

### **Current challenges of vocational teachers in six European Countries and their into innovators**

The symposium will dive into the topic of VET teacher education in Europe: its organisation and challenges in education and training future VET educators. Results from the Erasmus+ project VETteach (<https://www.ibp.uni-rostock.de/en/forschung1/erasmus-projekt-vetteach/translate-to-english-erasmus-projekt-vetteach/>) will be presented and discussed. The aim is to define theoretically and empirically underpinned, and practically relevant fields of action of teacher education at universities.

High-quality initial education and training of future VET teachers and their continuous professional development is a prerequisite and guarantee of excellent vocational education and training. Institutional providers in the field of the education and training of VET teachers and trainers (VET TE) are co-responsible for the professionalisation of VET educators. In the EU, the Riga Conclusion from 2015 highlights the decisive role of VET providers stating that "systematic approaches to, and opportunities for, initial and continuous professional development of VET teachers, trainers and mentors in school and work-based settings" (p. 4) are needed. Similarly, in an outlook post-2020, the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training emphasizes that VET needs to be delivered by highly qualified teachers and trainers and that the professional development of teachers and trainers should be fostered, including digital skills and innovative teaching methods (ACVT, 2018). A recent report of the ET 2020 Working Group on VET (ET 2020, 2018) highlights four areas of action to support educators: specifying the roles of teachers and trainers, strengthening their professional development, equipping teachers for critical challenges, and fostering collaboration.

To reach these goals, high-quality education and training of VET educators are indispensable. VET TE must take into account the many and very diverse challenges that current and future VET educators face. These are, for example, rapid technological changes, the demand to take on more and broader educational tasks and to adapt to new forms of work organisation (e.g., the flexibility of working hours, teleworking). VET educators must adapt the learning goals and didactical concepts of their teaching and need to design learning situations that allow their students the development of practical and academic competences. They must establish innovative learning arrangements at schools and in companies, which incorporate digital learning tools, open new opportunities to foster individual learning processes and occupation-specific forms of learning in different vocational fields. To do so, they must be able to analyse work processes to determine the competences required at the workplace. They should initiate and sustain close relationships and co-operations with (regional) companies. There is also a growing demand to support, advice and accompany an increasingly heterogeneous group of VET learners which asks for an educator's competences to guide other people. It is expected that VET educators support disadvantaged learners as well as talented VET students: They must guide their students in developing their professional career and facilitate the integration of students in the labour market. People in VET need to adhere to democratic and European values while they are fully developing their potential in a lifelong perspective. To become critical citizens, VET educators thus need to enable learners to raise their voice in democratic processes in the workplace, at school and beyond.

This symposium integrates four papers emerging from the Erasmus+ project VETteach. The first contribution deals with how teacher education is organised at universities across Europe and the relevance of prior vocational experiences. The second contributions highlight the importance of

civic education in VET and consequently also in VET educators' education in democratic societies. The third presentation focusses on teaching teachers to successfully support disadvantaged people in VET. The fourth presentation gives an insight in a study to catch the voices of VET teachers and their perception of challenges and needs in daily work. Each of these short 12 minutes presentations aims at stimulating thoughts and the discussion in the symposium.

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Keywords: VETteacher, innovation, comparison, Europe

Melanie Hoppe & Sofia Nyström

### **The importance of prior vocational experiences in VET teacher education - An insight to VET teacher education from six European Universities**

A teacher has many work tasks, roles and functions. This especially concerns the VET teachers since they are to organize and plan for vocational learning in the interplay between school and working life (Akkerman & Bakker, 2012; Mårtensson, 2020). In this interplay, VET teachers' dual identity, both as a teacher and prior vocational identity and experience, is emphasized as crucial for arranging uptodate vocational training (Fejes & Köpsén, 2012; Köpsén, 2014). It is also stressed that the legitimacy of VET teachers depends on their vocational knowledge, skills and competence (Andersson, Köpsén, Larson & Milana, 2013; Cedefop, 2019). Due to this, prior

working experience or a vocational education are often a general entrance requirement, for the admission to university to become a vocational school teacher (Hoppe & Kaiser 2021). With these experiences, prospective teachers also bring with them a prior vocational identity connected to a specific vocational community of practice in which they have learnt their trade and are now leaving. This is a process of transition from a vocational worker to the role of VET teacher, a process that could be filled with feelings of loss and 'letting something go' (Kolkin Sarastuen, 2020). The aim of this paper is to explore how different European universities and their VET teachers training program work in order to align students' vocational work-based identity with the new teacher identity. The paper will show examples of how students' prior vocational knowledge is an essential component in the teacher training program and how it is used in order to teach students about vocational didactics as well as to introduce university training concepts.

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- Keywords:** vocational identity, vocational knowledge, VET teacher training program

Franz Kaiser & Fernando Marhuenda

#### **Why Civic engagement and critical thinking is an important topic in VET teacher education**

The essential task of vocational teachers is seen in the integration of the young and adults in the labor market after the general education. This is accompanied by the professional qualification of the students or apprentices, for which the teachers must have a good knowledge of the realities of the business in the respective sectors and the scientific knowledge associated with the respective disciplines (CEDEFOP 2016, Nylund & Gudmundson 2017). In this context, however, the forms of collaboration in working life have also changed and employees are increasingly expected to play a formative role in the processes and not just do what they are told there. In this context, empathy and the design of group processes are of great importance for teamwork (Struck & Franz 2020). In order for the processes of cooperation and trade union co-

determination in the company to remain alive in the democratic sense, those working there must also be self-confident individuals who can enter into conflicts and at the same time also reflect on the effects of their actions and those of the company on global developments (Heikkinen 1997). This also requires corresponding learning arrangements in which future professionals take a look at problematic effects and at the same time practice disputes with managers and in the group on a trial basis at school.

The article outlines these challenges and approaches in a critical-reflexive and at the same time practice-oriented professional teacher education in Germany and Spain. Reference is made to approaches of reflexive thinking (Rönnlund et.al. 2019) and reflective practice of social engagement (Struck & Franz 2020) as well as to approaches of humanistic psychology (Kaiser 2018) and critical educational theory (Kaiser 2021)

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**Keywords:** VET teacher, critical thinking, social engagement, civil engagement

Fernando Marhuenda & Franz Kaiser

#### **Integration and Disadvantaged in VET teacher education**

The history of VET reminds us that in many countries VET evolved as an option for the further education of the kids of the working class and, as secondary education extended to the majority

of the population of a country, VET was also considered as an option for those students more practically than academically oriented. Nowadays, in a context of increasing international competition and a prolongation of compulsory and post-compulsory secondary education, the challenge for VET is to contribute to the successful enrolment and retention of youth who either were early school leavers or who suffer exclusion for different reasons, be them any kind of special education needs or also access and progression of late comers to the education system, as is the case of refugees or people who migrated in their childhood or teen years. The challenge for VET systems and for VET educators is to be ready to provide their best support in the vocational preparation and qualification of these people, hence contributing to equal access to appropriate teaching methods, therefore widening it to other challenges as those of civic engagement or digitalisation.

The contribution opens insides in the comparison of activities in Germany, Norway, Sweden Finland, Switzerland and Spain. It can be shown that there are different professionals involved in the integration of disadvantaged and disabled and that the integration in daily schools and to deal with the heterogeneity still is a challenge for VET teachers.

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**Key words:** disadvantaged, inclusion, VETschools, comparision, VET teacher

*Birger Brevik, Annica Issacson & Andrea Pons Juan*

#### **The abilities, needs and difficulties of VET teachers work**

In a European project with six countries, we research which factors support or challenge VET teachers' daily work (Hoppe & Kaiser, 2020). Taking into account how complex and diverse the educational pathways are in Europe (Issacson, Brevik, Struck, & Juan, 2021), the disparity of branches and levels of the programs involved in the study, and given the huge variety of traditions of vocational education and learning (Grollmann, 2008), these factors can be very different and it is difficult to generalize about the factors that shape teacher's practice in VET. More work-based learning and apprenticeships, more emphasis on key competences, new and more heterogeneous target groups and digitalisation are all putting more demands on teachers and trainers (Psifidou & Ranieri, 2020).

To identify the relevance of the factors for teachers work in six European countries, we developed a questionnaire, in which we asked VET students, teachers, school leaders and teacher educators about the abilities needed to be a good vocational teacher (Kaiser & Lindberg 2019), and to what extent they are important in teacher's daily work.

Although this is not an interview based study, we also wanted the group under study to answer open-ended questions about what causes trouble as a vocational teacher or what the respondents fear most? Since the overarching theme of our study is "VET teachers as Innovators", we ended the study with the following open-ended questions: What strengthens or helps VET teachers to be innovative?



The practical implementation for collecting the empirical data material was carried out using the Questback tool (<https://www.questback.com>). With this tool, we had the opportunity to translate our questions and answer options into six different languages and get a complete dataset as a result. In order to safeguard privacy through anonymisation, a link was sent out to the project partners, who in turn sent this to their contacts in each of the participating countries. Thus, no contact information of any kind was collected in the Questback system, nor were e-mail addresses collected. The analysis of the collected data material was divided into two sections where the quantitative part of the results was analysed using the software "SPSSStatistics". The analyses of the results from the open-ended questions were handled by each individual project partner since the answers have a large scope and are in the individual project partner's language.

Since there is a big difference between the vocational education systems in the countries participating in the project (Isacsson et al., 2021), we also expect that these differences will appear in the study results. However, we also expect to see some similarities across countries, in that many professions are similar across national borders. Something that is interesting to cover whether vocational teachers see themselves as teachers (educators), professionals in the profession they are trained for, or a combination of these as the double field of practice (Brevik & Lier, 2013). Here, the results will probably vary depending on the individual countries' education systems. We expect the disparities to be greatest among teacher education programs, as we have identified large differences in the educational requirements set in the various participating countries. The results from this study will form the basis for new studies with a focus on the vocational teacher education in Europe, and how we can benefit from each other's experiences through student exchanges.

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