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the magical properties of workshop learning

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Preface

In this book, I present a critique of existing models of vocational education, which are education preparing young people to participate in the present-day manual labour market. I then proceed to outline and advocate a workshop-focused pedagogical model for the future. This model draws upon my years of experience derived both from working in vocational education and from teaching vocational teachers to do research in the field of vocational education.

I worked for eighteen years as a welfare officer, counsellor, and lecturer at vocational schools in Oslo in relation to the crafts and industry vocational sector. Later I was appointed professor of vocational pedagogy in the Department of Vocational Teacher Training, University College of Akershus, Norway. For the past fifteen years, I have taught vocational pedagogy to students working on their thesis-based higher degrees. These students are vocational school teachers employed in upper secondary schools all over Norway. It has been a particularly rich and instructive experience for me to work with vocational teachers as they engage in research and begin to develop comparative and reflective knowledge in their various vocational specialties within the field of Norwegian education, and it is also a foundation for my knowledge of the development in upper secondary education during the latest reforms.

I have divided the book into three parts: In Part 1, I reflect upon the changes in upper secondary education in Norway in a historical and sociological perspective. I also discuss the educational changes in upper secondary education in Norway currently known as Reform 94. In Part 2, I focus on gender, which has its own history in modern vocational education research. In Part 3, I describe and analyse my use of workshop pedagogy in teaching at a university college and sum up my argument as to the practical and theoretical qualities of this method of pedagogy.

There is what we might call a red thread running through the book. The central issues here are the gender question in vocational education, the development of vocational schools for the crafts and industry sector, the relationship between vocational and general education, and the interface between very different learning styles – between those who learn from practical vocational instruction and through apprenticeship, and those who learn in the classroom. Workshop learning, as a promise of fruitful alternative pedagogies, is at the core of my arguments; moreover, it is addressed more fully in the final chapters, regarding the future of education.

My international contacts with friends and colleagues have had a significant effect on my work. To be able to compare the educational developments in one's own country with those in other lands contributes much to the understanding of both general and particular trends in the history and development of the vocational fields. I have long had research relationships with scholars and scientists abroad, especially at the Universities of Toronto in Canada, Joensuu and Tampere in Finland, and Adelaide in Australia. The 'journeyman wanderings' have been essential for my increased understanding of the wider field of vocational pedagogy. Colleagues in the research network 'Vocational Education and Culture Research Network', together with their annual conferences on vocational education, have been an additional source of great inspiration. In addition, critical scientific perspectives from the field of women's studies have allowed me to understand more about the distance between educational research and the everyday situation of vocational students and apprentices. Here I want in particular to thank Dorothy Smith and Hildur Ve.

I hope this book can contribute to a deeper interest in, and understanding of, both the unity and diversity of the vocational fields. Now, more than ever before, this general field has come to the fore in terms of research into education and learning. Nowadays, the relationship between education and working life is being discussed to a higher degree than ever before, both nationally and internationally. Vocational education is in focus, both in Leonardo da Vinci Projects across Europe and in international conferences. Vocational pedagogy

is placing new pedagogical problems on the agenda, and is challenging the hegemony of the classroom-oriented school.

Every institutional system has its own building period, its period of consolidation and stability, and its period of decline. Perhaps we could say that learning, purely in relation to the school, has enjoyed its period of greatness during the last thirty years. Once again, new questions are being posed and new concepts are arising. I expect questions are always being posed and concepts are always arising. I just want to indicate that these are special, or that the occasion for them is special. You might say 'old questions are being raised again and old concepts are being revisited', or one might say that 'fresh' concepts or questions are being put forward in education fields as diverse as medicine, nursing, and the caring sector in general, or in trades in the crafts and industry sector. Concepts like 'master teacher', 'journeyman' and 'apprentice' are central in this connection. These concepts give rise to fundamental questions in the debate about teaching and learning.

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