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Knowledge in VET curricula and power in society and labour market

POLICY AND PRACTICE: DEMANDS-BASED AND EMPLOYER-DRIVEN SWEDISH HIGHER VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

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Included articles

Article 1

Köpsén, Johanna, (2020). Employers placing orders and students as commodities: Swedish post-secondary vocational education and training policy*, Journal of Vocational Education and Training,*
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Article 2

Köpsén, Johanna, (2020). Demands-based and employer-driven curricula: defining knowledge in higher vocational education and training, *Studies in Continuing Education, 42*(3), 349-364.

Article 3

Köpsén, Johanna, (2020). Programme managers: key recontextualising agents in Swedish higher VET selecting knowledge for local course syllabi and organising teaching without regulatory requirements for qualifications, Unpublished manuscript

Article 4

Köpsén, Johanna, (2020). Being successful in the educational market: cooperation of providers and employers in provision of higher VET, Unpublished manuscript

1. Introduction

Social justice may be described as the right of everyone to be included socially, culturally and personally, and it is the right to participation at the level of politics through democracy (Bernstein, 2000). That is, the right to participate in the processes through which the social order is constructed, maintained and transformed. One key to inclusion and participation in democracy is education. Or, more precisely, it is access to knowledge that supports this inclusion and participation. In this sense, the organisation of education and knowledge in national educational systems is strongly interconnected with social justice and democracy. Education may function as a relay in the reproduction of social hierarchies through differentiated access to knowledge and the preparation of students in different educational contexts for different positions in society (Bernstein, 2000; Dobbins & Busemeyer, 2015; Wheelahan, 2007; Young, 2013). Education may reinforce the division of labour and unequal class relations; however, it may also function as a compensatory tool for egalitarian and emancipatory policies (Lundahl, 1997; Lundahl, Arreman, Lundström, & Rönnberg, 2010). Thus, investigations into the differentiation of knowledge in academic education and vocational education and training (VET) is an important issue when education is problematised as being part of and influencing socio-economic structures and stratifying processes (Avis, 2019). The consequences of differentiated participation in academic education and VET is thus also not only a question of distributive justice. As knowledge in different forms of education may or may not facilitate inclusion and participation at the level

of politics, differentiated access to knowledge in academic education and VET is also a question of social justice and democracy (Avis, 2019; Bernstein, 2000). For VET students specifically, access to knowledge is also important in working life. Besides enabling inclusion, civic practice and political agency, the knowledge labelled by some as 'powerful' (e.g., Avis, 2019; Wheelahan, 2007; Young & Muller, 2013), also gives workers autonomy and agency in their work and on the labour market. It gives workers the possibility to draw their own conclusions from independent and collective analyses and to participate in conversations, including controversies and conflicts in the organisation of work (Wheelahan, 2015).

This thesis presents a study of knowledge and the circumstances for its transmission, shaped by both national and local organisation, in a state-funded system of VET programmes. The study is set within the Swedish system of vocational post-secondary and continuing education called Higher Vocational Education or HVE (Swedish: Yrkeshögskola or YH). It entails investigations into policy and practice in its programme provision and analyses broad sets of data from both these realms in order to problematise and discuss system formation, knowledge in curricula, the organisation of programmes and employer involvement in VET. The inquiries are directed towards the processes that precede and condition the realisation of teaching practices in training and achieved from the standpoint of a perspective that questions the organisation of education and knowledge in relation to the distribution of power in society. This perspective is based in the Bernsteinian theoretical framework of this thesis, presented in Chapter 3.

Development of VET

HVE as a system of vocational higher education was established in 2009. Programmes are state funded and provisioned by independent education providers, both public and private. Every HVE programme is unique because they are envisioned and conceptualised by employers in cooperation

with educational organisations in local contexts. HVE was, like all VET systems, formed within a context. Different historical, societal and ideological positions create different relations between education and the labour market, which is an essential aspect of the formation of VET systems (e.g., Brockmann, Clarke, & Winch, 2008; Dobbins & Busemeyer, 2015; Thelen, 2004). Nations have followed different paths of development for the set-up of skill formation. In Sweden, the strong positions of the Social Democratic Party and workers' unions, but also support from employers' associations, were crucial for the development of a school-based VET system for skill formation (Berner, 1989; Lundahl, 1997; Virolainen & Persson Thunqvist, 2017). Carried out within the Swedish tradition of negotiation between the state and the labour market, the processes of development and reform of VET have been part of the 'Swedish model' since the middle of the last century.

The political basis for a school-based VET system was egalitarian. It was based on ideas not only of upper secondary education for all, but also of giving all students in upper secondary education access to academic and professional higher education (Lundahl, 1997). These ideas have been replaced over time, however, and are now consistent with a transnational neoliberal policy paradigm guided by market relevance. In upper secondary education, where the principal form of VET in Sweden is found, there is now a clear-cut division of tracks into either VET or higher education preparatory programmes (Nylund, Rosvall, & Ledman, 2017). The organisation of knowledge in these separate tracks differs greatly and prepares students for significantly different roles and positions in society. In initial VET, the knowledge is segmented and strongly context bound (Nylund & Rosvall, 2016). These VET curricula are heavily influenced by ideas of employability and the consequences are that:

> Students in [Swedish initial] VET programmes are trained to 'do' and to 'adapt', while the students in HEP [higher educational preparatory] programmes are trained to 'think' and to 'imagine possibilities'. Thus, students from different social classes are prepared for very different roles in society. (Nylund et al., 2017, p. 788)

Likewise, when everyday teaching practices in VET are studied, training in the kind of critical thinking that supports emancipatory citizenship competences is found to be rare (Rönnlund, Ledman, Nylund, & Rosvall, 2019).

However, looking internationally at contemporary VET systems, it is possible to distinguish different ways of organising VET and the knowledge in its curricula. For instance, in Europe there are at least two models for the formation of VET systems (Brockmann et al., 2008). A market-oriented 'skills-based' model, prevalent in the UK, and a 'knowledge-based' model found, for instance, in the German and Dutch VET systems. These different approaches determine what knowledge students get access to and thus what positions they may come to occupy in the labour market, as well as their possibilities for inclusion and participation in civic practice and political debate (Wheelahan, 2005, 2009, 2015).

Alongside the differences in contemporary VET systems, there are also similarities in their development. Giving rise to these parallels of development are transnational neoliberal discourses on education in general and VET specifically. These similarities are expressed as the formation of distinctive vocational pathways in higher education, elements of marketisation and governments shaping systems with significant roles for employers (Avis, 2012; Bathmaker et al., 2018). These three aspects are also all clearly recognisable in the system on which this thesis focuses, the Swedish system of higher VET. HVE is separate from academic and professional higher education, its provision is organised as a market of competing providers, both public and private, and employers have an influence both on the range of programmes offered and in the provision of individual programmes. The 2009 establishment of this system has been argued to reflect the then ruling Conservative–Liberal Swedish government's 'work strategy' (E. Andersson & Wärvik, 2012), a version of the traditionally strong Swedish principle of all citizens' right to work, which now also made employment the one crucial bearer of social inclusion. However, both the contemporary differences in VET, and those seen over time, show that there are choices for policy in

terms of the ways in which it is possible to organise both initial and higher vocational education.

So, what is at stake in the political choices about the formation of higher-level vocational education? I believe that two major values can be discerned, as being at stake. One is the value of education as a support for democratic inclusion and social justice, and the other is the value of VET that is sure in its aim of educating for the labour market. The latter for the benefit of citizens as workers and/or for the competitiveness of enterprises and the nation. It is significant that these two values are not in themselves inherently contradictory. However, I argue that recognition of these values as separate is intrinsic to investigations of and discussions about how vocational education interacts with social order and contributes to the construction and re-construction of power relations in society and labour market, as well as how it may determine possibilities in the lives of its students.

Swedish Higher Vocational Education

Before 2009, continuing VET in Sweden was provided within different educational contexts (Ministry of Education and Research, 2008b). There were education programmes organised by the municipalities, or by parties connected to the labour market and vocational education in higher education, but also within non-formal adult education, where VET continues to be provided. The forms, organisation and funding of these training programmes changed several times during the twentieth century.

However, from the beginning of the twenty-first century, Swedish continuing VET was mainly organised within a system called Advanced Vocational Education and Training, AVET (Swedish: Kvalificerad yrkesutbildning, KY) (Ministry of Education and Research, 2008b). AVET ran as a pilot project from 1996 but became a regular part of the Swedish educational system after a decision in 2000. However, when HVE was established in 2009, AVET was phased out. Since its establishment, HVE has grown into a significant context for adult and post-secondary education

(National Agency for Higher Vocational Education, 2020b) and is in large part a development of the previous system of AVET, which had already collected parts of a very scattered Swedish continuing VET within one system (Lind & Westerberg, 2015; Ministry of Education and Research, 2008b). The system of vocational higher education is separate from academic and professional higher education and the HVE programmes are initiated locally by employers to meet their need for trained workers (Ministry of Education and Research, 2008b). Last year, 10 years into the life of HVE, the system comprised over 200 education providers, several hundred different programmes and over 63 000 students (National Agency for Higher Vocational Education, 2020b).

The programmes

Within HVE, there is a wide range of programmes in many different fields of study aiming at many different occupations in different vocational areas. The programmes are sorted into different fields of study.

Table 1. Fields of study in HVE and number of cohorts of students in programmes during the year 2019 (National Agency for Higher Vocational Education, 2020b).

Fields of study	Number of active cohorts in programmes
Finance, administration and sales	481
Technology and manufacturing	446
Civil engineering and construction	376
Computer and information technology	319
Healthcare and social work	301
Hotels, restaurants and tourism	107
Transport services	97
Culture, media and design	96
Agriculture, animal care, gardening, forestry, fishing	75
Pedagogy and teaching	50
Journalism and information	32

In addition to those presented in Table 1, programmes can also be found in the fields of Wellness and body care, Law, Security services, Environmental protection and Other. However, there are very few study places in these fields. The table gives a snapshot of one year, but the focus and content of the programmes in HVE change over time. However, most programmes are in the areas of Technology and manufacturing and Finance, administration and sales, and this has been the case since HVE was introduced in 2009. The occupations for which the programmes in HVE prepare students vary greatly (National Agency for Higher Vocational Education, 2020a). Whilst some programmes prepare students for work as, for instance, train drivers, health administrators, payroll specialists, veterinary assistants and pharmacy technicians – occupations of which there is broader recognition – some programmes are preparation for more innovative roles, often very specifically defined. Examples include: forest rejuvenation manager, school dog instructor, solar energy planner specialising in solar cell installation, application developer for iPhone and for Android, Microsoft Azure Cloud Advisor and developers with competencies restricted to coding in one particular programming language.

HVE provides two different degrees to its graduates: a Diploma in Higher Vocational Education or an Advanced Diploma in Higher Vocational Education. All programmes are post-secondary/tertiary education and are positioned at two levels (five and six) in the Swedish and European Qualifications Framework, with level six being equivalent to a bachelor's degree (National Agency for Higher Vocational Education, 2017b). HVE programmes are targeted at students from both higher education preparatory and vocational upper secondary tracks.

The HVE programmes vary in length from one semester (20 weeks) to three years (120 weeks) and work-based learning in placements typically, but not always, constitutes a quarter of the programme, usually divided into a few periods spread over the course of study or completed at the end of the programme. If a programme is offered at level 6, it must include a minimum of 25% work-based learning in placements, but all programmes may include

this form of learning. HVE programmes can be offered at full-time or part-time pace and can be school based or organised as distance learning. Programmes are free and students universally qualify for financial aid from the Swedish National Board for Student Aid in the same way as students enrolled at universities and university colleges.

There is also a small proportion of HVE programmes that are approved and funded as what is called 'narrow occupations'. A programme for a narrow occupation is characterised by maintaining knowledge of traditional craftsmanship in fields that are in danger of disappearing. Hence, the definition as 'narrow' does not refer to the knowledge taught in these programmes but to the fact that a need in working life is not the basis for them being funded within HVE. Instead, these programmes must show that they have a special importance for society and maintain traditional professions. Programmes for narrow occupations constitute a minor part of HVE. In 2019, only 1% of students enrolling in HVE did so in programmes labelled as narrow occupations (National Agency for Higher Vocational Education, 2020b).

Students and labour-market outcomes

In 2019, there were 63 200 students enrolled in HVE (National Agency for Higher Vocational Education, 2020b). Of these, 48 000 were studying school-based programmes and 15 200 were in programmes organised as distance learning. The total number of HVE students can be compared to 410 000 students during the study year of 2018/2019 in first and second cycle Swedish academic and professional education, and around 100 000 students in initial VET (National Agency for Education, 2020a; Swedish Higher Education Authority, 2020).

In 2019, women made up 55% of new HVE students, and men 45% (National Agency for Higher Vocational Education, 2020b). These percentages have been consistent since the beginning of HVE in 2009. There are, however, grave gender imbalances in the different areas of study, reflecting the gendered labour market in Sweden. The biggest imbalances are in the

fields of healthcare and social work and technology and manufacturing. Overall, 23% of students were born outside Sweden and 77% in Sweden. The corresponding proportions for the entire population are 19.6% and 80.4% (Statistics Sweden, 2020). The median age of HVE students is 30 and many of them have experience of working life and/or other forms of higher education. Of the students starting their training in 2018, almost 20% had attended post-secondary education of less than three years and another 12% had post-secondary education of more than three years. However, these levels differ greatly between students born in Sweden and those born elsewhere. Amongst the students born outside of Sweden, 46% had gone through post-secondary education, whereas that percentage for students born in Sweden is 28%. Almost all HVE students have completed an upper secondary education, 53% of them in a vocational programme, 43% in higher education preparatory programmes and 4% in other forms of education. These statistics indicate that HVE students are diverse and that they make up a heterogenous group. They hence have different backgrounds and relationships to education and work, both for themselves directly and through their families and social contexts.

Looking at students who graduated in 2018, 93% were employed one year later, circa 56% in an organisation where they undertook work-based learning (National Agency for Higher Vocational Education, 2020b). In addition, 77% of graduates had been employed before enrolling and 13% were still working for the same employer as before their training a year after graduation. The proportion of graduates who report their work as being largely or to a great extent consistent with their training is 71%.

Education providers

All programmes in HVE are run by an education provider. Both public and private organisations provide education within this system; however, the majority of providers are private (National Agency for Higher Vocational Education, 2020b). In 2019, there were 214 active education providers, of which 120 were private. The proportion of public providers has decreased

over the years and whereas previously students were spread evenly between public and private providers, in 2019, 71% of study places had been approved with private providers. Public providers are mostly municipal adult-education organisations. Programmes are also provided by folk high schools, study associations and universities or university colleges. The providers can operate locally or nationwide and they may run only one or several programmes.

Annual applications to start programmes

The National Agency for Higher Vocational Education is the regulatory body of HVE. Its main area of responsibility is to ensure that HVE programmes meet the labour market's need for qualified employees. It analyses the labour market, decides which programmes qualify to be offered as HVE, distributes government grants, conducts reviews and produces statistics. The agency also carries out inspections and handles complaints regarding the programmes from students.

Applications to start new HVE programmes are submitted to the national agency by different education providers after an annual call (SFS 2009:128; SFS 2009:130). No distinction is made between existing and new programmes. The same process applies to education providers applying to enrol more cohorts in existing programmes as those wanting to start a completely new programme. Education providers are only granted funding for and permission to enrol the number of students that the pledged hiring needs indicate are necessary. The national agency approves between one and five cohorts of students per annual application and programme.

Even though the process is very similar to a tendering process, since education providers in competition try to meet the agency's requirements at the highest level, the outlines for applications to run HVE programmes do not identify specific services for purchasing as would be done in a contract notice in tendering. There is no declaration from the national agency of what occupations or vocational areas they wish to have provisioned in HVE programmes. However, the outlines are extensive and compliance

level is decisive for the decisions of the national agency (National Agency for Higher Vocational Education, 2017a). The agency grants or denies the submitted applications based primarily on labour-market needs, and the providers compete amongst each other for government funding by presenting their employment needs.

The appropriation from the government has historically been enough to distribute to about 300 programmes/year. However, since 2018 there has been a large expansion and the approved number of study places has increased annually since (National Agency for Higher Vocational Education, 2020b). How much is allocated to this specific part of the Swedish educational system is a political decision made in parliament and the size depends on the priorities set in the state budget.

Programme management and employers

The regulation of the HVE system demands that the education provider appoints a programme manager for every programme (SFS 2009:130). This person is to lead the day-to-day work with the programme but also has specific responsibility for making sure the programme evolves. HVE programmes are run in close cooperation with employers. In HVE, the employers – companies and organisations – working with the different programmes are expected to be active during the initial development as well as in the implementation and evolution of the programmes. Employer representatives are expected to verbalise educational needs and continuously work on quality assurance. The employer representatives are also on the management boards of each programme, which by regulation consist of representatives of different stakeholders, although the employer representatives must constitute the majority (SFS 2009:130). Other members of the board are the programme manager, representatives of the students, a representative from the public school system and, where the programme provides an advanced diploma, a representative from a university. The management board is the decision-making body with the highest mandate over an HVE programme and the education providers run their programmes

according to instructions decided upon by the board. Employers on these boards offer placements and supervisors for work-based learning and contribute financially through financial donations or by reducing the consulting fees charged by representatives of working life who take part in the programme as educators.

Curriculum and course syllabi

There is no national curriculum document or general syllabi for HVE that govern the education or frame the programmes in HVE. This distinctive character of HVE contrasts with, for instance, initial VET in Swedish upper secondary education, where the curriculum and course syllabi are national, relatively long-standing and developed by a national agency in cooperation with disciplinary and vocational experts. In contrast, every HVE programme is unique, envisioned and conceptualised by employers in cooperation with educational organisations in local contexts. If the application to start a programme is approved, course syllabi are then created. Course content, learning goals and grading criteria in course syllabi are expected to be developed by the education provider and the employer representatives on the management board of each programme in cooperation with each other and they are formally established locally by the management boards (National Agency for Higher Vocational Education, 2015b).

The course syllabi are only handed in to the National Agency for Higher Vocational Education in the occurrence of an audit. The syllabi can be altered during the course of the programme if the management board wishes to do so and if the students, via their representatives on the board, give their approval (National Agency for Higher Vocational Education, 2015b).

Aim of the thesis and included articles

This thesis – due to its Bernsteinian theoretical framework and the focus of its investigations – is positioned within a perspective that questions the organisation of education and knowledge in relation to the distribution of power in society and the social order of capitalism and neoliberal policies.

The overall aim of this thesis is to investigate policy on HVE and elements of practice in its provision in order to problematise and discuss system formation, knowledge in curricula, the organisation of programmes and employer involvement in VET. This aim has in part been operationalised in four studies, each presented in an article included in this compilation thesis. However, a concluding analysis is also presented, alongside summaries of these articles, in Chapter 5. This concluding analysis relates the findings presented in the four articles to one another.

The four studies portrayed in the included articles have been conducted in two dimensions, policy and practice. Within these two dimensions, the same two foci of interest are studied: organisation and curriculum (see Figure 1, following page).

The focus and aim of each of the four included articles are:

- In article 1, the focus is on organising structures formed in the dimension of policy. The aim of this study was to investigate the institutional relations between education and work, and between public and private, which the Swedish system of vocational higher education represents.
- Article 2 directs the focus to the particular interest of knowledge in curriculum. Still studying the dimension of policy, the aim of this study was to investigate policy on knowledge in curricula, and the analysis was led by the research question: 'How does policy define what knowledge should form the curricula in vocational higher education?'

- In article 3, the studied dimension shifts to practice in HVE, yet it has the same focus on knowledge as the previous article. The aim of this study was to investigate how programme managers take part in selecting knowledge for the locally created course syllabi, what that knowledge is and how programme managers organise the teaching of this knowledge in their programmes.
- Article 4 also studies the dimension of practice, however with the focus once again on organisation. The aim of this study was to explore and interpret how employers are positioned in the provision of higher VET. This was done in order to understand how institutional relations between education and employers that are set up in education policy are realised in HVE practice.

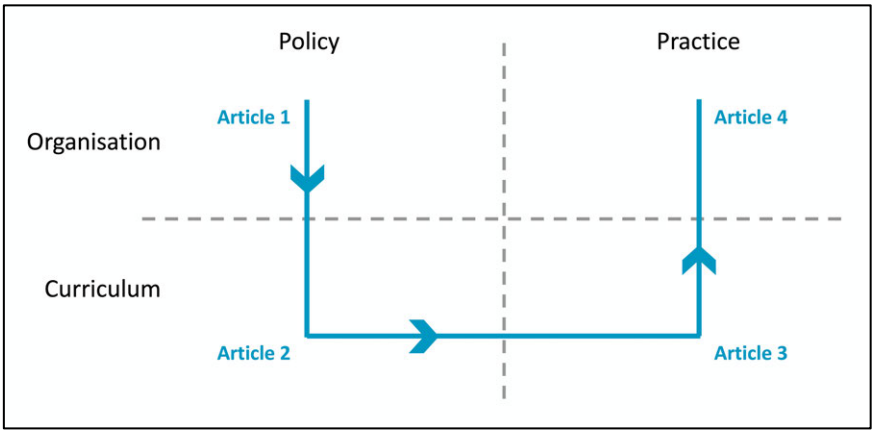

Figure 1. Studied dimensions and foci of interest.

Structure of this thesis

Having presented the context and aim of this thesis, I will now present a review of research that is relatable and important to this study (Chapter 2). This is followed by two chapters (3 and 4) that respectively present and discuss the applied theoretical framework and methodology. In the subsequent chapter (5), the findings of this thesis are presented, partly in the form of summaries of the four included articles and partly as a concluding analysis. Finally, there is a chapter (6) discussing the findings of this thesis from the perspective of questioning the organisation of education and knowledge and relating this to previous research, as well as discussing aspects of the study's design and its implications.

After these chapters, the reader will find appendices with translated versions of the interview guide, the letter requesting participation and consent forms in English, as well as a table presenting the analysed documents with their original Swedish titles.

The four articles that compose the remainder of this compilation thesis are also included in full at the end.

2. Research review

Research on VET covers a vast range of topics, including, but not limited to, studies of pedagogy and assessment, teaching and learning in the different contexts of school and work, effectiveness and equity in different systems and transition from VET to employment. Some research also focuses on how contemporaneous and historic economic, cultural and political aspects influence VET and its role in society.

In this study, the focus is on how policy has shaped a system of higher VET, the knowledge in its curricula and the relationships between education providers and employers within that system. Therefore, this chapter is an overview entailing a selection of previous research that has discussed and problematised these, or related, issues. These issues include the role that policy defines for initial and higher VET, system formations, marketised provision, employer involvement and VET curricula. As this study is positioned within a perspective that questions the organisation of education and knowledge in relation to the distribution of power in society and the social order of capitalism and neoliberal policies, the selection of what research is presented and discussed here is broad. The selection is based on either one or both of two merits: the relevance of context in relation to the subject of study in this thesis, and the relevance of perspective and phenomena in focus. Thus, the educational contexts underlying the research presented in this overview is broader than that of higher VET, or even VET per se.

The main section of this review is divided into two parts. The themes of these parts largely correspond to the two foci of interest in this thesis, which

were presented at the end of the previous chapter, namely organisation and curriculum. Their separation can at times be difficult, and this highlights the fact that these two interests are closely intertwined in such a way that the possibility of their separation is debatable. However, for the purpose of underpinning the studies that constitute this thesis, the separation, in this review and elsewhere, serves a purpose. Separating the two themes enables the analysis and discussion of how the two are actually linked, both in a general sense and in the context of the Swedish HVE system.

The two sections on organisation and curricula are followed by a shorter section presenting the limited previous research on HVE. And at the end of this chapter there is a concluding section in which I present which parts of this review relate to each of the four articles that make up this compilation thesis.

Organisation of VET

Historically, it has been the task of masters in guilds to pass on vocational knowledge, and the training of workers for their jobs has been arranged at workplaces. Today, vocational training is more often, at least in part, the responsibility of welfare states and national educational systems. These national systems of VET are formed in their own contexts. Different historical, societal and ideological positions have shaped them, and nations have followed different paths of development for their institutional set-ups of skill formation. Educational systems can be said to represent different institutional relations, which are linked to different conceptions of the relations between education and work and between education and the labour market, a crucial aspect of VET systems (Busemeyer & Trampusch, 2011; Dobbins & Busemeyer, 2015; Pilz, Li, Canning, & Minty, 2017; Thelen, 2004).

Even though there are differences between national systems, there are also recognisable similarities, or trends, in contemporary VET formation. These similarities involve marketisation and governments shaping systems

with significant roles for employers (Avis, 2012). International comparative analyses show that the trend is the same in higher VET as in VET in general (Bathmaker et al., 2018) and these trends are in line with capitalist hegemony and neoliberal policy (Avis, 2012, 2019).

In this first part, this review, in four sections, treats the neoliberal policies governing VET today both nationally and internationally, the emergence and organising principles for Sweden's school-based VET system, employer involvement, and marketised provision, respectively.

Neoliberal policies

Today, neoliberal discourse frames national and international policy, and an essential part of this discourse is the idea of the competitiveness of nations (Avis, 2012, 2019). This idea is strongly tied to the responsibilities placed on education to develop the human capital needed for national economic growth and prosperity. In relation to the notion of education as human capital development, a widespread instrumentalism, with its focus on skills and learning outcomes, is reflected in the worldwide formations of both national and international qualifications frameworks (Avis, 2012; Ball, 1998; Bathmaker et al., 2018; Gamble, 2016; Wheelahan, 2015). However, there are also notions of societal wellbeing, social cohesion and the prosperity of workers trading their skills in a market that are coupled with the idea of competitiveness and economic growth in the neoliberal discourses forming contemporary VET (Avis, 2012, 2019). The beliefs in competitiveness and prosperity, which underpin education policy and VET policy in particular, are manifested not only in national contexts but also in supranational organisations such as the OECD, the World Bank, the WTO and the European Union, all of which have a strong influence on national and international policy (e.g., Avis, 2012; Ball, 1998; Pettersson, Prøitz, & Forsberg, 2017). In the European Union, the so-called Copenhagen process, aimed at enhancing European cooperation in VET and establishing corresponding VET policies, was launched in 2002, and in 2010 the long-term strategic

objectives of the process were declared in the Bruges Communiqué (European Commission, 2002, 2010).

During the 40 years since Swedish initial VET became part of a unified upper secondary education, its objective has changed (Dobbins & Busemeyer, 2015; Lundahl et al., 2010). Swedish educational reforms have been in keeping with this international convergence towards neoliberal policy and the restructuring of education in Sweden at the end of the last century, which has continued on until today, reflecting the permeation of transnational neoliberal discourses and policies into the national context in a particular way (Beach & Dovemark, 2011; Englund, 2005; Lundahl, 2016; Lundahl et al., 2010). The particularity of the Swedish case is due to the speed at which transformations took place during the late 1980s and 1990s, and how the Swedish Social Democratic Party, discarding its strong traditional egalitarian values of educational equality, pushed through policies and reforms in line with ideas that, only a few years earlier, they had opposed. A 1991 education reform that enforced late tracking in upper secondary education, widely regarded as a tool for compensatory educational systems, revealed the motives and intentions as being focused on benefitting national economic growth rather than the traditional Swedish egalitarian and emancipatory goals of equal-opportunity education and increased equality between socioeconomic groups (Erikson, 2017; Lundahl et al., 2010). This change in objective has been labelled as a shift from a discourse of a school for all to a discourse of a school for the labour market. It could also be described as a shift whereby 'the 1970s upper secondary education was imagined as a platform for equality and societal transformation, while in the 1990s individuals were imagined to be responsible for their own progress' (Lappalainen, Nylund, & Rosvall, 2018, p. 348). This shift became visible in how the subject positions of students in policy and curriculum changed over time and in how the idea of citizenship was transformed from a collective democratic construction to one of individual adaptability and flexibility (Carlbaum, 2012; Terning, 2016). Today, the Swedish context is one in which most of the national educational system builds on neoliberal policy

discourses (Dahlstedt & Fejes, 2019; Fejes & Dahlstedt, 2019). This is perhaps most salient in the latest reform of Swedish upper secondary education, which distinctively geared initial VET towards employability and market relevance and created stronger relations between initial VET and the labour market (Lundahl, 2016; Nylund et al., 2017; Virolainen & Persson Thunqvist, 2017). This reform also reduced the VET students' opportunities to continue on to studies in universities and university colleges.

The school-based VET system and the Swedish model

The context of a school-based VET system, in relation to which both AVET and HVE were established, is the result of the development of Swedish VET in the post-war era and into the twenty-first century. This development may be described as a shift from a differentiated system, in part based on collective agreements among the labour-market parties, to a nationwide, school-based system controlled by the state (Berner, 1989; Olofsson & Persson Thunqvist, 2018a).

The 'Swedish model' of co-operation and negotiation between the, usually Social Democratic, government and the two strong labour-market organisations of employers' associations and workers unions has had a substantial impact on the reforms of Swedish VET over the last century (Lundahl, 1997). As the political field of the post-war era in Sweden has been characterised by a centralised state, for many years governed by the Social Democratic Party, which had organised relations with the parties of the labour market, the cooperation on policy reforms has been able to be both close and longstanding. Carried out within the Swedish tradition of negotiation between the state and the labour market, the processes of development and reform of a school-based VET system have been incorporated into this 'Swedish model' (Olofsson & Persson Thunqvist, 2018a). The foundations for this type of cooperation and agreement is the 1938 Saltsjöbaden Basic Agreement, in which the trade unions agreed to contribute to industrial peace and in return the employers accepted the welfare policies of the Social Democratic government (Lundahl, 1997; Olofsson &

Persson Thunqvist, 2018b). Throughout the political processes that have led up to the VET system of today, both of the two central parties of the labour market have been actively engaged and have responded to reform proposals from the state, participated in expert committees and taken responsibility for preparing reforms of VET. Over time, both parties have also advocated the importance of continuously modernising VET as a basis for industrial rationalisation, economic growth and international competitiveness – general societal and labour-market values on which the parties had come to reach agreement. In 1944, a joint committee on VET was formed and, in their work, there was a high level of consensus. The question of how to organise VET was seen as something that the two parties, otherwise often in disagreement and debate with each other, agreed upon (Lundahl, 1997). There was a common opinion that the central state should take responsibility for nationally equivalent education that would provide the workers needed for economic growth, and to use VET as a tool in labour-market policy. During the 1960s, a number of reports investigating aspects of vocational training were commissioned by the government. These led up to a crucial reform in 1971, which made vocational training part of an integrated upper secondary education. This reform came about because of, and was shaped in reaction to, the previous differentiated organisation of vocational training. Before the integration of VET into upper secondary education, although to a large extent state-controlled, it was provided by a wide range of organisations, including several political departments, national agencies and independent boards. But there was also some apprenticeship training through collective agreements among the labour-market parties. The teaching and learning were organised in various ways, and the duration of the training could range from only a few months to several years (Nylund, 2013). With the incorporation of vocational training into upper secondary education, the shift from a nationally differentiated system into one school-based system controlled by the state had occurred. Vocational training in Sweden had gone from a weakly institutionalised system to a highly institutionalised one (Berner, 1989).

One political aim of the establishment of VET as part of upper secondary education in 1971 was to broaden the participation of young people at this level of education and to give universal access to higher education. Qualifications from initial VET in secondary education made students eligible for professional and academic higher education, just like their peers who were following the academic tracks of upper secondary education. Both of the two major parties of the labour market supported this fundamental reform (Lundahl, 1997). However, their support was based on different motives. The employers' associations were more reluctant and argued that VET would become too general. They had wanted a more focused occupational training. However, the employers agreed to support the reform because it was believed to solve the problem of recruiting young people to undertake vocational training and go on to industrial work, which at the time was a hinderance to the expansion and competitiveness of Swedish industry. For their part, the trade unions confederation regarded the reform as an important element in the creation of an educational system based on emancipatory values. In direct contrast to the employers' associations opinion, the unions believed that the volume of general subjects in the new integrated upper secondary curriculum was too small. Nevertheless, this reform for an integrated upper secondary education may be seen as a major win for the Swedish labour movement and its struggle for equal educational opportunities and an end to the previous parallel system, which had locked out large groups of young people from further education pathways (Lundahl, 1997).

This way in which Sweden has organised VET has been described as a corporatist 'class compromise', an ideological and economic package (Hickox & Lyon, 1998). The integration of VET into upper secondary education can be understood as a deliberate political project of the Social Democratic Party to form Swedish society at both economic and ideological levels. The objectives of increased economic productivity and labour-market mobility, as well as social equality for workers, were interrelated. And the strong and centralised state control over the educational system,

including initial VET after 1971, gave the Social Democratic Party a platform for its corporatist economic planning model. Thus, in this light, the Swedish VET reforms of the post-war era can be seen as having been more than simply attempts by the state to meet the changing needs of employers and the labour market. The 1971 integration of VET and academic tracks in upper secondary education was progress for the twofold political commitment to development and economic growth, as well as egalitarian social policies (Olofsson & Persson Thunqvist, 2018a).

The consensus between workers' unions and employers regarding the organisation of VET has been both longstanding and strong. Since 1971, VET has continued to be part of a comprehensive upper secondary education and employers have gradually aligned their approaches in recruitment to school-based VET. Most Swedish political parties also support the system. The historical course of VET in Sweden demonstrates a strong path dependency (Dobbins & Busemeyer, 2015; Olofsson & Persson Thunqvist, 2018a).

However, when the plans for HVE's predecessor AVET were first introduced in 1995, the dynamic between the parties of the labour market was initially very different from the one which had characterised their positions in regard to initial VET in upper secondary education. In this case, the dynamic was not one of consensus. When AVET was first presented, the organisations representing employers and employees had distinctly different opinions (Lindell, 2004a). The confederation of workers' unions and perhaps primarily the Metal Workers' Trade Union, at the time of AVETs introduction in the mid 1990's, held a historically rooted socialist position. They argued for keeping training within the publicly funded and centrally controlled statist VET system. However, the confederation of employers' associations strongly supported the establishment of post-secondary VET in a marketised system with less central control. Their position was that opening up schools to market thinking would force schools and educationalists to stop teaching what the employers perceived to be obsolete knowledge, and instead teach the knowledge they defined as being required

in work. Yet, in a study of the reform by which AVET was made into a permanent system in 2002, after a pilot period which had begun in 1996, the main finding was positive opinions about the reform from these main stakeholders. With the exception of the Metal Workers' Trade Union and the National Agency for Education, the opinions of the different stakeholders had shifted to a consensus position in line with neoliberal discourse. Concepts like individual responsibility, market relevance and globalisation were central. It has been suggested that the consensus which arose between the stakeholders on the permanent establishment of AVET had been reached through the cooperative process of organising actual programmes during the five-year pilot project.

Employer involvement

The establishment of AVET introduced a form of VET involving much closer relationships between school and work in the Swedish educational system (Ministry of Education and Research, 2008b). To realise this close cooperation, policy defined how it would be organised (Lindell, 2006). Just as it would come to be in HVE, every programme in AVET was required to have a local steering group in charge of both operational and strategic issues. These groups should include representatives from both school and working life. However, who was supposed to take part in these groups differed from the HVE management groups. From working life, both representatives of trade unions and employers' associations were assumed to participate. Also, both educators and management were required to participate from the school side (Lindell, 2006). This meant a broad representation on the boards of AVET. These boards and their composition, where all the representatives could be interpreted as having an equal capacity to exert power and responsibility, have also been thought of as compensating for regional and industrial characteristics (Lindell, 2004a).

AVET was conceived of and talked about as an apprentice-like provision of training, and a major aspect of the employer involvement in AVET consisted of providing workplace learning (Lindell, 2006). A study of AVET

(Lindell, 2004b) found that four different types of workplace learning could be identified. Trainee placements were the most common form, but work-based projects were also used, and these focused on developing students' ability to plan and coordinate their own work. Classic apprenticeship approaches were only used in a few craft and trade courses. A less commonly used type of workplace learning was adoption, where students were adopted by companies and students, teachers and company representatives together planned different types of work-based learning related to the needs of the individual student.

In initial VET, the involvement of employers has been limited since the establishment of integrated upper secondary education in 1971. In the twentieth-century tripartite agreement, the responsibility for VET was held by the state. However, the 2011 reform of Swedish upper secondary education introduced new legislation on cooperation with employers for initial VET. The 2011 reform formalised relations with business and industry in national and local reference groups (Nylund, 2010; Nylund & Rosvall, 2016). Their purpose is to link VET more closely to the world of work. The national reference groups work in an advisory capacity with the National Agency for Education. The legislation regarding local reference groups is however limited. It does not regulate their constitution or forms of meeting, and it has been reported that local reference groups' relation to training is questionable (Panican & Paul, 2019). The local reference groups seem to be having difficulties in influencing both the training locally and the agenda of the national reference groups.

One other example of employer involvement is an industry-driven initiative regarding technical VET in Swedish upper secondary education, *Teknikcollege*, which has come to be realised and expand nationally (Persson & Hermelin, 2018). This initiative, which was formed in 2004, is said to have been made possible because working life had been given a more influential role in initial VET and national control of upper secondary education had been loosened due to decentralisation and marketisation. The initiative is a certification scheme, which runs parallel to the national regulations, and

aims to secure manual skills in technology-based industries. The initiative is based on voluntary, decentralised, regional cooperation between clusters of municipalities (which are responsible for the public provision of initial VET), an employers' organisation and a trade union. A similar initiative has also been successful in the area of healthcare education, but with the major difference that most of the employers involved in this case are public organisations (Andershed & Ljungzell, 2009). And, in many instances, the municipalities employing care workers with qualifications from initial VET are also the organisations that provide initial VET within healthcare to both young people and adults. There are also examples of a few industry bodies and employers' associations which have started schools of their own to provide upper secondary education and adult education. However, it is more common for industry certification or industry approval to be given to schools, which is done in different ways in different industries (Panican & Paul, 2019). These schools are marketed as quality assured and directly related to working life, since the employers are steering the training.

Employer involvement is widely recognised, in both practice and policy as well as in research, as a key factor in effective vocational training (e.g., Bolli, Caves, Renold, & Buergi, 2018; Higham & Farnsworth, 2012; Hodgson, Spours, Smith, & Jeanes, 2019). Within industries where employers find it difficult to identify candidates with appropriate training, industry–school partnerships are giving rise to new opportunities for both students and employers (e.g., Flynn, Pillay, & Watters, 2016; Lakes, 2012; McGurk & Meredith, 2018). But employer involvement in VET may take many different shapes. They may be informal practices or formal arrangements governed by policy. Although systems with strongly regulated forms of cooperation between VET and employers or industry do not provide a warranty as to how they operate, the actual cooperation may in practice diverge from that policy and regulation (Emmenegger, Graf, & Trampusch, 2019).

Whether formal or informal, the practices of employer involvement can be conceptualised, analysed or measured from different perspectives; for

instance, by examining the intensity of cooperation (Emmenegger et al., 2019) or aspects of what can be called education–employment linkage (Bolli et al., 2018). But initiatives can also be both conceptualised and understood as partnerships in which responsibility is shared, for both successes and failures (Pillay, Watters, Hoff, & Flynn, 2014). Another way of considering the practices of partnerships between school and industry is by using the concepts of communities of practice and boundary work. The crossing mechanisms of boundary work have been shown to support a relevant curriculum that is industry-based and contextualised as well as helping students to transform their behaviour in order to function successfully as apprentices (Flynn et al., 2016). Research on the work of vocational teachers in the Swedish context, in initial VET at upper secondary level, describe VET teachers' work as largely being practices of boundary-work and the fostering of sociocultural identities for entry into vocational communities of practice (P. Andersson & Köpsén, 2019; Berner, 2010; Fejes & Köpsén, 2014; S. Köpsén, 2014). This is expressed as teachers using boundary crossing. They translate the demands of occupations into the training and align school and work practices by situating the school-based training within an imagined workplace and its social context (Berner, 2010). In boundary crossing, teachers convey the norms and traditions from a community of practice to students by figuratively bringing the world of work into school by telling stories and providing examples (S. Köpsén, 2014).

The abilities of individuals to foster partnerships and cooperation with employers and industry are important, and thus a need for balance between regulated processes and flexibility that allows individuals room to create and maintain partnerships based on personal relationships has been advocated (Pillay et al., 2014). Employers' involvement in VET may be vulnerable to changes in school staff, and the informality of partnerships that are not supported by structures but rather are dependent on individuals also makes the processes of cooperation more difficult to monitor and evaluate (Polesel, Klatt, Blake, & Starr, 2017).

Marketised provision

Alongside the discursive transformation due to neoliberal policies entering the Swedish context, there was also a shift in who provides public education in Sweden. This has also been suggested as reflecting the permeation of transnational neoliberal policy into the Swedish national context (Ball, 2007; Ball & Youdell, 2009; Erixon Arreman & Holm, 2011; Fejes, Runesdotter, & Wärvik, 2016). Consistent with the global phenomenon of marketisation and privatisation, publicly funded but privately owned schools and for-profit educational enterprises now accompany public schools in the provision of education throughout the Swedish educational system, including adult education. Sweden is regarded as a pioneer of marketisation and privatisation because the owners of publicly funded independent schools are entitled to retain the profits generated from the provision of public education (Erixon Arreman & Holm, 2011; Rönnberg, Lindgren, & Lundahl, 2019).

With the greater presence of marketisation in VET systems, in Sweden and internationally, providers are also steered by market-oriented objectives. Educational organisations in contemporary VET systems cannot be assumed to act based on traditional ideas of social inclusion and the collective good. In competitive educational systems, where providers compete for market share, they may rather base their actions on economic factors and for the survival of the organisation (Emmenegger et al., 2019). Notably, this is not a prerequisite only for private providers, with market forces also influencing public education. In one instance of such policy strategies, it was found that American public community colleges had to become entrepreneurial, with market-driven goals, due to rising competition from for-profit VET institutions (Lakes, 2012). This phenomenon of marketisation within public organisations has also been found in the Swedish context, when the provision of adult and second-chance education is studied within a competitive model (Holmqvist, Fejes, & Nylander, 2020).

Knowledge in VET curricula

As already stated, VET is a broad field, and one area of difference is that not all VET systems are based on the same idea of what vocational knowledge is or what type of knowledge VET should entail. Within Europe, different systems focus on both practical skills for specific occupations, as in for instance England, and support a more holistic concept of knowledge in VET qualifications, as in for instance Germany and the Netherlands (Brockmann et al., 2008). What knowledge is deemed important in VET qualifications or curricula is also argued differently by educational researchers. One stance is that knowledge in VET curricula should not only entail context-bound experiential knowledge, but also give VET students abilities for autonomous reflection and influence in both occupational and societal conversations or controversies (e.g., Wheelahan, 2007, 2015; Young, 2006). Reflection and critical thinking have been raised as important in VET to avoid limiting the training to the learning of skills and the social order of the labour market (Rönnlund et al., 2019). On the other hand, VET systems that include a broader idea of knowledge may be criticised in relation to the goal of VET to provide training relevant to the labour market.

The second part of this review, below, treats different approaches to knowledge in VET and employers' role in relation to the knowledge included in VET curricula.

Different approaches to knowledge in VET

'Skills-based' systems are characterised by training for narrow skills with a minimal underpinning of theoretical knowledge. However, in sharp contrast, systems built on a 'knowledge-based' model, incorporate large amounts of theoretical knowledge from a holistic perspective, promoting personal development and civic education (Brockmann et al., 2008). Students in these systems are trained to be autonomous, with the abilities to reflect upon situations and actions and to create innovative knowledge in their occupational field. The outcomes of these 'knowledge-based' systems

are commonly negotiated by diverse groups of stakeholders. These can consist of the state, employers, unions, teaching institutions or others relevant to the specific context. This form of VET enjoys higher social status than VET in 'skills-based' systems (Webb, Bathmaker, et al., 2017). In addition, whilst employability in 'knowledge-based' systems isn't solely, or even primarily, based on the benefits to employers, the 'skills-based' formation of VET promotes an instrumentalist meaning of employability to meet the needs of employers and to strengthen national competitiveness (Avis, 2012). This instrumentalist perspective lacks a focus on citizenship and neglects values of personal autonomy, limiting the meaning of autonomy to employment, and thus hindering both occupational and social mobility (Brockmann et al., 2008).

One form of 'skills-based' VET is what is labelled competency-based training (CBT) (Wheelahan, 2007). In the Australian context, neoliberal reforms introduced CBT into VET, and it was initially formed as skill development that was meant to align with the needs of the economy in a more general sense. Changes in policy, however, have since narrowed the formulation of VET, emphasising that the aim of the VET system is to 'fulfil specific employer skills needs' at the expense of the needs of the workers (Gekara & Snell, 2018, p. 107). With the aim of making VET strongly related, and also highly responsive, to the needs of industry, a competitive VET market, in which providers compete for market share, was instigated (Pasura, 2014). A tripartite arrangement of educational development involving employers, government and union representatives has been reformed into a set of standardised industry-defined outcomes (Gekara & Snell, 2018). VET providers must deliver training in the form of CBT based on national, pre-defined so-called training packages (Wheelahan, 2007, 2009). An analysis of these training packages reveals their inherent formulation of knowledge as competency, described as 'knowledge and skill and the application of that knowledge and skill' (The Training Package Development Handbook, p. 105, as cited in Wheelahan, 2007, p. 646). What is described as theoretical knowledge is a requirement in the compilation of these

training packages, but it is limited to knowledge that is 'actually applied at work' (DEST, 2006, p. 117 as cited in Wheelahan, 2009, p. 231). This means that what is called theoretical knowledge is also bound to contexts of practice.

One of the strongest criticisms of 'skills-based' CBT and other VET formations that focus on outcomes as procedural knowledge is that it denies VET students access to knowledge that enables autonomous reflection, influence in societal conversations or personal development (e.g., Avis, 2012; Brockmann et al., 2008; Gamble, 2014; Wheelahan, 2007; Wheelahan, 2009; Young, 2013). The Australian and British educational systems have been put forward as elucidative examples of systems that are clearly characterised by neoliberal policies (Ball & Youdell, 2009) and VET models in these countries have been labelled as impoverished due to the favouring of skills over knowledge in the curricula (Wheelahan, 2009, 2015). The policies that shape the British FE system have been argued to disregard crucial aspects of VET, such as teaching, learning and the curriculum in an all-too-narrow focus on market relevance (Lucas & Crowther, 2016).

In the Swedish context, prevailing ideas about what knowledge is important in VET have shifted over time (Nylund, 2013). The decentralised organisation of vocational training before the reform that incorporated VET into upper secondary education in 1971 gave a strong influence on the training to local employers. The content of the training was determined by the logic of the local labour market, not that of education or political strategies. Before the 1971 reform, the content was unregulated, much was decided locally, and the knowledge was tied to specific contexts. This meant that the curricula varied greatly, even when directed towards the same occupations. However, the reform that integrated VET into upper secondary education created a new type of vocational curricula. The ambition was that the reform implemented in 1971 would ensure that:

> Social ties to the local factory or local community were cut off. The knowledge was not to be tied to a company's machinery or traditions. It should be possible to use in both an industry-wise and geographically broader labour market, but should also serve as a basis for the 'lifelong learning' that was now presented as an ideal. (Berner, 1989 as cited in Nylund, 2013, p. 53, my translation)

One pivotal idea in the reform was to create equality through providing the same education to students regardless of where or when it was provided (Nylund, 2013). The reform established VET tracks with content that was controlled centrally by a national agency, rather than training that was directly related to the needs of local businesses and employers. The curricula of initial VET in the new integrated upper secondary education was more wide-ranging and targeted at a broader labour market than the earlier forms of vocational training, whether school-based or part of an apprenticeship. Over time, Swedish VET, based on longstanding Social Democratic policy and tripartite agreements, has continued to be orientated towards the flexibility of workers in the labour market. Rather than aiming to train workers in specific practical skills, Swedish VET has entailed the idea of transferable and general skills as important both for the students/workers and for the economic growth of their employers. The idea has been that the VET curricula and the skills taught in VET are valuable if they are transferrable between different employers and different geographic regions and can function as a base for lifelong learning (Hickox & Lyon, 1998). The idea is that VET is a tool of the active labour-market policy characteristic of the Swedish model. Thus, VET could not be narrow or adapted to only a single workplace, because there would then be a danger of locking the individual into a specific and narrow sector of the labour market (Lundahl, 1997). As a result, Swedish VET, in comparison with many other vocational training systems, has included a relatively large amount of general or academic subjects and a smaller share of learning in workplaces (Nylund, 2013). However, the intention of the reform was to ensure that vocational and academic upper secondary education was not only integrated but also more

equal. The worker unions have continuously argued that VET, just like academic education, must provide the knowledge and skills that enable students to be active in society and politics and gives them qualifications necessary to go on to academic and professional higher education (Lundahl, 1997). Swedish VET curricula have not been shaped only to create skilled workers, but have also entailed knowledge that supports workers as participating citizens (Hickox & Lyon, 1998). This organisation of knowledge is based on the desire to minimise the socially reproductive function of VET and to also foster workers as active citizens who can manoeuvre within a changing labour market. This focus has also meant that the normative and disciplinary aspect of VET fostering working-class youth to be workers has not been as prominent as in, for instance, Great Britain and Australia (Lundahl, 1997), countries with systems of vocational training governed by a market-oriented approach.

The fact that modern Swedish initial VET has entailed general and academic subjects has been regarded for the most part as emancipatory, not least because it gives equal access to further educational pathways. But VET curricula with large proportions of general and academic subjects may be problematised. Two points of critique have been raised (Olofsson & Panican, 2017). Firstly, that Swedish initial VET, because of its large amount of general or academic subjects, has high levels of dropouts. This is problematic because dropping out may lead to precarity in working life and lower lifetime earnings, and all the disadvantages and risks associated with this. Secondly, the focus on general or academic subjects has been questioned because it is seen as hindering opportunities for well-paid employment and creating an occupational identity in relation to contexts outside of school, such as industry councils, guilds or other professional organisations or groups. The latter point of critique must, however, be seen in the light of VET as part of the wider organisation of labour in Sweden. In Sweden, vocations are not controlled by regulations or systems of certification of vocational skills elsewhere than in the centralised state-controlled educational system. The Swedish model and the consensus regarding the state's

responsibility to provide skilled workers have not created a system of parallel certifications (Dobbins & Busemeyer, 2015; Lundahl, 1997). The tripartite reform planning of Swedish VET, which is based on strong and collective negotiation, has provided legitimacy to the school-based vocational system (Hickox & Lyon, 1998).

Several of the research contributions discussing the Swedish VET system just before the turn of the century predicted a change in the longstanding paradigm of emancipatory values that were strongly influencing educational policies and reforms in the twentieth century (e.g., Hickox & Lyon, 1998; Lundahl, 1997). Although not seriously questioned at the time, these scholars predicted that the longstanding integrated educational system, with its significant elements of general education, would come under pressure:

> Class compromise is being replaced by a return to a more open class antagonism, in which the Swedish capitalist financial elites are gaining the upper hand. In educational terms this is … likely to be reflected in an increasing dissatisfaction with the existing delivery of vocational education and a desire to move towards a system which is more class selective and has greater direct employer influence over the nature and cost of vocational education. (Hickox & Lyon, 1998, p. 35)

These predictions have been realised. Still situated within a state-controlled school-based system, the current curriculum for initial VET in Swedish upper secondary education is nevertheless now consistent with the neoliberal discourses of international education policy which are guided by market relevance and employability, just like in a 'skills-based' formation. There is now a clear-cut division of tracks into either VET or higher education preparatory programmes. The organisation of knowledge in these separate tracks differs greatly and prepares students for very different roles and positions in society (Nylund & Rosvall, 2016; Nylund et al., 2017). In the curriculum for initial VET, which precedes HVE in the vocational pathway of the Swedish educational system, knowledge is segmented and strongly context

bound. A study of how critical thinking appears in teaching based on these curricula found that the teaching focused primarily on 'doing' but also found situations that involved critical thinking (Rönnlund et al., 2019). However, for the most part, these situations focused on self-reflections or reflection on the teaching object based on already acquired everyday knowledge. The transferring of such reflections between different contexts was restricted and these situations did not provide opportunities for discussing social, historical or political issues. However, there were some differences found in relation to field of training, which depended on the knowledge discourses permeating that field. In health and social care classes, students were sometimes asked to think critically, to question and debate in the classroom. This provided students with some form of individual analytical competences, including civic competence, similar to those of expressing criticism in society and actively participating in democratic processes.

These curricula reproduce social inequalities. Most students in Swedish upper secondary VET have a working-class background. The strong emphasis on context-bound knowledge and employability limits their possibilities to exercise their citizenship as well as their social mobility through hindering access to higher education at university level or progression within their occupational field (Nylund & Rosvall, 2016; Virolainen & Persson Thunqvist, 2017).

Employers and the knowledge in curricula

What is specific to VET, in contrast to other education, is the comparatively direct relationship with work. In this, employer involvement in shaping curricula or qualifications may play a greater or lesser role depending on the prevailing opinion about who best knows how to form curricula. It is advocated that employers with important industry experience and expertise are best used in processes where they can make a meaningful contribution, such as in commenting on qualifications or curricular design, but not taking the lead in designing them (Huddleston & Laczik, 2018). The development of

qualifications or curricula is raised as an example of where employers' knowledge and experience do not match the task. Policy giving them this influence and responsibility is argued by some to be problematic (Huddleston & Laczik, 2018; Young, 2006). However, conversely, it is argued by others as being crucial to the effectiveness of VET and to ensure the correspondence between skills supply and demand (Bolli et al., 2018).

Reforms and the development of VET in the UK have over time gone in different directions, making it possible to distinguish different positions for employers and/or industry in approaches to its formation (Young, 2006). One distinction is characterised by the assumptions that the vocational curriculum needs to be controlled by the key users, the employers, that all school-based VET teaching must be determined by the needs of employers in the workplaces and that vocational qualifications need to prioritise the assessment of competence in the workplace over knowledge acquired in school-based teaching and learning. This, 'skills-based' formation has been labelled a standards-based approach because the implications of these assumptions in the UK led to VET curricula being derived from national occupational standards agreed by employers. However, experience from the UK standards-based approach and its employer-led bodies that were intended to create curricula demonstrate that, in reality, many employers are reluctant to take on such a role and often lack the expertise needed to formulate curricula. There are differences between sectors, but the UK experience reveals a largely ad hoc method of defining outcomes and specifying what is called underpinning (theoretical) knowledge. These processes may result in:

> lists of topics which either amount to little more than what anyone would know after a few weeks in a workplace … or involve a combination of everyday workplace facts (what tools are needed or where to find them) together with some scientific or highly technical topics with little idea as to what depth they should be studied at. (Young, 2006, p. 111)

Another distinctive feature of UK VET policy has been labelled a connective approach (Young, 2006). In this approach, it is explicitly recognised that the knowledge provided in VET should not be limited to what can be learned in a workplace, thus connecting and complementing knowledge gained through work-based learning with that of school-based learning. This is a 'knowledge-based' formation. However, when this approach was implemented, it was again the employers in government-funded bodies who were to define the content and knowledge of the curricula. This preserved the problems of employers' unwillingness and inability to formulate curricula identified in the previously used standards-based approach.

Whether employers represent themselves in processes of curricula or qualifications design, or whether they participate through an intermediary organisation, has been raised as an important question when analysing and understanding the relevance of VET to work. From one perspective, intermediary organisations improve the process of defining employers' skills needs for qualifications because they aggregate information from single employers (Bolli et al., 2018). However, this is questioned by others. Clear tensions have been found, for instance, between what an Australian national skills council for a specific industry advocated as curricular content and the needs of local businesses cooperating with VET institutions (Polesel et al., 2017). Similarly, in the UK context, an example found that policy efforts to create a market-driven framework for meeting local labour-market needs were not successfully engaging local employers (McGurk & Meredith, 2018). As a result, the associations of enterprises created had only weak insight into the skills needs and priorities of local employers. And, as previously mentioned, in Sweden the relationships between local and national reference groups for initial VET also seem to be problematic (Panican & Paul, 2019).

One criticism of employer-defined curricula, regardless of whether this is done through aggregated processes by intermediary organisations or not, is that others who very well could have contributed to qualitative curricula are set aside (Bathmaker, 2013). It has been argued that the focus on

employers' control of curricula conceals the absence of other groups and limits curricula from being informed by new and evolving knowledge from research and specialists, or of occupational practice from worker representatives. From one perspective, it seems that the control over curricula by educationalists, vocational specialists in educational organisations, or employers is the dominant struggle, rather than the one over what is in these curricula. And the relative decision-making power of actors from education and industry to define qualifications has been raised as an important factor for knowledge in VET curricula (e.g., Bolli et al., 2018; Gekara & Snell, 2018). How this relative decision-making power plays out may also depend on the positions and qualifications of VET teachers. It has been argued that vocational teachers with responsibilities for curricular adaptation and development need more holistic teacher training if they are to be well-equipped stakeholders in such processes (Grollmann, 2008; Wheelahan & Moodie, 2012). To have power in the processes of creation and interpretation of curricula, as well as to facilitate training with high relevance to work, VET teachers need to have up-to-date knowledge of practices in the field (e.g., P. Andersson & Köpsén, 2019; Fejes & Köpsén, 2014; Isopahkala-Bouret, 2010; Wheelahan & Moodie, 2012).

In Sweden, as presented earlier in this overview, for an extended period of time during the twentieth century, complete responsibility for VET lay with the state, and national agencies formed the curricula (Hickox & Lyon, 1998; Lundahl, 1997; Nylund, 2013; Olofsson & Persson Thunqvist, 2018a). However, this has changed, and during the first decade of the twenty-first century employer and labour-market influence over Swedish VET have grown (Nylund & Rosvall, 2016; Olofsson & Persson Thunqvist, 2018a). This increased influence has manifested both through initiatives from the parties of the labour market and in the shape of reforms initiated in the policy realm.

One example where employers and trade unions to some extent control the training and influence the curricula is the industry-driven initiative regarding technical VET in Swedish upper secondary education previously

mentioned. This initiative, *Teknikcollege*, has challenged the nationally organised system with new structures in which business and industry are important partners in the local management and development of students' training (Persson & Hermelin, 2018). The certification scheme of this initiative applies differing criteria for the quality assurance of skill formation than the national curricula and the national agency. For instance, it places different demands on what knowledge the training should entail. The tripartite agreement of municipalities, employers and the union in this initiative not only aligns course content to locally defined needs, it places greater value on general academic knowledge than in the national curricula. This has led to a lengthening of the initial technical VET programme at certified schools, i.e. a departure that goes beyond national curricula and regulations. Students in technical VET at certified schools thus complete upper secondary education with more credits than students following the national curricula.

The 2011 reform of initial VET in upper secondary education formalised relations with business and industry in national and local reference groups (Nylund, 2010; Nylund & Rosvall, 2016). The national reference groups sprang from industry-specific groups consisting of representatives of employers' associations and trade unions created during the reform process. These groups gave their input on the formation of new vocational tracks and their curricula. These industry-specific national reference groups and related industry representatives also continuously consult with the National Agency of Education on specific occupational paths within the VET tracks in upper secondary school, and on the selection of courses for VET course packages in municipal adult education which provide initial VET at upper secondary level for adults (National Agency for Education, 2020b; Panican & Paul, 2019).

In AVET, employers had direct control over the content and the curricula together with schools. It has been reported that the possibility of employers influencing curricula in AVET, where programmes were designed in co-operation between educationalists and employers based on

local labour-market requirements, was considered a positive aspect of AVET after its pilot period (Lindell, 2004b). In AVET, much of the employer influence on knowledge was also manifested during workplace learning. One-third of the programmes consisted of workplace learning, which had the aim of being periods of advanced application of theoretical knowledge outside school (Ministry of Education and Research, 2008b). The aim of this workplace training was not only to be related to a specific occupation (Lindell, 2006). It was also a requirement that employers provided opportunities for training in a more general sense. The students were to train and enhance their analytical abilities, learn how to take responsibility for their own work and gain competences for cooperation with others.

Limited previous research on Higher Vocational Education

Even though educational research in Sweden is plentiful, there are few previous studies relating to HVE. A doctoral thesis, from within the context of a particular HVE organisation, focuses on a group of students who are being trained to become specialists in extracting, analysing and using digital data (Ye, 2018). Taking an interpretative, longitudinal and multi-method approach, this study follows students who are presented as experiencing a dual 'not-yet' situation. They are at the stage of aspiring to work, but the occupations to which they aspire do not yet exist. The findings of the study, however, present how a strong school culture, alongside a strong labour market, facilitates 'faith' in their weak-form occupational pathways. From this study, it is also possible to acquire some images of how learning is organised. In this case, the school has made 'efforts to move away from teacher-centric, test-based education' (p. 82). The programme is realised as real-life projects and the school organises 'interactive sessions and workshops where the school brings industry players from around the globe to facilitate lectures and seminars' (p. 82). Ye (2020) also reports on how these students navigate unclear occupational futures and the ethical grey zones in their field of work, and how this aspect may be seen as a challenge for HVE

programmes. Ye points to the fact that the programmes 'are short in nature (because their aims are to get students out into work fast)' and asks 'where programme managers will find time to fit in training on ethics and moral judgement as competences, and who will train on such issues' (p. 252).

The National Agency for Higher Vocational Education has commissioned three reports which contain research reviews by researchers specifically on HVE. These reports treat the themes of quality, or best practice, in work-based learning (Littke, Faurschou, & Thång, 2013), Swedish research on VET cooperation with employers (Svensson, 2014) and theoretical perspectives on teaching and VET educators (Olofsson, Kvist, & Leijon, 2016).

A forthcoming study, *Right competence at the right time – but for whom? Trajectories and aspirations within and beyond higher vocational education in Sweden* (Ye, Chudnovskaya, & Nylander, Project ID: 2019-04146, Swedish Research Council) will examine the recruitment of participants into HVE and their transition into the labour market through a mixed-methods study combining register data on enrolees and graduates with their educational and employment trajectories pre- and post-training in HVE, using observations and longitudinal qualitative interviews.

Conclusion: use of the research in this review

The presentation of research in this chapter has mainly served two purposes. Firstly, to present and give some specific insights into the historic and current national education policy context where HVE is found as well as into how Swedish VET has evolved during the last century. The review presents the development of the organisation of vocational training in Sweden in relation to how different ideas on the purpose of VET and its relation to work and the labour market has been dominant in different times. The Swedish context and its historical formation have also been put into an international perspective. Secondly, the presentation of research in this chapter has served the purpose of showcasing studies and discussions

related to the perspective of questioning the organisation of education and knowledge in relation to distribution of power in society. It has presented contributions to the field of VET research that ask the questions of who controls the selection and distribution of knowledge and what knowledge is worth most and whose knowledge that is. In all, the review presented in this chapter is only depicting a limited amount of research. It is not an exhaustive overview but a rather a partial one where contributions mainly stem from the Nordic research community and the contexts of northern Europe as well as, primarily, USA, Canada, Australia and the UK.

The research presented in this review is, though not exclusively, a compilation of the research presented and used in the four articles making up the base of this thesis.

In article 1 (J. Köpsén, 2020c), where focus is on how policy have formed the HVE and motivated its establishment, it is mainly the parts of the review above that present how educational systems can be said to represent different institutional relations linked to different conceptions of the relations between education and the labour market which overlap (e.g., Busemeyer & Trampusch, 2011; Dobbins & Busemeyer, 2015; Pilz et al., 2017; Thelen, 2004). However, also previous research presenting the historical development of Swedish VET play a crucial part for this article (e.g., Beach & Dovemark, 2011; Englund, 2005; Lundahl, 2016; Lundahl et al., 2010; Nylund & Rosvall, 2016; Nylund et al., 2017).

For articles 2 and 3 (J. Köpsén, 2020b, 2020d) which focus on curriculum and the knowledge in HVE it is foremost the typologies, discussions and previous studies presented in the sections 'Different approaches to knowledge in VET' and 'Employers and the knowledge in curricula' that have been used (e.g., Avis, 2012; Brockmann et al., 2008; Gamble, 2014; Nylund & Rosvall, 2016; Nylund et al., 2017; Wheelahan, 2007, 2009; Young, 2006, 2013) but also research that pose critical questions of whether the expanded access to, and vocational pathways in, higher education actually are contributing to reducing inequalities play a crucial part of the

backdrop for these articles (e.g., Bathmaker, 2017; Marginson, 2016; Webb, Bathmaker, et al., 2017; Webb, Burke, et al., 2017).

In article 3 (J. Köpsén, 2020d) research on VET teachers are presented and used for the discussion on programme managers as responsible for teaching in the programmes (e.g., P. Andersson & Köpsén, 2019; Berner, 2010; Farnsworth & Higham, 2012; Fejes & Köpsén, 2014; Grollmann, 2008; Isopahkala-Bouret, 2010; S. Köpsén, 2014; Priestley, Edwards, Priestley, & Miller, 2012; Wheelahan & Moodie, 2012).

In article 4 (J. Köpsén, 2020a) the focus is on cooperation between school and employers in the practices of education provision. Therefor research on different aspects of employer involvement plays the biggest part in this article (e.g., Bolli et al., 2018; Emmenegger et al., 2019; Higham & Farnsworth, 2012; Hodgson et al., 2019; Huddleston & Laczik, 2018; McGurk & Meredith, 2018; Pillay et al., 2014; Polesel et al., 2017; Rusten & Hermelin, 2017).

As a whole, this review helps to frame the issues investigated and discussed in this thesis and it also serves as a backdrop and sounding board for the discussions in chapter 6 of this thesis.

3. Theoretical and interpretative framework

In this study, the Swedish system of vocational higher education is investigated and problematised using the theoretical framework developed by Basil Bernstein (1990, 1999, 2000) in combination with further developed, VET-specific and contemporary contributions in the shape of discussions on the theory and applications in original research presented in the section 'Additions to the framework' below.

Besides contributing to insights into the context of HVE and some of its programmes, this thesis interprets and considers the HVE system and the training in its programmes as expressions of broader contexts, social structures and patterns. Thus, in this thesis, a distinction is made between, on the one hand, the concrete and directly observable and, on the other hand, the relations and structures that are not directly observable, but of which the concrete is an expression. Observation and recognition of the not directly observable or obvious is mediated by the concepts and models of the theoretical framework presented in the following. The overarching theoretical framework is also the interpretative framework. And theory engages directly with the empirical representations in data in the theoretical thematic analyses of this thesis (see Chapter 4).

Key concepts

Theory is a coherent system of ideas and concepts that make up a language. This language is an abstraction which enables the understanding and

communication of abstract relationships. This is how the theoretical framework is used as a tool in the interpretation and analysis of the studied empirical problem and phenomena in this thesis.

In the following, I will present the theoretical model and key concepts used in this thesis as they are described and defined by Bernstein (1990, 1999, 2000).

The model of the pedagogic device and recontextualisation of knowledge

In the analyses and interpretations of this thesis, an initial, or principal, criterion is that HVE is considered as a *pedagogic device*, a model outlined and intrinsically described by Bernstein (1990, 2000). The pedagogic device is a theoretical model of how generative principles of power and control shape education and its role in society. Thus, it is possible to view HVE, like other parts of the Swedish educational system, as part of a national pedagogic device that comprehensively reproduces power relations in society. The model is a tool for understanding education as a relay for the division of labour and power and of the social order through reproduction. In this thesis, it is the generative principles of power and control in HVE that are being investigated, and this defines how the model is used in this case. The motivation for using the model in analysis is that it is not merely descriptive but its formation offers the opportunity to understand the studied context, and phenomena within it, as something that extends beyond its immediate everyday interpretation. The understanding of education as the model enables an analysis of underlying principles for the transformation of knowledge into pedagogic communication because the model mediates between the empirical and theoretical levels. It provides the opportunity to explore the studied context by offering new language for understanding the phenomena and relationships within it.

In this study, two of the three levels in the model of the pedagogic device depicted in Figure 2 are used. These two levels are the top one, where *distributive rules* govern the *field of production of discourse* in which knowledge is

produced, and the middle level, where *recontextualising rules* regulate the *recontextualising fields* in which knowledge is selected and thus also transformed for the purposes of education. The third and lowest level is where *evaluative rules* relate to pedagogic practice in the *field of reproduction*. The processes of this level lie outside the scope of this study.

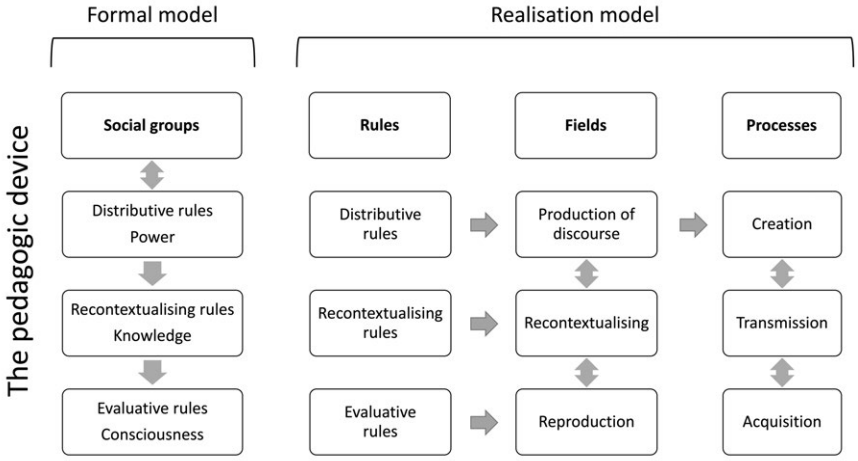

Figure 2. The pedagogic device and its key relations (modelled after Bernstein, 2000, p. 37).

The rules of the pedagogic device control who gets access to what knowledge (Bernstein, 1990, 2000). The rules of the device are hierarchical in the order of the levels presented above. At the left-hand side of Figure 2, the formal model shows that the distributive rules regulate power by regulating the relationships between social groups and consciousness, through giving or limiting access to knowledge (Bernstein, 1996, 44–45). Hence, the distributive rules differentiate and stratify groups and social power in the selection and transformation of knowledge for use in different educational contexts. To the right in Figure 2, the realisation model depicts how knowledge as discourse is created, moved and acquired in different fields and the rules that regulate these processes.

The recontextualising rules define the processes in recontextualising fields, the transmission of knowledge into pedagogic contexts. This means

that they regulate the processes that form *pedagogic discourse*. Pedagogic discourses are not, however, discourses of specific knowledge, but principles for transmission within recontextualising fields. These are principles for the selection of knowledge, moving them from the field of production of discourse into education and training. There are two types of recontextualising fields in a pedagogic device within which pedagogic discourses are formed and given specific meaning (Bernstein, 1990, 2000). Firstly, the *official recontextualising fields* which are directly regulated by the state in legislation and policy as well as administratively through authorities and national agencies. Secondly, the *pedagogic recontextualising fields* which are found in contexts of educational practice and involve actors in proximity to these contexts, including but not limited to local school boards, school leaders and teachers (Bernstein, 1990, 2000). The differentiation of these fields is not depicted in the visualisation of the model of the pedagogic device in Figure 2 above.

The actors in these fields are described by Bernstein as *agents* who all have recontextualising functions (Bernstein, 2000). These agents act on the basis of their power, social positions, interests, traditions and history, as well as on the basis of their knowledge. The rules of the pedagogic device, which are ideological and reflect the social order, regulate the processes of recontextualisation, as well as the relations of power and control in and between recontextualising fields and the agents in these fields. The fields may be aligned, if actors in policy and educational practice share positions on the selection and transformation of knowledge for use in the educational context, or in opposition if the positions differ. When in opposition, the fields struggle for control over the knowledge that is being recontextualised; thus, having power and control over the pedagogic recontextualising fields is key to controlling access to knowledge (Bernstein, 2000).

Imagined pedagogic identities

Discourses, when transformed in recontextualising for education, i.e. for acquisition in the field of reproduction, comprise both an instructional discourse of specialised knowledge (what) and an ideological, moral and

regulative discourse of social order (how) (Bernstein, 1990). The regulative discourse is dominant in producing the order of the instructional discourse, i.e. the organisation of subjects and their sequencing and pacing, as well as the rate of expected acquisition. This order, the theory of instruction, entails models of imagined pedagogic identities for students and teachers as well as of pedagogic contexts. These identities are projections of the bias and focus of the social order prevailing in policy struggles. Bernstein (2000) differentiates possible identities as one retrospective identity shaped by religious and cultural grand narratives of the past, one prospective identity also recontextualising the past, and two de-centred identities of autonomy. The de-centred market identity is based on the bias towards and focus on pedagogic practices that optimise the exchange value of their product in a market, and the autonomy that is necessary to respond directly to the market and be competitive. The market identity represents a focus on the short term, in what Bernstein characterises as a 'culture and context to facilitate the survival of the fittest as judged by market demands' (2000, p. 69), which installs a competitive enterprise culture within the managing and provision of education.

Knowledge as horizontal and vertical discourse

At a later stage in the development of his theory, Bernstein (1999, 2000) elaborated upon what he conceptualised as knowledge realised as either *horizontal discourse* or *vertical discourse*. The distinction between the two is based on the 'form of knowledge' and could be said to relate to what are sometimes labelled as real-world or common-sense knowledge (horizontal discourse) and academic or disciplinary knowledge (vertical discourse).

Knowledge realised in horizontal discourse is the mundane (Bernstein, 1996). It is segmented and context bound (Bernstein, 1999). Horizontal discourse is often oral and tacit and can be described as contextually specific sets of strategies, or as a segmented *repertoire* of competences for different contexts and their practices. The acquisition of horizontal discourse is to be understood as development of the repertoire, the individual set of strategies,

through the circulation of knowledge from the total sets of strategies possessed by all members of a community, the *reservoir*. This circulation is dependent upon access to and partaking in practices and the contexts of their enactment. Horizontal discourse may also be recontextualised for the purposes of educational communication. However, the segmented organisation of knowledge infers segmentally structured acquisition and thus segmented pedagogy. As this pedagogy mimics the everyday acquisition of knowledge in horizontal discourse, it is aimed at specific goals that are highly relevant to the student and preferably include features of the original context and practice.

Vertical discourse, on the other hand, is characterised by its systemic organisation of coherent structures of symbolic meaning or by its specialised language (Bernstein, 1999). It is the esoteric (Bernstein, 1996), the discourse of science and disciplines in which knowledge organised as meanings are hierarchically linked to one another (Bernstein, 1999). The meanings are neither segmented nor context dependent, and this indirect relation between meaning and the material base creates a (discursive) gap. This gap is what enables alternative relations between immaterial and material, it enables the potential of the unthinkable or the 'yet to be thought' (Bernstein, 1996, p. 44). In contrast, the meanings of context-bound horizontal discourse are directly related to the material base and are 'so embedded in the context that they have no reference outside that context' (Bernstein, 1996, p. 44). For the purpose of facilitating access to vertical discourse, segments of horizontal discourse may be inserted into it as a means of creating relevance (Bernstein, 1999). However, this accessible contextualisation of vertical discourse is restricted to the procedural level derived from the inserted horizontal discourse. Vertical discourse is thus reduced to strategies that are meant to improve the horizontally segmented repertoire and it loses the properties which enable the potential for transcending contexts and forming alternative relations between immaterial and material.

Classification and framing

A vital part of Bernstein's work is the idea of *classification* and *framing* (Bernstein, 2000). What is described by these concepts is the result of pedagogic codes, and their manifestation in pedagogic practice may be used to determine what they entail in the sense of relations in and between categories of different kinds.

Classification refers to differentiation and relations between categories (Bernstein, 2000). Classification creates and upholds divides, as well as keeping categories together. Some subjects in education can be seen as having a strong classification. Mathematics is an example of such a subject, in which the content is clearly demarcated. The opposite might be true in, for instance, the social sciences, where there is less demarcation and the choices of the teacher and students greatly influence the content. The demarcation of classifications regulates what counts as valid knowledge of the subject and what does not.

Framing refers to the principles of teaching (Bernstein, 2000). It controls what is available and how and when it is made available, as well as the social conditions for this transfer. Framing is concerned with the control within a classified category. This can also be described as the control of educational communication. Framing controls the organisation of teaching, the sequencing and pacing of subjects, the rate of expected acquisition and the evaluation of that acquisition.

How knowledge is classified and framed in education defines the pedagogic code of an educational context (Bernstein, 2000). Pedagogic codes are manifestations of the underlying principles of the organisation of knowledge. Which pedagogic codes influence education varies over time, social context and type of education and the dominant codes reflect historical, societal and ideological positions.

Discussions about and additions to the framework

Besides the foundation of the interpretative framework found in Bernstein's texts, several other scholars have been important for this study and have influenced the use of the Bernsteinian theoretical framework in this thesis.

The work of Young and Wheelahan are of great importance to this thesis, most prominently, yet not only, due to their relating of the Bernsteinian theory to vocational knowledge and VET. I agree with Young when he points out that it is a limitation for the use of Bernstein's ideas and concepts in VET research that he himself directed 'almost all his attention' (2006, p. 120) towards the knowledge which is vertical discourse. Investigations and discussions on vocational knowledge and VET require a focus on horizontal discourses as well. In addition, the work of Swedish researchers Nylund, Rosvall, Ledman and Rönnlund has been crucial in facilitating a better understanding of the Bernsteinian concepts through their applications of these ideas in contexts that are familiar to me. Their work also showcase how the analytical concepts and perspective chosen for this thesis are relevant to studies within the Swedish educational context (Ledman, Rosvall, & Nylund, 2018; Nylund, 2013; Nylund, Ledman, Rosvall, & Rönnlund, 2020; Nylund & Rosvall, 2016, 2019; Nylund et al., 2018; Nylund et al., 2017; Rönnlund et al., 2019). Additionally, the argument made by Singh, Thomas, and Harris (2013), that the Bernsteinian analytical concepts contribute to critical education policy analyses, reassured me that the framework could be used in a study of policy as well as of practice. They point out that the Bernsteinian concepts provide opportunities for understanding education policy and educational systems as creating and upholding institutional relations that are intrinsic to the conditions for education. Singh, Thomas, and Harris (2013) also provided me with great assistance in uncovering Bernstein's idea of imagined pedagogic identities as projections of the bias and focus of the prevailing order, and that these are identities which Bernstein describes as constructed discursively by policy actors in policy struggles.

Yet, being inspired by contemporary scholars and their discussions about and additions to the Bernsteinian framework is also, importantly, a question of identifying how specific developments relate to and make use of the original thought. Particular lines of development may emphasise some concepts over others, while other lines do the opposite. But the lines of development may also trace different perspectives, or interests, forming the use of and additions to the original Bernsteinian framework. Most important in relation to this thesis is perhaps the differences in how contemporary scholars treat Bernstein's development of Durkheim's idea of the sacred and the profane when he presents the idea of knowledge conceptualised as either vertical or horizontal discourse (Bernstein, 1999, 2000).

Specifically, there are significant discussions on *powerful knowledge*, the knowledge propagated as crucial for students to have access to, by for instance both Young and Wheelahan. The knowledge which is key for the students to have access to according to Young is knowledge 'specialised in how it is produced (in workshops, seminars and labs) and in how it is transmitted (in schools, colleges and universities)' (2013, p. 108). It is knowledge specialised and defined by boundaries between disciplines and differentiated from so called everyday knowledge. Young and Muller (2013) describe powerful knowledge as inherently connected to the structures of specialised disciplines:

> It is only through the boundaries of the disciplines that genuine freedom, unforeseen expanded possibilities, can be generated. In the meantime, we can but emphasise the importance of powerful specialised knowledge in its diverse forms as the best, and most just, basis for curricular decision-making. Nothing else seems to be on offer. (Young & Muller, 2013, p. 247)

And as the knowledge is powerful because it is specialised, they state:

> powerful knowledge as we have described it, is never distributed to all in an egalitarian manner. This is itself a consequence of specialisation; not everyone can be equally specialised in all things, even though everyone can, at least in principle, be offered access to the basic powerful knowledge deemed critical for responsible citizenship in a society. (Young & Muller, 2013, p. 231)

Here it is clear that Young and Muller make a crucial distinction of the knowledge they believe all learners are entitled to. I, however, question how powerful this 'basic powerful knowledge' may be if others have access to more elaborate forms of powerful knowledge? And I argue that there is another basis for curricula making on offer, which supports a more just distribution of knowledge and power.

I believe this other basis for curricula making is evident when powerful knowledge is described as powerful because it enables students to generalise beyond individual experience and the context-specific knowledge of horizontal discourse. Wheelahan presents how a curriculum through powerful knowledge gives students autonomy in work because of how it gives students the possibilities to evaluate and participate in conversations, including controversies and conflicts, in work and their occupational field of practice (Wheelahan, 2015).

> Vocational curriculum consequently needs to 'face both ways' and provide students with access to both types of knowledge – to the theoretical knowledge that underpins vocational practice within an occupational field, and to the tacit, context-dependent knowledge of the workplace. Trying to collapse the distinction between each type of knowledge does violence to both. (Wheelahan, 2015, p. 759)

This type of VET curricula also gives students and workers the possibility to develop their methods of work and occupational practice. In that sense the power is the possibility to develop new knowledge through access to disciplinary knowledge and the abstract relation between meaning and the material that opens up for the discursive gap and the 'yet to be thought'.

This is key to Young and Muller's (2013) description of powerful knowledge, however Wheelahan also clearly includes the aspect of enabling students' use of underpinning knowledge in occupational practice and thus agency and autonomy in work as well as for participation in debates in society (Wheelahan, 2015). In the latter of these two descriptions of what makes powerful knowledge powerful, the focus is not only put on epistemological constraints for curricula but also on VET curricula specifically as differentiated distribution of knowledge that may or may not give access to underpinning theoretical knowledge for occupational practice (Wheelahan, 2007).

In this thesis, the interest is on the knowledge in higher VET curricula and how it relates to distribution of power and prevailing social order. The focus is thus on the ideological and political aspects of what makes knowledge powerful and the social consequences of differentiated access to knowledge. This focus is very much in line with how Nylund describes and applies the Bernsteinian theory in studies of social and political implications of the organisation of content in Swedish initial VET (Nylund, 2013) and when Nylund and Rosvall (2016) ask if the Swedish initial VET curricula is one 'tailored for workers?'

These differences in focus, on the epistemic or the ideological, are critical for how various lines of development and application of Bernsteinian theory enable different types of research focuses. In this thesis, focus is on distribution of power and social order, and knowledge is viewed as powerful when it supports the inclusion and participation at the level of politics and in the processes where social order is created. That is, knowledge in VET curricula that trains students to for instance apply critical perspectives and draw their own conclusions is powerful as it creates agency for citizens and workers and facilitate the, in the Bernsteinian original perspective, crucial inclusion and participation at the level of politics (Rönnlund et al., 2019).

I argue that this knowledge also is powerful because it gives workers agency in struggles, not only as citizens in political debate, but also when it comes to their positions as employed workers and the organisation of their

labour. This ties into the position in this thesis of viewing citizens as having the right to participate in ideological and political struggles over social order. This is, as I interpret it, a sharp contrast to the understanding of citizens as they are presented in the Young and Muller excerpt above which defines a certain 'basic powerful knowledge deemed [as] critical for responsible citizenship in a society' (Young & Muller, 2013, p. 231) thus presenting citizens as being supposed to responsibly enact existing social order.

Conclusion: use of the framework

Using models and concepts of the applied theoretical framework, this thesis may be described as aiming to investigate and problematise the Swedish system of vocational higher education as a pedagogic device, what distributive rules are at play, what knowledge is recontextualised for pedagogic discourse and who the agents doing this are. But also, it aims to discuss the underlying principles and relations of power and control in and between recontextualising fields and agents in these fields.

In the first article of this thesis (J. Köpsén, 2020c), the theoretical framework is used to enable an investigation of the HVE system not only as an organisational scheme, but also as a representation of underlying principles and their production and re-production of the positions of actors such as employers and education providers, as well as of identities for the students. To this end, the model of the pedagogic device, its rules and different recontextualising fields, are used. These concepts are used to interpret how policy creates the relations of power and control between involved actors. Also, the analytical concept of imagined pedagogic identities as models of students, teachers and pedagogic contexts is used. The same array of concepts is used in the final article of this thesis (J. Köpsén, 2020a), which covers employer involvement in the practice of provision, but with a greater focus on agents in the pedagogic recontextualising fields and on the imagined pedagogic identity of the context of HVE programmes. These are the two articles where the focus of interest is on organisation, in the context of

policy and practice respectively. For the two articles focusing on the curriculum and knowledge in HVE (J. Köpsén, 2020b, 2020d), the theoretical framework is used with the emphasis directed towards other concepts. However, in these articles as well, pedagogic discourse and recontextualising play an important role in the analytical interpretations, the main analytical concepts being horizontal and vertical discourse. This conceptualisation of knowledge as two discourses is used to understand what knowledge policy defines for the Swedish higher VET programmes, and to consider its implications. They are also used to analyse the content of course syllabi in HVE programmes. Using the conceptualisation of knowledge as either horizontal or vertical discourse enables insights into how the structuring of knowledge in VET is a relay for power and how social power relations are mediated and reproduced through VET curricula. The concepts of classification and framing are used in the concluding analysis, where they enable analysis and interpretation from a more comprehensive perspective on the studied aspects of HVE when compiled and related to one another.

4. Method

I have conducted the inquiries included in this thesis by employing a qualitative methodological approach that combines the analysis of policy documents with studies in HVE programmes through interviews, observations and analysis of course syllabus documents. Thus, the methods used in the studies presented in this thesis have been multifaceted; however, the analytical procedure of theoretical thematic analysis has been consistent. This broad research design was developed to meet the need for different types of data in order to fulfil the aim of this thesis as it relates to both policy and practice.

The different sets of data

The outline of this study follows a path through two dimensions, one being policy and the other practice. Each of the two dimensions are studied with two foci of interest: organisation and curriculum (see Figure 1 in Chapter 1).

Due to the broad interest, the corpus of data in this study is diverse. However, the different sets of data for each article emanate from and relate directly to one of the dimensions of policy or practice and are used accordingly in the analyses (see Figure 3, following page). The same dataset of Swedish public documents relating to post-secondary VET and the establishment of HVE have been analysed for studies on the dimension of policy with the focus on both organisation and curriculum. For the studies in the dimension of practice, three types of data have been analysed. Course syllabi

from HVE programmes and interviews correspond to the focus of interest on the curriculum, whilst data from the interviews and observations together facilitate the examination of elements in practice in HVE provision with the focus on organisation.

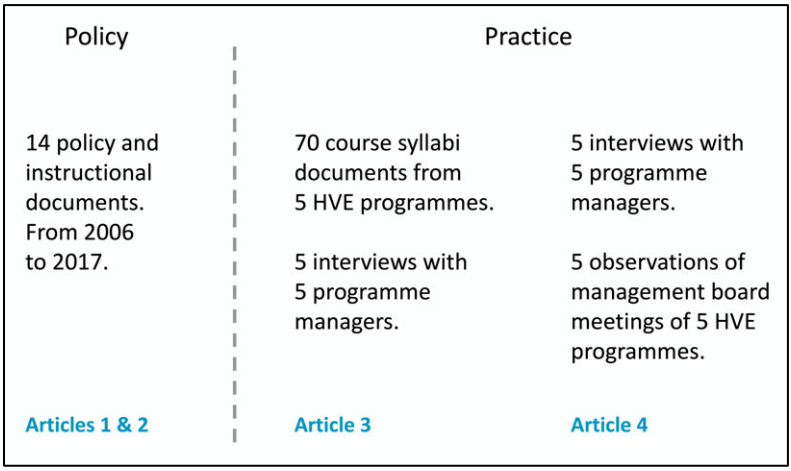

Figure 3. Data sets used in the four articles.

Policy and instructional documents – examining policy

Fourteen Swedish public documents relating to post-secondary VET and the establishment of HVE were analysed. The process of selecting the material for this set of data consisted of defining the type of documents to be analysed, and the time period of interest. The outcome of the document selection was a dataset consisting of two categories of document published between 2006 and 2017.

Firstly, all legislative and national policy documents about Swedish post-secondary VET during this period were included in the material. These form the basis for the interpretation of policy. This category consists of two Government Official Reports, one initiated by a Social Democratic government in 2006 and one by a Moderate Party-led government from the following year, as well as the directions given to the inquiry bodies responsible for these reports (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006a, 2006b,

2007, 2008b). This category also includes the government bill, law and regulations, presented by the Moderate Party-led government, that established the HVE system (Ministry of Education and Research, 2008a; SFS 2009:128; SFS 2009:130). Included in the material, there is also a report presented by the Ministry of Education and Research in 2015, based on a review of the HVE system and ordered by the then governing Social Democratic and Green coalition government (2015a). Also included is a subsequent government bill (Ministry of Education and Research, 2015b).

Secondly, instructional documents from the national agency directed towards the education providers were selected because they give insight into the communication by the national agency and thus the agency's interpretation and potential transformation of national policy. This second category consists of the formal outlines that education providers are required to follow when applying for approval and funding to run HVE programmes, which was published in 2010, as well as the equivalent document from 2017. This category also includes regulatory guidelines regarding work-based learning, management boards and course syllabi (National Agency for Higher Vocational Education, 2011, 2015a, 2015b). All of the material is in Swedish and excerpts have been translated by me. (See Appendix 1 for a presentation of the documents with their original titles in Swedish.)

The programmes – examining practice

Aspects of practice in HVE were studied through observations of management board meetings, interviews with programme managers and analysis of course syllabi for five diverse HVE programmes. The selection was made purposively to find HVE programmes that could provide diverse input through breadth in the range of studied contexts. In line with a multisite qualitative research approach, characteristics relevant to the theoretical framework, and other significant attributes, were used to create variation in the selection (Firestone, 1993; Larsson, 2009). The five programmes vary in their key characteristics. One characteristic of theoretical relevance that was used to create diversity in the material is the field of study in which

the programme is situated (Bernstein, 1990, 2000; Young, 2006). The programmes are classified as 'healthcare and social work', 'finance, administration and sales' and 'civil engineering and construction' – fields with different traditions for knowledge transfer and/or education. Another key characteristic that was considered in this selection was type of education provider. The five investigated programmes are provisioned by three different types of education provider. These providers may be classified as a private education corporation, a public adult education provider, or an organisation situated within Sweden's relatively extensive system of non-formal adult education. These three types of education provider represent a variation of providers in which most providers of Swedish HVE are found (National Agency for Higher Vocational Education, 2020b). Yet another criterion was geographical. The programmes are located in different regions of Sweden, and they are also found in what can be described as different types of labour-market contexts dependent on the size and location of the town/city where they are based (Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, 2016).

Because of this variation in key characteristics of the programmes, the involved employers are a multifaceted group. Since the field of study varies, the sectors of business and industry to which the programmes relate also vary. The local labour-market context also influences which employers are involved. Both public and private employers are involved in the programmes studied. On the management boards there are, for instance, representatives of both public and private organisations from a range of different types of healthcare services. Overall, the involved employers include both large and small organisations as well as both global and local enterprises. There are, as mentioned, employers in various segments of healthcare services, but also in the marketing and communications sector, IT, engineering and construction. The employers represented include both organisations with their own production and consulting firms.

When seeking access for this study, a number of organisations with HVE programmes were initially contacted via letter (see Appendix 2 for a

translated English version of that letter), then a follow-up email and phone calls. I used contact information available on a website run by the National Agency for Higher Vocational Education with a database of all upcoming HVE programmes believed to be reasonable, or on the websites of the education providers. In some cases, I was able to identify a strategic person within the organisation to direct my request to, whilst other organisations only provided general contact information. The number of contacted organisations exceeded the number of programmes to incorporate in the study. Some of the contacted organisations replied via email that they were willing to participate, and others gave the same answer when contacted by telephone. A few organisations never replied to any means of contact. When making the final selection, I focused on pursuing organisations with programmes that would contribute to creating variation in the field of study, type of provider and geographical/labour-market context. Two of the programmes are aimed at the same occupation, which is a common one in HVE. The two programmes are provisioned by different types of education provider and are located in different parts of Sweden, in different types of labour-market contexts (see Table 2, following page). Before any interviews or observations were conducted, I visited the organisations and met with the programme managers. These initial meetings were of different forms and ranged from a formal meeting with a vice CEO of one organisation to a brainstorming session in another organisation with a group of people working with HVE about their thoughts on what are the important aspects of providing HVE. In these meetings, I verbally presented the same information about this study and their participation as I had presented initially in the letters. In all these initial meetings, I was shown around the facilities and introduced to personnel and students whom my host and I happened to meet or chose to seek out specifically. In some cases, I had lunch or 'fika' with the personnel group. In cases where my host was not a programme manager but a principal or some other leader within the organisation, I also met the programme managers to present the study to them and ask them in person if they wanted to participate.

Table 2. The programmes

Field of study	Diploma offered to graduates	Study places in active cohorts	Length	Work-based learning	Pace & Form
Civil engineering and construction	Advanced diploma	2 x 35	400 credits 2 years	100 credits 20 weeks	100% School based with distance learning
Finance, administration and sales	Advanced diploma	2 x 35	400 credits 2 years	100 credits 20 weeks	100% School based with distance learning
Healthcare and social work	Advanced diploma/ Diploma*	2 x 35	400 credits 2 years	115 credits 23 weeks	100% School based
Healthcare and social work	Advanced diploma	2 x 24	400 credits 2 years	120 credits 24 weeks	100% School based
Finance, administration and sales	Diploma	1 x 32	400 credits 2 years	120 credits 24 weeks	100% School based

**Curriculum for one cohort gives the students an Advanced Diploma whilst curriculum for the other cohort gives the students the lower-level degree, a Diploma in Higher Vocational Education.*

Since all HVE programmes are unique, a more detailed presentation of the programmes is not possible because it would reveal precisely which programmes have been studied and the identities of programme managers and involved employers.

Course syllabi of the programmes

The course syllabi analysed in this thesis are to be considered as part of HVE programme practice. These syllabi come from the five selected programmes and include both school-based and work-based learning.

Course syllabi in HVE are to be created in cooperation between education providers and the management boards of each programme. It is also the management boards that make the final decision to establish the course syllabi for the programme. There is one syllabus for each course of the programme. The course syllabi are only examined by the National Agency for Higher Vocational Education if it conducts an audit. However, the agency does provide guidelines on the layout of a syllabus for education providers to follow (National Agency for Higher Vocational Education, 2015b). Referencing the Law on Higher Vocational Education (SFS 2009:128), these guidelines briefly establish that a syllabus should include course content, goals and principles for grading.

The studied course syllabi are all approximately one or two pages long and formatted into sections of lists. Each of the programmes in the selection consists of between nine and 19 courses. The total number of course syllabi analysed is 70.

Interviews with programme managers and observations of management board meetings

Five semi-structured interviews were carried out with the programme managers of the studied programmes (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). In accordance with the regulations, a programme manager is appointed by the education provider to run the daily work of each programme, who has a special obligation to ensure the development and progress of the programme (SFS 2009:130). Hence, the programme managers occupy significant positions in the practice of HVE programmes and can make meaningful and broad contributions in relation to the aim when interviewed. I conducted these interviews using a thematic interview guide. The focus of the themes in the interview guide was course syllabi and their creation, along with the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders in HVE practice; for instance, the interviewee's notion of their role and the role of employer representatives in the programmes. (See Appendix 3 for a translated English version of the interview guide.) The interviews varied in

length between 40 and 75 minutes. They were audio-recorded and pertinent parts were transcribed verbatim before analysis.

Five observations of management board meetings were also carried out, one for each of the five programmes. Observations of management board meetings were included as part of the research design because these gatherings are formally regulated meetings between employer representatives and education providers that occur in all HVE programmes (SFS 2009:130). The observations had a 'low level of structure' (Hammar Chiriac & Einarsson, 2018, p. 18). That is, during the observations, a few general questions roamed in the back of my mind as I observed and took notes: what is being talked about, what roles appear and to whom are they attributed/accredited, as well as what the general mood and culture appear to be. The participants were employer and student representatives, programme managers and, in some meetings, but not all, there were also representatives from universities. During one observation, a teacher working with courses in the programme and a school principal also participated. Some representatives participated via telephone or videoconference. The number of participants in each meeting varied between 5 and 15, not including me, the observer who did not participate in discussions. The meetings lasted for circa two hours each. The observations were documented in chronologically organised fieldnotes made during and directly after the meetings. These notes recorded the content, actions and articulations in the meetings but also my initial interpretations and theoretical analysis (Hammar Chiriac & Einarsson, 2018). The notes were formatted as three columns on a sheet of paper; in the left-hand column I recorded whom the note regarded, in the middle was a short description or a quote and in the right-hand column I wrote down initial interpretations and ideas for theoretical analysis if there were any. The notes were written in chronological order and spanned multiple pages. Taking notes during the meeting was uncomplicated. Several participants were writing on both paper and computers. I chose to take my notes in an A5 notepad using a pencil. The rather small notepad was chosen to give the impression that the notes were not extensive and I chose to use a pencil so

I could scribble down my notes in a way that is not readable to anyone else but me.

The exact number of programmes, interviews and observations to be included was not defined at the outset of this study but was instead determined as it progressed based on the material becoming exhaustive in relation to the aims of the investigation. Some patterns were recognised as being the same in all meetings and interviews. These included, for instance, programme managers describing their role in the interviews, and how management board meetings were organised and what roles were given and acted out in them. Equally, what aspects varied from programme to programme was also recognised and these variations within the five studied examples was significant in an analytical sense in relation to the theoretical framework.

Interviews and observations were conducted in 2018. In one case, the interview with the programme manager and the observation of the related management board meeting occurred on the same day, with the interview preceding the meeting. In all other cases, the two were conducted on separate occasions. The order in which interviews and observations followed each other varied depending on the scheduling of management board meetings and the availability of programme managers.

Research ethics in relation to participants

Contemplating the ethical aspects of this study is, in part, an exercise of weighing the benefits of presenting the findings and discussions on HVE against the possible risks for the participants who were being interviewed and observed. Thus, when considering ethics in this study, the most important aspects were to plan and take action to ensure the risks were minimised for these participating individuals. To protect the participants and minimise the risk of negative consequences for them, a number of well-established policies on research ethics were followed (Swedish Research Council, 2017). That is: concealing the identity of participants, informing

them of their rights and what the purpose of their participation is and asking for their consent, as well as the secure handling of data.

Firstly, efforts were made as far as possible not to reveal the identities of people participating in the study. No names of people, locations or organisations were used at any point in the analysis of data or reporting on this study. To the extent that names or other denominations were used in the interviews, these were anonymised during transcription. I both conducted and transcribed the interviews myself. I never recorded any names, dates or places in the fieldnotes of the observations. The choice of using gender-neutral pronouns when presenting the study was not made to enhance anonymity, but it undoubtedly has a positive effect on keeping participants' identities concealed. Because all programmes in HVE are unique, specific conditions arose in regard to how the included programmes could be described in this thesis. I am convinced that describing the programmes by the occupation at which they are aimed would, in at least three cases, have exposed the specific programme and thus also the identity of interviewed programme managers and observed management board members. This is also the reason for not including the type of education provider when presenting facts about the programmes in Table 2. Type of education provider in combination with the other facts would also have revealed the specific programme in at least three cases. Being recognised or having their identity revealed could have negative consequences for participants. It could impact upon their relationships with employers and colleagues and also with the Authority of Higher Vocational Education. Even though none of these parties identified a participant or objected to their participation or statements in any way, the mere awareness of that possibility is a stress on the participant impacting upon their relationships. Stress for the participants may also arise from having conversations in the interviews about (non-)compliance with laws and regulations, strained or uncertain work situations and feelings of inadequacy. However, I believe that, because the participants were interviewed and observed during their work, acting in their professional roles, this reduced the risk of stress and negative consequences to some extent.

The degree to which the informants revealed their own personal opinions or feelings was up to themselves because the interest of the study was on their professional roles, and this is what guided the interview questions. I also recognise positive consequences for participants. Perhaps primarily for the interviewed programme managers, participation in this study gave them opportunities for reflection on the work they do and to feel proud of it. I believe that, for some of the informants, the interviews meant being seen and feeling understood in a way that their everyday working life does not offer them. The interviews were an occasion for them to talk to someone outside of their own organisation, but with great interest in and knowledge of their field of work and personal experience and understanding of both the difficulties and joys it entails. (Information about my experience of working with HVE will follow shortly.) This may have a positive influence, both professionally and in a more personal sense.

Secondly, all the participants gave informed consent. The information given to participants focused on two aspects: the purpose of the study and the voluntariness of their participation (see Appendices 4-6 for the documents used in versions translated into English). The purpose of the study was presented based on its relevance to the participants and was described as examining the conditions for HVE created in policy and how they play out in the context of programme provision. It was also clearly communicated to participants that their involvement in the study was voluntary. The consent was collected as signatures. Participants were all given two pages of information which they signed. They gave back one page and kept the other, which encompassed all the information that was given, including contact information. These information sheets were sent in advance to all participants. I sent a version entailing consent to be audio recorded to the interviewed programme managers (Appendix 5) and they helped me to distribute the version constructed for giving consent to being observed (Appendix 6) to members of the management board in advance of the meetings. I also brought printed versions to the interviews and observations. The information on the sheet was also repeated verbally at the

beginning of each interview and observation. In those cases where participants in the management board meetings took part via phone or video, the process of documented informed consent was handled via post or email.

Thirdly, the secure handling of all data was ensured throughout this project, both in regard to the use of technologies and also in the sense of who has access. All the collected data was handled and stored in compliance with the policies of Linköping University (Directives for Information Security and Guidelines for Processing Personal Data) and general ethical guidelines for research materials (Swedish Research Council, 2017). This means that all audio files of interviews, their transcripts, the digitalised fieldnotes from observations and documents relating to course syllabi are stored on an encrypted, password-protected hard drive to which only I have access. To keep track of the files, each programme was given a code. This code was included in the names of files and also used as parts of substitutes for names written down in transcripts and fieldnotes. The correlation between these codes and the identity of the studied programmes/participants was never recorded either digitally or on paper, i.e. there is no code key to keep separate from the files. Upon completion of this project, necessary data will be archived with Linköping University in compliance with policies on the documentation and archiving of source data for research.

In the interactions with participants when conducting the interviews and observations, my own position as researcher was very evident to both me and the participants, not least because of the formalities of information and consent and, in the interviews, the recording device. However, because I have experience of working in HVE, and thus have preunderstandings of the context, regulations and practices, I also took the role of someone who understands the context and the specialised terminologies used in the system. My experience in HVE is as an educational strategist, analyst and project manager working with providers. I worked in HVE for five and a half years, half the time that HVE has existed, and for the greater part of that time I was also an elected board member and secretary of The Swedish Association of Higher Vocational Schools. The fact that I was

knowledgeable about HVE and its practices was known to all participants, in more detail by programme managers than management board members. In the interviews, I did not adopt a position of asking naive questions, implying that I did not know or did not understand what the interviewees were saying, to encourage them to give explanatory statements. Instead, I focused on getting more thorough representations from the programme managers, to elicit a deeper understanding of the interviewees' perception of aspects such as regulations or a specific occurrence within the HVE context. In the interview situations, my knowledge and previous experience in HVE thus had a significant impact on how they proceeded. As part of my reflexive researcher role, in these situations I actively reflected continuously on whether an interpretation I was making in the moment as part of the conversation was bias on my part, or more of a common understanding between us. In some cases, this was an internal process of piecing different statements together to determine a stringent meaning, and sometimes I checked my interpretation by posing follow-up questions to the interviewees.

From an ethical perspective relating to the participants, I believe that the observations may have been the most challenging. Most participants in these meetings met me only once, when the observation occurred, and were also usually visiting from outside the organisation. In the observation situations, I went back and forth from being a participant or a non-participant observer (Hammar Chiriac & Einarsson, 2018). I chitchatted with the members of the board as we waited for everyone to arrive, I made small talk during pauses for coffee and sandwiches, and I once again acted in a familiar way with the informants as they were leaving. During the meetings when we were all seated, and the chairpersons were leading the meeting, I was quiet and tried not to interact non-verbally either. This moving back and forth in my role in the observations is, to me, the most obvious ethical problem. The members of the board seemed to think I was no longer observing or being a researcher when we paused for coffee or after the chairperson had concluded the official meeting. Even though I stressed the fact that I was observing 'everything happening here today', this seemed to

be quickly forgotten. This means that I have had to be mindful of what was said and done during these specific times and I have aimed to use sound judgement and to exclude from my fieldnotes things that I believe the informants would consider extending beyond what they had consented to.

Method for analyses

I carried out my analyses of the data in the studies constituting this thesis using theoretical thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), guided by the comprehensive Bernsteinian theoretical framework presented in Chapter 3. As the aim of this thesis is based in a specific perspective, the theoretical framework was always intended to play an active part in the analysis. Thus, the integration of the theoretical and interpretative framework of this thesis in its method of analysis was crucial. Using theoretical thematic analysis has been instrumental in this because it enabled the possibility of problematising and discussing specific aspects of the data from the thesis' specifically demarcated perspective using the language of the theoretical and interpretative framework.

Even though theoretical concepts have guided the analyses of this thesis, it is not to be considered deductive. Rather, the approach of this thesis is abductive, using theory and previous studies of empirical problems as a guide and a source of inspiration for recognising patterns and internal relations in the data. Abduction may be defined as characterised by the generating of new descriptions of that which is studied (Bernstein, 2000; Moore & Muller, 2002). This form of abductive analysis is thus the description of a phenomenon as something that lies beyond an immediate understanding based on a priori ideas. This means that it is the interpretation of the original ideas about a phenomenon within the framework of a new set of ideas. The new empirical descriptions use the language of the theoretical framework which advances and broadens the understanding of the studied phenomenon through the structures and relations represented by that language. As the assumption underlying the methodology is that

theory engages in the empirical through descriptions, the principles of description within a framework are key to executing the analysis. Besides the language of the framework that is required in this form of analysis, it also requires creativity to see a phenomenon as something else. Creativity enables the recognition of patterns and relationships that are not given or obvious. It is the language, the principles of description, that is creating the relationship between theoretical and empirical levels in the analysis of this thesis. It involves placing the original ideas about HVE within a theoretical and interpretative framework and describing them anew using the principles of description from Bernsteinian theory (Bernstein, 1990, 2000).

Concretely, the theoretical framework has been operationalised in these analyses by using what Bernstein distinguishes as the two different languages of a theoretical framework (Bernstein, 2000; Moore & Muller, 2002). These consist of one internal language describing relations within theory, constructing conceptual objects and the relations between them, and one external language that describes the things outside the theory, that which is being investigated. The external language is used to describe empirical objects and how these objects relate to one another. These relations are then translated into the internal language describing structures and relations. I have based the progression of my analytical processes on the guidelines for theoretical thematic analysis presented by Braun and Clarke (2006). Not conforming, or limiting my work, to the six steps of analysis that they outline, these have nevertheless been the starting point and scaffolding of my practical operations in the analytical processes. Braun and Clarke's six steps are: (1) familiarising with the data, (2) generating codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes and (6) producing reports (p. 87). Also, as Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest, the validity of the themes are, as far as possible, ensured by considering Patton's dual criteria of 'internal homogeneity' and 'external heterogeneity', demanding that themes have a meaningful coherence within themselves and identifiable differences from other themes (Patton, 1990, as cited in Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 91). I have used software (NVivo for Mac) to facilitate the orga-

nised and structured processing of all my material, my corpus of data. Using this software ensured wide-ranging opportunities to try out different categorisations and to code, analyse, re-code and re-analyse data sets without distorting prior rounds of analysis or any of the data items. The software has not, however, in any way processed the material in an automated analysis or similar. The software facilitates the same type of operations that a copying machine, scissors, coloured pens and post-it notes may do.

The theoretical thematic analyses identified patterns in the data, which were coded accordingly. Codes were eventually collated into the themes that have functioned as units of analysis in the interpretation. This process of theoretically guided thematic analysis, which looks to produce analytical units – themes – at a latent level, rather than just descriptive ones, entails that the interpretation does not wait until the coding and collating process is finished. The sorting and collating of codes, and the development of themes is in itself an interpretative work (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This makes the method of theoretical thematic analysis well adapted to the abductive approach of this thesis. The analytical units, the themes, denote patterns occurring in the material that are understood in relation to the theoretical framework and the research questions of each study. These themes are described by the external language of description, which is filled with empirical categories that are translatable to conceptual categories of the internal language (Moore & Muller, 2002). The process has been recursive, moving back and forth between coding and re-coding to bring in the theoretical concepts at different stages. It can be described as a repeated process of going back and forth between theory and the empirical, gradually developing the interpretation and description of the studied phenomenon.

The different types of data rendered different conditions for the process of analysis. For example, the coding of policy documents was a more straightforward process than that of coding interview transcripts, because the latter is conversational language. For instance, the formal language of policy documents is grammatically correct and thus more precise, in contrast to the statements in interviews which, due to their incoherence, are

ambiguous. The coding of fieldnotes from the observations of management board meetings was challenging. It was difficult in the sense that they were so clearly already interpretations that had been made as they were written down. Using theoretical thematic analysis has been shown to lend itself well to the processing of different kinds of data within a study where you want to treat all the data as having the same significance and to contribute equally to the interpretation.

However, using theoretical thematic analysis and an abductive approach can be problematised. It may be argued as limiting the perspective and interpretations of a study, and thus the understandings of the object of study. This is valid in the sense that the abductive inference of the analyses in this thesis does not have the character of definitively establishing a truth. The results are new descriptions of the investigated phenomenon in HVE and those descriptions are dependent on the language of the Bernsteinian theoretical framework. They are no truer than any other new descriptions that could be made using other sets of ideas and language. Thus, nothing in this approach, either practically or conceptually, limits the possibilities of other descriptions. Even though the conclusions (findings) of an abductive inference do not claim to be the one and only description of something, it is imperative to evaluate them. Their value should be considered in terms of whether they are reasonable as a consequence of the theoretical and interpretative framework being employed, and whether that in itself is an appropriate and reasonable framework.

The choice of framework for this thesis was based on knowledge of this and other established theories, alternative models and different interpretative frameworks, as well as on the explanatory power of Bernsteinian theory showcased in previous engagements of that framework in empirical problems relatable to this thesis (e.g., Bathmaker, 2013; Gamble, 2014; Nylund & Rosvall, 2016; Nylund et al., 2017; Rönnlund et al., 2019; Wheelahan, 2007). And I argue that the presentation in this study shows awareness of its specific perspective and that, overall, the internal logic outlined by the one comprehensive interpretative framework connecting the analysis to the

aims, methods and findings benefits the quality of the study more than the 'limited' interpretation causes problems (Thornberg & Fejes, 2015).

Discussion on methodology and quality

Considering the quality of this study is perhaps most of all a question of considering how well the chosen methodology has facilitated an analysis that is in line with the theoretical framework and may give answers that address the aim of the thesis. This is a basic question of validity. It is a question of whether the research actually does what it sets out to do and whether the methodology actually can underpin valid results, i.e. whether the research can provide credible and trustworthy answers to the questions posed (Thornberg & Fejes, 2015). The analysis in this thesis draws on various forms of data. This data stems from multiple methods, such as interviews with programme managers and observations of management board meetings, as well as publicly available policy documents, and the strength of this corpus of data lies in its breadth. As part of a comprehensive methodological approach, the sets of data in the different studies have been analysed using the same procedures and the same theoretical and interpretative framework. Thus, the methods and data items vary but the theoretical framework and procedures for analysis are consistent throughout the studies that make up this thesis.

Another dimension of quality, and ethics, relevant to this study is my role as a researcher. I have preunderstandings of the context, regulations and practices because I have experience of working in HVE. This undoubtably affected my role as a researcher in this field. Handling my experience from an ethical perspective has meant extensive reflexive considerations throughout the project, constantly questioning any bias that may have arisen due to preunderstandings. However, for the most part I consider my experience to be a benefit, meaning that I did not have to spend the first year or so of my doctoral studies probing and examining the environment to determine where I might find significant aspects. As an example of this, the

choice to include observations of the management board meetings was a given to me. When designing this study, I already knew from experience how significant the management board meetings can be and how this is also the intention in the regulations. Additionally, my own experience of working in HVE was of great benefit when creating the interview guide. My experience has also influenced the amount of data. In all, the corpus of data used in this thesis consists of 14 policy documents of different kinds, 70 course syllabi, five interviews and five observations. My experience made it possible to base my investigations of practice on a smaller number of programmes, interviews and observations than might otherwise have been the case. There could have been more if I had not rather quickly recognised patterns and variations in line with my previous experience. As this is not the type of study which uses a randomised selection from a population, having more examples would not statistically 'prove' these aspects to be more true, or true in all contexts of HVE provision. My familiarity with the context, regulations and practices underpinned my understanding that this material of five programmes with in all 70 course syllabi, five interviews and five observations had become exhaustive in relation to the aim of the investigation. How this study was designed thus includes subjective elements. Subjectivity should be scrutinised, and in this study it is perhaps, with the exception of choice of perspective, most salient in the design and the conducting of interviews. From a quality perspective, the aspect of having prior experience and preunderstandings indicates the possibility of bias in interpretation, both in situations of interviewing and observing and during the analysis of both these forms of data as well as documents and thus, also in the presented results. However, my research makes no claim that the results of the analyses in this thesis can be disconnected from the subject who has created the knowledge or the context in which this has been done. Not being blind to the possibility of one's own bias is consequently a very important aspect of quality in research studies like this one, where the researcher has a prior relation to the field. Conducting this thesis, I have strived for a reflexive researcher role in which I have actively reflected

continuously on whether my interpretations were biased. I have also strived for transparency, both in interactions with participants and in this presentation of the thesis.

Generalisation of results is yet another aspect related by many to quality in research (Thornberg & Fejes, 2015). However, generalisation is of varying importance for different types of studies and, if applicable, may take different paths. For this thesis, the question of whether generalisation is either interesting or possible is twofold because it studies two different dimensions. The interpretations of policy for a national educational system is not valued for generalisation. Comparing national examples, for instance to find similarities and differences, may of course be of interest, but not as a question of generalisation. However, this thesis also studies practices in the provision of HVE programmes and the interpretations presented in these studies may be more relevant to consider for generalisation. However, the findings of this study are attributed to the specific programmes that have been studied, and the findings cannot be directly translated into descriptions of all HVE programmes. Nevertheless, the fact that the study's findings may not be generalised in the sense of sample-to-population does not mean that it is not generalisable in the sense of analytical generalisation or case-to-case transfer (Firestone, 1993) and the selection of programmes was made to maximise the possibility for this. The selection of programmes to study is in line with the advice that 'sample cases should maximize variation on relevant attributes – that is, those that might be expected to affect the phenomenon of interest. … The counsel here is to maximize diversity' (Firestone, 1993, pp. 19–20) and that 'The cases should also be as like the population of interest as possible' (Firestone, 1993, p. 20). To meet these criteria for generalisation in multisite studies, the cases vary in relation to field of study, type of education provider, geographical location and labour-market context but represent the population because they resemble the majority of programmes, which are school-based, two-year/400 credit programmes. However, in this thesis the assumption on the relationship between research and reality is that there cannot be definitively true theories,

i.e. as mentioned above, the findings are attributed to the specific programmes under study. New descriptions provide in-depth knowledge of individual cases. However, results gained from abduction may in some sense be confirmed by studies of more cases, and in this study the multisite design contributes to the corroboration of the interpretations as reasonable. Like Firestone (1993), I argue that multisite studies may use replication and comparison to strengthen the interpretations made at single sites. However, I also argue that this study may be generalised through 'recognitions of patterns' or 'context similarity' (Larsson, 2009) identified by readers, both researchers and practitioners.

Another strength of this thesis is the possibilities that the breadth of its combined material generates. Most saliently, the data has functioned to relate them to one another to reinforce the interpretations in the analyses, in the studies of practice where, for instance, course syllabi and talk about course syllabi was combined, but also in the studies of policy.

As this is a compilation thesis, the articles have been reviewed, commented on and revised in peer-review processes for their publication. Also positive for the quality of the research is the fact that they are part of a thesis, which means they have been commented on by other researchers at progression seminars and have gone through the extensive process of supervision.

5. Findings

The findings of this thesis study are presented in each of the four articles included in this compilation thesis. These findings will be presented in the following. These summaries are however followed by a concluding analysis which relates the findings presented in the four articles to one another as well as to the overall aim of this thesis.

Summaries of articles

Article 1: Employers placing orders and students as commodities: Swedish post-secondary vocational education and training policy

Köpsén, Johanna, (2020), *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*
DOI: 10.1080/13636820.2020.1744695

This article, the first of four in this compilation thesis, explores policy on Swedish post-secondary VET and identifies how and why the national system of HVE was created in 2008. Specifically, the aim of the study presented in this article was to investigate the institutional relations between education and work, and between public and private, which the Swedish system of vocational higher education represents. Paying attention to the institutional relations in VET systems has been presented as key to understanding and furthering the debate on the formation and reform of VET (Wheelahan 2015b). The analysis of this study also focuses on the ideas used in policy to mandate the establishment of the Swedish higher VET system.

Fourteen Swedish public documents, published between 2006 and 2017, relating to post-secondary VET and the establishment of HVE were analysed using a theoretical thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This consisted of coding the selected documents in relation to the framework of Bernstein's theory of the pedagogic device, its rules and principles of recontextualisation in different fields, and the analytical concept of pedagogic discourse as entailing models of students, teachers and pedagogic contexts in the form of imagined pedagogic identities (Bernstein, 1990, 2000; Singh et al., 2013).

The findings presented in the article demonstrate that the policy that established and regulate Swedish HVE is based on the neoliberal idea of education as human capital development and as a tool for national competitiveness and economic growth. It is identified that education policy has been formulated in order to create a system with efficacy to enable education providers to effectively cater to the needs of business and industry. Policy has been formulated to ensure efficacy by articulating the right objective and by incorporating all post-secondary VET into a single system. To achieve this effective provision at as low a public cost as possible, the allocation of funds is made via a tendering-like process in which education providers compete against each other by displaying their degree of association with employers who state employment needs and the level of co-funding of their programmes by business and industry. The limited involvement, by national comparison, of the state, the strong employer influence and marketised provision are clearly divergent from the previously strong Swedish paradigm of nationally controlled VET, the legacy of which still has a strong influence on initial VET in upper secondary education. The formation of qualifications and the positions of HVE graduates are not negotiated by the stakeholders of the traditional Swedish model, in which national employers' organisations and trade unions are central actors. The policy on HVE and the arrangement of the system have thus created relations of power and control that are new to the Swedish context. Power and control to a great extent have been positioned with the locally involved

employers and away from the national level, as well as from the traditional bi-partisan relations of the Swedish labour market. This is significant because the struggles over HVE, i.e. over the pedagogic device and its pedagogic discourse, concern not only education but also power relations in industry and positions for workers in the labour market.

The findings presented in the article also identify that the HVE students emerge in policy in a role that diverges from the continuously adapting learning subjects of discourses on lifelong learning usually found in contemporary neoliberal policy. Instead, students are positioned as input material in production and as the traded commodity on a market of supply-and-demand. With the overarching policy on HVE being to efficiently supply output, this reasoning requires a material or resource to be processed in order to produce this output. In this pedagogic device, students may be interpreted as input material that, through training, are turned into a product with exchange value. This reasoning construes graduates as a traded commodity rather than as individuals. There are no links made between students as individuals and the benefits that they themselves receive from education, because the underlying principles of the pedagogic device of Swedish HVE assert that needs of employers and their competitiveness are the entire foundation of HVE and its objective.

Article 2: Demands-based and employer-driven curricula: defining knowledge in higher vocational education and training

Köpsén, Johanna, (2020), *Studies in Continuing Education, 42*(3), 349-364.

The aim of the study presented in the second article was to investigate policy on knowledge in the Swedish system of higher VET, to enable a discussion on HVE as a vocational pathway in higher education and reproduction of social power relations. The analysis was led by the research question: 'How do policy define what knowledge should form curricula in HVE?'.

The exploration draws on a further analysis of the same national policy documents and instructional documents from the responsible national

agency as in the first article. To interpret the knowledge defined and to consider its implications the conceptualisation of knowledge as either horizontal or vertical discourse was used (Bernstein, 1999). In this conceptualisation knowledge realised in horizontal discourse is the mundane. It is segmented and context-bound. Horizontal discourse is often oral and tacit and can be described as contextually specific. Vertical discourse, on the other hand, is the esoteric, the discourse of science and disciplines in which knowledge is neither segmented nor context-dependent and it enables the potential of the unthinkable or the 'yet to be thought'.

Findings from the analysis of the policy documents and instructional documents reveal two definitions of what knowledge should form HVE curricula. These are however inconsistent with each other. Originally, knowledge for HVE curricula was defined in policy as knowledge generated in the production of goods and services and selected by employers. This is segmented, context specific and procedural knowledge realised as horizontal discourse. The knowledge in HVE is clearly demarcated in policy as not coming from research, the knowledge in HVE programmes should be coming directly from working life. Though, in 2016 this definition was coupled with another definition based on the Swedish adaptation of the European Qualifications Framework. This definition mainly entails disciplinary knowledge realised in vertical discourse unbound by context. The descriptors of levels five and six, as incorporated into the Regulation (2009:130) of Higher Vocational Education, do not primarily concern the application of knowledge in work. The articulations directly relating the definition of knowledge to work are limited to: 'Plan, execute and identify resources for performing specialised tasks', 'can identify, formulate, analyse, solve problems and perform complex tasks' and 'can apply specialised knowledge for development' (SFS 2009:130, ch 2 13-14§§). Thus, the incorporation of the qualifications framework descriptors introduced an inconsistency in policy. Viewed from the perspective facilitated by the conceptualisation of knowledge as realised in either horizontal or vertical discourse, the incorporation of the Swedish Qualifications Framework

(SeQF) descriptors into regulation created two inconsistent definitions of knowledge in the official recontextualising field. However, as the idea that curricula should be employer-driven is consistent throughout the material, as well as over time, the original definition of knowledge as horizontal discourse appears as the dominant one. Notably, this difference isn't in any way recognized or problematized in policy. The incorporation of the SeQF descriptors in 2016 isn't presented as something new. They are introduced as a new way for education providers to describe the same, the knowledge selected by employers. The incorporation of the descriptors, which also regulate knowledge in Swedish academic and professional higher education, isn't presented as in any way conflicting with the definition of knowledge for HVE as applied, tacit and procedural knowledge from working life, and not from research.

Implications of this dominant definition of knowledge in HVE as knowledge generated in the production of goods and services and selected by employers for social power relations and students' possibilities of social mobility can be described from two perspectives. Firstly, as this definition of what knowledge should form HVE curricula is based on meeting employers' needs for workforce suitable for production, the definition neglects knowledge which enables autonomous reflection and influence in societal conversations or controversies that is necessary for full democratic inclusion and participation in civic practice, which is key to equality. Secondly, as curricula are created in local processes, in which employers are positioned as the authority, it ties the programmes and their students to these employers through specifically adapted knowledge and outcomes in curricula. It locks the students into pre-defined positions in the local labour markets. It also inserts the logics of the stratified labour markets, and the general inequalities that come with the organisation of wage labour, into the HVE programmes. Thus, HVE reproduces existing social divisions and the students' positions in the social hierarchy as wage labour workers. And as curricula are not based on knowledge forming autonomous workers with abilities to reflect on situations and actions and to create innovative

knowledge in their occupation it does not support social mobility through mobility within the occupational field. No matter how advanced the repertoires of the higher VET students may be, they are still based on segmented knowledge of practice tying the students to the contexts of that specific practice.

Article 3: Programme managers: key recontextualising agents in Swedish higher VET selecting knowledge for local course syllabi and organising teaching without regulatory requirements for qualifications

Köpsén, Johanna, (2020), Unpublished manuscript

In Swedish higher VET programme managers have responsibilities similar to those of VET teachers. They are responsible for the organisation and management of the day-to-day work of programme provision, collaboration with employers and the continuous development of the programme and its syllabi. However, there are no nationally defined demands for qualifications or competences, neither pedagogical nor vocational, to be a programme manager in HVE. The aim of the study I present in this the third article was to investigate how these programme managers take part in selecting knowledge for the locally created course syllabi of Swedish higher VET programmes, what that knowledge is and how programme managers organise the teaching of this knowledge in their programmes.

Five programme managers of five diverse programmes were interviewed in qualitative semi-structured interviews based on a thematically organised interview guide focusing on course syllabi and their creation and on the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders in HVE practice. Also, the course syllabi for both school-based and work-based learning from these five programmes, established by each respective management board, were included in the analysed material.

Just like in the second article of this compilation thesis, the conceptualisation of knowledge realised as either horizontal or vertical discourse was used. In this the third article it is used to understand what knowledge is

selected for pedagogic discourse in local contexts of HVE programmes (Bernstein, 2000). These local contexts are understood as pedagogic recontextualising fields with agents which have recontextualising functions acting on the basis of their power, social positions, interests, traditions and history as well as on the basis of their knowledge. The interest of programme managers is connected to the interest of knowledge in HVE in part because programme managers are involved in selecting the knowledge in programmes in creating and updating course syllabi and in part as they are the ones organising the implementation and realisation of course syllabi - a process which involves interpreting and transforming course syllabi into practices of teaching and training.

Findings of the study show that in the examined programmes the programme managers' actions differ in relation to their own experience in and knowledge of the occupational field, giving more or less power and control over the process of selecting knowledge to involved employers. Correspondingly, how programme managers organise the school-based parts of their programmes differs in relation to whether they have their own experience from the field of practice. The programme managers use either one of two main strategies; they either hire others to work as teachers and to take responsibility for the courses (those without own experience), or they themselves teach and are responsible for some courses in combination with hiring others as teachers and experts to give lectures (those who have their own experience in the field).

Also, the knowledge in syllabi differs. The knowledge selected for the five HVE programmes is a broad variation of knowledge of how to 'do' and 'act' in specific occupational contexts, vocationally-specific theoretical knowledge and academic disciplinary knowledge.

The findings raise questions about firstly, the importance of prior experience of programme managers and secondly, the lack of attention on teacher qualifications or teacher identities. The findings highlight how practice in several ways may be difficult for programme managers without work experience in the relevant occupational field or knowledge in relation to it.

Programme managers are not required to have prior experience in the occupational field or knowledge in the field of study. Also, they are not, either in regulation or discursively, necessitated to have formal teaching qualifications. To achieve the purpose of Swedish higher VET to deliver training based on the demands of employers, programme managers who do not teach courses themselves must still be able to navigate the relevant sector of business and industry. This includes evaluating who has the right knowledge to be hired as a teacher on their programmes. And with no institutional regulations on teacher qualifications to fall back on, responsibility for assessing teachers' competences instead lies with programme managers. Teachers with both vocational knowledge and relationships with the field are significant in teaching this vocationally-specific knowledge, as they can facilitate training with high relevance to work.

A main point to take away from this study in a broader perspective is not what specific knowledge is selected for these five programmes in Swedish higher VET or who is hired to organise and teach on these specific programmes but that the choice of teacher and the type of knowledge that is recontextualised for pedagogic discourse differs greatly between the locally conceptualised and managed programmes. The conclusions of the study suggest that these differences, when found within a single higher VET system, strongly support the importance of examining what happens in more autonomous local contexts of VET provision as well as who has influence in these contexts and on what qualifications and knowledge these stakeholders base their actions. This as it is important to recognise how and if national VET systems fulfil their stated purposes and for understandings of what knowledge VET students get access to and the consequences this gives rise to in relation to the students positioning in the labour market and society.

Article 4: Being successful in the educational market: cooperation of providers and employers in provision of higher VET

Köpsén, Johanna, (2020), Unpublished manuscript

The passing on of vocational knowledge and the training of workers for their jobs have historically been the task of masters in guilds or arranged in work. Today, vocational training is more often, at least in part, a matter of responsibility for national education systems. However, employer involvement is still widely recognised as a key factor in vocational schooling. And within industries where employers have a hard time finding candidates with appropriate training, industry–school partnerships are giving rise to new opportunities for both students and employers. The study presented in this the fourth article investigates how institutional relations between publicly funded education and the private interest of employers that are set up in education policy come to be realised in higher VET. Specifically, the aim is to explore and interpret how employers are positioned in the provision of higher VET.

The study is set within Swedish HVE where state-funded programmes are started based on employer initiatives. In addition to the interviews used in the third article, this fourth article also analyse five observations of management board meetings which were done in the programmes where the interviewed programme managers work. The management board is the most salient form of institutionalised involvement of employers in HVE. The management board of a programme holds the power to for instance establish and update curricula/course syllabi. Other members of these boards represent the education provider, the students, the public school-system and, where the programme offers the higher of the two diplomas, a university or a university college.

The study has found that employers in provision of Swedish vocational higher education are positioned as *the experts with knowledge*, as *an asset to the programme* and as *the ones whose needs are to be met*. The study has found a logic of employer involvement and cooperation as a logic of demands to be met.

This makes employers powerful agents in the pedagogic recontextualising fields.

With the positioning of employers as the experts with knowledge they are given great power over decisions regarding the training. As recontextualising agents, they have power over pedagogic discourse and decide on educational content, the *what* of education. But with power over pedagogic discourse they also control aspects of sequencing and pacing of training, the *how* of education, as they in curricula making decide on the order and speed in which content is treated.

The employers are also positioned as an asset to the programmes in the sense that providers use employers to support them in the provision of programmes and employers are asked to help solve problems where industry relations are needed. Their networks provide support for the provision of training. For instance, the employers can be an important asset in marketing but most prominently regarding placements for work-based learning. The employers are positioned as an asset, but they have the discretion to choose to assist the provider or not. This makes the imbalance in power relations between providers and employers clearly visible.

In their interviews, the programme managers articulated to me how they constantly relate their work to the employers and how the employers are the main counterpart in the provision of training. This positioning of employers as the ones whose needs are to be met showcases the HVE programmes as pedagogic contexts discursively defined by a market identity where the relations of providers and employers is one of supply and demand. Employers are positioned as someone that the provider must consider because they are the ones who will or will not hire the students. That is, the employers are the ones deciding if a provider is competitive and producing a product with exchange value in the market - the *raison d'etre* of a provider in such a context.

On a more general level this study also indicates that training of workers in Swedish vocational higher education is the responsibility of actors in a market and controlled by market forces. And it's not just the provision of

training, but also overall responsibilities or strategies for national skills formation that's placed in this market.

Concluding analysis

The aim of this thesis is to investigate policy on HVE and elements of practice in its provision in order to problematise and discuss system formation, knowledge in curricula, the organisation of programmes and employer involvement in VET. This aim is realised not only by the studies presented in the four articles summarised above, but also in this concluding analysis, which relates the findings presented in the four articles to one another. Thus, this concluding analysis considers findings from the investigations of both policy on HVE and practices in its provision for a more comprehensive interpretation of HVE. Using the concepts of the Bernsteinian theoretical framework, one can say that it is an analysis that combines understandings of classification and framing, knowledge as horizontal and vertical discourse, the recontextualisation of knowledge for education, and formations of imagined pedagogic identities for students, teachers and educational contexts. This concluding analysis considers how patterns and relations range across the pedagogic device, which is HVE, its official recontextualising field in the realm of policy and local pedagogic recontextualising fields of programmes.

In the following two sections, I will present two comprehensive theoretical conclusions drawn from the multiple and diverse analyses presented in the four articles of this compilation thesis.

Knowledge is power – Whose ruler?

Bernstein describes the pedagogic device as a ruler 'ruling consciousness, in the sense of having power over it, and ruling, in the sense of measuring the legitimacy of the realisation of consciousness' (Bernstein, 2000, p. 114). Thus, in a study like this one, which investigates how power is distributed and controlled in society through a pedagogic device, it is relevant to ask:

Whose ruler is it? And what consciousness does it distribute? (The key relations of the device and its process are presented in Figure 2 found in Chapter 3.)

The distributive rules of the pedagogic device distribute different forms of knowledge to different social groups, and thus differentiate the consciousness of social groups (Bernstein, 2000). Key to understanding the distributive and differentiating function of the pedagogic device is recognising how these rules regulate access to the thinkable, official knowledge, and perhaps primarily the unthinkable, or the 'yet to be thought', i.e. the potential for new knowledge in new and alternative interpretations and understandings. In this study, attention has therefore been directed towards the institutional relations created in the Swedish HVE system in order to investigate relations of power and control amongst the involved actors, agencies and contexts of practice, and how the system creates and upholds these. This is important because these relations of power and control set the premises for the distribution of knowledge and consciousness in reproduction. That is, these relations define whose ruler it is.

The analyses of both policy and practices of provision presented in this thesis showcase the great power vested in employers, and the relatively lesser power of the state and education providers. In policy, power and control are to a great extent placed with the locally involved employers, and the competitive tendering-like process of allocating funds, in which education providers are dependent on employers, is meant to ensure this. In practice, the power of employers is also significant in the recontextualisation of knowledge into pedagogic discourse because they are the authority on the management boards of HVE programmes, where they have the power to define both the *what* and *how* of the training in HVE. These aspects from the realm of policy, as well as from the studied contexts of programmes, show that it is employers who rule the distributive and differentiating function of this pedagogic device. HVE is the ruler used by the employers, the social group controlling the means of production.

However, an essential part of the underlying principle of the model of the pedagogic device is that there is always a struggle for control over it (Bernstein, 2000). This struggle involves different social groups because the pedagogic device perpetuates the interests of the controlling group, and this renders the rules and processes of a device ideological. The studies presented in this thesis have not found any salient struggle, or indications of a less evident one either. Compared to HVE, other parts of the pedagogic device, which consists of the entire Swedish educational system, is much more clearly the object of an ideological struggle. Discussions on how Swedish education, from that of young children to adults, should be organised and delivered are part of everyday political debates and also a salient subject of debate in the media and society at large. And upper secondary education, which includes Swedish initial VET, is also the topic of many such debates.

I argue that one reason for the lack of a visible struggle, and thus the possibility of the HVE device to be uncontestably controlled in line with the interests of those controlling the means of production, is that the knowledge that is recontextualised for and reproduced in HVE is not strongly classified disciplinary knowledge (Bernstein, 2000). Instead, it is weakly classified knowledge created in fields of production of discourse where the same group holds control and power over these processes in the production of goods and services. The knowledge in HVE is defined as – and based on the study of course syllabi in this thesis, also in practice – mainly the often tacit, context-specific knowledge of production practice, not the kind of disciplinary knowledge over which actors in academia or research fight for the discretion to define. In combination with the weak framing of this knowledge, this is also a reason for the possibility of locally very different curricula within the same occupational field. The knowledge is not strongly classified or framed; thus, the local employers involved in different HVE programmes select different pedagogic discourses for reproduction in different pedagogical contexts. They define different *what* and *how* for training in different programmes that otherwise appear alike.

Knowledge is money – Education in crisis?

The analyses in this thesis have laid bare the absence of any representation of the interests of students, as well as students as learning subjects, in HVE policy. These are rather counterintuitive findings in education research. However, education policy not being related to students is completely consistent with one specific argument that Bernstein makes about the relation between the knowledge and the knower (Bernstein, 2000). Bernstein makes the argument that, in recent history, we have a new principle underlying the organisation of knowledge. This is an underlying principle which differs drastically from earlier underlying principles based in Greek thought (reason) and Christianity (faith). Bernstein labels this new secular principle dehumanising because it separates the knowledge from the knower. This contrasts with earlier principles, where knowledge was an expression of inner relations. In Greek thought and in Christianity, reason and faith functioned as guarantees for the legitimacy and value of knowledge. The new underlying principle that Bernstein describes is a capitalist one, where the legitimacy of knowledge stems from the market, as opposed to from knowers themselves. This is also the principle found in this thesis as underlying for the relations of HVE as a pedagogic device.

The investigations of both policy and practice in this study have showcased a market-oriented pedagogic identity. This identity is based on the bias towards, and focus on, pedagogic practice as a means to generate exchange value for its product in a market, and it defines the students in HVE as input material that, after being treated in production, becomes a tradable commodity with a value on the market. This is precisely in line with Bernstein's argument:

> Knowledge should flow like money to wherever it can create advantage and profit. Indeed knowledge is not like money, it is money. Knowledge is divorced from persons, their commitment, their personal dedications. These become impediments, restrictions on the flow of knowledge. (Bernstein, 2000, p. 86)

Based on this capitalist, market-based principle for the organisation of knowledge, HVE is construed as just one part of a supply-and-demand relationship between education and work, in which the production of skilled graduates is to be precisely calibrated to the needs of the employers involved. As I concluded in the previous section, it is the social group controlling the means of production, and their interests, which controls the distributive rules and the consciousness reproduced in HVE. The principles of the market and its managers hold increasing power over policy and education. Bernstein goes on to describe the consequences of this divorce between knower and knowledge (Bernstein, 2000): If knowledge is separated from people, then people can be moved, substituted for each other and excluded from the market.

The tendering-like application process to determine which programmes are to be approved is a crucial aspect of the competitive pedagogic contexts of this market identity. In this process, just as in many other aspects, education providers are dependent on employers. This all-encompassing dependence on employers may be interpreted as a manifestation of the underlying principles for the organisation of knowledge in the Swedish HVE system. As such, the underlying principles are based on market relevance and neoliberal ideas about education as a means to increase the competitiveness of companies and, thus, also nations. The authority of employers in the practice of programme provision can be described as a result of the market-oriented pedagogic identity permeating HVE and as an expression of the underlying market-based principle of the organisation of knowledge as detached from people.

Bernstein ends his argument regarding this modern capitalist principle for the organisation of knowledge with a statement that the consequences of this principle constitute a crisis for education. What is at stake in his argument is the concept of education as we know it. And perhaps the findings of this study must raise the same question, when students as benefitting from education and as learning subjects, as well as teachers, either as regulated roles or as identities in training, are excluded from HVE policy and the practices of provision studied. These are two otherwise vital parts of education, in practice as well as theory.

6. Discussion

This thesis has problematised and discussed system formation, knowledge in curricula, the organisation of programmes and employer involvement in VET through an investigation of policy on HVE and elements of practice in the provision of HVE programmes. These investigations have been conducted by analysing a broad corpus of data consisting of 14 official Swedish policy documents of different kinds, published between 2006 and 2017, and from the context of five diverse HVE programmes; 70 course syllabi, five interviews with programme managers and five observations of management board meetings. These data have been interpreted using the Bernsteinian theoretical framework in theoretically guided thematic analyses. In doing so, I have been able to put the HVE system and some of the practices of HVE programme provision into the perspective within which this thesis is positioned, which questions the organisation of education and knowledge in relation to the distribution of power in society. This is a perspective that ultimately turned out to also encompass positions and power in labour market for graduates of higher VET.

In this final chapter, I will first discuss the findings in relation to the study's aim and perspective, questioning the organisation of education and knowledge as well as the research presented in the research review in Chapter 2. Secondly, I will present my critical reflections on the design of this study and its theoretical framework. Thirdly, I will discuss ideas for possible future research focuses, to which this study has given rise. And, finally, I will consider possible practical implications by raising a few questions for

the actors involved in HVE policymaking or programme provision to take into account and reflect upon when further developing HVE and its programmes.

Discussion on findings

In the introduction to this thesis I posed the question: What is at stake in the political choices made about the formation of higher-level vocational education? The answers I suggested are twofold, one being the value of education as support for democratic inclusion and social justice, and the other being the value of VET that is sure in its aim of educating for the labour market. The latter is for the benefit of citizens as workers and/or for the competitiveness of enterprises and the nation. I pointed out that these two values are not in themselves inherently contradictory. However, I also emphasised my belief that recognition of these two values is intrinsic to discussions about how vocational education interacts with social order and contributes to the construction and reconstruction of power relations in society and labour market, as well as how it conditions possibilities in the lives of its students.

In the following, I will discuss how the findings of this study can be understood in relation to the study's overall perspective, which questions the organisation of education and knowledge in relation to the distribution of power in society and the social order of capitalism and neoliberal policies. In and of itself, this is also an understanding of how the formation of HVE and elements of programme provision relate to the two values that I posed as being at stake.

Decentralised organisation of education and knowledge

How Swedish VET has been organised and what has been deemed to be important vocational knowledge to encompass in vocational training have changed over time. The clearest shift in policy was when initial VET was made part of a unified upper secondary education in 1971 (Berner, 1989;

Lundahl, 1997; Lundahl et al., 2010; Nylund, 2013). Part of the motive for this was to create cohesiveness in the training system. The reform came about because of, and was shaped in reaction to, a differentiated organisation. When initial VET was made part of the national system, an important aspect was also the establishment of an equal and nationally coherent curriculum. The training should no longer be locally differentiated and directly related to the local labour market or specific employers (Berner, 1989). When HVE was established, one motive was also to create a cohesive system. However, in HVE, the training was once again to be directly related to local employers. If the changes in VET policy at the end of the twentieth century and in the 2011 reform of upper secondary education entailed aspects of a strong market orientation (Nylund, 2013; Nylund & Rosvall, 2016), the formation of HVE represents the same position on what is important knowledge in vocational training as during the early twentieth century, when organisation was local, differentiated across the country and directly related to local labour markets (Berner, 1989; Olofsson & Persson Thunqvist, 2018a). HVE is clearly divergent from the previously strong Swedish paradigm of emancipatory education policy and nationally controlled VET, in which equality and access to upper secondary education and higher education pathways were keywords (Lundahl, 1997; Lundahl et al., 2010; Virolainen & Persson Thunqvist, 2017). Instead of strong national control, power and control have to a great extent been positioned with employers, who are involved locally in initiatives for and management of programmes. Within this decentralised organisation, negotiations along the traditional bi-partisan relations for agreements on the Swedish labour market, which historically have included the formation of and curricula for VET (Lundahl, 1997; Olofsson & Persson Thunqvist, 2018a), are excluded from the process. The HVE system is creating institutional relations between publicly funded education, education providers and employers that are unlike any in the rest of the Swedish educational system.

In the decentralised HVE system, the training of workers has to a large extent become the responsibility of the market. Moreover, it is not only the

provision of training which is controlled or influenced by market forces. Planning for strategic skill formation is also decentralised and placed onto this educational market. In competitive markets, education providers and employers must act in line with capitalist goals to ensure their survival (Emmenegger et al., 2019). This has been suggested to have possible adverse consequences for pedagogy and learning, specifically in VET (Pasura, 2014). The commercial emphasis under a competitive training market logic, as in the case of HVE, is influencing education providers' training delivery, assessment of training and its internal quality-assurance mechanisms (Beach, 2008; Holm & Lundahl, 2019; Vlachos, 2019). The power over planning for skill formation from the national agency is limited to choosing between the initiatives available on the market. Planning for skill formation in vocational higher education in Sweden is demands-based with the demands being defined by locally involved employers. Under such circumstances, both international and Swedish research shows that public education providers also have to adjust their organisation to have a chance at providing education (Holmqvist et al., 2020; Lakes, 2012). In contrast, for initial VET, although it no longer runs under an emancipatory policy paradigm, the selection of educational content is still conducted at national level. Much of the power and control is positioned with national agencies and policymakers, and in processes where both unions and employers' organisations advise on curricula and reform, unlike in HVE where this is done locally and unions are not involved.

From a Swedish perspective, HVE, both contemporaneously and historically, is an extremely market-oriented version of publicly funded education. It deviates drastically form other forms because it is a system that features decentralised organisation of training and knowledge in curricula that are mainly controlled, not by the public, but by stakeholders who act based on a market logic (Beach, 2008; Rönnberg, 2019; Rönnberg, Lindgren, & Lundahl, 2019).

Demands-based and employer-driven VET

HVE was formed in line with the neoliberal idea of education as human capital development and a tool for competitiveness and economic growth (Avis, 2012, 2018, 2019). It is a system of demands-based and employer-driven VET. That the training is demands-based, as in directly related to needs of employers, is secured by the decentralised organisation discussed in the previous section. Also, just like other initiatives and reforms internationally, HVE is intended to increase employer involvement in VET to meet skills shortages and to support local businesses in their competitiveness (Flynn et al., 2016; Lakes, 2012; McGurk & Meredith, 2018). In the case of HVE, policy has formed a system in which vocational higher education is employer-driven.

In HVE, the relationships between education providers and employers stem from the institutional relations between publicly funded education and the private interests of employers that are set out in policy. Internationally, the formations for cooperation and relationships between employers and schools may be very different (Bolli et al., 2018; Emmenegger et al., 2019; Pillay et al., 2014). In HVE, this relationship may be described as one of dependency, where providers are dependent on employers. This dependency is in some sense mutual, but the most defining aspect of the relationship is that the demands and involvement of employers provide the *raison d'etre* for providers. Thus, there is a grave imbalance in relative power between education providers and employers. This is most saliently manifested in the tendering-like process in which education providers compete against each other by displaying their degree of association with employers, who state their employment needs and the level of co-funding. The study of practices in five HVE programmes also found that education providers are dependent on employers during the provision of programmes. This was made clear in the way in which programme managers talked about the employers' involvement, and in how the content, actions and articulations during management board meetings positioned the employers. The

positions of employers in the practice of programme provision are based on work–school cooperation as a logic of demands to be met. This is a logic that is created in policy. HVE, without student-focused regulation, is a demands-based and employer-driven vocational training that serves employers. As concluded in one of the articles constituting this compilation thesis:

> A Swedish employer can, in a sense, place an order by initiating an HVE programme, pay only a minor part of the cost by contributing to the education and training and receive the state-subsidised commodity when it graduates. (J. Köpsén, 2020c, p. 14)

Consequences for students of the employer focus in HVE

What is the significance of this focus on employers and of employers' extensive influence in the form of consequences for students? Seen from the perspective of this study, which questions the organisation of education and knowledge in relation to the distribution of power in society, the consequences for students may be grave. The focus on employers in HVE is especially significant because the struggles over the pedagogic device and the pedagogic discourse – the knowledge to which its students gain access – concern not only the realm of education, but also power relations in industry and the labour market, and thus the circumstances and possibilities in graduates' lives.

The consequences for students when employers have the power to shape the training of their own workers, as they do in HVE, are twofold. Firstly, because the training is formed to meet employers' production needs, the curricula overlook knowledge that enables autonomous reflection and critical thinking (Nylund et al., 2020; Nylund & Rosvall, 2016; Rönnlund et al., 2019; Wheelahan, 2007, 2015). The intended curricula for Swedish demands-based and employer-driven HVE do not include knowledge that supports the kind of influence in conversations or controversies that is necessary for full democratic inclusion and participation in civic practice. Secondly, because curricula are created in local processes, in which

employers are positioned as the authority, and established by the management boards, where employers are the majority, they tie students to these particular employers through their specifically adapted outcome goals and knowledge. The local demands that warrant these HVE programmes lock graduates into specific positions, defined beforehand by the involved employers:

> If VET is to address the 'needs' of employers in its immediate environment it will reflect the classed structure of such regionally and locally based employment. (Avis, 2012, pp. 5–6)

The close and dependent relationship between HVE programmes and the local labour market also means that the logics of labour markets, and the general inequalities that come with the organisation of waged labour, are part of the logics incorporated into HVE programmes and their training. And, because these curricula are not based on knowledge that could form autonomous workers with the ability to reflect on situations and actions and to create innovative knowledge in their occupation, it does not support social mobility through advancement within the occupational field. No matter how advanced the repertoires of higher VET students may be, they are still based on segmented knowledge of practice that ties students to the contexts of that specific practice. This may be described as, at one level, the students being locked into a specific position in the labour market and, at another level, a macro level, that they also are being locked into a social group defined by their role as waged labourers. As the qualifications and positions of HVE graduates are not negotiated by the stakeholders within the conventional Swedish model, a consequence is that the trade unions have no institutional power over what the qualifications from HVE are worth for the students. If the trade unions would have had a seat at the table, for instance on the management boards or in some capacity at national level, they could have had a chance to safeguard the interests of its members. But the unions are not part of any institutional relations influencing the curricula of Swedish vocational higher education and thus the positions

of its graduates in the labour market. Notably, the absent trade unions represent the workers who constitute the same social group as the students, which this study has shown has very little to do with the formation of HVE. By definition, HVE does not disrupt the reproduction of its students' positions in the social hierarchy. I believe this may be characterised as a break with the historically strong class compromise maintained by longstanding Social Democratic rule and the Swedish model (Hickox & Lyon, 1998). The implications for students' possibilities of occupational and social mobility, which has also been a topic for discussion within other national systems of higher or continuing VET (e.g., Bathmaker, 2017; Webb, Bathmaker, et al., 2017; Webb, Burke, et al., 2017) is deeply problematic from the perspective of this thesis as it values education and access to knowledge as a means for democratic inclusion (Marginson, 2016; Nylund et al., 2017; Wheelahan, 2007).

However, viewed from the ideological standpoint of neoliberal policy, the formation of HVE has good intentions. The formation of a system of employer control over pedagogic discourse is conducted in the name of employability and flexibility, which are considered valuable for students (Carlbaum, 2012; Terning, 2016). Yet, as described above, the formation of HVE provides students with perhaps only one particular form of employability and no or limited flexibility on the labour market. This questioning perspective and the conclusions about problematic consequences is warranted by the fact that this training, in which employers are shaping the training of their own workers, is publicly funded. The construction of HVE students as input material and commodities is in line with Bernstein's argument about the separation of knowledge and the knower, and in the formation of HVE it is possible to see just such an expression of an underlying market-based principle of the organisation of knowledge as detached from people (Bernstein, 2000).

Contributions to future use of the framework in VET research

Due to this study's approach of using the Bernsteinian concepts and models throughout, I also want to address what could be seen as a contribution to the development of the theoretical framework as a sort of result from this study.

This study contributes by showing that the often very abstract theoretical discussions in Bernsteinian theory can be used to design a tangible study that investigates a particular phenomenon or educational context. In-depth studies of individual cases, or several individual cases, are also necessary to test, develop and modify the theory's general structures (Moore & Muller, 2002). Development of the principles of description to which a theory gives rise, and the possibilities of generating elaborated knowledge about the empirical, thus lies in repeated and focused empirical research which is rigorously related to the theory. I would argue that this study is one contribution to such a process of the development of theory, and thus also that it expands our knowledge about what we may study when using it. This thesis is an empirical study in a new context, where the theory was engaged with some new categories. It is in precisely such instances, where the theory lacks the ability to reflect the empirical, where there is an opportunity for an expansion or development of the framework. Bernstein clearly stated that 'a theory is only as good as the principles of description to which it gives rise' (Bernstein, 2000 as cited in Moore & Muller, 2002, p. 12). Bernstein also argued that gaining more knowledge about the contexts and phenomena that we study within a field or discipline lies in the elaboration of internal language (Moore & Muller, 2002). And necessary to the elaboration of internal language is the development of external languages through the implementation of theory in research, where theory engages with the empirical, perhaps primarily concerning new empirical problems, phenomena or unfamiliar contexts.

In this thesis, the Bernsteinian theoretical and interpretative framework has been engaged in a context that has not previously been described by the language of that theory. The context of HVE is in that sense an altogether

new case, even though the internal relations and structures which the theory recognises and describes are not completely unfamiliar to research on VET. However, some descriptions are of non-traditional empirical categories in educational contexts. I am primarily thinking of the employers, who are creators of knowledge discourse, but are also not only part of, but essential to, the local pedagogic recontextualising fields in HVE. The theoretical framework has been able to explain these agents from working life due to how they relate to the model's field of production of discourse. While Bernstein had other interest groups in mind, he did point out the importance to study these instances in particular, where the producers of knowledge are also the ones recontextualising it (Bernstein, 2000).

I am also thinking of another unfamiliar empirical category, the programme managers interviewed in this study. They are neither the teachers, nor the principals, nor the educational administrators usually described as agents in the recontextualising fields. Even though they were not precisely like any of the more common categories of recontextualising agents, it is clear from this study that they are very much agents with recontextualising functions in the local pedagogic recontextualising fields of HVE programmes. This is the basis for problematising and discussing their positions and actions as important in this thesis.

Using this framework in studies of more conventional educational systems, agents described as educationalists are positioned as acting, not always but often, on the basis of a common good, and definitely on teacher training, or at least teacher identities. To the extent that there are agents who could be described and interpreted as traditional educationalists in HVE, there are also those who are difficult to denote in the same way, even though they hold equivalent positions in the organisation of training. Whether described as educationalists or not, they must also be related to their market-oriented context, in which HVE education providers are enterprises operating within markets. I believe that this is a type of context influencing education in such a forceful way that the theoretical framework would gain from creating a language that specifically and more clearly showcases the

added and/or altered relations of power and control it creates, and how they influence other aspects of the pedagogic device. Because in a context where pedagogic discourse is communicated as part of capitalist strategies within a market, there are different relationships between the recontextualising fields than in the context from which the model of the pedagogic device originated and was first developed.

A critical reflection on the study design

As all studies do, this study has its strengths and weaknesses. In the following, I will briefly present some reflective thoughts on the study design.

One strength of this study is that it focuses on a relatively new and yet not thoroughly investigated educational context. Thus, the study makes contributions in the form of new insights and knowledge to a collective understanding of this, to many largely unknown, context, both from the perspective of research and to other interested parties. But the study also increases the overall knowledge about contemporary VET because it gives both an empirical and an analytical description of one more example of a marketised, neoliberal, skills-based VET system.

Furthermore, I believe it is a strength that one comprehensive theory and method for analysis has been used throughout the entire study. This has comprehensively connected the findings from different investigations to one another. It has also made it possible to ascribe equal value to the very different types of data material. I believe the breadth of this material, encompassing both policy and practice of provision, to also be a strength. In relation to the aim of this thesis, which addresses interest in both policy and practice, and the fact that, from a research perspective, HVE is fairly unfamiliar, I believe this breadth serves a special purpose. The broad set of data material helps to paint a more comprehensive picture of HVE than a more narrow or focused set of data would have been able to do.

There are also, of course, aspects of the study that could be perceived as weaknesses. One such aspect could be that the studies of HVE practice did

not encompass following the informants all the way into the classroom, to study their practice of teaching or the specific dimension that the classroom, or workshop, represents. It would have been both interesting and enlightening in several ways to observe teaching situations and investigate instruction in HVE programmes, or to interview students on just about any subject. However, the inquiries of this study are aimed at the processes that precede and condition the realisation of teaching practices in training. Because of this, this study cannot say anything about the actual teaching in the programmes. I believe, however, that this is only to be considered a weakness if you also consider the aim of this study to be flawed by its lack of focus on instruction.

The direct engagement of Bernsteinian theory with the empirical in this study makes the theoretical and interpretative framework a vital part of the study design. And in this, discussions on the strengths and weaknesses of this study are the same as those on the strengths and weaknesses of such a research approach. What would I have discovered if I had instead designed a study of policy and practice of provision in HVE based on an inductive approach? For instance, I believe that there is a great risk that I would have missed the opportunity to lay bare how specifically knowledge in the curriculum is part of stratifying social power. For this, I believe that I needed the theoretical framework and its prior engagements with similar empirical problems as an analytical model and as inspiration. The powerful positions of employers would, however, I believe, have been hard not to recognise using any approach.

However you value the abductive research approach, where theoretical frameworks are given significant roles, one weakness of this study may be a possible weakness of the specific theoretical framework. In some sense, it can be perceived as constrained by a structuralist perspective. This type of critique probably has some merit, for instance in regard to the idea of recontextualising fields, which tends to lend itself more easily to longstanding centralised models for curricular formation than other, more temporary or informal, arrangements with other types of actors involved. The theoretical

concepts and models have also been primarily described using the specific context in which Bernstein was active, in relation to the British educational system. This has at times given rise to uncertainty about whether disconnects in the ability of the theory to describe and interpret the context I have studied are merely due to contextual differences or if they also, as I ultimately conclude, reflect another organisation and balance in the relations of power and control.

In conclusion: themes for continued research and practical implications

This thesis is only one of many contributions to the research on VET, higher VET and knowledge in VET curricula. Yet this study has contributed to the research field in particular by investigating a largely unresearched context, and by applying a critical perspective to the study of a form of education which in its political and societal context is more or less undisputedly considered to be very successful.

In the following, final section of this thesis, I will present ideas for further research related to HVE. Finally, I will also raise a few questions for possible consideration in policy and the provision of programmes.

Questions for further research on HVE

This thesis is not a study entailing everything that is interesting about HVE, nor everything that is important about it. The findings and discussions presented in this thesis have given rise to thoughts about several other interesting research questions, which I believe it is vital to address in possible future studies of HVE. Since research has not come near to exhausting all the themes for studies of HVE, the questions I will raise here are plentiful. However, four strands of thought entail more pressing questions.

Firstly, the only saliently presented criterion regarding the evaluation of HVE, the proportion of graduates who have jobs six month or a year after

completing their training, stands at around, and lately even above, 90% continuously year after year (National Agency for Higher Vocational Education, 2020b). However, this number only means that HVE is successful in relation to this specific criterion. I believe that it should be noted that this criterion – of employment rate among graduates – is an interpretation of what the outcome of the aim of HVE is. The aim of HVE in policy is not formulated as employment rate. It is formulated as 'catering to employers. Both the system and the education providers are intended to deliver programmes that provide employers with … manpower' (J. Köpsén, 2020c, pp. 9–10). The National Agency for Higher Vocational Education phrases it as: 'HVE exists to ensure that companies and organisations have access to the competence they need' (National Agency for Higher Vocational Education, 2017a, p. 5). The agency uses the phrase 'Right competence at the right time' as a slogan for HVE and encourages education providers and other parties to do the same (National Agency for Higher Vocational Education, 2018). However, this is an aim that could be operationalised into other criteria than that of employment rate to measure success. Another criterion could focus on employers. For instance, whether they are satisfied and/or filling their vacant positions. The perspective used in this thesis makes visible that the underlying principle of HVE is the employers' needs and that the students' interests are nonessential. Therefore, in advance of all other perspectives, I believe that the success of HVE should also be assessed by investigating the influence of HVE training on students' lives in a broader sense than merely regarding whether they are employed six months or a year after training. The gauging of the achievements of this part of the Swedish educational system should also encompass those who do not graduate. Do students gain new opportunities and/or higher incomes? Is it the same in all study areas of HVE, or are there differences between, for instance, areas of study dominated by different genders? The findings of the study presented in this thesis show major differences within the same system. I am pleased that a coming research project will investigate educational and employment trajectories both pre- and post-training in HVE for both enrolees and

graduates (*Right competence at the right time – but for whom? Trajectories and aspirations within and beyond higher vocational education in Sweden,* Ye, Chudnovskaya, & Nylander, Project id: 2019-04146, Swedish Research Council), giving us more knowledge in direct relation to the high employment rate of students who graduate, viewed by many as proving that HVE is successful. More knowledge about the trajectories of students may give an opportunity to evaluate the proportion of graduates who are working after their training more adequately by viewing it in relation to various related factors, such as recruitment of participants, their backgrounds and a qualitative analysis of graduates' trajectories through interviews.

Secondly, a research question that I believe to be especially vital regards the teaching on HVE programmes. How is the lack of demand for teacher training affecting instruction? I believe it is important for a study of who is teaching on the programmes to investigate both of the aspects that are presented as important for VET teachers: teacher training and vocational knowledge and experience (P. Andersson & Köpsén, 2019; Fejes & Köpsén, 2014; Grollmann, 2008). A study investigating how instruction in HVE programmes is organised, what forms of instruction are used and what type of premises and materials are available for use in HVE programmes could shine some light on the training in this diverse system. And, in direct relation to the findings of the study presented in this thesis, a pressing question requiring answers is: who is teaching on these programmes? Also, in the interviews conducted for this study, a question that was raised in conversation several times regarded whether there are 'professional programme managers', i.e. people who have neither teaching competencies nor vocational knowledge but who are creating professional profiles for themselves specifically as programme managers.

Thirdly, and very much in relation to the questions regarding teacher competencies, my work with this study has sparked questions around why some students do not complete their training, how students are supported if they fall behind, due to being ill, taking parental leave or failing courses, and how the education providers relate to students with special needs,

pedagogical or other. Organising instruction for students with greater need for support is unquestionably a task that requires both resources and knowledge (Wheelahan & Moodie, 2012), and supporting students in relational ways is an important part of a vocational teacher's competences (S. Köpsén, 2014). We know little about how students with support needs, extensive or limited, fare on HVE programmes, where there are no legal requirements for pedagogical personnel trained to support students in their learning. A study of how HVE programmes handle these issues would highlight how a decentralised and extremely marketised part of the Swedish educational system gives the providers opportunities to live up to the ideal, and the regulation, of inclusiveness in all Swedish education, including HVE.

Lastly, I believe that it would be fruitful to explore more systematically who sits on the management boards of HVE programmes and who actually attends their meetings. Broadening our knowledge about how, and how often, management boards convene would also be beneficial for understanding the involvement of these boards in the training. The data could be gathered through a survey, perhaps combined with data from the National Agency for Higher Vocational Education. On the management boards there is supposed to be representation from 'the school system' and, in programmes offering the higher of the two degrees, also from universities. Exploring who these representatives are, how they came to be on the management board and how they perceive their roles could highlight how this representation is operating in relation to the intention that it works as quality assurance. In direct relation to the results of the study presented in this thesis, such a study could also include an examination of whether, or to what extent, trade unions are represented on management boards.

Besides these perhaps more pressing questions, another interesting aspect is how recognition of prior learning is incorporated into HVE. To what extent, and how, do students get formal credit for prior learning in the programmes? And, perhaps more interesting: how is recognition of prior learning used to determine students' eligibility to enrol on programmes? This has been advocated as especially important in relation to immigrants'

opportunities for education and work. In the cases where it is used, how is it done, and has it worked in favour of certain groups on the Swedish labour market?

Linked to the question of recognition of prior learning is thus also a broader question of how processes of determining eligibility and the admission of students are arranged. Admittance onto HVE is today a system of local control over differentiated processes for each separate programme. The regulation of how admittance onto Swedish vocational higher education is organised is in sharp contrast to the admittance process to its national counterpart of academic and professional higher education, which in general is perceived as a transparent and fair process. The education providers in Swedish HVE, on the other hand, are responsible for assessing eligibility without access to the national database of registered degrees and qualifications through which universities and university colleges collectively organise their admittance. I believe that these local processes, in which education providers evaluate documentation filed by those applying in order to determine eligibility, may risk admittance onto HVE programmes being perceived as biased or unfair. Education providers may be inexperienced and unskilled, or perhaps even influenced, or believed to be influenced, by market-oriented objectives in determining who is enrolled and who is not.

It could also be enlightening to expand our knowledge of research coming from fields or disciplines other than Education or Sociology, where my previous suggestions are based, such as Economics, Business Administration and Industrial Management. These disciplines could fruitfully investigate questions related to how employers on the Swedish labour market view HVE and their possible involvement in and benefit from HVE programmes. I believe that this is especially interesting because these perspectives focus on the employers as businesses and relate directly to the goal of HVE to deliver training to meet these employers' needs and contribute to their competitiveness.

Questions possible for consideration in policy and practice of HVE provision

What this thesis may contribute to the studied contexts of HVE policy and HVE programme provision is, from one standpoint, best defined by those working in, or otherwise populating, these contexts. However, from the standpoint of an abductive study like this one, research studies contribute because theory is able to generate empirical possibilities which are not empirically evident. A theory can generate possibilities that are yet unrealised in practice (Moore & Muller, 2002). This means that this study and its findings, as well as the discussions it raises, may offer possibilities of doing things in HVE in a different way than they are being done today, or than they are being done in specific contexts. In the words of the applied theoretical framework, a thesis like this, where theory engages with the empirical, may produce a discursive gap and possibilities to think the 'yet to be thought' (Bernstein, 1996, p. 44). Even if it is not a previously unthinkable thought that leads to change, there are many aspects about which this study may spark some thoughts and, in the best of cases, also debate.

I will present some aspects that regulators and agency staff, as well as public education management, education business leaders and HVE programme staff, could take into account in further developments of the HVE system and its programmes. Based on the findings of this study and what they highlight, I will focus on two questions that may be raised, to be either regulated differently in policy or done differently in provision.

The first question regards what qualifications and competences are needed by staff working in programme provision. Throughout the Swedish educational system, regulation denotes different tasks for staff with specific training. Teachers are required to have teacher training and certification from the National Agency for Education. Principals, with great responsibilities at all levels of Swedish education, are required to have qualifications from, or undergo, specific training at university level. The Swedish regulators have not, however, set any regulatory requirements for qualifications

of personnel working in HVE. The only role for staff in provision defined by policy is that of programme managers. These are not required to have neither teacher training nor vocational knowledge. This of course does not mean that there are no teachers working in HVE or that personnel are not valued for the qualifications and competences that they have. However, I believe it might be fruitful for the training in HVE if discussions about the aspect of staff qualifications were raised more clearly, both in policy and in the context of provision.

The second question also relates to appropriate tasks in relation to competences, and is one of curricular formation. Can policy and education providers really ask employers to take such great responsibility for forming syllabi as they are given in HVE? The creation, evaluation and reformation of curricula are widely researched and recognised as important and being intrinsic and ideological processes. In HVE, these otherwise frequently strongly debated processes have been decentralised and dispersed into the hands of employers via the education providers. I argue that the local characteristic of HVE curricula does not rid them of the broader importance and ideological characteristics of the national curricula recognised in other forms of education. The question at hand then becomes: do the Swedish employers and providers in the education market have the ability to create curricula? Do employers, and education providers, need competences specifically for curricular formation? This question is relevant whether it relates to curricula containing knowledge solely valued for its usefulness in production, or whether it also refers to knowledge related to the students and their possibilities, valued for its usefulness to them in their lifelong learning as it enables autonomous reflection and debate in the occupational field and society.

If these two questions were raised in discussion, and perhaps also debated, given that the outcomes of those debates favour a broader idea of what successful HVE is, this could lead to changes that would enable both the values at stake, education as a support for democratic inclusion and social justice, and educating for the labour market, to co-exist in HVE. This

would make both public and personal investments in this form of training worth more, both in supporting competitiveness for Swedish business and industry and the nation, and in giving people access to education and training that strengthens their opportunities and positions – their power – in society and labour market.

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Appendix 1: Table of policy and instructional documents (in Swedish)

To facilitate easier recognition of the analysed documents for those who read Swedish and who are familiar with the context of Swedish policy processes, I present here a table of the analysed documents using their original Swedish titles.

Policy documents	**Instructional documents**
Kommittédirektiv: • Översyn av den eftergymnasiala yrkesutbildningen Dir. 2006:33 • Utredning om införandet av en yrkeshögskola Dir. 2007:50 **SOU:** • Eftergymnasiala yrkesutbildningar – beskrivning, problem och möjligheter SOU 2006:115 • Yrkeshögskolan: För yrkeskunnande i förändring SOU 2008:29 **Propositioner:** • Regeringens proposition 2008/09:68 Yrkeshögskolan: För yrkeskunnande i förändring • Regeringens proposition 2015/16:198 En stärkt yrkeshögskola – ett lyft för kunskap **Departementsskrivelser:** • En stärkt yrkeshögskola – ett lyft för kunskap Ds. 2015:41. **Lag och förordning:** • Lag (2009:128) om yrkeshögskolan • Förordning (2009:130) om yrkeshögskolan	**Årligen utgivna anvisningar:** • Anvisningar för ansökan om att bedriva yrkeshögskoleutbildning 2010 • Anvisningar för ansökan om att bedriva yrkeshögskoleutbildning 2017 **Allmänna råd och riktlinjer:** • Myndighetens syn på utbildningsplan och kursplaner dnr. YH 2015/3 • Myndighetens syn på ledningsgrupps-arbete dnr. YH 2011/491 • Myndigheten för yrkeshögskolans allmänna råd om lärande i arbete MYHFS 2015:3

Appendix 2: Request for participation (translated)

LINKÖPINGS UNIVERSITET

2017-10-11
REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION
1(1)

DEPARTMENT OF BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE AND LEARNING, IBL
DIVISION OF EDUCATION AND ADULT LEARNING

Address:

Conditions for HVE

The research project on the conditions for HVE aims to understand the mission of the HVE, as communicated in politics, and to highlight the conditions that apply to organisers to conduct HVE-courses. The research project is carried out by Linköping University, Johanna Köpsén, PhD student at the Department of Behavioural Science and Learning (IBL), the Division of Education and Adult Learning.

The study is based partly on political documents and legal texts, but above all on visits to various education providers who run HVE programmes and interviews with programme managers and others working with programmes. There is currently no research on the HVE, either on how it is regulated or on how it is implemented. Therefore, this study is now being carried out to increase knowledge.

Against this background, I wonder if you and your colleagues would like to participate in this study. In practice, this may mean that I interview you, programme managers, teachers, or consultants about how you perceive the aim of HVE and the prerequisites for providing HVE programmes. It may also mean that I participate as an observer at management board meetings and other work meetings where you, for example, plan courses. The study will not cover the teaching or the students.

I will contact you to see if you are interested in participating and then schedule a meeting with you where we talk more about the project and our cooperation.

Please let me know if you have any questions!
Sincerely

Johanna Köpsén
johanna.kopsen@liu.se
013-28 21 45

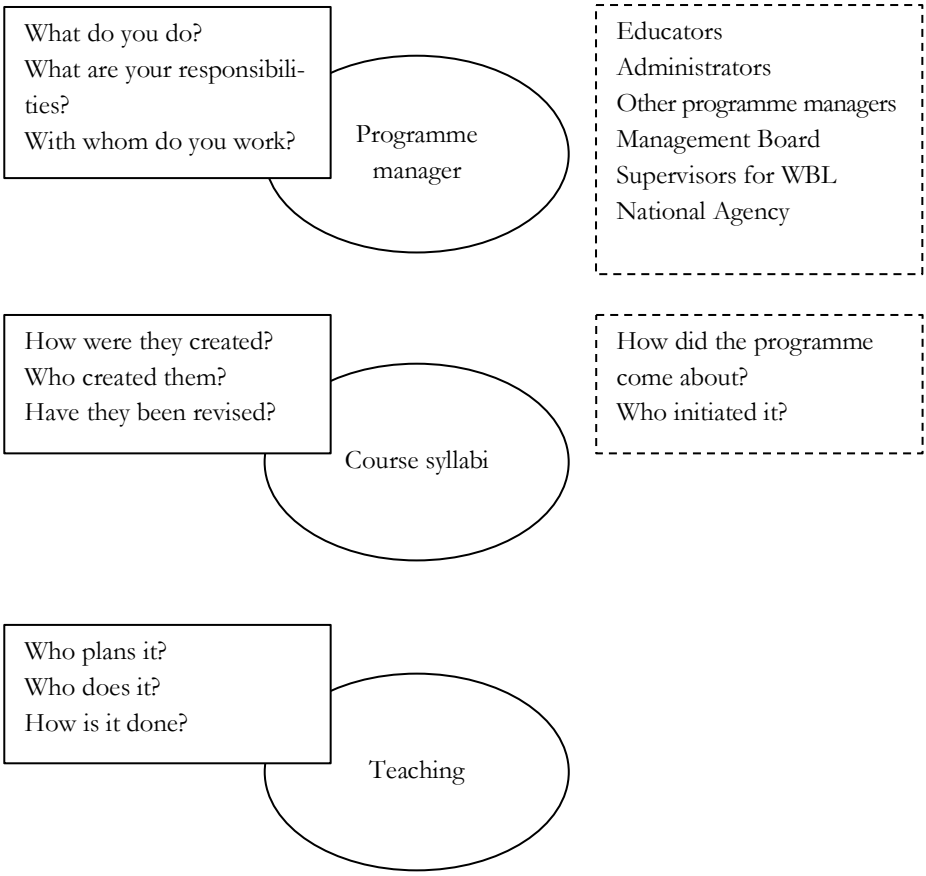
Professor **Per Andersson**
Responsible for research; Vocational didactics
per.andersson@liu.se

Participation in the project is voluntary and is possible at any time, without justification, to terminate. All individuals give individual consent to participation. What is said during an observation or interview may be reflected in the research project's publications, but not names or any other information that can identify participants or its context. The information that will be collected in the study will be handled confidentially and all processing of personal data will be carried out in accordance with the Personal Data Act.

Appendix 3: Thematic interview guide (translated)

Starting question:
Can you describe your role and what you do?

Themes:



Final question:
Is there anything else you think I should ask you about or anything you wish to add?

Appendix 4: Consent form – information letter (translated)

LINKÖPINGS UNIVERSITET

2017-10-11
CONSENT FORM
1(1)

DEPARTMENT OF BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE AND LEARNING, IBL
DIVISION OF EDUCATION AND ADULT LEARNING

Conditions for HVE

The research project on the conditions for HVE aims to understand the mission of the HVE, as communicated in politics, and to highlight the conditions that apply to organisers to conduct HVE-courses.

The research project is carried out by Linköping University, Johanna Köpsén, PhD student at the Department of Behavioural Science and Learning (IBL), the Division of Education and Adult Learning.

The study is based partly on political documents and legal texts, but above all on visits to various education providers who run HVE programmes and interviews with programme managers and others working with programmes.

Important for you to know

1. Participation in the project is voluntary and it is possible at any time, without justification, to terminate the participation.
2. What is said during an observation or interview may be reproduced in the research project's publications, but not the name or any other information that can identify the participant or its context.
3. The information that emerges from the study will be handled confidentially and processed so that no unauthorized person can access it. All processing of personal data is in accordance with the provisions laid down in the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).
4. A participant has the right to request the information registered about them annually, from Linköping University.
5. I may contact participants in the study for follow-up interviews. It is then possible, without justification, to decline further participation.
6. Information from the study will be collected by Linköping University for ten years, locked up and on an external hard drive, and then destroyed.

Contact
If you would like further information, please contact:

Johanna Köpsén
johanna.kopsen@liu.se
013-28 21 45

Professor **Per Andersson**
Responsible for research; Vocational didactics
per.andersson@liu.se

Appendix 5: Consent form – interview (translated)

LINKÖPINGS UNIVERSITET

2017-10-11
CONSENT FORM
1(1)

DEPARTMENT OF BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE AND LEARNING, IBL
DIVISION OF EDUCATION AND ADULT LEARNING

Conditions for HVE

Since you have chosen to participate in this study, I would like to inform you about how we process the information that comes to light. The information letter is attached to this consent form.

I would like to record our interview (audio recording). The recording is done solely for data collection purposes, i.e. so that I can later remember everything we talk about. The audio file will not be available to others. You give your consent by your signature on this form.

With your signature, you certify that you have received information about the purpose and procedure of the research project, that you have had the opportunity to ask questions, had them answered, and that you have received information about the processing of personal data. By signing, you also agree to participate in the study.

Participant's signature	
Name clarification	
Date	

Contact
If you would like further information, please contact:

Johanna Köpsén
johanna.kopsen@liu.se
013-28 21 45 or 070-089 58 22

Appendix 6: Consent form – observation (translated)

LINKÖPINGS UNIVERSITET

2017-10-11
CONSENT FORM
1(1)

DEPARTMENT OF BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE AND LEARNING, IBL
DIVISION OF EDUCATION AND ADULT LEARNING

Conditions for HVE

Since you have chosen to participate in this study, I would like to inform you about how we process the information that comes to light. The information letter is attached to this consent form.

With your signature, you certify that you have received information about the purpose and procedure of the research project, that you have had the opportunity to ask questions, had them answered, and that you have received information about the processing of personal data. By signing, you also agree to participate in the study.

Participant's signature	
Name clarification	
Date	

Contact
If you would like further information, please contact:

Johanna Köpsén
johanna.kopsen@liu.se
013-28 21 45 or 070-089 58 22

The articles

Articles

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FACULTY OF EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES

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