



Learning at work and at school

A VET student perspective on the strengths and weaknesses of dual training

Structure of presentation

- Danish students in vocational education and training (VET);
- Motivation for choosing VET;
- Two learning environments;
- Work-based training;
- School-based education and training;
- School-work interaction;
- Teacher/trainer roles and qualifications;
- Conclusion

Students in VET

”Young people here are far from unbound zapping, but want a working life where they can find their identity in their work (”being someone, doing something”), which implies that you are active, you are of value to others, you can see results, be creative, solve problems and tasks, develop self-confidence, and be part of a(n imagined) community” (Larsen, 2006, p. 107)

Motivation

”The media are not occupied with work, and especially not old-fashioned physical work, but young people who choose to enter a vocational education and training programme, they are! To them, identity is not only about prestige, but also about ”being able to” and ”mastering”” (Larsen, 2006, p. 103)

Motivation

”But as they say, this is a vocational education and training programme, we are to use our hands, not our heads” car mechanic student.

Work-based training

”In the company, you are treated as an adult” car mechanic student.

”We learn a lot at school, which we cannot use in reality. All the stuff we learn at school has to do with the regulations, and of course the teachers’ experiences, however the most important stuff, we learn from the journeymen in the company” car mechanic student.

”It’s more real, this is, I think; I’m part of it, this is everyday life for a car mechanic” car mechanic student.

Identity

”You jump into your trousers, and then, then you’re a landscape gardener, or you feel like one, and then you start working... and then you know, that you really are one” landscape gardener student.

”Before starting on this programme, I had not the same self-confidence... as further into the programme. Let me give you an example, we were working at some factory, and somebody calls, ”Electrician!” My God, he is calling for me! I was surprised ... electrician ... well, I have become something... Yeah, maybe I have also gained more self-confidence... because I have chosen this myself and found out, well, this is something I can do, and I’m actually good at it” Electrician student.

School-based education and training

”Yeah, but it [school] is just like a huge concrete block, because you come here, well, most of them who come here, they haven’t really showed interest in school, and ”great, now we are off to learn some craft”, and then suddenly natural science is shoved in your face, and physics, chemistry and math at extended level. And now me, I have never had it, so it was like being hit by a grenade, although I came through, even though I had to add 15 extra weeks, but that’s ok, I guess?!” car mechanic student

School-based education and training

Theory and practice

”At school, you learn how you ought to do it. Whereas at work, you take it easier cause there ain’t time enough. But it is good to know how it ought to have been done” florist student

”There is stuff which has really made me sweat while working in my company and then it has been explained to me when I got back to school. I have also experienced that I during work-based training have carried out tasks quite mechanically, and when I got back to school and was taught about these tasks, then I got an understanding of the underlying principles. Besides the fact that it is more satisfying, it also means that you remember stuff better” accounting student.

Theory and practice

”Biology can be a bit too academic. But it is important to learn biology, it deals with how the plants grow, how the soil should be cultivated, where to plan, when to plant, growth, light ... ” landscape gardener student.

School-based education and training

”You learn some stuff and are able to try it out here at school. Often you haven’t got time for this in the store. I practice to take a cylinder hub apart [...] That’s the strength of the school periods, you can say what you’re not good at, and then practice and practice so that you learn” bicycle mechanic student.

School-based education and training

Exchanging experiences

”They make a mistake at the vocational college. They form classes which only consist of Imerco, Inspiration or Bahne [i.e. segregate students from different retail chains]. And that is a mistake! The two first weeks where we were mixed, we had a lot of fun discussion. It was not that we got into a fight, but we had some good discussion in class because we came from different chains, and ”here we do like this and this” and could compare practices...” retail assistant student.

Teacher/trainer roles

”The journeymen, who are really good at their job, those who really know some tricks so you’re blown off your feet and say, ”Wauw, he is good”, those are the guys you listen to another time, no doubt about it” precision mechanic student.

Conclusion

”Young people here are far from unbound zapping, but want a working life where they can find their identity in their work (”being someone, doing something”), which implies that you are active, you are of value to others, you can see results, be creative, solve problems and tasks, develop self-confidence, and be part of a(n imagined) community” (Larsen, 2006, p. 107)