This is the accepted version of a paper presented at International VET-Conference 2017. Crossing Boundaries in Vocational Education and Training: Social Dimensions and Participation, Rostock Aug 16-18.

Citation for the original published paper:

Transnational policy and the recognition of vocational knowledge: A device for understanding transformations in policy and practice.
In: Presented at: International VET-Conference 2017

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published paper.

Permanent link to this version:
http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:lnu:diva-69466
Transnational policy and the recognition of vocational knowledge: A device for understanding transformations in policy and practice

In education systems around the world, new policy spaces are taking shape. These spaces are neither exclusively national nor exclusively international (Sassen, 2006). In recent research, the constitution of a particular transnational space and policy flows has been exemplified by the educational policy of the EU or the OECD. The educational systems of the nation-states are under pressure through the agency of transnational actors and by softer policy agreements or harder educational standards and bench-markings (Grek et al., 2009; Ozga, Dahler-Larsen, Segerholm, & Simola, 2011). In the last two decades, we have seen a number of policy initiatives and legislative interventions from the EU with the ambition to decrease unemployment, develop the human capital and to promote economic growth through restructuring VET systems (Wallenborn, 2010; Boutsiouki, 2014). In line with such aspirations, there are various frameworks for qualification and transferability of vocational knowledge, for example the ECVET. A general problem is that the abstract character of frameworks fail to recognise vocational knowledge (see Rauner, 2009). Another important field, where different frameworks may fail in recognising vocational knowledge is within the growing field of validation also labelled as recognition of prior learning (RPL) or accreditation of prior learning (APL) (see for eg. Allais, 2012; Andersson, 2006; Bohlinger, 2012; Breier & Ralphs, 2009).

The purpose of this paper is to develop a theoretical device in order to understand transformations of VET in policy and practice by elaborating on a framework that raises questions concerning i) transnational policy flows affecting or working in parallel with national reforms, ii) how recontextualisation processes shape intentions and their communication in reforms designated for local policy, and iii) the implications and in what ways intentions are configured in local VET contexts. The ambition is to provide an outlook for comparative studies on VET curriculum and contribute to a new approach for looking into the policy-making, enactment and governance of different VET systems. In order to do that we will take two turns.

The first turn is towards classical curriculum theory (Lundgren, 1972; Wahlström, 2009; Sundberg & Wahlström, 2012) with its different levels of analysis: the societal/ideological level, the curriculum/programmatic level and the teaching and classroom level. This theoretical and methodological framework takes transnational influences into consideration for understanding educational reforms (Wahlström & Sundberg, 2015). In order to relate the three different discursive levels to each other and to make explicit how meanings and discursive claims travel between different contexts Bernstein’s (2000) concept of recontextualisation is used. According to Bernstein (ibid.), there is a mutual – but in no way identical – relationship between the official recontextualisation field (constructed on the societal/ideological level) and the pedagogic recontextualising field (the curriculum and teaching/classroom arenas). In this recontextualisation, there is a discursive contest between notions and conceptions of curriculum. When educational reform discourses are relocated in new contexts they reconnect, merge and transform with the inherent logic, conceptions and normative values of the actual context. In short, when concepts and ideas are moved from one context to another, their original meaning change (Bernstein, 2000).

The salient features of the local curriculum context need to be theoretically addressed. The second turn we will take is the conceptual framework for “putting knowledge to work” (Evans et.al. 2009, 2010). Evans et.al. point at four contexts of recontextualisation. “Content
recontextualisation” refers to the selection of codified knowledge and how it is framed for teaching in the programme design environment through the curriculum. Disciplinary knowledge is general and abstract, and therefore easier to recontextualise, while selecting “know how” in terms of procedural and work process knowledge is harder. In the teaching and facilitating environment, the “pedagogic recontextualisation” encompasses teachers’, tutors’ and trainers’ organisation, sequencing and structuring of curriculum into teaching and learning activities. It concerns, for example, the deliberation on the relationship between theory and practice and is to a great extent shaped by values and beliefs. In the workplace, the students are supposed to be supported in their knowledge development. “Workplace recontextualisation” works according to the logics of the workplace, where the students engage in practices and activities. Finally, “learner recontextualisation” is the process where learners make meaning out of their education in terms of the different recontextualisation processes. It is dependent on individual experiences, personality, social and cultural background, prior learning and so on, and has to do with the strategies, insights and knowledge development of the individual learner. The process is of utmost importance for the formation of a vocational/professional identity (Evans et al, 2009, 2010).

Through an empirical example of validation of vocational qualifications, the theoretical device’s potential for being operationalised is illustrated. Validation as presented in policy, guidelines and frameworks, nationally and internationally provides an example of transnational policy flows affecting or working in parallel with national reforms. In addition, it holds several recontextualisation processes which have implications for the local practice of validation as well as, in the long run, VET. The recognition of prior learning (RPL) is used to assess the vocational qualifications as a requirement for getting admission to the vocational teacher education (Johansson, forthcoming). RPL is built on the idea, at least rhetorically, that all forms of knowledge and learning counts. There is a close connection between RPL and current policy trends, such as competence based curricula (Mulder, Weigel & Collins, 2007), the focus on learning outcomes (Allais, 2012) and the use of qualification frameworks (Bohlinger, 2012). Sweden has made criteria for the vocational qualification in form of teaching subjects and the assessment is supposed to be done in combination with level five in the Swedish quality framework (SeQF, 2016).

References


