sat and watched TV with them. So I rarely went because it was so boring. I failed that one.' Her absence was not prompted by conflict but by monotony, an absence of stimulation or progression that eroded her sense of agency. In both cases, absence shows that something has gone wrong in the learning process. When the work ceases to teach, the learner ceases to attend. Several other students echoed this theme of demotivation, connecting it explicitly to the perceived futility of WBL. Noel (HPM) expressed frustration with the lack of tangible reward or recognition, 'Some days you just don't want to go to work. I don't have that drive that says, "if you do this, you'll get your pay at the end of the month." [...] what's the point?' His rhetorical question reflects a broader sentiment that the institutional framing of WBL undervalues students' labour and, by extension, their learning. When effort yields neither economic nor educational reward, attendance becomes difficult to justify.

In these accounts, students were absent not because they did not care, but because WBL had lost meaning for them. Students were not refusing to learn. They were articulating, through withdrawal, that their placements failed to provide learning in a meaningful sense. The monotony, lack of feedback, and absence of purpose collectively undermined their capacity to invest in WBL. These narratives suggest that the pedagogical power of WBL depends less on its resemblance to 'real work' and more on whether students perceive it as educationally significant. When workplaces rely on students as extra labour rather than as novices entitled to supervision, motivation erodes. Absence can here be understood as a quiet form of protest, expressing what students may find difficult to say within WBL.

Practical and physical barriers

While most accounts of absence were emotionally or socially or pedagogical grounded, a smaller group of students pointed to practical and physical barriers that disrupted attendance. In these accounts, absence arose from logistical difficulties, long commutes, illness, unclear instructions, or temporary loss of placement, rather than from lack of motivation or wellbeing. Even such 'neutral' explanations reveal how institutional inflexibility can amplify vulnerability.

Johanna (NR) explained that geographical distance often made attendance exhausting, 'Since I live quite far away, the best thing is when they [school] try to find placements, so I don't have to travel three hours to get there.' Her statement captures the material dimension of absence. When attending WBL demands hours of travel, students' energy become stretched thin. The expectation of regular presence under such conditions risks excluding those whose everyday lives are already precarious. Another example appears in the interview with Nathalie (NR), where she described how a simple misunderstanding about workplace rules led to several weeks without a placement, 'I was told I could wear a hat and headphones, but when I came they said I couldn't. Then it just didn't work out, and I had to wait three weeks for a new placement.' The student spent this period completing written school tasks instead, a temporary solution that nonetheless disrupted the continuity of her vocational learning. Similarly, illness could easily result in unplanned absence that the system was ill-prepared to accommodate. Chloé (HT) noted, 'I was sick the last weeks and it kind of felt like I was done there.' What might appear a minor episode of absence in administrative terms marked, for the student, an abrupt and premature ending of a learning experience.

These cases demonstrate that even seemingly straightforward absences, caused by illness, distance, or organisational gaps, reflect broader structural fragilities in how participation is managed. When placements are geographically distant or poorly coordinated, students shoulder the burden of adaptation. Their physical presence becomes contingent on workplaces flexibility. Thus, absence here signals not individual failure but the systemic vulnerability that relies on the goodwill of multiple actors without caring for the student's continuity.

Reflexive synthesis

Absence emerges as a relational and communicative response to conditions that undermine participation in WBL. Rather than indicating individual failure, it reflects disconnection from environments that do not provide sufficient safety, meaning, or support. For some students, absence was linked to psychological strain. For others, it arose from relational insecurity, lack of pedagogical purpose, or structural / organisational barriers that disrupted continuity. These findings illustrate that participation in WBL depends on more than physical presence. It

is shaped by whether students experience the workplace as a good environment that supports their learning and acknowledges their vulnerabilities. When such conditions are lacking, absence can be understood as an outcome of these circumstances rather than as a disciplinary issue. This perspective may reframe absence in VET from an individual deficit to an indicator of relational and pedagogical conditions. Absence may therefore become a potential source of insight into how WBL arrangements function.

Discussion

This article focuses on students who experience difficulties in WBL and/or in their vocational subjects for a range of reasons and examines how they make sense of their absence from WBL. These difficulties are not understood as being solely linked to formal diagnoses, but rather as situated experiences that emerge in the interaction between individual conditions and the pedagogical, relational, and organisational contexts of VET. Rather than framing these students as individually deficient, the analysis highlights how existing support structures fail to accommodate vulnerability in WBL. Withdrawal appeared not as indifference but as a situated response to conditions that restricted their possibilities for meaningful participation. Because the participants were students for whom WBL was already fragile, their narratives illuminate the points at which vocational learning environments fail to support continuity and pedagogical purpose. Existing studies often treat absenteeism as an administrative or behavioural problem. By foregrounding students who already encountered difficulties in vocational subjects, the present study addresses this gap and offers a nuanced account of how absence becomes meaningful within WBL.

Students' descriptions of psychological strain illustrate how emotional well-being shapes the very possibility of participating as newcomers in WBL. Within CoP, early participation depends on having a recognised role that enables newcomers to begin engaging and negotiating identity (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). For students who described overwhelming anxiety or exhaustion, these emotional states disrupted the stability required for such involvement. This confirms earlier research linking mental health difficulties to disengagement (Böhn & Deutscher, 2022; Vanneste et al., 2017) while extending it by showing how emotional overload undermines not only motivation but the relational conditions that make early participation legitimate. These students were unable to appear as subjects because the environment implicitly demanded a composed, 'fully functional' self (cf. Biesta, 2022). Their withdrawal therefore signals a collapse of the conditions for subjectification.

Experiences of insecurity and poor treatment similarly reveal the relational fragility of WBL. Prior studies have shown that disrespect, lack of supervision, and exclusion contribute to dropout and disengagement (Dagsland et al., 2015; Snell & Hart, 2008). The present findings deepen this by showing how such encounters erode the recognition that the theory of CoP identifies as central to learning. When students felt ignored or treated with hostility, their role as legitimate participants was compromised, and absence became a protective response rather than a failure of commitment. Biesta's notion of socialisation sheds further light. WBL is intended to induct students into professional norms, yet when these norms include indifference, sexism, or disrespect, socialisation becomes ethically troubling. Withdrawal thus expresses a refusal to internalise practices that threaten one's dignity, an aspect rarely emphasised in existing research.

Experiences of meaninglessness further highlight how pedagogical conditions shape students' willingness to remain engaged. Students described repetitive or marginal tasks that lacked developmental value, echoing research on the demotivating effects of limited task variation and insufficient feedback (Nielsen, 2016; Wyszynska Johansson, 2021). The present findings add theoretical nuance by showing that such conditions restrict access to core practices essential for vocational identity development (cf. Fuller & Unwin, 2003). Without meaningful engagement, students' trajectories stagnated, and absence may become an identity-based critique of the version of the vocation that the workplace presented. Biesta's (2022) qualification domain is also relevant here. When WBL fails to provide valued learning opportunities, participation loses its educational significance. Absence then becomes a response to environments that fall short across qualification, socialisation, and subjectification.

Practical and structural barriers, such as long commutes, gaps between placements, or unclear expectations, also contributed to absence. Prior work has shown that organisational conditions and discontinuities between school and workplace can undermine attendance and participation (Lannegrand-Willems et al., 2011; Mårtensson, 2020). This study extends such findings by demonstrating how these disruptions erode forms of coherence that the theory of CoP regards as vital for progressing towards fuller participation. From Biesta's perspective, these structural breaks diminish the stability needed for qualification, the continuity required for socialisation, and the autonomy central to subjectification. Even seemingly neutral absences therefore reflect relational and structural failures rather than individual shortcomings.

Findings of the present study point to several ways in which the field may be advanced. They show that absence in WBL is not merely a precursor to dropout nor solely an outcome of poor supervision (cf. Snell & Hart, 2008), but a form of relational communication that reveals when participation has become untenable.

The study also integrates psychological, relational, and organisational explanations and demonstrates how these interact in students' experiences. Last, the contribution of the combined use of CoP and Biesta's educational theory provides an understanding of VET and WBL as simultaneously social, pedagogical, and ethical. The theory of CoP clarifies how withdrawal marks a breakdown in the structures that support early participation, while Biesta shows how stepping back can also represent an attempt to preserve integrity when educational conditions fail to recognise vulnerability or agency. This allows absence to be interpreted both as a collapse of legitimate participation and as a response to harmful or unproductive WBL. Yet, both theoretical frameworks have limitations. The theory of CoP presumes relatively coherent and stable communities, whereas many students in this study encountered fragmented or weakly structured workplaces that offered limited opportunities for meaningful participation. Biesta's (2022) conceptualisation of subjectification provides fewer tools for analysing the material and organisational constraints that shape WBL. Acknowledging these limitations highlights the need for analytical approaches that recognise the unevenness of contemporary vocational learning environments.

By foregrounding students who struggled with WBL, the study highlights where VET systems are least stable. That is, where they are less able to accommodate vulnerability and provide conditions for meaningful participation. The students' accounts indicate that improving WBL requires attention not only to supervision and task design but to the emotional, relational, and structural conditions. Absence here becomes an indicator of how adequate VET supports young people to participate and appear as subjects within the world of work.

Conclusion

This article has examined how vocational students who in different ways experienced WBL as challenging or found aspects of their vocational subjects difficult respond to challenges encountered during WBL. By foregrounding students' own accounts, the study has shown that absence is not simply a matter of individual deficit or lack of motivation. It instead constitutes a response to environments in which safety or pedagogical meaning has fractured. In the findings, absence emerged as an embodied signal that the social and organisational arrangements of WBL had ceased to support the student's capacity to learn or appear as a subject.

The analysis demonstrates that WBL participation is contingent on more than administrative placement or physical presence. Drawing on concepts from the theory of CoP (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), the findings reveal how students' learning trajectories relied on access to legitimate participation,

meaningful tasks, and supportive relationships to school and supervisors. When these elements were missing, whether due to emotional overload, insecurity, lack of pedagogical purpose, or structural gaps, students' withdrawal functioned as an indicator of restrictive learning environments rather than as a personal failure. Biesta's (2022) theory of educational purpose further showed how absence reflects breakdowns in qualification, socialisation, and subjectification. In several cases, withdrawal expressed not only vulnerability but an ethical refusal to be shaped by practices experienced as harmful or meaningless. This perspective advances existing research by reframing absence as a form of student voice, a communicative act through which students articulate the limits of their participation when their needs or wellbeing are not heard. While previous studies have linked attendance to supervision, motivation, or structural fit, few have analysed absence as a relational response on the conditions of VET and WBL.

This may have implications for how VET is organised and supported. If absence is to be addressed meaningfully, interventions must target not only students' behaviour but the things that shape their participation. Ensuring continuity between school and workplace, strengthening supervisory practices, attending to students' emotional wellbeing, and creating expansive learning environments are essential strategies for supporting sustained engagement. These findings may have different implications depending on the VET model. In school-based systems with shorter WBL placements ensuring continuity between school and workplace, and providing structured follow-up during placements can be particularly important. In workplace-dominant or apprenticeship systems, where participation is more sustained and embedded in employment relations, it may be more important to have recognition within workplace communities, and participatory structures that support students' voice over time. All the things although have importance across both models. Absence should not be understood as an individual deficit but as feedback on the relational and pedagogical quality of WBL. Understood this way, absence provides educators and policymakers with a valuable resource, revealing where WBL fails to offer conditions where students can learn and appear as responsible participants. Addressing this is therefore both a practical concern and an ethical consideration for VET systems committed to equity and learning.

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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

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Abstract

Even though social and health care education (social- og sundhedsuddannelserne) in Denmark has existed since 1991, the amount of research in this field is limited. This scoping review aims to bring together the existing knowledge about social and health care education in Denmark in the attempt to produce an overview of research topics and findings. Hence, the scoping review explores what research in a Danish context has been interested in when researching social and health care education programmes since 1991. The first part of the review focuses on the research in two specific arenas: those of school, practices of school culture, teaching, and learning on the one hand, and those of apprenticeship, training, and learning on the other. The second part of the review examines the transversal complex interactions between school culture, teaching, learning, the students' subjectivity, communities etc., and how these factors affect students' motivation, participation, and retention throughout the educational processes. Furthermore, the review unfolds which aspects of social and health care education have been studied the most and which lack focus, thereby identifying potential knowledge gaps in the research into social and health care education.

Keywords: scoping review, vocational education, social and health care education, apprenticeship



Introduktion

Social- og sundhedsuddannelserne¹ i Danmark blev oprettet i 1991 og har siden 2008 været indlemmet i erhvervsuddannelsessystemet, som består af 101 erhvervsuddannelser med over 300 trin eller specialer (UddannelsesGuiden, 2025). Ligesom det gør sig gældende med erhvervsuddannelserne generelt, er frafaldet meget højt, eksempelvis på social- og sundhedsassistentuddannelsen, hvor 31–35 procent af eleverne er faldet fra efter tre år (Rambøll, 2024). Der er derfor brug for viden dels om frafald og gennemførelse på uddannelserne såvel som mere generel viden om, hvad der fungerer og hvilke udfordringsbilleder, der tegner sig.

Generelt har det været kendetegnende for erhvervsuddannelsesforskningen i Danmark, at den har været sparsom i omfang, præget af fragmenterede vidensmiljøer samt begrænset systematisk udvikling af samarbejdet mellem forskning og praksis (Uddannelses- og forskningsstyrelsen, 2022). Denne udvikling er dog forandret de senere år med både Center for Viden om Erhvervsuddannelser (CEVEU) og ForskningsCenter for Uddannelse på SOSU-området (FoCUS), som netop har til formål at styrke forskningen og samarbejdet omkring udvikling af viden til gavn for praksis.

Dette scoping review er et forsøg på at tage endnu et skridt i den retning og skabe overblik over noget af den forskning, der eksisterer på social- og sundhedsuddannelsesområdet. Reviewet er blevet til som en del af forskningsprojektet "Faglig tilblivelse og øget gennemførelse på SOSU H", som undersøger elevers forløb gennem social- og sundhedsuddannelserne med fokus på muligheder og barrierer for gennemførelse i skoledelen, oplæringsdelen på arbejdspladsen og koblingen mellem disse. I arbejdet med forskningsprojektet er der opstået et behov for at få et overblik over, hvad forskningen har interesseret sig for, hvad angår selve uddannelserne og hvilken viden der er produceret. Vi ønsker dermed at få overblik over den forskning, som har undersøgt problemstillinger relateret til både skoledelen af uddannelsen til social- og sundhedsassistent og -hjelper, oplæringsdelen, hvor eleverne er i oplæring på plejehjem, hjemmepleje, hospital, psykiatri, bosted og andre steder, hvor man bruger social- og sundhedsuddannet personale samt mere tværgående perspektiver. Dette scoping review er derfor udarbejdet med udgangspunkt i følgende undersøgelsesspørgsmål: *Hvad fokuserer forskningen i social- og sundhedsuddannelserne i Danmark på og hvad mangler der fokus på?*

Metodevalg og fremgangsmåde

Et scoping review er et systematisk litteraturstudie, som har til hensigt at afdække eksisterende litteratur i et givent felt med henblik på at identificere

metodiske og begrebsmæssige tendenser samt potentielle videnshuller (Daudt et al., 2013). Hvor et systematisk review eller en metaanalyse ville forudsætte en relativt homogen litteraturlæse og et mere effektorienteret forskningsspørgsmål, ligger scoping reviewets styrke i dets evne til at rumme variation og skabe analytisk tematisk overblik men med mindre stringente krav til kvalitets- og vurderingskriterier (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Levac et al., 2010). For at kunne etablere et analytisk præcist overblik har vi truffet to metodiske valg med betydning for de tekster, der er med i reviewet. For det første har vi valgt at zoome ind på den eksisterende forskning i en dansk kontekst og dermed udelade et internationalt perspektiv. Da social- og sundhedsuddannelserne er historisk, organisatorisk og lovgivningsmæssigt forankret i en dansk erhvervsuddannelsestradition, hvor vekselluddannelsesprincippet, arbejdsmarkedsparternes rolle og den kommunale forankring spiller en central rolle, vil inddragelsen af forskning fra andre lande med andre institutionelle rammer og reguleringsformer gøre det vanskeligere at skabe dette vidensoverblik, der har gjort og gør en forskel for praksis i Danmark. Dette skal ikke forstås som en antagelse om, at internationale perspektiver er irrelevante, men som et metodisk greb der muliggør en analytisk stringent kortlægning af et lille forskningsfelt, hvor en kontekstspecifik viden kan bidrage til at sikre praktisk anvendelighed.

For det andet har vi valgt kun at inddrage peer-reviewed forskning eller anden publiceret viden, der lever op til gængse forskningskriterier som gennemsigthed, systematik og relevans. Dette valg er truffet for at sikre sammenlignelighed på tværs af studier og for at kunne analysere feltets metodiske og teoretiske udvikling. Valget indebærer, at praksisrapporter og udviklingsprojekter uden tydelig metodisk redegørelse ikke er inkluderet. Selvom disse rummer værdifuld viden til gavn for praksis, repræsenterer de en anden vidensform, der ikke inkluderer gængse videnskabelige kvalitetskriterier og som det derfor ikke er muligt systematisk at sammenligne i en kortlægning.

Indeværende scoping review er udformet med udgangspunkt i Arksey og O'Malleys (2005, s. 22) foreslåede trin: 1) identifikation af forskningsspørgsmål, 2) identifikation af relevante studier, 3) udvælgelse af studier, 4) kortlægning af data og 5) rapportering af resultater. Forskningsspørgsmålet er udviklet med udgangspunkt i formålet for scoping reviewet og søgestrengen er udarbejdet med basis i denne. Søgestrengen anvendt er derfor:

- SOSU* OR "social- og sundhedsassistent*" OR "social- og sundhedshjælper*" OR "social- og sundhedsuddannelse*"

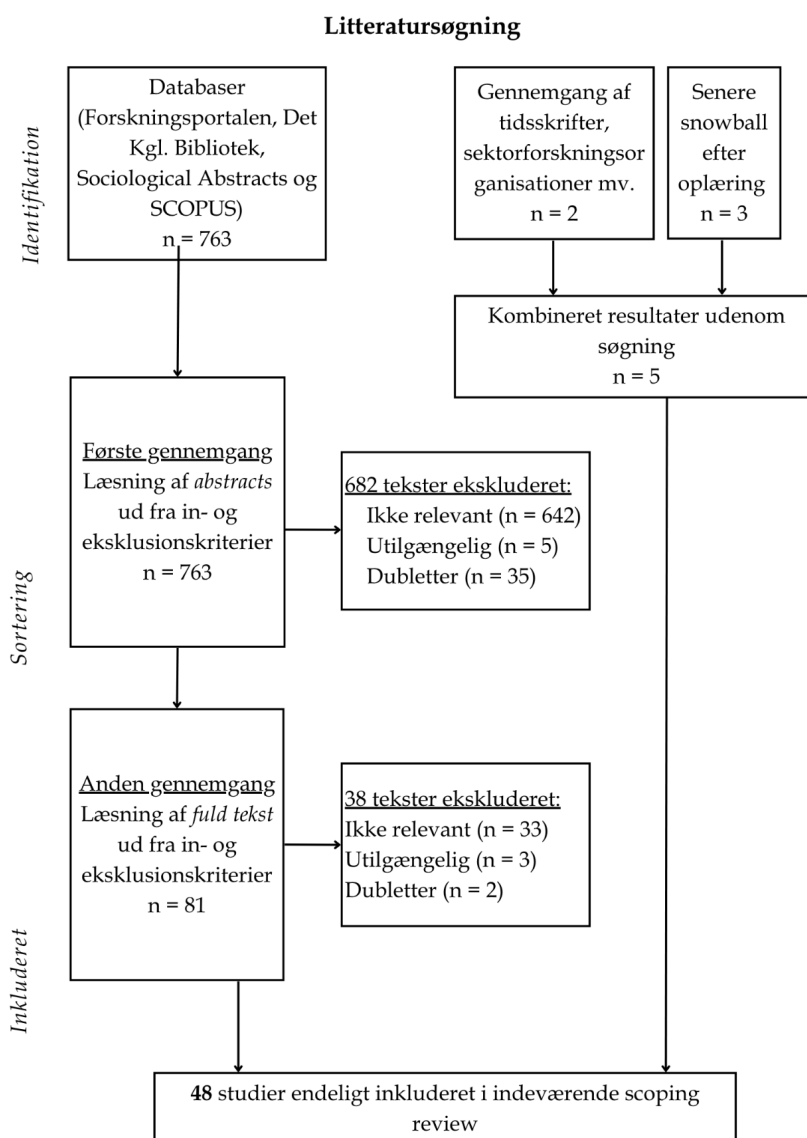
Litteratur til scoping reviewet er hovedsageligt fundet ved anvendelse af søgestrengen i følgende fire databaser: Forskningsportalen (275 resultater), Det Kongelige Bibliotek (470 resultater), Sociological Abstracts (7 resultater) og SCOPUS (11 resultater). Søgningen har således givet 763 resultater, som herefter

er gennemgået, først med læsning af abstracts siden af fuld tekst, med henblik på at in- eller ekskludere dem ud af fra følgende fire kriterier: 1) udgivelsesdato er mellem 1991 og reviewets udarbejdelse i 2023, 2) teksten undersøger social- og sundhedsuddannelserne i en dansk kontekst, 3) teksten omhandler helt eller delvist social- og sundhedsuddannelserne specifikt eller anvender social- og sundhedsuddannelserne som case og 4) teksten er peer-reviewed forskning eller på anden vis lever op til kriterierne for forskning og evaluering i forhold til afgrænsning, gennemsigtighed, valg af metoder, stringens etc. Som supplement til søgningen har vi gennemgået Det nationale forsknings- og analysecenter for velfærd (VIVE)'s og Professionshøjskolernes Vidensdatabase (UC Viden)'s databaser i overensstemmelse med Arksey og O'Malley's (2005) anbefaling om manuelt at gennemgå nøgleorganisationer og -tidsskrifter. Her har vi inkluderet to tekster, som levede op til reviewets kriterier, men ikke var dukket op i databaserne. Den oprindelige søgning er foretaget i medio 2023 og gentaget i medio 2024 med fokus på nyere publikationer i 2023 og 2024, hvoraf der ikke blev fundet nogen.

Relevante studier blev identificeret via en in- og eksklusionsproces opdelt i to faser. Første fase var baseret på gennemlæsning af abstracts, hvor 682 tekster blev ekskluderet. Den hyppigste årsag til eksklusion var, at teksterne var undervisningsmateriale, hvor 254 tekster blev sorteret fra. Den næst hyppigste årsag til eksklusion var, at emnet ikke omhandlede uddannelse. Her blev 149 tekster frasortet. Derudover var årsagerne til eksklusion, at teksten undersøgte forhold relateret til arbejde frem for uddannelse (128), at det ikke var peer-reviewed eller levede op til gængse kvalitetskriterier for forskning (82), at teksterne omhandlede en anden uddannelse end social- og sundhedsuddannelserne (28), at de ikke var tilgængelige (5) og én, som var udgivet før 1991 (1). De resterende 35 tekster var dubletter. Dette efterlod 81 tekster til anden fase. Disse blev læst i dybden med henblik på dels yderligere at frasortere tekster, der ikke levede op til reviewets inklusionskriterier, dels at skabe overblik over de inkluderende tekster. Der er tale om en dobbelt screeningsproces, hvor to eller flere forskere har gennemgået de inkluderende tekster.

I næste skridt, der også er inspireret af Arksey og O'Malley (2005), har vi for hver tekst systematisk noteret udgivelsestype, genstandsfelt, fokus, formål, tematikker, metode, teori og tekstens konklusioner, samt hvorvidt teksten in- eller ekskluderes. Dette muliggør dels en kvantitativ optælling af den type af forskning, der er lavet om uddannelsen siden opstart (forskningsrapporter, artikler, ph.d.'er mv.), dels en kvalitativ analyse af, hvilke spørgsmål forskningen har været optaget af, hvilke metoder er anvendt samt resultaterne af forskningen. I anden fase blev 38 tekster ekskluderet. Her var den største årsag til eksklusion, at teksten ikke var peer-reviewed eller levede op til gængse kvalitetskriterier, på baggrund af hvilket 25 tekster blev ekskluderet. Derudover var én tekst under-

visningsmateriale, fem havde et emne, som ikke er relevant for indeværende review, to undersøgte andre uddannelser end social- og sundhedsuddannelserne og tre var utilgængelige. Derudover var der to dubletter. Herefter gennemgik vi relevante tidsskrifter og sektorforskningsorganisationer og andre for eventuelle oversete publikationer, hvorefter to publikationer blev tilføjet. Sluttelig er der tilføjet tre tekster via snowball-metode med særligt fokus på oplæring i uddannelsesforløbet, da der var færre publikationer herom end forventet i vores oprindelige søgning. I det endelige review er dermed inkluderet 48 tekster. Oversigt over in- og eksklusionsprocessen ses i følgende flow chart (figur 1):



Figur 1. Flow chart over eksklusion og inklusion af tekster i indeværende scoping review.

Efter en fuldtekst-sortering og syntese af teksterne er resultaterne blevet sammenholdt og der er foretaget en inddeling af teksterne i tværgående tematikker. Med udgangspunkt i korte resuméer af hver af teksterne, har vi inddelt dem i tekster, der handlede om det samme, for eksempel fag og undervisning, trivsel, frafald og fastholdelse, oplæring og så videre. En del tekster har mere tværgående tematikker med fokus på sammenhæng og samspil, mens andre var mere rettet mod afgrænsede og arenaspecifikke temaer. Vi endte således i den endelige opdeling, som beskrives i det følgende.

Analyse: Scoping reviewets resultater

Analysen af de endelige tekster falder i to dele. Den første del handler om den forskning som har de to specifikke arenaer *skole* og *oplæring* som undersøgelsesfelt. Det er således forskning, som retter blikket mod bestemte praksisser i forhold til skolekultur og undervisning på den ene side og oplæring på den anden side. Den anden del af scoping reviewet handler om forskning, som ikke har disse arena-specifikke nedslag, men som i stedet undersøger de tværgående komplekse samspil, der sker når skolekultur, undervisning, oplæring, møder diskurser, elevernes subjektivitet, fællesskaber etc., og hvordan dette spiller ind i forhold til elevernes motivation for at være elev på social- og sundhedsuddannelserne. Der er i denne del fokus dels på elevernes *faglige tilblivelsesprocesser* og dels på *til- og fravalsprocesser* af uddannelsen.

Skolekultur, undervisning og fag

Dette tema indeholder 19 inkluderede bidrag, som omhandler følgende temaer: *praksis og læring*, *innovation*, *simulationsbaseret undervisning og læring* samt *klasserumskultur og trivsel*. I det følgende vil vi give et kort oprids over forskningen på disse områder.

Praksis og læring

Praksisnærhed og forholdet mellem teori og praksis er, som på andre erhvervsuddannelser, et centralt tema også på social- og sundhedsuddannelserne. Bøje et al. (2015) udfolder i en undersøgelse af forholdet mellem teori og praksis en række forskellige praktiseringer af dette i forhold til elever med forskellige typer af motivation for social- og sundhedsfaget samt uddannelse generelt (Bøje et al., 2015). Forholdet mellem teori og praksis er også i fokus i en forskningsartikel af Valero et al. (2014), hvori der præsenteres et nuanceret praksisbegreb og betydningen af klarhed, overgange og transfer diskuteres ved at kigge på grundfaget naturfag. De finder, at grundfaget ofte kobles til en formel undervisningspraksis og ikke relaterer sig til erhvervspraksis, og at der dermed er en udfordring med at tilrettelægge undervisningen, så eleverne får mulighed

for at deltage i forskellige erhvervsrettede praksisser. Artiklen peger på, at der skal være større klarhed om, hvornår der er tale om henholdsvis undervisningspraksis og erhvervspraksis samt fokus på overgange mellem dem (Valero et al., 2014).

Et scoping review af dansk forskning om læring på social- og sundhedsuddannelserne (Møller et al., 2021) peger på, at en overvejende del af forskningen i læring på social- og sundhedsuddannelserne har fokus på elevernes læring, læringsforhold og tilrettelæggelsen af læring frem for samspil og sammenhænge mellem elevens og medarbejderes læreprocesser og kollektive læringspraksisser. Der påpeges derudover også manglende forsker-praktikersamarbejde, hvor forskningen i højere grad er med til at udvikle den aktuelle praksis på uddannelserne. Tilsvarende efterlyses i en forskningsartikel en højere grad af etableret samarbejde mellem social- og sundhedsuddannelserne og forskningsverdenen (Nyhus Rohwedder & Thomassen, 2022).

Innovation

Omkring 2012–2017 er begrebet innovation i social- og sundhedsuddannelserne fremtrædende i litteraturen (Wegener, 2012; Wegener, 2013; Haslam et al., 2016; Sørensen et al., 2017). Således undersøger Wegeners ph.d.-afhandling (2013), hvordan sociale praksisser udfolder sig i social- og sundhedsuddannelserne i lyset af innovationsimperativer. Denne forskning viser, hvordan gennemgribende krav om innovation især påvirker uddannelserne i relation til professionelle kompetencer, arbejdsrutiner og værdier. I ph.d.-afhandlingen argumenteres der for, at innovation er en gennemgribende diskurs karakteriseret af ambivalens og modsætninger, som aktørerne i feltet både er modtagere og medskabere af (Wegener, 2013). I en forskningsartikel relateret til sin ph.d. diskuterer Wegener (2012) innovationsdiskursens betydning for innovation i praksis. Der konkluderes, at innovationsbegrebet har nemt ved at engagere diskursivt, men også at konkrete praksisforandringer foregår isoleret fra innovationsdiskursen og at konkrete innovative processer vil øge sandsynligheden for at skabe praksisforankret, bæredygtig udvikling (Wegener, 2012).

I 2016 viser en evaluering af et tværinstitutionelt workshopforløb om sundhedsteknologisk innovationstænkning hos erhvervsskoleelever (heriblandt social- og sundhedsuddannelserne) (Haslam et al., 2016), at samarbejdet mellem elever fra forskellige uddannelser øger respekten for andres såvel som ens egen faglighed samt øger bevidstheden om, at alle har noget at byde ind med i en innovationsproces. Konklusionen peger dog også på en række mere praktiske udfordringer med at planlægge en tværinstitutionel workshop, som går ud over fokus i denne sammenhæng (Haslam et al., 2016).

Foranlediget af den daværende regerings innovationsstrategi undersøger en forskningsrapport (Sørensen et al., 2017) fagligt entreprenørskab i erhvervs-

uddannelserne (herunder social- og sundhedsuddannelserne) gennem en kvalitativ analyse af, hvordan undervisning gennem entreprenørskab kan påvirke elevers læring, motivation og lyst til at deltage i uddannelse. Det konkluderes, at nogle elever profiterer af indsatsen og især engagerer udfordrede elever sig samt at mindre klassisk lærerstyring og mere proces og organisationsstyring kan berige og fremme motivation og læring (Sørensen et al., 2017).

Samlet har innovation siden 2012 haft en fremtrædende plads i social- og sundhedsuddannelserne men er også karakteriseret ved nogen ambivalens og modsætninger, ligesom det konkrete praksisrettede arbejde med innovation kan byde på nogle udfordringer men også fremmer motivation for nogle elever.

Simulationsbaseret undervisning og læring

Simulationsbaseret undervisning og læring, hvor elever sættes i simulerede praksissituationer, er et af de helt store temaer i forskningen i social- og sundhedsuddannelserne. I 2019 publiceres fra et udviklingsprojekt omhandlende simulationsbaseret undervisning (Aarkrog & Puge, 2019) og dennes betydning for elevernes motivation, forståelse, refleksion og anvendelse af det lærte. På baggrund af projektet konkluderes det, at simulationsbaseret undervisning generelt virker motiverende og engagerende for eleverne. Det gør det nemmere at lære teori, samt at observere, give feedback og reflektere over forskellige måder at udføre en handling på.

I 2021 igangsætter Aarkrog et udviklingsprojekt om simulationsundervisning i elevernes første praktikophold. Resultaterne af projektet viser blandt andet, at eleverne i simulationsugen oplever en intens læreproces, at deres bekymringer for udførelse af praktiske opgaver lettes og at de derudover får øget mulighed for at reflektere og lære af deres fejl. Socialt opnår eleverne en tættere tilknytning til oplæringsvejlederen og fællesskabet mellem eleverne styrkes. Derudover oplever eleverne en tættere kobling mellem skole og oplæring, ligesom oplærere og undervisere får et indblik i hinandens forskellige læringsarenaer (Aarkrog, 2023).

Aarkrog har derudover sammen med Jensen, Lyngholm og Bach (Jensen et al., 2022) undersøgt om kort intens VR-træning og debriefing kan give samme læringsudbytte som case-arbejde. Konklusionen er, at deltagerne husker VR-undervisningen bedre og tilmed har et signifikant højere niveau af tryghed i forhold til at hjælpe en borger efter undervisningen, fordi de er mere sikre på, hvordan de vil gå til en opgave i praksis end kontrolgruppen, som virker mere tøvende og ukonkrete (Jensen et al., 2022).

Møller et al. (2017) har undersøgt simulationsbaseret undervisning i forhold til tværfaglig undervisning for social- og sundhedsassistentelever og sygeplejestuderende. Artiklen konkluderer, at forløbet giver deltagerne bedre forståelser for egne og andres kompetencer, og at det er centralt at begge faggrupper faglig-

hed kommer i spil for patientens bedste. Specifikt for social- og sundhedsassistenteleverne bidrager forløbet også med refleksioner over deres kompetenceniveau i forhold til sygeplejersker og bestyrker deres egen rolle i særlige situationer (Møller et al., 2017). I en forskningsartikel (Møller, 2022a) med relation til Møllers ph.d.-afhandling (2022b) analyseres derudover en elevs fortælling under simulationsbaseret undervisning, hvori der skal træffes hurtige valg. Artiklen viser, hvordan tvivl og uventede situationer i omsorgsarbejdet faktisk har potentiale for at skabe læring, fordi det at give plads til tvivl kan reducere afmagt og mindske elevens følelse af at stå alene om udfordringerne. Der peges således på, at tvivlen med fordel kan fællesgøres og føre til læring.

Samlet set viser forskningen i simulationsbaseret undervisning på social- og sundhedsuddannelserne, at denne undervisningsform har stort potentiale for læring og motivation. Det ser således ud til, at simulationsbaseret undervisning styrker elevens motivation for læring, øger følelsen af tryghed i potentielt svære situationer, giver bedre kollegial forståelse, mindre tvivl og generelt øget læring. I det følgende forlader vi nu det mere indholdsmæssige i undervisningen og ser nærmere på forskningen i klasserumskultur og trivsel på social- og sundhedsuddannelserne.

Klasserumskultur og trivsel

Klasserumskultur og trivsel er også et fremtrædende tema i forskningen på social- og sundhedsuddannelsesområdet, som flere bidrag handler om. Lynggaard-Jensen og Wegener (2016) har undersøgt klasserumskultur, fællesskaber og gruppearbejde på social- og sundhedsuddannelsen i et aktionsforskningsprojekt. Konklusionen peger blandt andet på, at undervisere og eleverne sammen udvikler et fælles sprog og en fælles bevidsthed om klasserumskultur. Underviserne bliver dermed mere interesseret i at arbejde med elevperspektiver og mere opmærksomme på forskellige elevgrupper i gruppearbejdet. I tråd med dette har Jensen (2011) undersøgt, hvordan man skaber et inkluderende klasserum. Med udgangspunkt i kvalitative interviews og ved brug af diskursanalyser og positioneringsteori, vises det, hvordan diskurser om rummelighed, frafaldsbekæmpelse, uddannelsens status i samfundet og "eget ansvar" medfører særlige positioneringer og dermed eksklusioner af nogle elever i klasserummet. Opfordringen lyder på baggrund heraf, at skolen bør understøtte underviserne i at være opmærksomme på diskurser om "eget ansvar" og hvordan de konkret forholder sig til forskellige elevgrupper.

I 2007 viser en større undersøgelse af undervisningsmiljøerne på ungdomsuddannelser i en særskilt publikation på social- og sundhedsskolerne (Wegener, 2007), hvordan eleverne oplever en tæt sammenhæng mellem trivsel og læring, når de går i en god klasse, bliver behandlet som voksne, har et godt forhold til underviserne og får kompetent hjælp fra underviserne. Den viser også, at en tæt

kontakt mellem underviser og elev er vigtig, dels gennem kontaktlærerordningen og dels i den daglige kontakt også med fokus på omgangstonen mellem eleverne. Derudover peges på nødvendigheden af at have hjælpemidler til rådighed, at tilbyde individuelt tilpasset hjælp samt at styrke demokrati og ansvarlighed gennem elevinddragelse, for eksempel i undervisningsmiljøarbejdet.

Netop demokrati på erhvervsuddannelserne er noget som Duch og Skov (2023) også undersøger, nemlig elevernes erfaringer med demokrati og deres fremtidige forventninger til deres arbejdsliv. Dette viser, at nogle elever er meget demokratisk aktive og har positive erfaringer, som viser at formålet om at styrke den demokratiske deltagelse i erhvervsuddannelserne efterleves. Andre elever har dog svært ved at ytre sig, udøver en form for selvcensur og oplever i mindre udstrækning at have agens og handlemuligheder. Dette mener Duch og Skov kalder på opmærksomhed og didaktiske tilgange, som kan adressere dette. I en artikel undersøger Duch (2023) yderligere, hvilken viden om og erfaringer med demokrati kan elever få gennem skole og oplæring og viser skolers interesse for demokrati i undervisningen men også, hvor forskelligt dette gøres i praksis.

Forskningen i klasserumskultur og trivsel på social- og sundhedsuddannelserne viser samlet set, at dette fokus udvikler en større bevidsthed og fælles sprog herunder også bestemte in- og ekskluderende positioner samt kontakt mellem elever og mellem elever og undervisere. Vi skal i det følgende se nærmere på den del af forskningen i social- og sundhedsuddannelserne der handler om oplæring.

Oplæring

Til trods for at oplæring² på arbejdspladser er helt centralt i social- og sundhedsuddannelserne og tidsmæssigt udgør størstedelen af den samlede uddannelse, er oplæringen forskningsmæssigt meget mindre belyst end skoledelen. Dette tema indeholder 7 inkluderede bidrag som med deres store forskellighed viser hvor fragmenteret erhvervsuddannelsesforskningen i Danmark er.

I 2001 lavede Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut (EVA) en evaluering af uddannelseskvaliteten i social- og sundhedshjælperuddannelsen, hvor det blandt andet fremhæves, at både uddannelsens opbygning og sammenhængen mellem skole og praktik vurderes forskelligt af elever og undervisere, samt at der behov for at tydeliggøre mål og midler for enkelte uddannelsesdele.

I en ph.d.-afhandling undersøger Bisgaard (2018), hvordan elevers engagement og læring styrkes i oplæringen. Afhandlingen pointerer blandt andet, at engagement og læring styrkes med grundige forberedelser til oplæringen og i sammensætningen af arbejdsopgaver og de didaktiske fokusområder i de enkelte arbejdssituationer. Resultaterne viser også, at elever sjældent opnår fuldt status i praksisfællesskabet, samt at praksislæring kan føre til "sikkerhedsproblematiske

erfaringer” men også til selvstændighed, helhedsforståelse, indgåelse i både rutiner og udvikling af faget (Bisgaard, 2018).

I et litteraturstudie (Louw & Hansen, 2018) undersøges det, hvordan unge på social- og sundhedsuddannelserne såvel som på sygeplejerskeuddannelserne oplever deres uddannelsesliv. Det konkluderes, at faglige fællesskaber både med andre elever i oplæringen og med vejlederen har stor betydning, og at eksklusion fra de faglige fællesskaber i oplæringen kan føre til frafald fra uddannelsen. Desuden oplever eleverne udfordringer med at håndtere deres faglige identitet som elev under uddannelse og som kollega på en arbejdsplads og føler sig i nogen udstrækning ikke klædt på til at tage ansvar for deres egen læring i oplæringen (Louw & Hansen, 2018).

For at håndtere sådanne udfordringer har Nyhus Rohwedder (2022) udviklet en model for praksisforbedrende læringssamtaler mellem elev og lærer, praktikant og vejleder, som kan anvendes til igangsættelse og kvalificering af læringssamtaler, som har til formål at forbedre praksis. Modellen viser fire idealtypiske læringssamtaler: rådgivning, fejlretning, monitorering og udforskning, der kan benyttes til at blive klogere på hvordan man for eksempel som oplæringsvejleder kan forbedre og kvalificere læring.

I et pilotprojekt undersøger Aarkrog (2022), hvordan simulationsbaseret læring indvirker på udvalgte oplæringsmål i elevernes overgang fra skole til første oplæringsperiode på hovedforløbet, samt på deres motivation for at fortsætte på uddannelsen og på deres opnåelse af oplæringsmålene. Projektet konkluderer, at eleverne i en forsøgsgruppe med simulationsbaseret læring har bedre kontakt til oplæringsvejleder end dem i kontrolgruppe. Det ser således ud til, at dette kan have betydning for, hvordan man falder til på oplæringsstedet. Der viser sig dog ingen systematiske forskelle på de to elevgrupper i forhold til oplæringsmål og motivation (Aarkrog, 2022).

I et mere administrativt perspektiv undersøger Jørgensen et al. (2006) manglen på praktikpladser og årsager til, at godkendte praktikpladser ikke tager elever. Her skiller social- og sundhedsuddannelserne sig ud, da alle elever er sikret en plads men der er alligevel store geografiske forskelle, hvor fokus på rekruttering og fastholdelse for eksempel i hovedstadsområdet er centralt. Undersøgelsen viser også, at unge elever opfatter praktiksteder som mere krævende end de ældre elever og de unge er dermed mere udsatte. På samme måde opleves elever, der har sproglige udfordringer, også som særligt ressourcekrævende for praktiksteder (Jørgensen et al., 2006).

I en undersøgelse af unges forhold til arbejdsmiljø og risikoadfærd i arbejdet (Nielsen & Sørensen, 2009) viser en rapport blandt andet, at social- og sundhedsassistentelever taler graden af farlighed i praktikken ned, også selvom nogle allerede har haft arbejdsskader. Sikkerhedsforanstaltninger fortælles ofte frem som virkelighedsfjerne regler, der ikke tager hensyn til omsorgsarbejdets

kompleksitet og uforudsigelighed og der er derfor tale om manglende accept af at risikoadfærd opleves som en nødvendighed og at opgaver i praktikken kan udgøre en risiko (Nielsen & Sørensen, 2009).

Forskningen i oplæring på social- og sundhedsuddannelserne er således meget spredt med nedslag i både praksisfællesskaber, fokus på sikkerheden samt betydningen af alder, sproglige udfordringer og mere administrative forhold for frafald. Generelt er det iøjnefaldende, hvor sparsom forskningen i oplæringsdelen er taget i betragtning, hvor stor en del af deres uddannelse det udgør. Vi vender nu blikket mod den anden del af forskningen i social- og sundhedsuddannelserne, som omhandler de mere tværgående samspil i forhold til faglig tilblivelse og til- og fravalg af uddannelserne.

Faglig tilblivelse

Vi bevæger os nu ud i de mere tværgående temaer i forskningen, hvor vi starter med at se nærmere på det vi samlet set kalder faglig tilblivelse – altså de processer hvor igennem elever tilegner sig faglige kompetencer og opbygger deres faglige identitet (Davies, 2000; Jensen, 2012). Dette tema indeholder 8 inkluderede bidrag, som omhandler perspektiver der går på tværs af skoledelen og oplæringsdelen af uddannelsen.

Jensens ph.d. (2012) undersøger social- og sundhedselevs læring i samspillet mellem skole og praktik med fokus på klasserum, praktik og elevtilblivelser gennem såkaldte fortællespor, praksisser og samfundets diskurser. Der fremhæves tre analytiske fortællespor; det primære som er sygepleje (at gøre en forskel), sekundært om at være lønarbejder (arbejdsforhold) og tertiært et spor der kaldes husmor-fortællesporet (det omsorgsfulde og almindelige). Det konkluderes, at positionen som social- og sundhedselev handler om at kunne tage ansvar for egen læring, hvilket er en position, mange elever har svært ved at kunne indgå i. Dertil kommer, at underviserne er fanget mellem et ønske om at få alle elever godt gennem uddannelsen og bekymringen om, at nogle elever ikke er i stand til at varetage arbejde med ældre (Jensen, 2012). I forlængelse heraf undersøger Jensen (2013) også på social- og sundhedselevs vej mod en faglig identitet. Her vises det, hvordan det er op til eleverne selv at navigere i de forskellige fortællespor i mødet med borgerne. Dette kan være svært for eleverne at reflektere over, og uddannelserne mangler fokus på at skabe de nødvendige refleksionsrum.

Lehn-Christiansen undersøger i sin ph.d.-afhandling (2011) samt i en artikel (2013b), hvordan sundhed og sundhedsfremme praktiseres på social- og sundhedshjælperuddannelsen. Lehn-Christiansen viser blandt andet, at social- og sundhedseleverne forventer at kunne varetage opgaver inden for sundhed for den enkelte borger, men tiltroen til om eleverne faktisk kan dette er lav. Samtidig påpeges det, at social- og sundhedshjælper elevernes fagligheder ikke altid

kommer nok i spil på grund af arbejdets organisering, hvor nogle faglige handlinger kun må udføres af sygeplejersker. Eleverne er dermed i et krydsfelt mellem myndig og umyndig (Lehn-Christiansen, 2011, 2013b). Elevernes egen sundhed anses derudover som et individuelt ansvar, som nogle elever lever op til, mens andre elever, særligt i minoritetsgrupper, har sværere ved dette. Afhandlingen viser også, at elevernes færdigheder og kompetencer ikke altid kommer i spil, ligesom de forventes både at kunne deres faglighed og være gode til at skabe relationer, hvilket ikke altid spejler uddannelsens socialpædagogiske profil (Lehn-Christiansen, 2011).

Bøje et al. (2014) undersøger i et aktionsforskningsprojekt match og mismatch mellem elever og den kultur, de er elever i. Projektet finder at i et match er eleven i stand til at kommunikere med underviserne på positiv vis og stiller relevante faglige spørgsmål, som fremmer deres identitetsprocesser. I et mismatch kæmper de elever, der forhandler klasseidentitet med sine undervisere og ikke har dansk som førstesprog, med at blive anerkendt for sin faglighed fremfor udelukkende at blive set som en med sproglige vanskeligheder.

I Livengs ph.d.-afhandling (2007) samt forskningsartikel (2006) undersøges det, hvad der sker når social- og sundhedshjælpernes orienteringer møder arbejdsmarkedet og "virkeligheden" både under uddannelse og efter. Liveng fremhæver tre hovedpointer. For det første spiller den enkelte elevs livshistorie en stor rolle for deres valg om tage social- og sundhedsuddannelsen. For det andet er en drivkraft at udøve omsorg, som er en væsentlig motivation særligt for de kvindelige elever i faget. For det tredje er det en central pointe, at der ikke mangler motivation for omsorgsarbejde, men de ydre omstændigheder såsom lav løn, lav social status og manglende samfundsmæssig anerkendelse, står i stor kontrast til de kvindelige elevers omsorgsorientering. Tilsvarende sætter Dahl (2000) fokus på omsorgskundskaber og behovet for nye måder at indlære omsorgskompetencer på. Dahl peger blandt andet på, at det er centralt at tage udgangspunkt i elevers allerede eksisterende omsorgskundskaber, hvilket også styrker deres selvstændighed og evne til refleksion.

Samlet set peger forskningen om elevers faglige tilblivelser på social- og sundhedsuddannelsen på udfordringer i match mellem egne og skolekulturens forventninger, uoverensstemmelser mellem motivation for omsorg og regler på arbejdsmarkedet, dilemma mellem forventninger om at tage et stort ansvar og mistilliden til at de kan leve op til samt social- og sundhedsuddannelsen manglende anerkendelse og status i samfundet.

Til- og fravalg af uddannelsen

Dette er et relativt omfattende tema og indeholder 14 inkluderede bidrag, som omhandler en række perspektiver på emnet. I 2022 udgiver VIVE (Larsen & Jakobsen, 2022) et overblik over eksisterende litteratur om rekrutterings-

udfordringer og mangel på arbejdskraft i velfærdsfagene. I forhold til social- og sundhedsuddannelsen, viser det, at der mangler arbejdskraft, ledighedsprocenten er meget lav, der er meget ufaglært arbejdskraft på området og det forventes at manglen på arbejdskraft vil stige i takt med, at der kommer flere ældre. Der tegnes desuden et billede af, at optagelsen på social- og sundhedsuddannelsen er faldet samt at der er et stort frafald på hovedforløbene, og undersøgelsen peger på, at dårligt image, praksischoke og faglige og personlige udfordringer kan ligge til grund.

Social- og sundhedsuddannelsens image uddybes ligeledes i et andet bidrag (Lauritzen et al., 2022), som viser, hvordan stigmatiserende og negative associationer blandt elever i grundskolen og andre ungdomsuddannelser og i medierne, dårligt arbejdsmiljø og medarbejdere uden kvalifikationer spiller en rolle for social- og sundhedsuddannelsens image, som kan føre til frafald. Omvendt fremhæver social- og sundhedselever selv et mere positivt image knyttet til komplekse arbejdsopgaver, engagerede og omsorgsfulde medarbejdere samt højt fagligt niveau.

Samlet viser forskningen, at rekrutteringsudfordringerne hænger sammen med strukturelle og arbejdsmæssige forhold såvel som social- og sundhedsuddannelsernes image. Der har dog også i forhold til rekruttering og valg af uddannelsen været et særskilt fokus på betydningen af køn, hvilket vi kigger nærmere på i det næste.

Kønnede valg

I forlængelse af føromtalt ph.d.-afhandling, undersøger Lehn-Christiansen i en artikel (2013a) forestillinger om "den gode elev" i social- og sundhedsuddannelserne, og hvordan disse hænger sammen med køn, klasse og seksualitet (Lehn-Christiansen, 2013a). Der konkluderes, at eleverne oplever at skulle leve op til en række normer og sociale koder for kvindelig (heteroseksuel) middelklasseelev, hvor de hverken er for meget eller for lidt i deres påklædning, sprog og væremåde. Dette kan således være medvirkende til frafald, også blandt heteroseksuelle mænd, der eksempelvis kan opleve at de skal "forsvare" deres seksualitet på grund af valg af et fag der opfattes som kvindeligt (Lehn-Christiansen, 2013a).

I Wohlgemuths ph.d.-afhandling (2010) undersøges mænds begrundelser af og erfaringer med at vælge en omsorgsuddannelse og -karriere. Den peger på vigtigheden af videreuddannelse, gode jobmuligheder/jobgaranti og omsorgsperspektivet. Dertil belyser ph.d.-en et makro policyniveau, hvori det tydeliggøres, at systemet skal indtænke mænds tilvalg af omsorgsuddannelser ikke som en nødvendighed men som et arbejde, som mænd også kan brænde for og efterspørge som meningsfulde arbejdsliv.

Brandt undersøger i sin ph.d.-afhandling (2013) sammenhænge mellem livsbaner og valg af erhvervsuddannelse med fokus på betydningen af køn for gennemførelse og frafald. Afhandlingens hovedkonklusioner lyder, at valget på den ene side er emotionelt og på den anden side også har med strukturelle og historiske omstændigheder at gøre. Kønnede forventninger til valg af uddannelse har en betydning, og da normen er, at kvinder bør uddannes inden for omsorg og pleje, bliver der overensstemmelse mellem kognitive erfaringer og sociale strukturer, der får betydning for tilvalg og fravalg af omsorgsuddannelse. Det understreges, at normerne for hvad der er kvindeligt og mandligt, også inden for faget, opretholdes af både mænd og kvinder.

Bloksgaard (2009) undersøger barrierer for, at flere mænd vælger og bliver i social- og sundhedsfaget og konkluderer, at når fag er henholdsvis feminint eller maskulint konnoteret, så har dette indflydelse på valg af uddannelse og beskæftigelse. Bloksgaard peger på barrierer som dårligt og forældet image, en lav løn, praksischoke, at uddannelsesvejledning er kønnet og at omgivelserne kan virke uforstående eller fordømmende over for mænd der søger social- og sundhedsfaget. Mænd bliver således mødt med en række fordomme, herunder spørgsmål om deres seksualitet og mangel på maskulinitet. anbefalingerne er at opdatere fagets image, benytte sig af mandlige rollemodeller, rekrutterings- og vejledningsmateriale til mænd og at skabe faglige fællesskaber for mænd i social- og sundhedsfaget, for eksempel gennem mentorordninger (Bloksgaard, 2009). Hvad angår mænd i faget, undersøgte Weber og Baagøe Nielsen (1997) mænds erfaringer med SOSU-uddannelsens daværende indgangsforløb og konkluderer, at mændene er optaget af fast arbejde, indkomst og videre muligheder, af omsorgspleje og at indgangsforløbet var med til at åbne for et blik for det mere brede felt af omsorgsarbejde.

Det gentages således i forskningen, at social- og sundhedsuddannelserne i høj grad tillægges feminine værdier og primært tiltrækker kvinder mens de mænd, der faktisk vælger uddannelserne, på trods af at de møder megen kulturel og samfundsmæssig modvind, finder at der er plads til maskulint kønnede værdier og omsorgsarbejde. I det følgende skal vi se på, hvad forskningen viser af forskellige tværgående perspektiver i forhold til fravalg af uddannelserne.

Tværgående perspektiver på fravalg

Allerede i 2004 blev social- og sundhedsuddannelsernes historie, optag og afbrud af uddannelse afdækket via en litteraturgennemgang (Pedersen, 2004), der viste, at 95 procent af social- og sundhedseleverne er kvinder, som har været beskæftiget inden for social- og sundhedsområdet inden påbegyndt uddannelse. I 2004 var afbrudsprocenten for social- og sundhedselever 20 procent, hvilket var det samme som andre erhvervs- og ungdomsuddannelser. Også dengang skete de fleste fravalg af uddannelsen særligt i den første praktikperiode og allerede

dengang nævnes "praksischok" som en af årsagerne. Det fremhæves i litteraturgennemgangen at årsagerne til afbrydelse af uddannelsen falder under tre hovedgrupper: De praktikrelaterede som blandt andet handler om, at man bruges som billig arbejdskraft, kun får ensformige opgaver eller finder ud af, at uddannelsen ikke var noget for dem alligevel. De personlige årsager som blandt andet sygdom, barsel, økonomiske forhold eller familieproblemer, samt skolerelaterede frafaldsårsager, som ikke forekommer ofte, omhandler at uddannelsen opleves enten for fagligt nem eller for krævende (Pedersen, 2004).

Relationer og fællesskabers betydning står centralt i en frafaldsanalyse af velfærdsuddannelserne (Tanggaard & Wegener, 2012), som konkluderer, at institutionerne har mere brug for organisatorisk viden og sammenhæng end for nye fastholdelsesinitiativer. I analysen peger elever på relationer, tilhørsforhold og oplevelsen af at blive inkluderet i et læringsmiljø som noget af det mest afgørende for deres trivsel og muligheder for at gennemføre uddannelsen. Det fremhæves også som centralt at opleve faget forud for uddannelsesvalget, hvor det især er de kropslige, oplevelsesbaserede møder med faget, der betyder noget. Det er også centralt at udvikle kompetencerne til at være en del af et fællesskab og at indgå i den direkte kontakt med mennesker, der behøver hjælp og som er syge og døende. Dette eksistentielle perspektiv er centralt for social- og sundhedsuddannelserne også i forhold til frafald (Tanggaard & Wegener, 2012).

I 2006 undersøger Andersen og Juhl (2006) gennem en spørgeskemaundersøgelse sammenhængen mellem undervisningsmiljø og frafald på erhvervsuddannelserne herunder social- og sundhedsuddannelserne. En central konklusion i undersøgelsen er, at det sociale undervisningsmiljø, forstået som tryghed, lærernes faglighed og formidlingsevner, omgangstone og social omgang med klassekammerater, har en positiv effekt på fuldførelse af uddannelse. Således giver høj tilfredshed med det sociale undervisningsmiljø mindre sandsynlighed for frafald eller overvejelser herom. Det fysiske undervisningsmiljø, forstået som pladsforhold, vedligeholdelse af skolen, udendørsarealer og adgang til IT-udstyr, vurderes ikke til at have en selvstændig effekt på frafaldstilbøjelighed.

I 2011 fremhæver en evaluering af social- og sundhedsskolernes anvendelse af rekrutterings- og fastholdelsesmidler (Pedersen & Hjermov, 2011) potentialerne ved at skifte fokus fra at ville øge tilgangen til uddannelsen til et fokus på at kvalificere overgangen mellem skole og praktik samt at intensivere samarbejdet med praktiksteder. Evalueringen viser derudover blandt andet, at der er en organisatorisk forankring af frafaldsindsatser samt et styrket samarbejde med andre uddannelsesinstitutioner og Ungdommens Uddannelsesvejledning.

På trods af at motivationen for omsorgsarbejdet fylder meget for valget af social- og sundhedsuddannelsen, er frafaldet stadig stort. Vi ser her, hvordan dette tilskrives en række faktorer, som praksischok, der har floreret i 20 år, såvel

som tilhørsforhold og inklusion i læringsmiljøet samt et stort fokus på overgange mellem skole og praktik.

Særlige grupper og indsatser

Det sidste tema inden for forskningen i til- og fravalg af social- og sundhedsuddannelsen handler om fokus på indsatser for særlige elevgrupper. I 2022 viser en forskningsrapport (Ibsen, 2022) om støtte særligt i forhold til fastholdelse af sårbare social- og sundhedselever, at omfanget af elever som har vanskeligheder med deltagelse i uddannelsen kan opleves som en byrde for vejledere og skabe frafald af elever. Dette kobles især til "praktikchok", som ofte opleves af sårbare elever og som kan afhjælpes af overgangstiltag som for eksempel forventningsafstemning, vejlederbesøg og støttesamtaler til dem, der har det sværest. Praktikvejledere er helt afgørende for at hjælpe elever ind i det faglige fællesskab samt løsning af opgaver. I den forbindelse nævnes det, at oplæringsmål kan erstattes med elevens egne mål eller fokus på det de selv har svært ved at lære. Uddannelsen kan med fordel for de sårbare elever tilrettelægges således, at eleverne er tilknyttet primært et oplæringssted, hvorved de får bedre vilkår for at indgå og deltage i det faglige fællesskab, som er vigtigt for gennemførelse af uddannelsen (Ibsen, 2022).

Et nyere studie fra VIVE (Sparre & Nielsen, 2023) har fokus på den gruppe af social- og sundhedselever med flygtninge og migrationsbaggrund, der vælger uddannelsen ud fra en motivation om at få et arbejde og dermed muligheden for opholdstilladelse i Danmark. Det viser, at for personer med asyl- og arbejdsmigrant status er social- og sundhedsuddannelserne og det efterfølgende sikrede fast arbejde og fast indkomst en vej til (mere) sikkerhed og en permanent opholdstilladelse, selvom de enkelte kan have haft drømme om andre uddannelse- og karriereveje. Kortere uddannelser, hvor man dermed hurtigere kan få fast arbejde, samtidig med mulighed for løn undervejs i praktik, er derfor attraktive for at nå målet om en større sikkerhed.

I en ældre evalueringsrapport fra EVA (Wegener et al., 1996) var formålet at evaluere effekten på støtteaktiviteter for elever med anden etnisk baggrund end dansk. Rapporten kommer med tre centrale konklusioner. For det første, at det er vigtigt, at det er tydeligt hvem elever, ansatte og samarbejdspartnere skal henvende sig til, hvis der er spørgsmål eller problemstillinger. For det andet, at der er gode erfaringer med informationsmøder, sprogpraktikker og vejledningsmøder for det de kalder "tokulturelle elever" - også før og under ansøgningsproces. Ligeledes ses der god erfaring med tæt samarbejde med sprogskoler og sagsbehandlere. Og for det tredje konkluderes det, at erfaringerne med lektiecaféer og målrettede tilbud mod tokulturelle elever har været blandet; nogle positive andre ubrugte. Her understreges det, at tillid til personen bag tilbuddet er centralt for eleverne (Wegener et al., 1996).

Samlet viser forskningen i fastholdelsestiltag for elever med særlige behov samt elever med minoritetsetnisk baggrund, at det er centralt at der er fokus på forventningsafstemning samt hjælp og støtte undervejs med både faglige og personlige forhold. Den oplæringsansvarlige har en helt afgørende rolle såvel som det at hjælpe eleverne ind i det faglige fællesskab, som kan have afgørende betydning for gennemførelse af uddannelsen.

Diskussion og konklusion

Dette scoping review har haft til formål at skabe et samlet overblik over den forskningsbaserede viden om social- og sundhedsuddannelserne i Danmark siden deres etablering i 1991. Gennemgangen viser et felt, der på den ene side er kendetegnet ved tematisk bredde og metodisk variation, men på den anden side også ved store forskelle i tyngde og betydelig fragmentering. Samlet peger resultaterne på et forskningsfelt, hvor bestemte tematikker – særligt simulationsbaseret undervisning, klasserumskultur og frafald – har opnået relativ konsolidering, mens andre områder, herunder oplæringsdelen og samspillet mellem institutionelle niveauer, fremstår underbelyste.

Et centralt fund i reviewet er, at forskningen i høj grad er praksisnær og ofte udviklet i tæt relation til konkrete udviklingsprojekter eller lokale problemstillinger. Dette vidner om et felt med stærk kobling til uddannelsesinstitutionernes aktuelle udfordringer. Samtidig betyder denne praksisnærhed, at forskningen i mindre grad fremstår kumulativ og teoretisk konsolideret. Studierne er ofte tematiske nedslag snarere end led i længerevarende forskningsindsatser, og der ses et behov for mere systematiske videreudviklinger af begreber, metoder og analytiske perspektiver på tværs af studier. Dette hænger sammen med de strukturelle vilkår for et relativt lille forskningsfelt, der historisk har haft begrænsede forskningsressourcer, hvilket netop understreger behovet for mere sammenhængende og langsigtede forskningsindsatser, som med udgangspunkt i det praksisnære kan bidrage til teoretisk fordybelse og akkumulering af viden.

Et andet centralt fund i reviewet er en tydelig asymmetri mellem forskningen i skoledelen og forskningen i oplæringsdelen. På trods af at oplæringen tidsmæssigt udgør en væsentlig del af uddannelsen, er denne arena markant mindre udforsket. Hvor skoledelen er genstand for analyser af didaktik, klassekultur og innovation, fremstår oplæringen primært belyst gennem enkeltstående studier om praksisfællesskaber, sikkerhed eller særlige elevgrupper. Denne skævhed rejser et centralt spørgsmål omkring den viden der prioriteres i forskningen, og hvilke dele af uddannelsens virkelighed der dermed bliver mindre synlige. Oplæringen udgør en kompleks organisatorisk og relationel kontekst, hvor elever indgår i skiftende arbejdskulturer og magtstrukturer. En styrket

forskningsindsats på dette område vil kunne bidrage til en mere helhedsorienteret forståelse af vekselluddannelsens dynamikker, herunder hvordan ansvar, læring og professionel identitet formes i spændingsfeltet mellem skole og praksis.

Et tredje centralt fund er den gennemgående problemorientering omkring frafald og fastholdelse. Frafald fremstår som en vedvarende analytisk og politisk reference, der strukturerer forskningsinteressen. Denne orientering er forståelig i lyset af sektorens rekrutteringsudfordringer, men den kan samtidig medføre, at uddannelsen primært forstås gennem en individualiserende mangeloptyk og at man overser betydningen af længerevarende processer omkring faglig tilblivelse, omsorgsorientering og menings-skabelse. En fremtidig forskningsagenda kunne med fordel balancere frafaldsperspektivet med analyser af, hvad der konstituerer bæredygtige lærings- og professionsfællesskaber især i oplæringsdelen og hvordan faglighed udvikles over tid med fokus på hvad der understøtter dette.

Afgrænsningen til forskningslitteratur i en dansk kontekst har muliggjort en analytisk sammenlignelig og kontekstnær kortlægning af feltet, som indebærer, at internationale perspektiver ikke er inddraget. En komparativ analyse med internationale studier ville kunne bidrage til at synliggøre, hvilke problemstillinger der er specifikt danske, og hvilke der er strukturelt forbundet med sundheds- og omsorgsuddannelser mere generelt. Ligeledes har afgrænsningen til peer-reviewed og metodisk transparente publikationer udeladt erfaringer fra udviklingsprojekter og praksisrapporter. En syntetisering af den viden, der samlet set tegner sig i disse, vil kunne bidrage med indsigt i potentialet for systematiske videreudviklinger af begreber, metoder og indsatser, der kan styrke feltet. På denne baggrund ser vi dermed flere centrale vidensbehov: 1) Mere dybdegående forskning i oplæringsdelen, herunder organisatoriske vilkår, vejledningspraksisser og relationer i skiftende fællesskaber. 2) Langsigtede studier af faglig tilblivelse, der følger elever gennem hele uddannelsesforløbet og ind i arbejdsmarkedet. 3) Analyser af institutionelle og strukturelle rammer, herunder styringsformer, reformer og arbejdsmarkedsforhold, og deres betydning for uddannelsens indhold og identitet. 4) Styrkelse af kumulative forskningsprogrammer, hvor begreber og metoder videreudvikles systematisk på tværs af projekter. Samlet set, vil en mere sammenhængende og forskningsmæssigt forankret vidensopbygning om uddannelsernes pædagogiske, organisatoriske og professionsdannende dimensioner, kunne styrke social- og sundhedsuddannelsernes centrale rolle i velfærdssamfundet fremover.

Slutnoter

- ¹ Social- og sundhedsuddannelserne består af uddannelserne til social- og sundhedsassistent, som varer 3 år og 10 måneder og social- og sundhedshjælper, som varer 2 år og 2 måneder.
- ² Undervisningsministeriet ændrede terminologien på erhvervsuddannelsesområdet fra januar 2022, så "praktik" fremover benævnes "oplæring" (jf. Børne- og undervisningsministeriet, 2020), i nærværende artikel anvender vi oplæring i artikler efter denne dato og praktik i artikler før.

Om forfatterne

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