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Technical and Vocational Teacher Education Practice: Profession or Semi Profession?

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Abstract

The article discusses the meaning attached to the concept profession, and in that context, it has been examined whether the practice as teacher in technical and vocational education can be defined under the concept of profession or semi-profession. For us, it is interesting to examine the concept profession through the professional demands within the frame of an academic education and the work performed by a teacher in vocational education. In Norway, a teacher in technical and vocational education has no academic background, but has, instead, a combination of expertise in a craft or/and the vocational training as the basis for his/her teacher education. In the final discussion we emphasize that vocational teacher can be considered a profession today if we consider the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) as a basic standard.

Keywords: Professions, TVET, EQF, Educational system

Background

The purpose of this paper is to discuss changes that have taken place in Norwegian Higher Education after the reform of 2005 (KD, 2005), which introduced a new structure in higher education in Norway and it consists today of 3 years for bachelor degrees and 2 years for master degrees. Such reform was carried out in agreement with recommendations made by the European Union for member countries, and also non-member countries, such as Norway, to follow the Bologna process. The new structure has had an important impact on education for professions in Norway, specifically on teacher education for vocational teachers, which is one of the professions we discuss in more depth in this paper.

Prior to the reform in higher education (HE) professional education within universities and colleges was based on levels of education defined by labour requirements and it consisted of two-year programs. Due to the length of the education, two years, these programmes were considered as semi-professions. Vocational teacher education was among these programmes and it was considered a semi-profession. In addition to the Bologna process, other changes taking place in the European educational scenario, such as the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), are also having an impact in Norway. They are affecting the education of teachers in vocational education, and the profession of vocational teachers. In Norway, the EQF has been translated into the National Qualifications Framework (NKR), and its consequences on the education of vocational teachers are next discussed.

The national qualification framework in Norwegian higher education (NKR)

The Norwegian Qualifications Framework NKR builds on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF). Most European countries have, or are in the process of developing national qualifications framework of their education systems (KD, 2011, p. 4). Therefore, we will briefly present our use of the EQF as a background for the discussions in this article.

Vocational teacher education structure, form and content can be integrated into European Qualification Framework (Artinger, 2005; EQF, 2012). Although the development of professional studies for vocational teacher differs from the general teacher education, they have still the same professional level as prior to 2005. This means that both types of teacher education are placed in EQF standard Level 6. The intention of the EQF is to absorb the variations that occur in educational systems. It could mean that teachers in vocational education can also have their professional practice approved as part of the Bachelor program, even if it is not acquired through college or university studies.¹ EQF will be an assurance of vocational teacher education so that it meets the requirements that we describe in relation to a profession.

Professions and semi-professions

A brief clarification of the concepts of the authors' understanding of "profession" and "semi-profession" is necessary here. We start by stating that professional practice is related to specialization. Freidson (2001, p. 89) describes three different categories, which are known as craftsman, technician and professional. In the category craftsman, he means occupations characterized by having the training at the workplace and requiring a public certification such as a trade or journeyman's certificate. Craftsmen that have this certificate can work as teachers and instructors (Freidson, 2001, p. 89). In the category technician, he refers to technical occupations, such as a professional who has various forms of formal education as opposed to one who has an artisan training (p. 90). The characteristic of the third category, professions, is that the education is controlled and carried out by members of the profession, as for example in nursing, engineering and others.

Although we have outlined some characteristics of professional term, it is difficult to determine the distinction between defined academic professions and other occupations that university colleges have worked with such as teacher training. Molander and Terum describe these occupations by stating that "professions are occupations that have achieved professional status" (Molander & Terum, 2008, p. 17). Freidson goes further and expands the description of the term professionalism by including institutions. He states "Professionalism is a set of institutions that allows members of a profession to make a living where they control their own work and work is defined as an activity that is valuable for others (Freidson, 2001, p. 17).

As we have pointed out above, when professional education received from a college consisted of two years, which was shorter than the education of other professions, the degree gave entrance to what has been previously called a semi-profession. Such semi professions gave the professionals freedom to make choices and take decisions in their professional practice (Blom, 2007, p. 13). However, it is important to notice that Johansen

¹ Here, we consider the knowledge and skills acquired by means of non-formal/informal learning at the workplace or somewhere else, as defined by CEDEFOP (Cedefop, 2009)

(2009, p. 26) emphasizes that the term refers to the semi-professions in which professional practice is research based.

If we assume Blom and Johansen descriptions, we can say that the vocational teacher can be a professional, not a semi-professional, because the exercise of judgment is a significant part of his/her professional practice as vocational teacher, and he/she has freedom to make his/her own choices and decisions.

We claim that a profession's practice is central to the recruitment of a vocational teacher that works in upper secondary schools. In our discussion, we choose therefore to put more emphasis on the profession's practice, rather than on the length of the academic education, which is the basis for the work of vocational teacher educators. However, academic knowledge is also very important for the profession, because we need to understand the abstract formal systems knowledge, their origin, and thus their impact on the profession's discretion (Abbott, 1988, p. 53).

However, Abbott writes that, although it is the abstract knowledge that serves to legitimize the professional work, it should not trivialize the other functions of a profession (p. 55). Central to the abstract knowledge of vocational teacher are the vocational pedagogy and vocational didactics, in addition to the framework of understanding.

Characteristics of Education for the practice of Vocational Teacher

The characteristic of education for the practice of vocational teacher is that teachers are members of the profession they are trained for, which (Freidson, 2001, p. 93) describes as "always" and in the Norwegian context is described as "in some cases, teachers in schools / instructors: always in the company". This is related to the Norwegian structure of technical and vocational education, which consists of two years as a pupil at school, and two years as apprentice in the work life. This duality of education, 50% at the school and 50% at the workplace is also described in the third characteristic, where basic education takes place at the workplace. In Freidson's description, it is used forever, and for the Norwegian context, it then becomes a 50/50 split school / work life (See Figure 1).

The fourth feature in Freidson's table (2001, p. 93) is about the teacher or instructor working as full time teachers. Freidson says that this is rarely the case for craft teachers/instructors. In the Norwegian context it is described as: Largely (most time in the school) in the school, and in small degree at work.

The last two characteristics are linked to academia, where our description of the Norwegian context is similar to Freidson's description. We claim that vocational teachers are not engaging in scientifically based research, and that schools are not normally associated with the college-university sector (Figure 1). However, it is important to mention the development that has occurred in vocational teacher education. From the late 1970's there has been a research-based graduate / master's degree in vocational education, which opened the possibility for vocational teachers to work at colleges and become college professors.

Therefore, we can see a relationship between Freidson's model for professional education, and the traditional training of vocational education teachers, although it cannot be regarded as purely academic education (see figure 1).

Characteristics of training	Crafts	Vocational Teacher profession
Proportion of time spent at school and workplace	50% at school, 50% as apprentice at the workplace	To have the 50/50 model is the core of vocational education
Teacher's membership in the occupation	Partially necessary for teachers working in schools / always necessary for instructors in companies	Teachers: Rarely Instructors: Always
Basic education at the workplace	50% as apprentice at the workplace	To some degree, through practice periods in a companies
Full Time Teachers	Largely in school, to a small degree in the crafts.	Full time at school
Engagement in research	No	Yes
University / University college attachment	No	Yes

Figure 1. Characteristics of education

Since a vocational education teacher is an academic who has the same basic education as a journeyman, we chose in addition to set up the characteristics of education as vocational teacher in the same table that shows characteristic craft and handicrafts education (Figure 1), in the same way as Freidson makes it in his description (Freidson, 2001, p. 93).

It ought to be mentioned that a vocational teacher might receive his initial pedagogical education at a college or university that offers a one-year practical pedagogical training. Although the colleges' teacher educators are professionals in the field of education, they are not necessarily members of their students' crafts or occupations. The student-teachers are required to go through a twelve weeks training that is carried out as a teaching internship in the vocational education program of an upper secondary school. The teachers at colleges are full time teachers, while practice supervisors are practitioners of the occupation that they teach in the upper secondary school.

Structure of Vocational Teachers Education,

In this part of the paper we discuss the requirements for becoming a vocational education teacher. The vocational education teacher's background differs from the other Norwegian teachers in two significant areas. One is that a vocational teacher has an upper secondary education that consists of two years at school and two years in the work life. The second is that after receiving a trade or journeyman certificate, the vocational teacher must have a minimum of two years experience as a professional in the field before he/she can apply for vocational teacher education. Vocational teacher education consists of a three-year bachelor's degree, at a college or university that integrates subjects, pedagogy and didactics.

The requirement for becoming a teacher in general subjects at the upper secondary level is different from what is required for vocational education. A general subject teacher must have

fulfilled 3 years at the upper secondary level and completed a bachelor degree at a college or university, prior to attending a fourth year of pedagogical training. The purpose of this comparison is to show how the two types of education – general and vocational education – differ, while they are considered equal in regard to their classification as a profession.

Professions Seen in Relation to the Vocational Teacher' Role

Another important aspect to be considered in vocational teacher education is the tradition that masters and learners work and learn together. This is what happens with apprentices in the companies when they learn from and work together with instructors. The same happens with the student teachers when getting their bachelors in vocational teacher education. The university teachers are their role models. This has been an important aspect kept up in vocational teacher education, in spite of reforms not emphasising this important aspect.

In an empirical study from 2010, the results show that school reforms did not lead to major changes in the schools' professional understanding (Møller, Ottesen, & Hertzberg, 2010; Seezink, Poell, & Kirschner, 2010), and may therefore be an indication that professional interpretation is not directly affected by changing curricula. Just as significant others serve as role models for students in school (Sjaastad, 2012) can also teachers who educate vocational teachers serve as role models for these teachers. This is therefore an appropriate topic for further research on teacher educator's professionalism and how they function as role models for future vocational education teachers (Lunenberg, Korthagen, & Swennen, 2007). This means that we as teacher educators should act as role models for future teachers, and thereby develop their professional identity (Lamote & Engels, 2010). This is an area in need of further research (Swennen, Jones, & Volman, 2010), and in particular within the vocational part of teacher training.

A special feature of the role of vocational teachers is their profession's double practice field, which is thoroughly discussed in the white paper "Quality Reform for new teacher education Diverse - Demanding – Relevant (St.meld. nr. 16, 2002, p. 114).

The 3-year vocational teacher education is a practice-based and occupation-oriented study which differs from other teacher education by the fact that all students have completed vocational or professional training and, in addition have experience from the work life before starting their teacher training. Another important characteristic and basic principle of the 3-year vocational teacher education is its anchoring in the dual field of practice (St.meld. nr. 16, 2002, p. 114).

The particularity of the dual field of practice is that it qualifies for the teaching profession and professional life just as vocational training qualifies for occupations such as technician or engineer in industry. At work, this means that a vocational teacher is qualified to work as a vocational teacher in vocational programs of upper secondary schools within their own disciplines, and be qualified to work in a private vocational training in the work life outside schools. This distinguishes vocational teachers from other professionals involved with teaching activities.

The two most general properties required for calling an occupation a profession, is, according to Freidson a profession that is so specialized that it is not possible for those who lack the education and experience to work within the profession and that the profession can

not be standardized and rationalized (Freidson, 2001, p. 17). Slagstad describes professionalism as a distinction between professional experts and lay people (Slagstad, 2001, p. 31). With this description of an occupation as a profession, for example careers as electricians and plumbers fit well. Both of these occupations require education and certification. The profession is to some extent standardized, but many decisions must be taken by the individual practitioner and cannot be rationalized.

One of the key concepts to consider here is specialization as defined by Freidson. In the context of professions he makes a distinction between three types of specializations - mechanical specialization, manual judgment specialization and intellectual judgment specialization. Manual judgment specialization is associated most often with professions that involve practical work by making something, i.e., producing something. Intellectual judgment specialization is associated with intellectual occupations on the basis of a university education such as education in law, medicine, theology and philosophy (Freidson, 2001, pp. 19-21). A vocational teacher has a sound foundation in both specializations here described. He/she has a practical vocational training (manual judgment), and then an intellectual judgment specialization through earning a teaching degree at a university or college.

Although a vocational teacher has previously practiced as a skilled worker, and he/she was thus placed in a manual judgment discretionary specialization, he/she is no longer a practitioner in the craft, and might have a moderate knowledge of his/her craftsmanship. However he/she has become a practitioner as vocational teacher.

Discussion

A special feature of the vocational teacher's role is the double practice field, which is referred in The White Paper no. 16 "Quality Reform for new teacher education Diverse - Demanding – Relevant" (St.meld. nr. 16, 2002, p. 83). The specificity of the double practice field is that it qualifies both for the teaching profession and for the work life, within the specific occupation for which one has been trained during the vocational training, as for example, a technician/engineer in the industry.

For us as teacher educators, this means that we should look into the perspective that we act as role models for future teachers (Zhu, Valcke, & Schellens, 2010), especially those of us who previously served as vocational teachers in upper secondary schools. All teacher education programs are based on pedagogical and didactical subjects, which are made visible in different ways. Vocational teachers have different demands. In the electrician trade, for example, the teacher works with a subject that is in continuous development and requires a close connection to the trades and professional communities that work daily with technical issues. Thus, in technical and vocational teacher education, the studies are carried out by means of lectures, study groups and self-study. In addition, the student must seek out businesses and professionals outside the campus in order to develop the professional expertise that is required to be able to work as a vocational teacher.

In summary, vocational teacher can be regarded as belonging to a profession today if we consider the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) as a basic standard. Prior this EQF standard, the vocational teacher belonged to a semi-profession because there was no clear requirement for research based teaching. However, after the reform, research was given a

clear mandate and has become part of to the colleges' work tasks. The educational programs at professional colleges can then be defined as education for professions.

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