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How vocational teachers describe their vocational teacher identity

Susanne Köpsén

Given the current demands of Swedish vocational education and the withdrawal of the requirement for formal teacher competence in vocational subject teachers, the aim of this article is to develop knowledge of what it means to be a vocational subject teacher in an upper secondary school, i.e. how vocational subject teachers describe their vocational teacher identity. Drawing on a sociocultural perspective, this study analysed data from 22 interviews. The vocational subject teachers describe their relationship with students and the fostering work of teaching for studies, life and work as distinctive characteristics of vocational teacher identity. The fostering work is focused on students' behaviour, i.e. the relational and normative aspects of a social practice. The study results suggest that the identity of vocational teachers includes guiding students towards memberships in various social practices. The benefit of both high-quality teacher competence and vocational competence in vocational teachers is discussed.

Keywords: vocational teaching; vocational teacher identity; vocational teachers' competence; sociocultural perspective; vocational education

*We are supposed to take care of young people and try to help them into careers.
A vocational subject teacher at a Swedish upper secondary school.*

Introduction

Nearly half of the young people in Sweden choose a vocational programme when they reach upper secondary school; such programmes are mainly school-based. Two thirds of the vocational education at upper secondary school cover subjects specific to the vocational programme. This means that vocational subject teachers are responsible for the major part of nearly half the Swedish young peoples' education at the upper secondary level. Despite this, there is no requirement for formal teaching qualifications in vocational subject teachers. Rather, the government sees high quality vocational knowledge and skills as critical to being a successful vocational subject teacher. Formal competence in teaching, however, is only seen as a complement that is encouraged but not required (Ministry of Education 2009).

Recently, vocational education in upper secondary school has been reformed to address a high rate of dropouts and to strengthen and adjust the educational outcomes to meet the demands of working life (Ministry of Education 2009). Thus, Swedish vocational subject teachers at upper secondary schools are expected to prepare students for future working life. Furthermore, they are expected to support the young students' learning and prevent them from leaving school before they have completed their studies. How do vocational subject teachers (henceforth, called 'vocational teachers') meet the contemporary demands of vocational education? And teaching in general?

Those who make decisions about vocational education seldom have personal experience with vocational teaching (Billett 2011). Referring to a reform of British further education, Gleeson and James (2007) note the lack of knowledge of how vocational teachers define professionalism. There is limited research on Swedish vocational education and vocational teaching and particularly limited studies of vocational teachers. Thus, there is a need to develop such knowledge. Hence, a study of vocational teachers' narratives of their learning trajectories has been conducted to learn more about vocational teachers, their path to vocational education and how they experience their teaching work. In Fejes and Köpsén (2012), it is shown how teachers develop identities as

vocational teachers by boundary crossing between prior occupations, teacher training and current occupations as teachers. In this article, the aim is to examine how vocational teachers describe their vocational teacher identity in relation to teaching vocational subjects.

Vocational education and modernisation

There is no single solution for structuring vocational education; rather, there is a diversity of solutions, with different purposes for a heterogeneous group of students (Billett 2011). Furthermore, there are differences according to national traditions and culture (Achtenhagen and Grubb 2001; Brockmann, Clarke, and Winch 2008; Brockmann et al. 2008; Grollmann 2008). Vocational education could be structured as workplace-based learning, integrated into everyday work or as a dual system, whereby apprenticeship complements school-based courses, both general and vocation-specific. Such a dual system of vocational education could be more or less occupational or political governed (Juul and Jørgensen 2011). Vocational education could also be school-based, with an extensive integration of the vocational curriculum into vocational secondary schools (Grollmann 2008). The Swedish upper secondary vocational education is school-based, although some learning takes place in workplaces. However, in the recent reform of upper secondary vocational education, there has been a movement towards working life, wherein industry and labour representatives have been given more influence over planning as well as student examination and the school-based pathway has been complemented by one of apprenticeship (Ministry of Education 2009).

Learning outcomes rather than learning processes are the target of the current modernisation of European vocational education (Cedefop 2009). According to policies and goals rooted in national structures and labour processes, there are various national notions of vocational education systems' desired learning outcomes (Brockmann, Clarke, and Winch 2008; Brockmann et al. 2008). It is argued that vocational education could be skill-based, promoting functional employability, as in England; could be more holistic and knowledge-based, including the development of personal attributes, as in Germany and the Netherlands; or could foster the multi-dimensional development of the student as citizen as well as employee, as in France. The vocational educational system in Swedish upper secondary schools has traditionally aimed for an integration of general and vocational courses, with the goal of preparing students for working life and employment in a vocation as well as preparing them for further studies and the development of citizenship. However, recent changes in Swedish vocational education at the upper secondary level include a reduction in general courses (Ministry of Education 2009) and thus vocational students will no longer be formally qualified for further studies at a university unless they take extra courses. Through the reform, the Swedish vocational system attempts to reduce multi-dimensional development and emphasise more knowledge-based learning outcomes related to employability. Nylund (2012, 2013) argues, this could be seen as leaving a policy that would give all social classes equal access to an equivalent education and reduce social imbalances in education and instead is likely to aggravate class inequalities.

Vocational teacher qualifications

In an analysis of European countries' modernisation of vocational education and training, a trend to enhance the quality of vocational teachers and vocational teacher training is recognised (Cedefop 2009). However, members of a variety of professional groups work as vocational educators, and according to Grollmann (2008), this corresponds to a low status, fragmented situation and variation in how these professionals are recruited and prepared for their tasks. There is no common tradition for the recruitment and qualification requirements of vocational teachers nor is there for vocational teacher training in Europe (Cedefop 2009; Grollmann 2008). As vocational teachers are expected to have work experience and be qualified within their vocational teaching subject, there are often recruitment routes other than those used for academic

teachers (Andersson et al. 2013; Gleeson and James 2007; Grollmann 2008; Fejes and Köpsén 2012). Swedish vocational teachers are required to be formally vocational educated and to have extensive work-life experience, that is, a solid vocational identity is required. However, formal teacher qualifications could be acquired in-service training (e.g. Lucas and Unwin 2009), and according to Cedefop (2009), the training seems to be designed for general education and does not include specific vocational pedagogy.

In Sweden, formal teacher qualifications are stressed in relation to school in general. To be employed as a teacher, you are expected to have been educated to be a teacher. Furthermore, to have the right to examine students, a teaching certificate is required. However, vocational (subject) teachers are exempted from such demands, despite the intentions to strengthen vocational education and the demand for betterqualified vocational teachers (Ministry of Education 2009) and despite the creation of a new vocational teacher training programme emphasising vocational pedagogy (Ministry of Education 2010). According to previous mandatory teacher qualifications, many vocational (subject) teachers are formally educated. Nevertheless, the proportion of formally qualified vocational teachers in upper secondary school is significant lower (40–60%) than for teachers of general subjects as mathematics, Swedish, English, etc. (more than 90%) (The Swedish National Agency of Education).

Being a vocational teacher

Vocational teacher professionalism and identity were studied as part of research investigating a reform of British further education (e.g. Avis 2006; Bathmaker and Avis 2005; Gleeson and James 2007). In a complex and somewhat unstable context, there were no unified conceptions of teacher professionalism; rather, new teachers' identities were being generated. Some teachers regarded the reform as involving enhanced opportunities for development, whereas others perceived constraints and de-professionalisation (Gleeson and James 2007). For example, new groups of students involved changing demands on teachers, which the teachers perceived as a downgrade of teacher professionalism or developments on how to support learning. In the work of Avis (2006), the possibilities of shifts from teachers being subject specialists to more relational and supportive teachers facilitating learning were addressed. In addition, Robson, Bailey, and Larkin (2004) investigated professionalism in the same context with a focus on role and work tasks. The authors found narratives about adding value to curricula, in supporting personal development, maintaining current skills and quality within the industry, and sharing their expertise with students. It was also found that vocational teachers maintain strong loyalties to their former occupational identity. This result is consistent with the findings in Fejes and Köpsén's (2012) study of vocational teachers' identity formation through moving between practices of occupations, teacher-training and vocational teaching. Some vocational teachers emphasise teacher identity, whereas others place more emphasis on occupational identity. For example, vocational teachers who have a weak relation to their previous work would rather emphasise teacher identity, whereas those who strongly identify with the practice of their occupation (e.g. construction) still consider themselves workers and do not identify as teachers.

The interplay between school and working life is an essential part of the work of vocational teachers and represents an outstanding field of research concerning vocational teaching and learning (Akkerman and Bakker 2012; Berner 2010; Tanggaard 2007; Vähäsantanen, Saarinen, and Eteläpelto 2009). Vähäsantanen, Saarinen and Eteläpelto (2009) and Berner (2010) claimed that vocational teachers' decisions regarding teaching and training are based on their interpretations of opportunities and constraints on the boundary between school and work. Different learning rationales for school and work practices (Billett 2003, 2011; Ellström 2006; Moore 2004), involve differences in students' learning processes and knowledge development (Schaap, Baartman, and de Bruijn 2012). Tanggaard (2007) argued that vocational teachers play a crucial role in connecting the different cultures of education and working life to ensure student

success. However, as, Robson, Bailey, and Larkin (2004) found, vocational teachers may position themselves as gatekeepers of their occupation and may focus on teaching students the occupation according to their own views, based on their occupational experience rather than strictly following the curriculum.

How vocational teachers understand their roles and thus enact vocational education goals in teaching (e.g. Billett 2011; Gleeson and James 2007; Robson, Bailey, and Larkin 2004), relates to vocational identity. There are international differences in terms of whether vocational education denotes skills for functional employability or knowledge development to prepare individuals to become citizens as well as employees (Brockmann, Clarke, and Winch 2008; Brockmann et al. 2008) and lifelong learners (Tennant and Yates 2005) and to encourage future workers' well-being (Robson, Bailey, and Larkin 2004). In other words, vocational teachers are creating future workers and/or supporting personal development. Using the term of vocational habitus, Colley et al. (2003) described the teaching and learning of skills and knowledge to foster behavioural competence as processes of becoming and transmission of cultures. These processes resemble those described in the classical study of English schoolboys' learning to become workers (Willis 1977) and a recent Finnish study of the gendered divisions in the educational routes of young people who choose a vocational path after compulsory education (Lappalainen, Mietola, and Lahelma 2013). In fact, a Swedish study of a construction programme found that students were more likely to learn how to participate in a hierarchical formed practice of construction than to learn the professional competence of construction (Berglund 2009). According to the supportive task of teaching, the prevention of dropouts from vocational education is a substantial concern (e.g. Jäppinen 2010; Lippke 2012). In a Swedish survey of vocational students who did not complete their studies in upper secondary school, the students stated that support from teachers might have prevented them from dropping out (Olofsson 2010).

The teacher-student relationship is another area of research related to vocational teaching and vocational teachers (Aultman, Williams-Johnson, and Schutz 2009; Ketelaar et al. 2012). Hargreaves (1998) and O'Connor (2008) noted the emotional aspects of this relationship and of teaching in general. Studies examining this aspect of the relationship in vocational education are limited, but it is mentioned in the works of Gleeson and James (2007), Robson, Bailey, and Larkin (2004) and Hjelmér, Lappalainen, and Rosvall (2010), who described vocational students' negotiations with teachers to minimise the amount of time spent in school.

The aim

Previous research has shown the complexity and diversity of vocational education and what vocational teacher identity could mean in different contexts. With current changes and new demands relative to vocational education in Sweden, it becomes important to provide more knowledge of vocational teaching and vocational teachers. The aim of the current article is thus to examine how Swedish vocational teachers describe vocational teacher identity.

A sociocultural perspective

The article draws on a sociocultural perspective on practice, identity and learning (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998). Vocational education is considered a type of social practice, and vocational teaching is regarded in terms of communities of practices constituted by teachers' negotiated engagement and joint enterprise as well as shared repertoire (Wenger 1998). It is through participation that individuals develop an identity and belong to a community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998). However, identity is fundamentally temporal, and the concept of trajectories refers to the gradual and ongoing development of identity in practice. Having developed an identity and being a competent member of a community of practice entail possessing the knowledge and competence needed for accountability and the understanding of

the main tasks, i.e. how to perform tasks, which tasks are more important than others, how to engage with and communicate with others and how to competently interpret and use the shared repertoire of the practice. Accordingly, a vocational teacher's identity and competence are shaped and re-shaped through active engagement in the practice of teaching a vocational subject. This shaping-process implies the understanding of what the main tasks of teaching are and how to perform them; how to relate to other teachers and students; and how to competently use the routines, resources and artefacts of vocational teaching practice. A vocational student's participation in vocational education is viewed as preparation for future engagements and membership in a community of vocational practice (i.e. developing an identity as, e.g. an electrician, a plumber, a hairdresser, a waitress or a mechanic) as well as other practices (e.g. future studies). Accordingly, the joint enterprise of the practice of teaching a vocational subject could be viewed as part of the process of enabling students' future memberships. Thus, teaching entails the competence needed to accurately guide students' learning (Rogoff 1995) of knowledge and skills that will fit different communities of practice.

In this article, the aim is to examine vocational teachers' identity in relation to teaching their vocational subject. This study is performed by analysing vocational teachers' descriptions of participating in the practice of teaching. The analysis will illustrate which work tasks the vocational teachers view as significant and how the teachers connect this view to their relationships with vocational students as well as the available repertoire of structures and routines. On the basis of this analysis, it will be possible to return to the initial issue concerning the contemporary demands on vocational education and vocational teachers.

Context and methodology

This article is based on a study of vocational subject teachers working in Swedish upper secondary schools for young people aged 16–20 years. Vocational education at this level is regulated by a curriculum, and municipally run schools usually arrange this education, although the number of private schools has increased during the last few years. Vocational education is organised into 12 three-year programmes, of which at least 15 weeks are work-placed learning. Two thirds of the school-based education is specific to the vocational subject and is conducted by vocational teachers. The other one third of a vocational programme includes academic subjects, such as mathematics, Swedish and English, conducted by academic teachers with formal qualifications for teaching the academic subject. Vocational education can also be structured as an apprenticeship education with two thirds of the time being spent in a workplace and the remaining time spent at school. It is possible to find a job directly upon graduation, although students' employability has been questioned by the labour market. This was the main reason for the reform of the upper secondary programme in 2011. It is also possible to continue in post-compulsory studies. However, since the reform, vocational students who wish to prepare for studies at the university level need to take extra courses.

A diverse sample of teachers was desired to gain access to different types of vocational and teaching practices. A letter of inquiry asking about teachers' interest in participating in the study was sent to formally qualified vocational teachers at 15 upper secondary schools, which have approximately 6–10 programmes. Some of the schools are specialised, having only one programme (e.g. the National Resource Use Programme). The selection of the interviewees was based on those 28 vocational teachers who responded to the call. This selection was necessary because too many responses were received from two large vocational programmes (Electricity and Energy, and Building and Construction). On the contrary, there were no interested vocational teachers from the Health and Social Care Programme and the Hotel and Tourism Programme. Despite extraordinary efforts, there were no respondents available from these programmes. Hence, there is some over-representation of vocational programmes with male students. However, this reflects the fact that most vocational programmes are dominated by male students

and male teachers. The current article is based on semi-structured interviews with 22 vocational teachers (8 women and 14 men) representing nine different vocational programmes (Building and Construction, Business and Administration, Childcare and Recreation, Electricity and Energy, Handicraft, Industrial Technology, National Resource Use, Restaurant Management and Food, and Vehicle and Transport). Two of the female interviewees work at a programme largely consisting of male students.

Each interview lasted for approximately one hour and covered questions regarding the interviewee's perspectives on being a vocational teacher and teaching a vocational subject. All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. With the theoretical frame of identity formation as a starting point and through close examination of the transcripts, the question was asked how did the interviewees describe the enterprise as a vocational teacher and how did these descriptions relate to a sociocultural perspective of identity. The analysis will illustrate four themes that recurred in data, although the descriptions varied in their explicitness in reference to the different themes. The quotations in the findings were selected based on how rich the quotations were. Thirteen of the interviewees are represented in quotations, which are slightly more than half of the group; nine interviewees are men, and four are women, which almost reflects the distribution of the total group of interviewees.

Findings

The vocational teachers describe the relationship to their students and the fostering aspects of teaching as distinctive features of a vocational teacher identity. In the following four sections, this will be presented. The first section addresses vocational teachers' close relationships with their students. The following three sections, each describe and analyse the vocational teachers' work as fostering for studies, life and work, in other words, guiding (Rogoff 1995) the students into inbound trajectories for memberships in various communities of practice (Wenger 1998).

Close relations to the vocational students

The vocational teachers believe the practice of teaching a vocational subject differs from other teaching practices at upper secondary schools. They argue vocational teachers have a different kind of relationship with their students than do other groups of teachers. Kenneth, a vocational teacher at the Vehicle and Transport Programme, states:

As a vocational teacher, you get very close to the student; we have better ... what can I say, overview of the student's situation/ ... /because we have more lessons, we spend more time with them and they turn more to us. We are more ordinary like that; they have better social contacts with us. For example, if an academic subject teacher has a problem with turbulence in the classroom, we can go into the classroom and then it immediately becomes quiet.

The interviewees say vocational teachers meet and work together with the vocational students more often and for a longer time than do other groups of teachers. They could have the same students for three years. In addition, the school schedule is structured so that teaching a vocational subject is more coherent and can last for several hours or days. In this way, they argue, they get to know their students better than other teachers do. This could be seen as illustrating how a practice of teaching a vocational subject has its own sociocultural structures (Wenger 1998) and this allows the vocational teachers to develop close relations with the vocational students.

Furthermore, Kenneth's statement above, 'We are more ordinary', may be viewed as academic teachers are of a different type and that the vocational teachers and the students are more alike. A vocational teacher from the Building and Construction Programme (Oscar) even says he does not want to call himself a teacher, as he had bad experiences in school: 'Teacher, for me, is to be

authoritarian; I want to be one of the guys'. In addition, a vocational teacher is expected to also have a vocational identity as a worker, the same type of identity that the vocational students are heading for.

Hence, there seems to be a special type of student-teacher relationship in the practice of vocational teaching, one that emerges from structural conditions and from mutual recognition between vocational teachers and students. This relationship affects how vocational teachers understand their work tasks and performance as teachers, i.e. the vocational teacher identity. Teaching vocational proficiency and skill are not in the foreground when the interviewees describe a vocational teacher's working tasks. They emphasise, rather, the fostering aspects of the teaching work, which will be presented in the following sections.

Fostering for studies

This section concerns the vocational teachers' descriptions of fostering the young boys and girls to become fully engaged students. One starting point is the vocational teachers' recognition of themselves as participants in a school practice. Hans, a teacher in the Electricity and Energy Programme states:

I feel like taking care of, helping those who have difficulties in school; it is easy to understand them. One should not go through school not using the school time wisely. It is better to use what I have gone through.

Hans' statement concerns helping the vocational students to be successful as learners, in other words, to become active participants within the practice of vocational education. It is also an example of how a vocational teacher's experience with an unhappy learning trajectory in school has an impact on the vocational teacher's identity, i.e. which working tasks are seen as important as well as how to relate to others (Wenger 1998). This teacher wants to guide the vocational students into a different type of learning trajectory in school from his own.

Another starting point is the vocational students' lack of interest and engagement in studies. This is a recurring theme in the interviews with the vocational teachers. The teachers talk about the struggle to help young boys and girls understand the necessity and benefit of having a degree from an upper secondary school. John, a teacher in the Electricity and Energy Programme, is concerned about the students' lack of engagement:

They don't understand that they must make an effort to learn ... I have students who never bring their schoolbooks; they don't want to do anything. Why are they here?

Kenneth, the teacher in the Vehicle and Transport Programme, says that the students tell him 'I started the programme by chance only' and 'I wasn't admitted to any other programme as my admission score was too low'. This vocational teacher goes on to say what most of the interviewees mention: 'Well, to make the students motivated, ... to arouse their interest, that's the biggest challenge!' The students' commitment to schooling affects the relationship, as the teachers cannot avoid being influenced by the students' attitudes toward studies. George, who teaches mechanics at the Vehicle and Transport Programme, says he sometimes gets fed up:

Those who want to learn, I take care of them, but the others ... I say, I don't care! But when it comes down to it, then I'm not able to think like that. You want to have everyone with you; you want them all to learn.

However, some interviewees mention the students' development as a satisfying outcome of the practice of teaching. They say that as the students age, the interest for studies often awakens. George, who admits his shortcomings above, also expresses other views on the practice of teaching:

... those who have been troublemakers, to see that they have grown up and have begun to understand that 'now I must do something about this'. That's fun, and then I feel that it's easier, but the first year ...!

This change is seen as a part of the students' learning trajectory through vocational education and thus a result of the vocational teachers' caring and fostering activities. This is a challenging teaching task, according to the vocational teachers. Some even emphasise this as being the most significant task for a vocational teacher. The vocational teachers are guiding (Rogoff 1995) the students into the practice of studying and participation instead of non-participation (Wenger 1998). However, there are vocational students who stay as peripheral members, as they never develop an identity as a student before leaving school. Thus, fostering young boys and girls to develop a student identity is an essential task for vocational teachers.

Fostering for life

The interviewees also describe that being a vocational teacher means helping young vocational students grow up. However, this is different from the fostering activities that are aimed toward the development of a student identity. Fostering for life means the vocational teacher's guidance of the student into adulthood in a more general sense. This engagement in fostering is grounded in various descriptions of what tasks are included in a vocational teacher identity.

Peter, a teacher at the Industrial Technology Programme, expresses one type of description:

You can influence them ... We have that mission to make them good citizens/ ... /you start the lesson with 'How was the weekend?' You can talk a little about it ... and sometimes help them with values and norms ... if it is opportune and well timed.

This description of the teaching tasks relates to the steering documents of upper secondary school, which state that one goal is to develop the student's competence as a responsible citizen. Another description of the vocational teacher identity also includes an imagined identity as a parent. Henrik, a teacher in the Building and Construction Programme states, 'you are a teacher, father and counsellor, all of it ... you are not only a teacher'. The parental role also appears in Hans' (a teacher in the Electricity and Energy Programme) description of the young boys as puppies:

All are not house-trained when they come here; they can't behave ... I tell them why they shouldn't behave like that, why they shouldn't say whatever they want to each other/ ... /they don't understand that they hurt other people with their behaviour, running and pushing each other and doing things that annoy others ... and I have to be there saying 'No! It's not OK to do so!'

Likewise, Helene, a hairdresser and teacher at the Handicraft Programme, refers to the processes of development: 'The social problems are teething problems and mostly present during the first year'.

A third description of the vocational teacher identity includes caring activities not only related to students' participation in the practice of school. The fostering activities could also concern the vocational students' private sphere outside school. Eric, who teaches future lorry drivers, says that he spends several hours in the cab with a student and thus he explains, 'I get quite close to the students'. He continues:

... so I hear a lot, also, about their private lives. There are many students who have a difficult situation at home ... and I've said many times, it's well done of them to even come to school.

However, caring activities, which include those in the private sphere, are seen as problematic and, furthermore, are questioned by some interviewees. Henrik, a teacher in the Building and Construction Programme argues that it reduces the time for teaching the vocational subject.

You might as well be spending half a lesson with a student and comfort him in his social situation in life and then, perhaps, you have to spend the other half of the lesson talking about this 'stuff' with the others in the class.

This teacher also notes that this work task demands the knowledge of 'how to draw boundaries so you're not getting too involved'.

Thus, the practice of teaching a vocational subject comprises activities that become prominent and important because of the teachers' close relationship with the students. The vocational teachers in the study describe the teacher identity in various ways, including not only teaching the vocational subject but also guiding the young boys and girls to grow up and preparing them for life in general. They describe this fostering as demanding, although some also talk about these processes of guidance and individual learning (Rogoff 1995) as interesting and rewarding. However, some interviewees question the engagement in students' personal problems as a task of the teaching practice. The interviewees discuss their competence to carry out this part of the practice of teaching, arguing that they lack the appropriate knowledge and skill. Therefore, some teachers express their need for the support of experts.

Hence, it is interpreted that vocational teachers in the study consider their work tasks to include enabling students' learning trajectories and helping them develop an identity as an adult and member of society. In accordance with this, the interviewees point to the need for competence and an appropriate repertoire of resources (Wenger 1998) to responsibly fulfil this work task.

Fostering for future work

Guiding students into working life is described as a substantial part of the practice of teaching a vocational subject. However, teaching professional skills is not the focus. Once again, it is shown that the vocational teachers interviewed focus on the fostering aspects of teaching.

When the interviewees talk about teaching a vocational subject and preparing the students for working life, they focus on the relational and normative aspects of a social practice (Wenger 1998), i.e. the future vocational practice. The teachers say that they have to describe working life to the students, as the students have no experience of working life. However, the students do not always believe the teachers are telling the truth and thus, the teachers claim that the students have to learn through their own experience. Jacob, a teacher and sheet metal worker, gives an example of what happened when he introduced a student at the work place where the student performed his practicum.

'For God's sake, don't bring your cell phone!' That's the first thing they said to him! The guy looked totally shocked, but he saw that it was exactly what we had talked about in school ... So it's for such things that it is really important for them to get out.

One theme in the vocational teachers' description of the fostering for future work involves encouraging students to take initiative and not expect to always be told what to do. Hanna, a teacher in the Restaurant Management and Food Programme, gives an example:

I often try to bring up that we [employees] actually cost money ... 'as soon as you don't have anything to do, you can't just sit on a chair',/ ... /to teach them what it's like out there in working life, 'you can't be late for work', ... I don't think any of the 'theoretical' teachers talk about what it's like out there. ... Young people today want to sit down as soon as they don't have anything to do ... and wait.

Another theme of the teachers' fostering relates to showing the proper respect for time, working hours and work schedule. Madeleine, a teacher in the Childcare and Recreation Programme, says she teaches the students how they should not behave at a work place and gives an example:

You are supposed to relieve me at eight o'clock, but you arrive totally unconcerned at ten past eight! And then you say you have to go to the bathroom first! It doesn't work!

Furthermore, Kristina describes an example from teaching in the Electricity and Energy Programme. Kristina arranged a situation so that the students could learn from experience. The students were given a task to work on for a couple of days, and they were to complete the task by a specific time:

... but that's what it's all about, you have a deadline, the day that the job should be completed. Thus, it's not OK to sit on a chair talking nonsense one hour, you have to hang on from the very beginning because it will always be something that causes trouble or has to be changed. Stuff will be missing, break ...you need a margin. So I want to show a little bit of this ...

These examples of fostering for working life are about learning to be responsible and knowing the rules and norms that are important when participating in the everyday work of the future vocational practice.

A third theme of the vocational teachers' fostering work concerns the student's individual appearance when communicating with members of the specific vocational practice. The following example, given by Jacob, the former sheet metal worker, shows the importance of appearing to be a strong man.

I tell them, 'If you are looking for a job and shake hands like a dead man, it does not work! You need a handshake that shows you've got balls, it's just so'. Those kinds of things/ ... /You can't go out there and be too weak and you can't be too cocky, you have to be somewhere in between. You must know your place, but still take initiative.

Jacob concludes, 'either you can be on your own, or if you wish to be part of the community, you have to fit in, to adjust ...'.

These examples are all about teaching vocational students to become members of future vocational practices. The interviewees' descriptions show that developing a vocational identity not only includes learning the skills and know-how but also includes understanding the sociocultural values, rules and traditions as well as how to communicate with other members of the practice (Lave and Wenger 1991). Furthermore, vocational teachers' guidance for future working life also concerns developing the normative qualities of a worker's identity; e.g. a strong male sheet metal worker who is not too cocky nor too withdrawn, a restaurant worker who is always on the go and who can be independent and take initiative, a member of a worker's collective that demonstrates respect for other workers and is on schedule or a lorry driver who knows the importance of being sober and well-rested when out on the roads. The interviewees believe it is necessary for the students to have such an understanding of the vocational identity to be let in and accepted as new members of a vocational practice. This study shows vocational teachers that are highly engaged in guiding students to develop such inbound trajectories (Wenger 1998). In keeping with this characteristic of vocational teacher identity, several interviewees state that it is essential that vocational teachers have their own vocational experience and competence. It takes personal experience to provide credible examples of the prevailing norms and values. Jacob, the teacher above also, says:

It is good if a teacher himself has been working in the vocation and understands the codes, how the jargon is. In my vocation, it can be a pretty tough jargon at the workplace ...

Finally, Henrik, also a teacher in the Building and Construction Programme, states what is a recurring description of a vocational teacher identity in the study: 'We are supposed to take care of young people and try to help them into careers'. This statement can be seen as a mission to

prepare students for a working life. It does not specifically relate to working skills but rather to a more comprehensive preparation for a future working life. It also expresses the preparatory nature of the teaching assignment and the aim that the students should be employable, though not necessarily full-fledged professionals. In other words, the interviewees in the study emphasise the vocational students' movement from school into membership in a certain vocational practice and the inbound character of such a learning trajectory (Wenger 1998). Furthermore, the supportive and caring quality of the teaching tasks, as expressed by Henrik, is consistent with the other fostering aspects of a vocational teacher identity, which have been described in the previous sections.

Conclusions

The vocational teachers interviewed describe their relationship to students and their fostering activities as distinctive features of vocational teacher identity. They emphasise caring and teaching teenagers to become students, adults and future members of vocational practices. Thus, vocational teacher identity means guiding (Rogoff 1995) the students into memberships in various social practices or, in other words, fostering students for a nexus of identities (Wenger 1998).

A significant aspect of the practice of vocational teaching, according to the vocational teachers, is the relationship to the students, which affects how vocational teachers understand the work tasks and conduct themselves as teachers, i.e. the vocational teacher identity. This relationship is a result of structural conditions and seen to be due to mutual recognition between the vocational teachers and their students, i.e. between the former and the future workers.

The interviewees describe teaching vocational subject knowledge as a substantial part of the practice of teaching, and they emphasise that it is necessary to have a vocational identity of their own. However, teaching does not specifically concern working skills but rather involves a more comprehensive preparation for a future working life. Knowing how to behave in the workplace is seen as critical to being accepted into working life and the community of vocational practice. Thus, to enable students' inbound trajectories for membership into vocational practices, the relational and normative aspects of the future vocational practice is emphasised. Furthermore, teachers' fostering for future working life also concerns the normative qualities of a worker's identity.

The students' lack of interest and engagement in studies are described as a challenging aspect of vocational teaching. The teachers guide (Rogoff 1995) the students into the practice of becoming engaged in learning and thus develop an identity as a student (Lave and Wenger 1991). However, there are vocational students who never develop such an identity before leaving school.

The vocational teachers interviewed also consider their work tasks to include enabling their students' development of an identity as an adult and member of society. However, they point to the need for competence and an appropriate repertoire of resources (Wenger 1998) to responsibly guide students into adulthood.

Discussion

The aim of the current article has been to examine how Swedish vocational teachers at upper secondary schools describe vocational teacher identity. According to the current demands of Swedish vocational education at the upper secondary level and the change of requirements with regard to vocational teachers' competence and qualifications (Ministry of Education 2009), there is a need to develop further knowledge of vocational teaching and vocational teacher identity. There is no general understanding of vocational teacher identity due to the international diversity

of goals, structures (e.g. Billet 2011; Brockmann, Clarke, and Winch 2008; Brockmann et al. 2008; Gleeson and James 2007; Grollmann 2008) and practical intentions (e.g. Berner 2010; Colley et al. 2003; Ketelaar et al. 2012; Tennant and Yates 2005) for vocational education and vocational educators. This article contributes knowledge of the Swedish conditions with respect to vocational teachers' descriptions of their teaching practice, i.e. their descriptions of vocational teacher identity. However, the article is based on a small-scale study, which do not lend the findings to generalisation. Nevertheless, because there has been limited research, especially in Sweden, it is hoped that the findings will be considered useful for understanding the conditions of vocational teachers and vocational teaching.

A main finding of this study is that vocational teachers describe fostering activities as significant functions of vocational teacher identity. They express the preparatory nature of the teaching assignment; their students should become employable, although not necessarily full-fledged professionals. The fostering is focused on the students' behaviour, namely, the relational and normative aspects of membership in the vocational practice, school and society. One could imagine vocational teachers would highlight the teaching of practical skills. However, they highlight the multidimensional aspect of teaching and learning and what this means for themselves as vocational teachers: the structural and relational conditions and the challenges of fostering teenagers, i.e. preparing them to behave and fit in with different social practices.

Based on this study, however limited, it is possible to argue that policy-makers and practising vocational teachers emphasise different aspects of vocational teacher identity. Billett (2011) argues that policy-makers and others who decide about vocational education and vocational teaching seldom have personal experience of vocational teaching. The vocational teachers in the study describe the preparing, fostering and pedagogical work as a characteristic aspect of vocational teacher identity. Policy-makers emphasise instead the quality of teachers' competence in their chosen vocation, i.e. actual and related work experience (Ministry of Education 2009). This study shows the need for such vocational competence; however, it also shows there is more involved in teaching a vocational subject than only being a competent hairdresser, vehicle mechanic, carpenter, tinsmith, preschool-teacher, electrician, waitress and so on.

Vocational teacher identity that involves a close relationship between vocational teachers and vocational students could be seen as an asset for vocational teaching. It enables vocational teachers to care for and provide support to students for studies, life and work. This relationship, as described, is the result of structural conditions and can also be seen as being based on mutual recognition between vocational teachers and students, i.e. former and future workers. The vocational teachers interviewed claim that teachers in academic subjects do not have the same relational conditions and responsibilities. However, focusing on the special nature of vocational teacher identity with respect to the close student-teacher relationship may overshadow the benefits of professional vocational teacher competence to teach and foster vocational students. Being an experienced worker and a wise adult is not always sufficient. Nonetheless, the relationship provides an opportunity. In Ketelaar et al. (2012), it is argued that a shift from knowledge transmission to the facilitation of students' learning has occurred, thanks to the vocational teachers' coaching role, which has been made possible through a good relationship between the teachers and their students. Furthermore, the interviewees argue that this close relationship is a prerequisite for the caring aspect of vocational teacher identity. To some extent, this resembles what is shown in Lippke (2012), who describes how emotional practices shape positive identities for teachers as well as students, and in so doing; establish a productive force in vocational education.

Being a vocational teacher also means being able to design and maintain a situation for learning that takes account of the type of knowledge to be taught in the proper context, in other words, basic pedagogical knowledge and teaching skills. Vocational teacher identity could be seen as

being comprised of different identities, both a vocational identity and a teacher identity (Fejes and Köpsen 2012; Robson, Bailey, and Larkin 2004). Thus, it is necessary to be competent with respect to teacher identity as well as vocational identity. The study in the article has shown the need for the ability to foster vocational students into becoming students, adults and workers. Accordingly, it has been discovered that there may be benefits of formal teacher competence.

Motivating students to engage in studies is shown to be an aspect of vocational teacher identity. However, the vocational teachers in this study express the need for greater competence and resources to perform this task. One motive for reforming the Swedish vocational education system was the high dropout rate of vocational students (Ministry of Education 2009). The political solution was to reduce vocational students' study of academic subjects, thereby limiting pursuit of higher education. Students leaving vocational school before they completed their studies is not only a Swedish problem. The systematic development of pedagogical practices, such as team-based management and leadership, a collaborative curriculum and multi-professional guidance, reduced the dropout rate in Finnish vocational education (Jäppinen 2010). The Danish study mentioned above (Lippke 2012) shows that special courses and caring work prevent students from dropping out of school. Thus, one could argue that a higher quality of Swedish upper secondary vocational education including fewer dropouts could possibly be achieved from using the structural conditions, vocational teachers' and students' mutual recognition, and if vocational teachers, as well as the academic teachers, hold the pedagogical knowledge and skill for teaching and learning.

As mentioned above, a vocational teacher identity includes both teacher identity and vocational identity (Fejes and Köpsen 2012). Vocational teachers need to have a vocational identity to be competent in terms of vocational knowledge and skills but also to have a knowledge of prevailing norms, traditions, ways of relating and so on. In other words, they need to have sociocultural knowledge of a specific vocational practice. In the current study, it is shown that vocational teachers perform what is called boundary work (Berner 2010), as they, in addition to practical tasks, figuratively bring the practice of work into the practice of education. The vocational teachers tell stories and provide students with examples of how to communicate and act in the students' forthcoming practicum and future practice of work. This practice is similar to the vocational teachers' sharing of experience and knowledge to the students described by Robson, Bailey, and Larkin (2004). Thus, the vocational identity is an asset and a necessary prerequisite for a vocational teacher who transfers the 'appropriate' behaviour to the students so that they will fit into vocational practice. Colley et al. (2003, 488) describe this as making the student 'the right man for the job'. They argue that a vocational habitus works in disciplinary ways to prescribe how vocational students should feel, look and act and what values and beliefs they should embrace. Thus, it can be determined how social class and gender aspects are reproduced and even cemented through the vocational teaching and fostering of the teenagers. With regard to the demand for the reform of Swedish vocational education, e.g. the development in students of personal attributes, such as flexibility and initiative (Ministry of Education 2009), the heritage of 'vocational habitus' may be a barrier. Hence, there is a need for a contemporary and modern vocational identity of the teachers that addresses the current demands for vocational knowledge and skills as well as values and attitudes.

This article has revealed that vocational teachers may regard the fostering work that is included in vocational teacher identity as significant and to some extent challenging. Thus, the benefit of formal teacher competence together with vocational competence has been discussed. In other words, it is likely that all students at the Swedish upper secondary level would benefit from having pedagogically educated teachers in all subjects – both vocational and academic subjects.

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