

studien zur berufs- und weiterbildung  
studies in vocational and continuing education  
band / vol. 3

# working knowledge in a globalizing world

from work to learning, from learning to work

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## Working Knowledge, the Issues

As Lorenz Lassnigg points out below there has always been a gulf between general or academic education, on one hand, and vocational education and training on the other. Put bluntly, general education, or what Antony Lindgren in his chapter calls the Latin model, makes up the vocational training of the ruling and middle classes in society, while VET involves job-related working knowledge for those who are shut out of power and influence in both politics and society. Thus, when reforms occur around the question of democratizing the school system, the models developed in the vocational sector are usually paid little attention, and reforms centre on increasing the amount of academic or classroom learning on both sides of the social canyon. This fissure in society continues to separate classes despite prevailing ideologies of horizontal democracy and classless society. These educational reforms never seem to take much account of the experiential knowledge and educational needs of the manual work force, but rather, they are undertaken in response to the needs of the ruling class, government and corporate leaders of business and manufacture.

The situation is ripe with paradoxes and contradictions in this time of upheaval and social change. New demands are put on education from a market driven economy. Education is perceived as a commodity for sale from the countries in the richer world to the former colonized and oppressed parts of this globe. Privatization and market economy logic are threatening public schooling in advanced welfare states. Vocational streams with their workshops and equipment are more expensive than general academic classrooms and that leads to downgrading of vocational craft qualifications and real vocational knowledge in favour of more ephemeral and less profound market-driven modular skills, to be upgraded and retrained over and over, without depth of understanding or mastery of a craft. The market hegemony and the growing imbalance between state responsibility to industry and to its citizens. general wellbeing lead to cuts in funding and the closing of vocational schools and colleges.

On the other hand the European Union has placed a strong emphasis on the importance of education in general and vocational education in particular, especially as a means of integrating the European labour market and making Europe a stronger player in the global market. The OECD reports on .Knowledge and Skills for Life., the Bologna and Lisbon proposals on adult education and life-long learning are important documents in this context. The .European Qualification Framework., agreed

upon by the European ministers of education in May 2005 is closely connected to the European nation-building project and its competitive goals on the world market. Some forecasts maintain that Europe could well be the world's strongest economy by 2010 (see Mjelde 2003). We also experience a change in paradigms on the question of teaching and learning. A shift of emphasis has taken place from teaching to learning. The old Latin school model, with the teacher up front faced by rows of student heads is now being criticized and learning through activity and cooperation and in proximity to working life are on the general agenda – a model we now derive from workshop learning in vocational education.

Twenty years ago, working knowledge, vocational education and apprenticeships were neither on the public agenda nor topics researched in the science of education. They were excluded from the field of history of education, from pedagogy and from sociology of education (Heikkinen & Sultana 1996, Harney 2002). General education debates in Norway went on as if the manual labour market, working class education and apprenticeships did not exist. That has changed dramatically during the present crisis, where schooling and its remoteness from working life are now central in the discussions on both academic and vocational education. This has put working class and vocational education on the agenda in a new way.

Manfred Wahle (2003) outlines a new programme for historical studies for the twenty-first century and points out that research is an important resource not least in the history of education. Historical research is necessary for the self-understanding of vocational education and training both as a discipline and as pedagogical knowledge. Research into people's life stories has also given a deeper understanding of the effect of education on people's lives (Goodson 2000, Antikainen 1999, 2005). An understanding of the total organisation of labour and the dynamics of gender, class and ethnicity are important dimensions in future research into the complexities of the relations human beings have with work and education (Glucksmann 1995, Gonon, et al 2001, Husemann, et al 2003, Lakes 1997, Carter and Lakes 2004).