Student Experience of Vocational Becoming in Upper Secondary Vocational Education and Training
Navigating by Feedback

av

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AKADEMISK AVHANDLING

som med tillstånd av utbildningsvetenskapliga fakulteten vid Göteborgs universitet för vinnande av doktorsexamen i pedagogik framläggs till offentlig granskning

Fredagen den 19 oktober 2018, kl. 10:00.
Göteborgs universitet, Pedagogen, Sal: AK2 136

Fakultetsopponent: Professor Per Andersson, Linköpings universitet.

UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG
ACTA UNIVERSITATIS GOTHOBURGENSIS
Abstract

Title: Student Experience of Vocational Becoming in Upper Secondary Vocational Education and Training. Navigating by Feedback

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Language: English with a Swedish summary

ISBN: 978-91-7346-977-7 (print)


ISSN: 0436-1121

Keywords: upper secondary vocational education and training, Child and Recreation Programme, vocational becoming, vocational identity formation, vocational knowing, vocational concepts, feedback, students’ experienced curriculum, service work, security officer, learner readiness

This doctoral thesis explores student experience of vocational becoming, particularly the navigational role of feedback in the process for Swedish upper secondary vocational students. Vocational becoming is explored as conflating the development of vocational knowing and formation of a vocational identity. The interest is in the experienced curriculum as emergent and thus unpredictable, fragile and dependent on feedback in interaction. This unpredictability is juxtaposed with tensions involved in standardised outcome-based assessment of vocational knowing and assessment for learning. The thesis focuses primarily on students attending the Swedish Child and Recreation Programme, which is chiefly school-based and intended to prepare young students (16 to 20 years old) for a range of interaction-intensive and people-centred occupations, e.g., nursery nurse, gym instructor and security officer. It is based on empirical material consisting of transcripts of focus group interviews and participant observations of classroom instruction. Four appended articles illuminate students’ collective vocational becoming in this context, two of them specifically addressing students’ experience of becoming prospective security officers.

The analysis reveals difficulties for students to interpret the progression of their vocational becoming in the framework of standardised outcome-based assessment and indicates that their experience of vocational becoming for service work centres on attunement to others, referred to as pedagogising encountering (i.e., readiness to learn from encounters and subsequently adjusting to service recipients). Students halfway through their education showed reluctance to participate in feedback, which is presumed to reflect their incomplete progression towards becoming a service provider who pedagogises encountering.

Students’ experienced curriculum of becoming security officers is investigated in terms of their meaning-making of central concepts (e.g., surveillance law), called here vocationalising concepts. Vocational becoming, based on students managing discontinuities, is investigated as generalising knowing horizontally between vocational courses in both school- and workplace-based parts of education. It is suggested that young students develop a vocational stance, orienting themselves towards occupation-specific values, e.g., child care and customer care.

Teacher-led and structured feedback that orchestrates self-assessment and peer feedback with regard to students’ readiness appears beneficial for vocationalising concepts whereas loosely structured group work mostly offers opportunities for staging pedagogised encounters in peer groups. In addition to contributing to a nuanced understanding of the role of feedback-making in vocational becoming for service work, this thesis contributes to theorisation of vocational becoming in institutionalised settings.