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MARIA C. JOHANSSON

**THE INSTITUTIONALISATION OF
VALIDATION AND THE TRANSFORMATION
OF VOCATIONAL KNOWLEDGE**

LINNAEUS UNIVERSITY PRESS

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The institutionalisation of validation and the transformation of vocational knowledge: The case of admission into Vocational Teacher Education in Sweden

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Abstract

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The aim of this thesis was to understand the validation of vocational knowledge prior to entry into vocational teacher education in Sweden with regard to conceptions and understandings of vocational knowledge, and also to understand how institutional conditions, such as ideas of how to organise validation, influence the content and form of the validation practice. From this aim the following research questions were developed: What ideas about the organisation of validation stand out in the policy and practice of validation? What conceptions and understandings of vocational knowledge is the organisation of validation built on and what do they entail? Who has the agency to describe and decide upon vocational knowledge in the policy and practice of validation? What institutional arrangements appear in the practice of validation?

To conduct the studies in the thesis a multimethods approach was adopted, combining policy analysis and interviews. For theoretical support, new institutional theories were used and also theories of knowledge. The results revealed that the regulative elements of validation have transformed vocational knowledge to fit a frame similar to formal education. In terms of norms and values, it appears as if validation is more of a social and economic project than one of accounting for vocational knowledge and vocational pride. Cultural/cognitive matters that are taken for granted when considering vocational knowledge differ quite significantly between agents involved in validation. Validation of vocational knowledge exhibits a conceptual confusion having different conceptions of knowledge simultaneously at play. This confusion blurs the boundaries between concepts of knowledge, learning, and the learning context. In the complexity of ideas of how to organise validation and different knowledge conceptions, institutional arrangements appear to be based on a sense of belonging, either to academia or to the trade. The agency of those with vocational knowledge is limited in several ways within validation.

Keywords: agency, competence, institutional arrangements, institutional conditions, institutionalisation, validation, vocational knowledge, qualification framework

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since 2011, Sweden has had a new curriculum as well as new education legislation. In the current VTE, vocational teaching subjects are not included in the program, and the requirement of higher education (90 credits) prior to the program, which was a prerequisite for previous VTE, has been removed. This has reduced the credits given for the whole education by half the amount. Vocational knowledge is included in the current VTE, as a requirement which gives no credit. Applicants have to apply, as in all other courses and programs, to prove general eligibility for higher education. In addition, they have to complete an application form which include a process of validation whereby they elaborate in writing on their vocational knowledge, submit a list of work life experiences, attach copies of workplace certificates, and a list of completed work related courses, all of which are relevant to each of the different vocational subjects applied for.

The process of validation is handled a little differently in each of the ten Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) providing VTE. In all cases, the process could basically be described as follows: the application is received and an initial screening is conducted by study counsellors. Then, the application is sent to a vocational expert. The expert assesses the application and gives a recommendation which is sent back to the HEI. The HEIs then take the final decision of admitting or rejecting the applicant.

It is pertinent for vocational education and future vocational students that a selection of high quality teachers is made and that no one is rejected on inadequate grounds. As can be noted, there are several issues within this process of validation as it is currently organised. First, there is an assumption that it is possible to elaborate in writing on vocational knowledge in relation to criteria set up by Swedish Council for Higher Education. Second, vocational knowledge crosses institutional borders when its relevance is negotiated between agents from the trades and from academia in relation to those criteria. Thus, those involved come from organisations in different institutional

contexts, and the process of validation can be seen as a practice in between work life and academia, not clearly belonging to either academia or to the trades. Validation could though be seen as a developing institution on its own. This means that understandings of both knowledge and institutional conditions are of importance for validation. No matter how well-intended validation and its organisation and potential institutionalisation might be, and whatever purpose it may serve, validation seems to be quite complex in practice.

In many cases, applicants find it difficult to express in writing their embodied practical knowledge. *“The application was the most difficult part of the entire education process”* is an expression I have heard from vocational teacher students. Such difficulties can also lead to some applicants being wrongly excluded from VTE under the current process, which means a potential loss for the applicants in terms of their time and career opportunities, and also a loss for VTE and the societal need for vocational teachers. The process of validation is difficult for others involved in it as well. One study counsellor with whom I talked said: *“Validation is so difficult so you’d better be a little religious to handle it”*.

Against this background, the object of study in this thesis emerged, namely, the validation of vocational knowledge gained prior to entry into the VTE in Sweden. Accordingly, the general research interest is to explore the effects of the organisation, and potential institutionalisation of validation on vocational knowledge, and, in the long run, also its public image, and how this positions those with vocational knowledge. The foci in this thesis are the organisation of validation, the conceptions and understandings of vocational knowledge and the institutional conditions within the admission procedure of VTE. In this introduction section, I will give a description of how the research interest developed. Furthermore, I will point to the connection between the admission procedure of VTE in Sweden and the global emergence of validation. Then, I will address the knowledge question, and other issues in validation, along with proposals for a new institutional theory for handling the issues central to this thesis. Next, I present the aim of the thesis, and the relevance of the study. Finally, I outline the structure of the thesis.

1.1 Vocational knowledge in the academic context

My interest in vocational knowledge developed when, for several years, I worked as a teacher in vocational programs in the Upper Secondary School. Thereafter, I conducted ethnographic workplace studies for my licentiate

thesis¹. These studies shed light on the complexities surrounding vocational knowledge in work. One conclusion from these studies was that it can be difficult to notice and to understand knowledge and learning across institutional borders such as work and academia. Later, when I was working as a tutor in VTE, I became even more fascinated by the students' range and depth of vocational knowledge and experience. However, I was often left with the feeling that the students were not fully able to accurately describe their vocational knowledge within the institutional context of academia. One of my concerns was that the students were sometimes positioned as having a lack of academic skills, but I felt that there might be other issues also at play, such as different perceptions of what is considered to be valuable knowledge, and that perceptions were likely to vary across assessors coming from different institutional settings. With issues such as these in mind, I also worked as an assistant in the admission procedure of the VTE for a short period and gained some insight into it. Then I realised that issues similar to those I had become aware of in my work as a tutor were apparent already in the admission procedure.

Those issues caught my attention and aroused my curiosity, and became the point of departure for this thesis. Part of this curiosity is to understand what happens when vocational knowledge is the target of validation within the academic context. This curiosity involves a problem area in which questions of knowledge, institutional conditions, and agency are important. The importance of the question of knowledge is quite evident, as validation is underpinned by certain conceptions and understandings of knowledge, and may evoke new ones due to its organisation and those involved in validation. Conceptions and understandings may also vary between agents and assessors coming from different institutional contexts, which points to the fact that institutional conditions and those of agency are important as well. An institution is, in its most basic description, a social system with rules and norms for human actions (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). It can be considered as a relatively lasting formation, ensuring a certain consistency between individuals' actions within the institution, and also giving it legitimacy from outside (see, e.g., Scott, 2014). Academia can, for example, be considered as a well-established institution, to which we assign certain characteristics and expectations that the institution itself should uphold and thus maintain its legitimacy. Work life could also be considered as yet another institutional context to which we assign other characteristics such as wage labour and the

¹ I was enrolled as a research student in the project "Adults' mathematics: In work and for school", supported by the Swedish Research Council. The project was initiated by Professor Tine Wedege, of Malmö University. Its objective was to describe, analyse and understand adults' mathematics containing competences in work – including social, ethnic, and gender related aspects – in relation to demands made on students' qualifications in formal vocational education.

production of goods and services. In the study of validation of vocational knowledge as it crosses institutional borders, institutional conditions, conceptions and understandings of vocational knowledge, and agency become crucial. This becomes relevant also in considering that the Swedish admission procedure for VTE has become organised in a way that shares affinities with the globally developing practice of *validation*². Validation has received increasing attention worldwide as a part of the knowledge society.

1.2 Validation and the knowledge society

Today's society is often labelled as the *learning* or the *knowledge* society. It is characterised by technical progress, globalisation, mobility, and competition. This implies that people are moving between contexts. In a globalised world (FitzSimons, 2014), the flow of humans, knowledge, and capital has drawn attention to the potential of recognising and making use of people's prior learning through the developing practice of validation. There are, however, different incentives for validation such as getting credits for education undertaken in another county, for reducing the length of participation in an educational program, for getting employment, or, as in the case of this study, providing evidence of a required qualification prior to entry into VTE. Validation is a fairly new phenomenon, at least in organised forms (Andersson & Fejes, 2014). It refers to the idea of making visible, assessing, and recognising different forms of learning, or the result thereof, irrespective of how and where the learning has taken place (Andersson & Fejes, 2014; Gustafsson & Mouwitz, 2008; Pouget & Osborne, 2004; Stenlund, 2011).

The emergence of validation is visible through the vast number of policy documents produced on the topic (see, e.g., CEDEFOP 2009; CEDEFOP 2015; CEU 2012; Ds, 2016:24; SOU 2017:18; UIL 2012). In those policy documents validation is described as a promising opportunity, with anticipated benefits for both individuals and society (Duvekot, 2014). Likewise, there is a growing amount of research describing validation from different perspectives, focusing on issues of knowledge (Breier & Ralphs, 2009; Cooper & Harris,

² The practice of validation is described in a variety of different acronyms such as: Validation des Acquis Professionnels (VAP). This term originates from the French tradition (see, e.g., Pouget & Osborne, 2004), Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning, abbreviated either as APL or AP(E)L, are the terms commonly used in British literature (see, e.g., Scott, 2010), Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is used in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa USA and Scotland (see, e.g., De Graaff, 2014; Harris, 2006), Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) or Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) is used in sources from the USA and Canada (see, e.g., Conrad, 2008, Van Kleef, 2014) and Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning (VNFIL) is the term used by the European Union (EU) (see, e.g., CEDEFOP 2009, 2015). In Sweden the French term validation is translated to the Swedish term validering. Validation is the term used throughout this thesis, except from in quotes where the author's own term is used.

2013; De Graaff, 2014), quality (Van Kleef, 2014) validity and reliability, (Stenlund, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013a, 2013b), power and policy (Andersson & Fejes, 2005; Duvekot, 2014), and more. It is evident that the process of validation concerns fundamental educational matters such as different forms of knowledge, different cultural or institutional contexts, assessments, authority, quality issues, equity, educational policy, and more (Young, 2006). For the applicants, the boundary crossing between different institutional contexts, such as between work and academia, also involves matters of identity and identity change (Fejes & Köpsén, 2014; Klope, 2015, 2017). Among all of the matters involved in the organisation of validation, conceptions and understandings of vocational knowledge, agency, and institutional arrangements make the concepts of institutions, institutionalisation, and agency crucial in this thesis. An institution is, as previously mentioned, in its most basic description, a social system with rules for human actions. Institutionalisation refers to the process in which an institution develops and becomes accepted. Institutional conditions become even more important as validation can be thought of as an attempt to provide a bridge between the institutional settings of formal education and work (De Graaff, 2014). As such, this bridge and hence the practice of validation, may therefore potentially develop as an institution in itself. Validation as a potential institution is suggested to account for knowledge whenever and wherever it was developed. This becomes a promising idea as it is often claimed that we live in the knowledge society, as mentioned above.

1.3 Validation and vocational knowledge

In our knowledge society, knowledge has almost become a buzzword used to give emphasis to a range of different claims. Although knowledge is often used as an argument in support of these various claims, it is not always obvious exactly to which conceptions and understandings of knowledge the claims refer. There are those who suggest that knowledge is being removed from current education policy and replaced by a focus on general competences (e.g., Young, 2010), and yet there are others who suggest that the agency of discussing knowledge has moved from the academy to the media (Englund, 2004). This is particularly the case for vocational knowledge, which is given space in the media in relation to labour market issues and the societal needs for vocational knowledge. The concept of vocational knowledge as interesting and important in its own right is often left unnoticed. In this thesis, conceptions and understandings of vocational knowledge are therefore taken as essential within organisation of validation. Instead of giving a definition at the outset, this thesis takes an explorative approach towards knowledge as it cannot be assumed that the meanings of vocational knowledge are shared among different agents and organisations. This becomes particularly important

in a practice such as validation, due to the fact that different agents and stakeholders involved also have different backgrounds and reasons for being involved in the process. Conceptions and understandings of vocational (and other) knowledge may also be based on different assumptions, as well as different ontologies and epistemologies, and it is important to understand all of these (Czarniawska, 2005). In addition, the way that validation is organised is built on certain conceptions and understandings of knowledge, and through its enactment yet other understandings of vocational knowledge may be entailed. These understandings are also likely to be influenced by institutional conditions. Such influence comes from the organisational field of policy producers and, and as earlier mentioned, from assessors coming from different institutional settings.

The validation of vocational knowledge, which is the focus of this thesis, takes place within the established institution of academia, but is intended to account for knowledge developed in work, and thus involves different organisations and agents, such as the trades and their representatives. From what has been described so far it would appear that that validation is going through a process of institutionalisation itself. The potential for theorising such complexity is found within new institutional theories which are oriented towards an understanding of ideas and patterns of actions and modes of organising amongst organisations, institutional surroundings (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 2014) and also agency (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). To take advantage of the possibility of combining different levels of analysis, and taking into account different agents and organisations, the study is framed within a new institutional perspective. With this theory the organisational and institutional frames of validation can be explored, as can the institutional arrangements which are created based on ideas about how to organise validation and conceptions and understandings of vocational knowledge; also what it means in terms of the agency of those involved.

1.4 An institutional perspective on validation

In taking a new institutional perspective, the focus is turned onto organisations, organisational fields of policy producers, and institutionalisation (Scott, 2014), which presupposes that institutions are influenced by surrounding organisations and prevailing conditions, and that both policy and practice are taken into consideration. Within the theoretical framework of new institutionalism, institutionalisation is not only a matter of formal regulations, but also of the norms and values and cultural/cognitive perceptions becoming institutionalised and, as such, taken for granted (Mickwitz, 2015). Taking a new institutional perspective on validation also means those ideas about how and why the organisation of validation has

developed and spread, and how organisations adapt to and translate certain ideas in order to give the practices of validation legitimacy, can be the objects of study. Thus, it is assumed that ideas, here construed as perceptions turned into actions, travel between different contexts and change as they travel (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996). Another reason for this choice of theory is the possibility of combining studies of policy and practice, and thus of analysing the movement of ideas and modes of organising from one context to another (Scott, 2014).

Scott (2014) defined an institution as being comprised of three pillars: the regulative, the normative, and the cultural/cognitive. Throughout the empirical parts of this thesis, these pillars will provide the structure for the analysis. The organisation of validation as described in policy is built on certain conceptions and understandings about vocational knowledge. The practice of validation may, however, entail yet other conceptions and understandings of vocational knowledge. This structure of analysis should be seen, though, as an analytical construct because it cannot be assumed that there are clear cut boundaries between either those pillars or those levels of policy and practice, or that ideas travel only in one direction. As Lindberg (2009) has suggested, the intention is not to decide whether ideas are based either in policy or research, because policy makers and researchers are both involved in forming relations and alliances with one another.

The first empirical part addresses the institutional frame and the organisational *field of policy producers*. The second part addresses the *organisational level* and the different HEIs which conduct validation prior to VTE. In the last part the *organisational level* is addressed by turning the interest towards the case of a person's application, vocational experts, and one specific trade. The empirical parts can be thought of as different levels of the potential institutionalisation of validation which are analysed in terms of ideas of how the validation is supposed to be regulated, and what normative and cultural/cognitive matters it involves in policy

Since the new institutional perspective has been criticised for not accounting sufficiently for individuals, the analysis is also supported by the theory of agency (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Agency becomes crucial in relation to institutional arrangements in validation, in terms of decision making about vocational knowledge. With this theory, such decision making and who has agency in the validation of vocational knowledge can be addressed. Based on these assumptions it is suggested that the peculiarities of validation of vocational knowledge, along with institutional conditions, can be understood more deeply, thus supporting the aim of the thesis.

1.5 The purpose and aim of the thesis

Validation is in this thesis seen as a practice that is potentially developing as an institution between the established institutions of academia and work life, both of which are influenced by national and transnational policy on validation. Within this complexity different agents, such as academics and representatives from the trades, negotiate their understandings about vocational knowledge as it crosses institutional borders. This makes validation complex, and the overarching purpose of this thesis is to explore the effects of the organisation, and potential institutionalisation, of validation on vocational knowledge, and, in the long run, its public image, and how this positions those with vocational knowledge. This is particularly relevant with regards to the kind of validation studied in this thesis, namely validation prior to entry into VTE in Sweden. From this overarching purpose and general research interest, the case and aim of the thesis developed.

The aim of this thesis is to understand the validation of vocational knowledge prior to entry into vocational teacher education in Sweden with regard to conceptions and understandings of vocational knowledge, and also to understand how institutional conditions, such as ideas of how to organise validation, influence the content and form of the validation practice. From this aim the following research questions were developed:

- What ideas about the organisation of validation stand out in the policy and practice of validation?
- What conceptions and understandings of vocational knowledge is the organisation of validation built on and what do they entail?
- Who has the agency to describe and decide upon vocational knowledge in policy and the practice of validation?
- What institutional arrangements appear in the practice of validation?

The first question has to do with ideas about how validation should be organised. Ideas concern perceptions expressed in one form or another, in ways that make them tangible. The notion of *idea* expands the discussion to also include what, how and why certain ideas are applied, as well as what is intended to be achieved by certain applications (Kilhammar, 2011). In the second question, conceptions and understandings of vocational knowledge refer explicitly to those on which validation is built; also to those entailed by its organisation and potential institutionalisation. The third question is about agency. Agency is not only a matter of having power, but is also about the

outcomes of decision making among individuals and organisations (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, Scott, 2014) Thus, to explore agency is to find a way of unpacking who is responsible for deciding what is relevant vocational knowledge. In the last question, the institutional arrangements refer to those constellations of meaning making and negotiation which spring from the desire to gain agency over the validation of vocational knowledge.

1.6 Outline of the thesis

The application procedure for VTE in Sweden is extensive and quite different from those for other university courses or programs. Moreover, there are different phases, agents, and organisations involved in the admission procedure. Chapter 2 describes in detail how the application procedure is organised, both in terms of its policy and which agents and organisations it involves. Accordingly, the central concepts in this thesis are *vocational knowledge*, *validation*, *institutions*, *institutionalisation*, and *agency*.

An underlying assumption in this thesis is that the concept of validation is potentially becoming institutionalised. In the process of institutionalisation, policy producers are important for producing ideas about validation and how it should best be organised. Validation has also attracted increasing interest among researchers. The review in chapter 3 offers a presentation of validation as an emerging research field. Different methods for validation will be described, as will quality, validity, and other pertinent issues.

The instructions for validation prior to VTE in Sweden emphasise the need to account for vocational knowledge gained in work and through other relevant life experiences. A crucial aspect of this thesis' purpose is to explore the effects of the organisation of validation and its potential institutionalisation on vocational knowledge. Therefore, both institutional theories and concepts of knowledge become important. Although this thesis takes an explorative approach towards knowledge, some theories and concepts of knowledge found in the literature and in policy need to be outlined. In this exploration attention has to be paid to both terms *vocation* and *knowledge*, neither of which is simple or unambiguous. This complexity and ambiguity is an underlying issue of the exploration throughout the thesis. Furthermore, it could be claimed that there is a conceptual leap from research on vocational knowledge to what is actually stated in policy documents. In the policy on validation, vocational knowledge is – as are all forms of knowledge currently in validation in Sweden – conceptualised as learning outcomes and structured by the use of qualification frameworks. To understand conceptions and understandings of vocational knowledge which might be found in validation, I elaborate in

chapter 4 on the concepts such as knowledge, vocation, and vocational knowledge, and outline a description in the light of current policy trends.

Chapter 5 presents a theoretical section thorough a description of new institutional theory, its related concepts, and the theory of agency.

The theoretical section is followed by a section on methodology in chapter 6. In this section, the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the study, as well as methods adopted, are discussed in relation to the choice of theory. Furthermore, ethical considerations and measures taken to ensure trustworthiness are described.

After the sections on theory and methodology, three empirical sections follow. In chapter 7 the institutional frame of validation is addressed by making a policy analysis of ideas about validation, based on how it is regulated, and what normative and cultural/cognitive elements it involves. In this chapter, I also explore – with support from institutional theories – my assumption that validation is developing as an institution.

The same structure is deployed in the second empirical part which concerns the organisational level of validation. Thus, in chapter 8 the results of interviews with study counsellors at all ten HEIs currently providing VTE in Sweden are presented.

Chapter 9 presents the third empirical part. This is made up of an analysis of the instructions for, and exemplified by, the content of an application; for example, the kinds of certificates and the narratives that are submitted. This is complemented by interviews with a vocational expert and an applicant, both from the hairdressing trade.

In chapter 10, a synthesis of the three empirical studies is made. Here, the results from the different empirical parts are taken together and are analysed in order to respond to the research questions.

Finally, in chapter 11 a concluding discussion summarises the thesis, from the point of departure, together with the results which address the research questions, and finally elaborates on what could be considered relevant for further research.

1.7 The relevance of the thesis

My ambition is that this study can contribute to the field of vocational education and training (VET) with an informed discussion about understandings of vocational knowledge underpinning and evoked by the organisation and the institutionalisation of validation. Another contribution is to highlight the experiences of the study counsellors who are involved in validation, as well as accounting for the perspective of trade representatives and applicants. The struggle of the study counsellors, vocational experts and applicant to overcome the difficulties they are confronted with, and to create meaning across institutional borders within the plethora of conceptions and understandings of vocational knowledge, sheds light on several issues in validation. This is of importance for vocational teacher education insofar as it is desirable that the appropriate selection of high quality vocational teachers is made. From the perspective of the applicants, it is essential for them to gain recognition for their vocational knowledge, and not to be rejected on inadequate grounds. From the broader societal perspective, it is vital that attention is paid to vocational knowledge, and also to what the institutionalisation of validation of vocational knowledge might imply in terms of transforming vocational knowledge; also in the positioning of those with vocational knowledge. Within the community of vocational education and training (VET) a profound understanding and sensitivity with regard to vocational knowledge is important. Such an understanding can also be of importance for workplace development, and for society as a whole as well.

2. THE ADMISSION INTO VOCATIONAL TEACHER EDUCATION

In this section I will describe the admission procedure of VTE in Sweden. This description includes both its practice and policy, and thus the agents and organisations explicitly and implicitly involved in it. Explicitly involved organisations are the different HEIs organising validation prior to VTE. Considered as implicitly involved in the application procedure are the policy producers of transnational and national policy. This review also provides background information for the premises within in the admission procedure, such as criteria and the like.

2.1 Vocational teacher education and the admission procedure

Historically both VET, and accordingly VTE, have taken different forms. These forms of education have also been a target of institutional struggles and debates over how they are going to be organised and by whom. Vocational education has historically taken place mainly at workplaces (Broberg, 2014). However, as early as 1918, an institute of vocational pedagogy was launched in Sweden, but it was closed down shortly after (Hedman, 2001). It turned out to be impossible to agree on the need for specific education for vocational teachers, the content and how such education should best be organised. In the same year as the institute of vocational pedagogy was introduced, different legislations and regulations for vocational education were established, and were renewed in 1955 (Rudvall, 2001). In terms of vocational teacher education, short in-service courses in pedagogy were, after WW2, organised by the Royal Authority for Vocational Education (Kungliga Överstyrelsen för Yrkesutbildning). Such courses in combination with vast experience in a vocation (a common requirement was 7 years of experience) or a Journeyman's certificate³ gave the formal right to work as a vocational teacher. However, vocational teacher education, Rudvall (2001) notes, has historically been given in different forms, by different agents and addressing various interests; this also occurs in relation to the idiosyncrasies of each vocation. For example, vocational teachers in health care had their own education organised by the nurses' trade union. Not until the 1970s did

³ The Swedish Craft Council (Sveriges Hantverksråd) is the organisation which issues a Journeyman's certificate. (<http://hantverksrad.se/> retrieved, 20 October 2017).

vocational education became a part of the regular education system when it was integrated into Upper Secondary School, as a vocational preparatory program. These vocational preparatory programs were shorter than the higher education preparatory programs. The development of specialised vocational knowledge in this organisation was expected to take place after the education and within the vocational practice. When vocational education became integrated into general education the discussion and debate about a coherent vocational teacher education became vivid, and so it still is. Organising vocational education implies that attention is paid both to work life and the education system, and to general and vocation specific knowledge. Thus, it involves agents and organisations with different institutional backgrounds who have tried, and still try, to achieve agency over vocational education, and thus also over understandings of vocational knowledge.

Today, most of the VET in Sweden is conducted at the Upper Secondary, non-compulsory school level, where all programs are three years and students are between 16 and 19 years old⁴. Those who intend to become vocational teachers in Upper Secondary School in Sweden currently apply to the university and VTE. For entry to VTE, general eligibility is required, as is the case for all university programs. In most cases this means having completed an Upper Secondary Education, although there are also alternative ways to prove that basic admission requirements are met. For admission to VTE there are also special eligibility requirements, consisting of having qualified and relevant vocational knowledge, and to have this validated (SFS 2010:2021). This validation is the part of the admission procedure in focus in this thesis.

Since 2011 Sweden has had a new curriculum as well as new education legislation. In the current VTE, which started in 2011, teaching subjects are not included as credits in program and the requirement of higher education (90 credits) prior to the program, which was a prerequisite for previous vocational teacher education, has been removed. The previous length of education included a total of 180 credits, whereas the current vocational teacher education has no requirement for prior higher education and is, in total, 90 credits. A kind of validation was a part of the previous admission procedure as

⁴ There are twelve vocational programs in the integrated Swedish Upper Secondary School, each with one or more vocational exits. These are: Child and Recreation Programme (Barn- och fritidsprogrammet), Building and Construction Programme (Bygg- och anläggningsprogrammet), Electricity and Energy Programme (El- och energiprogrammet), Vehicle and Transport Programme (Fordons- och transportprogrammet), Business and Administration Programme (Handels- och administrationsprogrammet), Handicraft Programme (Hantverksprogrammet), Hotel and Tourism Programme (Hotell- och turismprogrammet), Industrial Technology Programme (Industritekniska programmet), Natural Resources Programme (Naturbruksprogrammet), Restaurant Management and Food Programme (Restaurang- och livsmedelsprogrammet), HVAC and Property Maintenance Programme (VVS- och fastighetsprogrammet), Health and Social Care Programme (Vård- och omsorgsprogrammet). (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2019)

well. Back then, some applicants, as for example nurses, could fulfill the requirement of 90 credits with the academic courses related to nursing in their exam. Some vocations could be validated and awarded credits equivalent to up to one and a half years of study, or they could take university courses related to the vocation to get the required 90 credits. In the previous admission procedure it was difficult for the vocations with little or no connection to academic studies as these were neither included nor applicable, and this was a requirement for entry into the education. This, among other things, was an argument for the new admission procedure (SOU 2008:112).

As noted earlier, Sweden is suffering from a shortage of vocational teachers. Hence, for vocational teachers there is an exception made from the mandatory Swedish teacher certificate. In an official state report, the admission requirements were identified as one of the causes of this shortage of vocational teachers in general, and of those having a teachers certificate in particular (SOU 2008:112). The report suggested a greater focus should be on knowledge developed in the workplace and that the requirements for admission should be changed. The new requirements are supposed to be based on increased attention to vocational knowledge, and to focus on knowledge gained outside the formal education system. These ideas are aligned with validation in general, which is supposed to account for knowledge no matter where and how it has been acquired. The admission procedure for vocational teachers also follows the recommendation given by the Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education which is the authority responsible for coordinating and supporting general validation and also for the Swedish qualification framework.

In the regulations for higher education it is stated that the students who apply for VTE should have qualified and relevant vocational knowledge (SFS 2010:2021). Instead of perceiving vocational knowledge as connected to a certain vocation or vocational area, the admission is based on vocational knowledge in a collection of more than 200 vocational subjects. Descriptions of criteria for different vocational subjects are provided by the Swedish Council for Higher Education (UHRFS 2013:4). These criteria are supposed to be used in conjunction with the Swedish qualification framework (SeQF, 2016). To give some examples of what such criteria look like, those below are taken from the subjects Nursing and Caring, Building and Construction, and Craft:

Nursing and Caring:

Specialised (experiential and theoretical) knowledge of the normal aging process physically, psychologically and socially, of

older people's diseases, of health care in the final stages of life, of the disposal after death, of laws and regulations in the health care field as well in responsibilities connected to social service organisations .

Competences to be used, independently as well as in collaboration with others to plan, execute and identify resources for carrying out specialised tasks (based on professional ethical guidelines and established safety considerations and regulations) in nursing and nursing process, in accordance to the legislation and regulation within the areas of nursing and caring and healthcare and social service.

Oral and written communication competence with regards to, and solutions for patients and users in health care or in social services. (Swedish Council for Higher Education, 2016, my translation and bolding)

Building and Construction:

Specialised (experiential and theoretical) knowledge of at least one vocation within the building and construction industry, painting or sheet metal work, or at least one specialised vocation within the building and construction industry, the methods, materials, tools and machines that are relevant for the vocation at stake, about ordinary vocations and work processes in the building and construction industry, about what sustainable development means in the building and construction industry, as well as laws and regulations in the vocational area. Specialised vocations means vocations where the tasks include glass technology, tiling, scaffolding or concrete punching.

Competences to be used, independently as well as in collaboration with others to plan, execute and identify resources for carrying out specialised tasks (based on vocational ethical guidelines and established safety considerations and regulations and environmental demands) within at least one vocation, house construction, painting or sheet metal construction, or in at least one specialised building industry, in accordance with the laws and regulations of the industry. (Swedish Council for Higher Education, 2016, my translation and bolding)

Craft:

Specialised (experiential and theoretical) knowledge of sales and service, as well as techniques, materials, machines and other vocational work equipment in at least one of the arts and crafts, florist, hairdresser and textile designs or one of the other craftsmanship areas of the craft program.

Competences to be used, independently as well as in collaboration with others to plan, execute and identify resources for carrying out specialised tasks (based on vocational ethical guidelines and established safety considerations and regulations and environmental demands) in planning and production, with appropriate crafts techniques and methods, as well as in sales and service related to vocational work within at least one of the arts and crafts industry, florist, hairdresser and textile design or one of the other craftsmanship areas of the craft program. (Swedish Council for Higher Education, 2016, my translation and bolding)

Criteria, such as the above examples, cover a teaching subject and are supposed to be validated in combination with level five in the Swedish Qualification Framework (SeQF, 2016) (Table. 1), which says:

Table 1.

Level 5 in The Swedish Qualification Framework (SeQF) with Swedish terms in brackets.

Level 5	Knowledge (Kunskaper)	Skills (Färdigheter)	Competence (Kompetens)
	<i>Can show:</i>	<i>Can:</i>	<i>Can:</i>
	Specialised knowledge in a work - or study area,	Plan, execute and identify resources for performing specialised tasks,	Independently handle the contents of a work or study area that leads to further learning and professional development,
	knowledge and overview of the areas connected to their own work or study area,	solve complex problems in a work or study area,	monitor the work or study activities and complete the prescribed projects.
	knowledge of work processes and quality within an area of work or studies.	communicate the commitments and the solutions in a work or study area in at least one foreign language.	

The criteria are all very similarly formulated among the different teaching subjects, and the bolding is exactly the same for all subjects. In some cases, as with the subject Craft, the whole set of criteria is identical for carpenters, textile designers, hairdressers, and florists. Thus, in the case of the subject Craft, several vocations share the same criterion. Sometimes several subjects are instead needed for constituting a vocation. For example for a Building and Construction worker more subjects are needed than the sole subject of Building and Construction. One difficulty in formulating criteria for vocational subjects is that, in comparison to formal education institutions, informal learning takes place in a wide range of contexts. The variety of informal learning is much greater than that of formal education institutions (Eraut, 2004). It is furthermore likely that the different vocations have developed along different cultural and historical lines, involving both different traditions and connections in terms of disciplinary roots and knowledge bases (Muller, 2009).

As can be seen from level 5 in the qualification framework (Table 1), this is empty of specific content and arranged with support of the descriptors knowledge, skills and competence, the so-called KSC-typology. The qualification framework is similar to the European Qualification Framework (EQF), which is linked to the European Credit System for Vocational

Education and Training the so-called ECVET (Forsberg, 2009). Forsberg further notes that the KSC-typology connects knowledge to theories and facts, skills to cognitive and practical capabilities, and competence to responsibility and independence. The knowledge conception within the KSC-typology knowledge is separated from skills and competence and can possibly be understood as a prerequisite for the development of skills and competence. It is noteworthy that this typology differs from the conception of knowledge in the Swedish curriculum. In the Swedish curriculum, knowledge is the overarching concept, and seen as dependent on and made up of different aspects – facts, skills, understanding and acquaintance – resulting in different competences, sometimes translated as capabilities (Carlgren, 2009). These knowledge conceptions will be further elaborated on in chapter 4.

For the applicants, the main focus is perhaps not the knowledge conceptions within the admission procedure but rather to find criteria that fit with their vocational experience. Moreover, the applicants have spikey profiles due to their wide variety of informal learning experiences, and in the next section, I will give a few examples of the difficulties faced by potential applicants.

2.2 The applications and the applicants

The applicants have a diversity of vocational backgrounds, be it as employers or employees, in the public or private sector. Furthermore, the choice to become a vocational teacher may have been influenced by the fact that they are already working as teachers, albeit lacking a teacher's certificate. Some might have had apprentices and realised how interesting it is to teach people. Yet others might have been exhausted by their previous working conditions. Some of the applicants have completed academic examinations, whereas others have mainly developed their vocational knowledge in and through work. An applicant could, for example, be a nurse with some years of work experience who has decided to become a teacher. Being a nurse implies that the person already has completed an academic exam as well as holding a license from The National Board of Health and Welfare. Another applicant could be a carpenter who has lengthy experience of various jobs in the construction industry, but with limited or no formal higher education. Having a background as a carpenter in the construction industry may, however, involve many different forms of education, licenses and certificates recognised by the trade, but probably with no official recognition outside of the trade. Another applicant could have a background in some kind of traditional craft such as hairdressing. This applicant may have run his or her own business. It is also likely that an applicant from some of the traditional trades holds a Journeyman's and/or a Mastership certificate.

When the applicant has decided which subject(s) s/he considers best fit their vocational knowledge and experience the admission procedure begins. For the applicant it means to gather all sorts of information about their previous education and work, such as workplace certificates, licenses, and the like, in order to prove that they meet the criteria of the subjects of which they think they can gain eligibility to teach. In addition the applicant is supposed to write narratives about their vocational experiences⁵.

Considering the situation for the applicant, it is quite evident that it might be difficult to find all former employers and to get all the relevant documentation of work life experience. When the applicant has completed the application it is sent to the HEI. However, it might be a challenge to put in writing the knowledge that characterises a skillful and proficient nurse, carpenter, or hairdresser. One issue at stake here is the difficulty of giving a precise account for what Aristotle labelled *practical wisdom* (see, e.g., Breier & Ralphs, 2009; Gustavsson, 2002; Janik, 1996).

2.3 The organisation of the admission into vocational teacher education

In Sweden there are ten HEIs currently providing VTE⁶. To support the applicants, each HEI has a study counsellor to provide advice before and during the admission procedure. Out of these ten HEIs only four take care of the validation within the institution. In these cases the routine and the options are basically the following:

1. In the first phase, a preparation board receives the application. In the screening phase this board accepts or rejects the application, with no further measures. The board can also ask for clarification or more developed descriptions of the vocational knowledge, or ask for further proof of employment as stated in the application.
2. In the second phase, the application is, or should be, forwarded to a vocational expert for assessment of the vocational subjects applied

⁵ There is a difference in the requirements concerning the narratives. The applicants who apply to Valiweb need to complement their employment certificates with motivations for the vocational knowledge gained from the employments. Those who apply to the other HEIs are supposed to write more detailed narratives of their vocational knowledge.

⁶ The validation prior to the VTE is basically made up by the following organizations : Dalarna University (Högskolan Dalarna), Gothenburg University (Göteborgs universitet), Karlstad University (Karlstads universitet), Kristianstad University (Högskolan Kristianstad), Linköping University (Linköpings universitet), Linnaeus University (Linnéuniversitetet), Malmö University (Malmö högskola), Stockholm University (Stockholms universitet), Umeå University (Umeå universitet), University West (Högskolan Väst), and the company Valiweb.

for. The vocational expert assesses which vocational subjects the applicant has specialised in and the relevant vocational knowledge. The recommendation by the vocational expert is then sent to the HEI.

3. In the last phase, the recommendation from the expert is reviewed by the admission board responsible for the final admission. The decision of this board is based on the recommendation made by the vocational expert, but the admission board has the right to either agree or disagree with the expert's recommendation.

The other six HEIs use an external company for taking care of the validation. In this case the application is made using an online web form (ValiWeb, 2016), and the screening phase as well as the assessment is taken care of by ValiWeb⁷, corresponding to steps 1 and 2 above. The decision about admission is taken by the HEIs when they have received the suggestions from Valiweb, as in step 3 above.

It should be noted that during the period of this study there were some changes in the admission procedure in terms of responsibility. When the study began, one of the HEIs was responsible for coordinating the admission procedure to VTE in order to reach national equivalence. This responsibility of coordination was taken over in 2017 by the Swedish Council for Higher Education. As a consequence the vocational experts, who had previously been connected to either an HEI or to ValiWeb, were taken over by the Swedish Council for Higher Education in order to be available in a national vocational expert assessor bank. Previously the different HEIs and ValiWeb had chosen their own assessors. All of them have now merged into the national bank of assessors. These assessors cover the whole range of vocational subjects possible for applicants to apply for. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, the Swedish Council for Higher Education is responsible for the criteria for the vocational teaching subjects and the Swedish National Agency for Education is responsible for the syllabi for the vocational programs and subjects in the Upper Secondary school⁸. The Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education has the national responsibility for the qualification framework. The admission procedure is thus influenced, explicitly and implicitly, by many different national stakeholders. Furthermore, the national frame of reference, here, the qualification framework, is to a large extent imported from transnational stakeholders, which implies that validation is made with regards to those global guidelines of validation (Panican, 2016). It

⁷ ValiWeb is a company specialised in validation of vocational knowledge prior to the VTE. It is owned by the municipality of Skellefteå and was founded in the early 2000.

⁸ The teaching subjects defined by Swedish Council for Higher Education do not always correspond to the subjects in the vocational programs described by Swedish National Agency for Education.

is also widely recognised that educational matters and policy are becoming less of a solely national concern and more of a transnational one (Carlgren, Forsberg, & Lindberg, 2009; Ozga & Jones, 2006; Tsatsaroni & Evans, 2014). Although the influence of transnational policy on national policy is often recognised and mentioned in educational research, this connection is often assumed rather than explored (Mickwitz, 2015). Such an exploration will be made in chapter 7, and followed up in the synthesis in chapter 10. Thus, it is relevant to map also the transnational policy producers, which will be done in the next section.

2.4 Validation and the transnational policy field

As validation is accompanied by high expectations, there are many organisations involved in producing policy on the topic. At this stage, it is relevant to speak of a developing policy field. According to Powell (2007), such an organisational field is characterised by an increased interaction among organisations in the field. Signs of this interaction are the emergence of patterns of coalition between organisations, an increase in the information load with which organisations must contend, and the development of a mutual awareness among participants that they are involved in a common enterprise. Also, Scott (2014) concludes that one important sign of an organisational field is that the different agents and organisations take each other into account. In the endeavor of selecting important agents in the policy field of validation, Duvekot's (2014) chapter *Lifelong learning policy and RPL in the learning society: The promise of Faure?* (Duvekot, 2014) was of particular help.

Important international agents in the development of education policy and guidelines for validation are, for example, the United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the International Labour Organization (ILO). The European Union (EU), as a supranational body, has the explicit intent of coordinating the implementation of policy among the member states (Mickwitz, 2015), and has thus become an increasingly important policy producer. The European Union (EU) involves different bodies and agencies such as the European Commission (EC), the Commission of the European Communities (CEC), the Council of the European Union (CEU), and the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP). The transnational organisational field of validation is obviously made up of quite disparate organisations, sometimes with different missions and vision, although having in common an interest in and concern for validation. Concerning validation specifically related to vocational education and training (VET), CEDEFOP is an important agency within the European Union

supporting the development of European VET systems. This agency is supposed to develop policy and contribute to the implementation of those policies in the member states. As there is an explicit intent of harmonising vocational education among member states in the European Union, as well as implementing policy on validation, it is likely that those policies also influence the VTE in Sweden. The intent behind the current admission procedure for which the academic institution is responsible is to give emphasis to knowledge gained in different vocational settings, which means outside of the formal education institution. This is aligned with validation in general, which aims at making visible, assessing, and recognising different forms of learning, or the result thereof, irrespective of how and where the learning has taken place. It is clear that validation comes with many promises such as bridging the gap between formal education and work, promoting equity, supporting the labour market, and enhancing employability and growth. Consequently, validation has been the target of increased interest among different groups. Validation itself is even emerging as an independent area of research. This will be explored in the next chapter.

3. VALIDATION

In this section I will give an overview of the emergence of validation as an independent research field. Moreover, I will describe different forms of validation procedures, quality issues in validation, and research on validation prior to VTE in Sweden with regards to validity. Then, I review some previous studies, focusing on different issues bound to appear in the practice of validation. Finally, I discuss how these issues are connected to the foci of this thesis. My intent with this chapter is to provide a foundation for an informed analysis of validation with regards to conceptions and understandings of vocational knowledge, institutional conditions, and agency within validation prior to entry into VTE.

3.1 Validation as an emerging research field

The development of validation practices differs between countries. For exemple, France has, a longer tradition of validation than many other countries, with possibilities for obtaining an engineering diploma through validation as early as in the 1930s (Duvekot, 2014; Pouget & Osborne, 2004). However, for validation to become a worldwide practice, both the Maastricht Treaty (1992) and the Lisbon Strategy (CEC 2000) were important. In the former, the European vision of having common educational goals highlighted the need for a transnational policy. In the Lisbon Strategy, the member states agreed on making Europe the most competitive knowledge economy in the world. In the process of realising this competitive economy, particular attention was paid to the learning outside of the formal education system, and highlighted workplace learning among other things.

Validation was earlier a subfield of research on adults' learning, workplace learning, and lifelong learning, but it is now growing as an independent research field. This can be taken as one sign which supports the underlying assumption in this thesis – that validation is potentially becoming institutionalised. At least there are clear markers of validation developing as a research field of its own. One such marker is the publication of handbooks and/or anthologies (see, e.g., Andersson & Harris, 2006; Andersson, Fejes, & Sandberg, 2016; Harris, Breier, & Wihak, 2011; Harris, Van Kleef, & Wihak, 2014). Another early marker of the development of validation as a research field was the creation of the bibliography NALL (New Approches to Lifelong Learning), by researchers at the University of Toronto (Wihak, 2014). A later initiative was that of creating a searchable database, which was supposed to facilitate the search for research without getting lost in the different acronyms

used for validation (Wihak, 2014). Wihak further suggests that there is still a need for articulating what is known and done within this field up to now because:

PLAR (Prior Learning Accreditation and Recognition, my insertion) as a field of practice and research is, however, still emerging and hence it is important to articulate what consensus we have about what we know and how we gauge the trustworthiness of that knowledge. Essentially, we need to reflect on the research that already exists in the PLAR field, in much the same ways as we ask learners on their experiences in creating PLAR portfolios. We need to discern themes and patterns in what has been up to this point a diffuse, sporadic and somewhat marginalized field. (p. 28)

As indicated by the quote, research within the field of validation is sporadic and there is still a need for discerning patterns of what is actually known about validation. Due to the fact that the field of research on validation is relatively new and diffuse, many publications have the character of summarising what is known and done. Several studies are thus conducted as reviews and/or overviews. Such reviews may concern for example which methods are most commonly used in research on validation, concluding that they are mostly qualitative studies (see, e.g., Cameron, 2011; Van Kleef, 2011). There are also attempts to summarise the different phenomena related to validation that have been studied, such as learning, governing, communication, gender, organisational processes, and validity (Andersson & Stenlund, 2012). In terms of summaries, Harris (2014) has outlined the theories that have been used in research, and gives as examples sociocultural theories, critical theories, social realist theories, postmodern theories, theories of recognition, and also socio-material theories which take into account the agency of non-humans. Harris (2014) raised a concern that not all research on validation has a sound and explicit sense of the ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions on which it is based. One reason for this may be that the practice of validation is a relatively new phenomenon, and that its applications preceded the research. When it comes to why, when, and how validation is applied, there are different models and procedures used.

3.2 Different models and forms of validation

There are several incentives for validation. It can be about mapping knowledge for reducing the length of a person's education, or to get credits and access to that education (Stenlund, 2011). Workplaces and employers are also using validation prior to a person's employment (Panican, 2016) or for

workplace development (Berglund, 2010; Cameron, 2014). Another area where validation is receiving increased attention and use is for supporting immigrants in making their prior learning useful in the new society (see, e.g., Andersson & Fejes, 2010; Andersson & Osman, 2008; Diedrich, 2013).

Different models of validation procedures have developed to meet to different purposes. One model is the *credit exchange model* in which applicants are supposed to demonstrate their knowledge against learning outcomes and assessment criteria relevant to the subject or education for which recognition is being sought (De Graaff, 2014; Stenlund, 2011). Another model is the *learning and development model*, in which applicants are assisted in exploring their prior learning, often with the development of a portfolio (Conrad, 2008). The latter takes more of a reflective approach (De Graaff, 2014). The validation studied in this thesis can be thought of as a hybrid in relation to these different models. The validation of vocational knowledge prior to entry into VTE in Sweden is made against certain criteria, as in the credit exchange model. However, the production of narratives has a more reflective approach in line with what is labeled the development model.

The different models described are also related to different forms of assessment. Andersson (2006a) distinguishes between two forms of assessment: convergent and divergent. Convergent assessment aims at assessing what a person knows in relation to a certain criterion or standard. Divergent assessment has more of an explorative character and a holistic approach to what a person knows. Andersson further argues that the holistic assessment approach provides for high validity, whereas the reliability is higher in the convergent form of assessment which relies more on standardised criteria. Validity in validation refers to the extent to which the assessment is well founded, measures what it is supposed to measure, and corresponds to what the applicant really knows. With a more open-ended validation procedure it is more likely to capture aspects of what a person really knows, but it might be difficult to replicate, which is an aspect of reliability. Reliability means that the assessment is reliable and returns similar results in a variety of contexts, on different occasions. Both validity and reliability are connected to the quality of validation.

3.3 Quality and validity

Many studies about validation mention quality issues but do not concentrate on quality alone, and, in any case, there is a lack of consensus about what quality actually is; also a lack of empirical investigation on this matter (Stenlund, 2011). Moreover, quality is found not only in traditional measurements such as reliability and validity, but also in:

The establishment of an environment and the implementation of policies, processes and assessment practices that maximize individuals' opportunities to fully and accurately demonstrate relevant knowledge, skills and competences. (Van Kleef, 2014, p. 208)

This definition of quality, as being the establishment of an environment that maximises the possibilities for adequately describing and assessing prior learning, can be seen as a prerequisite for fair decisions in validation. Simply put, it is about creating an environment that makes fair assessment possible. The validation studied in this thesis takes place within academic institutions, but is conducted in collaboration with assessors from the trades and industries. This implies that the many agents involved come from different institutional backgrounds, which could have consequences for the validation procedure, its processes, and assessments because they may have different understandings of for example vocational knowledge. To add to the complexity, the guidelines of validation prior the VTE are created through the implementation of global policies in conjunction with national ones and these may not always be compatible.

To the best of my knowledge, and with regard to my review of previous research on validation, the only ones which focus on the particular case of VTE in Sweden were conducted by Stenlund (2011, 2012, 2013a, 2013b)⁹. Stenlund took a mainly quantitative approach and focused her studies on matters concerning validity and reliability. In a literature review on the validity aspect of validation in general, Stenlund (2010) concluded that there was a striking absence of studies examining the threats to validity, reliability, and trustworthiness in validation. Furthermore, Stenlund suggested that more research is needed on the consequences of political or economic influences on the quality of validation, on how different types of assessment and the different purposes of validation influence its perceived value and relevance, and also on how validation affects the self-esteem of those who are undergoing the process validation.

In a study concerning validation prior to VTE in Sweden, Stenlund (2012) also investigated the applicants' experiences of validation by distributing a questionnaire to those who had been through the validation process (n = 632). The sample was obtained from a web-based assessment instrument used by most, but not all, HEIs in Sweden with VTE. Stenlund's results revealed

⁹ It should be noted that this investigation concerned the previous VTE, with slightly different requirements compared to the current one. However, the results presented here can be regarded as relevant also for the current admission procedure. The relevance for this study is that some of the current principles were used in the previous admission procedure, with vocational experts assessing the vocational knowledge and HEIs deciding on admission based on those recommendations

different threats against validation as being valid. One threat was that the competence of those who had difficulties in understanding the validation instructions could be underestimated. Another threat was that some applicants were not used to actually describing their vocational knowledge, which makes guidance during validation important. Yet another threat was that the process of validation was time consuming, which led to incomplete or unfinished documents being submitted. The last threat noted by Stenlund was that there was a lack of clarity concerning exactly what was being assessed, and also the grounds on which the assessments were made.

In another study, Stenlund (2013a) investigated the vocational experts' judgments and recommendations, and related those to the final decisions from educational authorities in the higher education institutions. According to her results there existed differences between the vocational expert recommendations and the final decisions made by the HEIs, in so far as the latter tended to be more generous in their judgments. Another difference was that the HEIs tended to favor those who had already worked as vocational teachers, whereas vocational experts were more focused on vocational experience. The study also revealed gender differences, and men were more likely to be given admission.

In yet another study by Stenlund (2013b), she examined, among other things, the inter-rater (the correspondence between raters) reliability. The vocational experts had all received the same information, but the result showed that there was poor inter-rater reliability. This lack of reliability was explained by the possibility of their interpreting instructions and criteria differently. For higher education to be trustworthy, it is necessary to improve the quality of assessment, Stenlund (2013b) suggested. She further stressed that it is important to have transparent and clear criteria, and that the assessors should agree on what is being assessed prior to the assessment taking place.

From Van Kleef's (2014) suggestions about setting up a qualitatively solid environment as crucial for validation, taken together with Stenlund's (2010, 2011, 2012, 2013a, 2013b) findings of validity and reliability problems, the aim of this thesis seems relevant. The aim of this thesis is to understand the validation of vocational knowledge prior to entry into VTE in Sweden with regard to conceptions and understandings about vocational knowledge, and also how institutional conditions influence the content and form of the validation practice. The relevance of this aim could be formulated as an ambition to find qualitative answers to the questions raised by Stenlund's quantitative findings. One such finding is the occasional lack of agreement between different vocational assessors and academic staff, as found by Stenlund, and this might for example be related to different conceptions and

understandings of vocational knowledge. Furthermore, the institutional conditions can be of importance when it comes to the discrepancy between vocational assessors and academic staff, not only in terms of conceptions and understandings of vocational knowledge, but also in terms of agency. Agency becomes a crucial question related to those of conceptions and understandings of vocational knowledge, institutional conditions, and arrangements. The concept of agency refers to decision making and to who is gaining influence over the validation procedure in instances of potential disagreements. With regards to the aim of this thesis and to issues such as these, earlier research on validation was reviewed (the search is described in detail in section 6.4). The review revealed that few had focused on the question of knowledge alone, and even fewer on a combination of conceptions of knowledge and institutional conditions; this also assumes that there is a gap to fill. However, a few studies had some connections with issues central to this thesis, such as vocational knowledge and institutional conditions. These are presented next.

3.4 Issues in the practice of validation

Cooper and Harris (2013) emphasised the need for debates on the nature of knowledge, with regards to validation. Their point of departure was the social realist assumption that knowledge gained in work-life is as valuable as formal academic knowledge, although these forms of knowledge are different in character. The setting of their study was the academic context in South Africa. In South Africa there has been strong encouragement for validation, due to the inequality of opportunities for education for historically disadvantaged groups. However, the authors also had a concern that many attempts at validation have failed, and not lived up to the high expectations placed on validation in terms of equity. Another concern of the authors was that the question of knowledge is, to a large extent, neglected in earlier research on validation, and:

Where they do discuss knowledge it is largely from the perspective of social psychology rather than connecting with the rich and varied debates about the nature of knowledge within philosophy and social theory. As a result, RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning, my insertion) is mainly seen as a device to map one body of knowledge (e.g., working knowledge) against another (e.g., academic knowledge), rather than an exploration of the relationship between the two. (Cooper & Harris, 2013, p. 449)

In order to fill this gap, and to better account for the relationship between what they labelled *working knowledge* and academic knowledge, they conducted a qualitative interview study across 16 academics within different fields in a

HEI in South Africa. The academic institution selected was described as a one which is ‘epistemologically conservative’ and; “prides itself on being a ‘world-class’, research-oriented university in Africa” (Cooper & Harris, 2013, p. 449). Their purpose was to investigate the restricted uptake of validation, and whether this was for epistemological reasons, or whether it was simply a lack of willingness to recognise knowledge that was not immediately recognisable within the academic institution. The result from the qualitative interviews with academics showed that the knowledge differentiation was not as important that they had suggested it to be. More important than the knowledge question, was the pedagogic agency and the commitment among academics for opening up possibilities for non-traditional learners. Another result was that the institutional practices and cultural differences were just as important as knowledge differentiation for producing either barriers to or affordances for validation.

If the differentiation between different forms of knowledge was the concern in the study by Cooper and Harris (2013), it should be noted that validation also takes place in contexts where knowledge is loosely defined or described. In a study conducted by Andersson (2006b) knowledge was defined as competence in cleaning, gardening, and building. Part of the reason for this loose definition was that there had been no formal education for this vocation of caretakers. Andersson undertook a phenomenographic interview study to investigate how caretakers experienced validation. In this study validation was carried out through the use of written, oral, and practical tests. Andersson analysed his results with regards to earlier research on validation and with what he described as a need for a reasonable level of validity, reliability and legitimacy, in combination with an open mind towards different learning experiences. He concluded that:

If we want validation to become something that really makes a difference when it comes to what learning and knowledge that ‘counts’, to make full use of the potential of the idea, critical perspectives are important driving forces. There is, for example, an important challenge to find ways of making visible what is beneath the surface, in this case vocation-specific approaches that are experienced not as superficial but as identifying what you really can do and know. (Andersson, 2006b, pp. 130-131)

What people really can do, based on both knowledge and judgement, in a given moment can be related to the concept of *phronesis* coined by Aristotle (Breier & Ralphs, 2009). As a point of departure for their article, Brier and Ralphs emphasised the need for a better understanding of *phronesis*. *Phronesis*, they claimed, is not so easily tangible although becoming an

increasingly popular concept. In the first part of the article they theoretically disaggregated the concept of phronesis, connecting it to modern social theory and knowledge theories. In the second part they searched for empirical examples of how and when phronesis can be identified in validation. In giving a theoretical foundation for the concept, they traced it back to its Aristotelian roots, and connected it with modern theorists such as Bourdieu (1992) and his “feel for the game”. Furthermore, the authors explained Aristotle’s concept of *episteme* as connected to formal learning, Bernstein’s (1999) vertical discourse, and, as such, manifested in principles, propositions, and hierarchically organised concepts. The vertical discourse differs, they explained, from the Bernstein’s horizontal discourse, in so far that the latter is based on local, contextual, and segmentally organised principles. The meaning of segmental organisation is that the principles are not related in terms of being integrated into a coherent conceptual understanding. Furthermore, Brier and Ralphs also described Aristotle’s *techne* as basically belonging to the same vertical discourse as *episteme* but connected to non-formal learning, and as manifested in technical knowledge through the use of artefacts. Phronesis, they suggested, is manifested in ethically motivated deliberations and judgements which provide a link between the general and the particular, between *episteme* and *techne*. This implies that phronesis is relational and cannot be determined in advance, because in its essence it is a response to the moment. In the second part of the article, Brier and Ralphs analysed qualitative data from two separate validation projects in order to provide an empirical understanding of what it means to be practically wise. They studied written narratives of prior learning and followed up the written narratives with interviews. Their aim was to investigate the meaning of the term phronesis and whether it could be viewed as a form of knowledge, and how it relates to concepts of formal, informal, and non-formal learning in policy documents. They concluded that:

...it is a form of knowledge and of reasoning that is ethical and directed at the achievement of a good life, where ‘good’ is used in the Aristotelian sense to refer to a life that seeks to be virtuous as well as comfortable, with an orientation towards a wider community. It involves a flexible relationship between general, universal knowledge and particular facts or circumstances of daily life and it is acquired with experience. In Basil Bernstein’s terms, it incorporates elements of both horizontal and vertical discourse in a manner that cannot be predetermined because it is, in its essence, a response to the moment. (Breier & Ralphs, 2009, p. 409)

From their empirical examples, they concluded that phronesis can be viewed as a form of knowledge. So, in comparing the written descriptions with oral

accounts of non-formal and informal learning, the interviews could reveal more information about practical wisdom and account better for the participants' phronesis. The authors stressed the importance of addressing the concept of phronesis in adult education, even though they suggested it could be difficult to get formal accreditation for this kind of knowledge. Phronesis and related Aristotelian concepts will be further described in chapter four.

From a workplace and employer perspective, Panican (2016) investigated validation in different trades¹⁰, through the use of 20 semi-structured interviews with trade associations' representatives. An underlying concern in Panican's study was the mismatch between job seekers and the needs of the labour market, and to what extent validation could provide a solution to this mismatch. All the participating trades in the study except one were part of the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise (in Swedish Svenskt Näringsliv). The perspective in this study was clearly trade association oriented, where trade unions and, notably, the National Agency of Education were seen as counterparts. This employer oriented perspective became visible also through critical comments from respondents, such as perceiving vocational programs in Upper Secondary School as insufficient both in terms of quality and the number of students. The aim of Panican's study was to investigate different trades' approaches to, and systems for, validation with regards to knowledge, skills, and competence based on non-formal, informal, and formal learning. The result was that people could mainly be divided into three groups: those who were positive but hesitant, those who were positive and actively working with validation, and those who were reluctant – seeing it as top-down steering from the EU. Many respondents in the study were critical of the categories of knowledge, skills, and competences in the qualification framework. The main critique was that the category of competence could not be understood as a distinct category of its own, but was perceived as the product of and thus requiring both knowledge and skills. It is also noteworthy that among the many empirical examples of opinions about validation systems, qualification systems, and not least transferable generic competences which seemed to be embraced by many trades, there were also some examples of very trade specific competences. These could, according to Panican, be seen as a combination of tacit knowledge and so called soft skills. The quote below illustrates such a trade specific example of tacit knowledge:

(Respondent) If you take animal husbandry for example it is absolutely important that you have the animal-eye, and I cannot say that it would be needed in other trades. Here it's attached to

¹⁰ Panican's work was done for the Ratio research institute which is an independent research institute in Stockholm, Sweden (Ratio, 2016). Ratio's research concerns conditions for companies in the business sector, and areas of concern are the market economy, entrepreneurship, and growth.

it all. If you haven't an animal eye, and all people do not, you will never be a top animal keeper and racer. You can never train it.

(Interviewer) *And what is the animal eye about? Can you explain, can you verbalise what animal eye is about? Can you validate if the individual has an animal-eye?*

(Respondent) *I have an animal-eye so I can see directly if a person is good at this. It does not matter what kind of animal we are talking about. Then of course you can be better at some animals. But I can see immediately if a pig is sick or hungry. Anyone who knows horses can see directly by looking at a foal if it can become a prize winning horse. This requires an animal-eye. It's the same as when you're good at children, you can immediately see the child's need, it's a feeling you have.*
(Panican, 2016, pp. 75-76, my translation)

To have the animal-eye seemed crucial to being a successful animal keeper and racer, and can be seen as trade specific tacit knowledge in contrast to a generic competence. There are obviously many issues and difficulties in the trades' validation systems, not least concerning conceptions and understandings of knowledge. From Panican's results it also seemed difficult to fully account for certain kinds of knowledge with the support of the adopted standardised validation systems. As an overall conclusion, Panican reflected on the difficulty of clearly outlining and identifying beneficial factors for the trades' validation systems. He suggested that one explanation for the trades still putting in place validation systems might theoretically be explained as a matter of institutional isomorphism (Di Maggio & Powell, 1983). Isomorphism refers to how organisations become more and more similar and this concept will be further explained in section 5.1 and 5.3. Briefly, isomorphism in Panican's study, implies that the trades look over their shoulder and see what others are doing, and, in not running the risk of being seen as lagging behind, validation is introduced in a similar manner. There are obviously many issues at stake, both in terms of understandings of knowledge and institutional matters, and also different objectives for validation.

Cavaco (2009) undertook an ethnomethodological study in a "New opportunity centre" in Portugal, where unemployed adults could gain recognition and accreditation for their prior learning. Cavaco sought to identify the complexity and underlying tensions in skill recognition and accreditation. With regards to conceptions and understandings of knowledge, the article is based on the notion of skills according to the schemes that were used in the centre. Cavaco further problematised and questioned how and whether it would be possible to transform knowledge devolved in work to the

academic arena. However, the knowledge question was not the main focus of this article. It was instead to understand the complexities and tensions in validation, and Cavaco (2009) concluded that these arose from:

...on the one hand, the humanist ideology that still currently moulds the specific features of the methods used, and on the other the ideology of individual responsibility geared towards human resources management and the meeting of policy targets defined at national and European levels. (p. 129)

In other words, the underpinning ideology and the methods used were, according to Cavaco, based on a humanist approach, whereas the objectives were based on an individualistic and econometric approach. This made the validation difficult for the staff, and their capacity for critical reflection was seen as extremely important, thus highlighting the agency of those involved in validation. The agency of navigating between conflicting interests seemed crucial. A humanistic ideology, as mentioned by Cavaco, is at the core of many research contributions on validation, whereas the actual conduct can have a slightly different purpose, as exemplified in Panican's (2016) study where the actual conduct and the usefulness for the labour market was in focus. Within the different research contributions on validation there seems to be a tension between the assessment of individuals in order to supply the labour market and the recognition of people as being at the core of validation. Recognition proved to be the most crucial aspect of validation, according to Hamer (2011).

Hamer's (2011) article was based on her ongoing Ph.D. project in which she studied the meaning of validation for adults in the VET system in Australia. She conducted in-depth interviews with candidates and assessors, but instead of exploring issues of knowledge in validation, she concluded from her empirical work that it was as much a question of ontology, meaning, recognition, and relations. Hamer supported her argumentation using a theory of recognition, and stressed the importance of mutual relational engagement from candidates and assessors, and the need for an:

[u]nderstanding that there is an ontological purpose to skills recognition and applying skills to demonstrate care, respect for individuals' rights and social esteem shifts us from a one-way act of normative judgement that risks constructing the inadequate selves or further alienation from the formal education, towards fundamental acknowledgement of human value. (p. 106)

Beside the delicate balance of recognition as an ontological pursuit and assessment of useful skills, validation influences the self-esteem of those who are validated, according to Hamer's results. As was further noted by Hamer, the alienation from formal education seems to be a common denominator of the articles reviewed here. A summary of the findings in the reviewed articles will be presented next.

3.5 Summary of issues in validation

Cooper and Harris (2013) concluded that the commitment among academics for opening up possibilities for non-traditional learners was as crucial as the question of knowledge. Andersson (2006b) concluded that it was difficult but very important to make visible vocational related competence which has not previously been described or recognised. Workplace related experience conceptualised as *phronesis*, based on both knowledge and judgement, in a given moment, was addressed by Breier and Ralphs (2009) who concluded that some candidates in validation are less likely to have access to the formal academic way of articulating such knowledge. They claimed it to be crucial to recognise *phronesis* as a form of knowledge and also to find appropriate methods for making it visible. They suggested interviews to be a better option than written narratives. Validations undertaken with support of qualification frameworks and descriptors for knowledge, skills, and competence seemed to be just as problematic, due the difficulty of distinguishing competence from knowledge and skills (Panican, 2016). Some representatives from the trades and industries were also critical of models of validation, and perceived it as top-down steering from the EU. Although being critical they conducted validation according to those models, which Panican interpreted as an institutional matter linked to isomorphism where organisations to become increasingly similar. Cavoco (2009) found a problem in the conflicting aims of validation: Within the same validation procedure both the aim of affording recognition to people's work-related achievements and the development of human capital as an economic endeavor were apparent. This observation means that critical reflection among those conducting validation is vitally important (Hamer, 2011).

In the various articles reviewed, different conceptions and understandings of knowledge are made evident; for example as competence, *phronesis*, skills, and more. The commonality between the articles is found in the difficulties of comparing and assessing knowledge across institutional borders. Furthermore, tensions between the economic and the social aspects of validation were addressed. Validation involves not only conceptions of knowledge but also different objectives, norms and values, and is underpinned by different ideologies (Cavaco, 2009; Hamer, 2011) The resulting tensions and

difficulties are apparently inherent in the validation practice (Andersson, 2006b; Breier & Ralphs, 2009; Cavaco, 2009; Hamer, 2011; Cooper & Harris, 2013; Panican, 2016). One pertinent issue in validation concerns conceptions and understandings of knowledge (Breier & Ralphs, 2009; Cooper & Harris, 2013, Panican, 2016). However, institutional conditions (Cooper & Harris, 2013, Panican, 2016), and the agency of those involved must also be considered important (Cavaco, 2009; Cooper & Harris, 2013). In taking a holistic approach on these matters, and thus acknowledging the “knowledge question,” institutional conditions, and the agency of those involved in validation, this study is framed within the perspective of new institutionalism. In order to analyse and account for conceptions and understandings of vocational knowledge within validation, in the next chapter I will make an exploration of the knowledge question, knowledge related to vocational experience, and curricular conceptualisations of knowledge.

4. VOCATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

The potential institutionalisation of validation is at least rhetorically based on the idea that knowledge developed through a variety of learning experiences counts. However, as I concluded in the previous chapter, different conceptions and understandings of knowledge are apparent in validation. In this chapter, I address the knowledge question, the practice turn in social science, and what this has implied in terms of conceptions and understandings of vocational knowledge. I also describe different interpretations of tacit knowledge and competence. Furthermore, I outline current policy understandings of learning contexts, knowledge, skills, and competence. Also presented in this chapter are reflections on vocational knowledge from the perspective of educational sociology and a critique of the current policy trends.

4.1 The knowledge question

The question of knowledge is difficult and has been contested since ancient times, as will be discussed below. Conceptions and understandings of knowledge are based on many different assumptions. This is also the case for validation, as was concluded in the previous section. Sometimes knowledge becomes more or less used as a code; for example, using terms such as *the knowledge society* or *the knowledge economy*, where the conceptual meaning of knowledge is vague, subordinated, or even absent. On other occasions, the use of the term *knowledge* has a conceptual meaning, and can be related to its epistemological foundations, the nature of knowledge, how we can develop knowledge, and the like. Understandings of knowledge may also relate to what is considered valuable knowledge and by whom, and, as such, are connected to power and equity. Broadly speaking, philosophers are often interested in the nature and definitions of knowledge, whereas psychologists and educationalists in how people develop or share knowledge, or the assessment of knowledge. Sociologists are often more concerned with the distribution of knowledge among different groups, and how knowledge is valued within and among groups and in society at large. In educational practices all these matters converge and become more or less inseparable; this often confounds the knowledge question. Conceptions and understandings of knowledge are, however, crucial for the organisation and content of educational practices (Carlgren, Forsberg, & Lindberg, 2009), including validation. In validation the question of knowledge is closely connected to assessment which is an integral part of validation. Assessment is not explicitly addressed in this thesis as it is assumed that conceptions and understandings of knowledge, institutional

conditions, and agency in terms of who is a suitable assessor are fundamental issues that precede the actual assessment activity itself.

Plato was among the first to define and establish criteria for knowledge to be regarded as true and proven (Gustavsson, 2002). One of his main concerns was to distinguish knowledge from beliefs (*doxa*). Gustavsson further notes that the Platonic understanding of knowledge does not take into account any practical aspects of knowledge. Many contemporary theories of knowledge, as well as current curricular and policy conceptualisations, derive from Aristotle's view of knowledge. Aristotle expanded the discussion of knowledge and related it to humans and their practices, to include collective, aesthetic, and moral values. The different knowledge forms identified by Aristotle were *episteme*, *techne*, and *phronesis*, where the first is related to theoretical knowledge, the second to technical craft skills, and the third involves judgment, ethical components, and collective goals (Gustavsson, 2002; see also Janik, 1996). In the 1990s, the interest in Aristoteles and the pragmatic philosophers was reawakened (Carlgren, 2015), in line with the practice turn in contemporary social sciences. Carlgren notes that the practice turn has directed the focus towards know-how, tacit knowledge, and dispositions. This turn has had implications for conceptions and understandings of knowledge within the field of education. The practice turn has challenged a dichotomised thinking that makes a strict demarcation line between thought and action, theory and practice, subject and object (Scatzki, Knorr-Cetina & Savingy, 2001). With this turn, it is acknowledged that there is a dimension of thought in doing as there is a dimension of action in thinking (Carlgren, 2016).

4.2 A vocation and vocational knowledge

Decisions on what should count as knowledge are sometimes restricted to formalised, theoretical knowledge, which is possible to articulate and is connected to propositional knowledge. Propositional knowledge refers to statements such as "I have a dog," which can be proven true or false. Accordingly, knowledge that is not as easily articulated is labelled non-propositional. Non-propositional knowledge refers for example to being able to ride a bicycle. In taking this example there is a risk that riding a bicycle is perceived as a very simple activity. However, everyone who has taught a child to ride a bicycle, or who has learnt to ride as an adult, knows that few succeed at the first attempt; quite the contrary, it takes a lot of effort and many attempts. Once it is learnt it becomes so obvious that the process of learning is forgotten. Being asked, years later, to write a manual for how to ride a bicycle would most likely be quite difficult for most people. Mostly, the development

of knowledge is, of course, not dependent on either propositional or non-propositional knowledge but rather on a combination of both.

Traditionally, the education system was built on the assumption that students should develop formalised theoretical knowledge which they later apply in different contexts¹¹. Within the practice turn, the idea of formalised theoretical knowledge as preceding its practical applications is challenged, and interest is directed towards the process of becoming knowledgeable (Carlgren, 2015). Simply put, within the practice turn, thinking is not separated from doing.

A practice, such as those found in workplaces where different aspects of vocational knowledge develop, is dependent on many different factors. In order to develop a better understanding of vocational knowledge it is also relevant to consider what constitutes the meaning of *vocation* by turning to the word's etymology. The word vocation comes from the Latin word *vocare*. *Vocare* refers to a call for a specific way of life, and is thus linked to individuals' aspirations, meaning, interest, and self-worth (Billett, 2011). This line of reasoning connects a vocation to more than just earning a living, and it can be seen as:

[p]ersonally directed and assented by often socially derived practices that reflect an individual's enduring aspirations and interests, and are usually manifested in culturally and historically derived activities that may carry worth for both the individual and their community. (Billett, 2011, p. 66)

Various culturally and historically derived activities have resulted in a wide range of vocations within which vocational knowledge has developed. Historically, such vocational practices were connected to craft traditions, within various guilds (Broberg, 2014). As Billett notes, a vocation carries worth for individuals as well as for the community. This means that vocational knowledge is embedded into a practice where it both fills a function and is a source of personal development (Carlgren, 2015). This implies that a vocation and vocational knowledge are also linked to self-esteem, identity, and vocational pride (Klope, 2015). Hence, certain aspects of vocational knowledge are personally bound situated vocational judgements, which include knowing what to do and how to do it in evolving situations in the vocational practice (Carlgren, 2017). Vocational knowledge is also connected to the pride of mastering something unique linked to the particular vocation and its collective, moral and aesthetic values (Johansson & Klope, 2018; Klope, 2015). Adopting this view on a vocation makes it possible to connect it

¹¹ In validation, the situation is to some extent reversed and is based on the assumption of formalising the knowledge gained in a variety of contexts.

to *Bildung*¹². Tyson (2016) uses the notion of *vocational Bildung*, and explains:

Vocational Bildung might seem a foreign concept, especially since, from Plato through Humboldt, one perspective within the tradition has been to contrast Bildung with vocational training. Bildung is then associated with the educated aristocracy (through birth or inherent talent) and understood as a general formation and cultivation of character and, mostly, humanistic knowledge. VET is then opposed to this as that education which aims at instrumental training, characterised as illiberal and narrow, for the masses of people destined to be servants rather than leaders. (p. 361)

Tyson argues that the development of vocational knowledge and excellence is anything but instrumental and narrow. Instead, he connects vocational knowledge to *Bildung* and the development of vocational excellence and formation of character. To connect vocational knowledge to *Bildung* may seem foreign, as Tyson notes, but it becomes particularly relevant in the Swedish context. The development of the two last curricular reforms was underpinned by the ideal of *Bildung* and a non-reductionist perspective on knowledge, inspired by Aristotle and the pragmatist philosophers (Carlgren, 2015). In the Swedish curricula (see, e.g., Swedish National Agency of Education, 2013), knowledge is the overarching concept, one which is dependent on the non-hierarchical categories of facts, skills, understanding, and acquaintance for the development of different competences, sometimes translated as capabilities (Carlgren, 2009).

Vocational education in Sweden is integrated into Upper Secondary School, although a minor part is conducted as workplace practice. The integration of school based education and workplace practice have been considered important for the development of both general knowledge and vocationally specific knowledge. The workplace practice is crucial because vocationally specific knowledge is, as already noted, embedded in certain cultural and historical practices (Billett, 201; Carlgren, 2017; Klope, 2015). Important aspects of vocational knowledge are developed in the workplace, using a

¹² The notion of *Bildung* comes German and is in Swedish translated to *bildning*. It is both contested and embraced. The classical idea of *Bildung* can be connected to Humboldt and his vision about free universities, where the development of knowledge is not limited and biased by certain goals but is free and connected to personal development and virtues (Humboldt, 2000, see, also Gadamer, 2009). The concept of *Bildung* even divides the Swedish labour movement into those who think that concept applies just as well to the broad mass as to the elite. Others criticise the use of the concept for imposing a gospel of knowledge on the masses, who cannot afford to be involved in the development of knowledge for its own sake (Brolin, 2013).

particular vocabulary, and the appropriate use of certain tools (Lindberg, 2003). However, in acknowledging the vocation specific vocabulary, it is important to note that in the craft tradition, as in many modern workplaces, the knowing is passed on from a master to an apprentice. Thus, vocational knowledge is sometimes developed through imitation of actions rather than being transferred verbally (Klope, 2015). This implies that a perfect language for describing vocational knowledge does not always exist due to the epistemological nature of vocational knowledge (Janik, 1996). Many considerations and descriptions of knowledge are difficult to articulate, as the knowledge is tacit – at least in part.

4.3 Tacit knowledge

The concept of tacit knowledge gained attention and popularity in Sweden during the 1980s (Carlgren, 2015). This attention came as a reaction against and concern for what computerisation and artificial intelligence (AI) could bring about in terms of recognising humans and their knowledge. Without diminishing the need for explicit and formal knowledge, there were reasons such as cultural, moral, and social to pay attention to informal and tacit knowledge (Göranzon, 1990; Janik, 1996; Josefsson, 1998; Mouwitz, 2006). From those concerns and intentions, a research environment – Skill and Technology – developed in cooperation between The Royal Dramatic Theatre and The Royal Institute of Technology in Sweden. The driving idea was to deepen discussions about work, language, culture, and knowledge, and to take seriously the relationship between Science and Art, by the means of dialogical seminars (Ennals, Göranzon, Nelson & Alvunger, 2016).

In this research environment, practical philosophy became important for supporting a better understanding of vocational knowledge and its tacit aspects. Janik (1996) suggests that tacit knowledge comes from repetition and training, and it cannot be developed through reading or speaking about it. He claims that tacit knowledge is an epistemological category and: “it is neither good nor bad, neither conservative nor radical” (p. 49). In the Wittgenstein tradition of tacit knowledge, the language games expressing acquaintance with the practice are crucial (Janik, 1996). The acquisition of those language games comes from rule following. Such rule following is not dependent on conceptual understanding, as then there would be rules for how to follow the rules. Instead, those language games are a way of acquainting the learner with what constitutes the practice of a vocation, for example. This kind of knowledge is, according to Janik, neither true nor false in the sense of formal logic, because the issue of relating a rule to its exception, in order to understand and make judgements, and the need for modification and refinement will forever remain (Janik, 1996).

According to Polanyi, knowledge always includes a tacit dimension, and, consequently, we know more than we can tell (Polanyi, 1983). Polanyi was inspired by Gestalt psychology and suggested that the "...body is the ultimate instrument of all our external knowledge, whether practical or intellectual. (p. 15). As a consequence, he preferred to speak about knowing rather than knowledge. The tacit dimension is, according to Polanyi, crucial for all knowing, and to eliminate the tacit dimension in the process of formalising knowledge he considered self-defeating. According to Polanyi, knowing is dependent on two dimensions of our consciousness, the focal and the subsidiary (Carlgren, 2015). Carlgren used the activity of hitting a nail with a hammer as an example of the relation between the focal and the subsidiary consciousness. It is not possible to have in the focal consciousness both the hammer and the nail simultaneously, but the hammer will remain in the subsidiary consciousness while hitting the nail is in the focal consciousness. Tacit knowledge thus seems to be of significant importance in work, but one obvious question that arises is whether, or to what extent, it is possible to articulate. According to those who follow the Wittgenstein tradition, there are aspects of knowledge which are impossible to articulate, whereas the Polanyi tradition opens up for such a possibility, if we are able to make the subsidiary aspects the attention of our focal consciousness.

Case studies, examples, and indeed narratives have been used and suggested to carry the potential for elicitation of vocational knowledge (Alvunger & Adolfsson, 2016; Göranzon, 1990; Janik, 1996; Lindqvist & Nordäng, 2007; Nordäng & Lindqvist, 2012). Joint reflections on particular cases in dialogical seminars have been used to promote recognition and through narrative engagement (of the particular case) generate a general understanding of some common characteristic of vocational knowledge (Alvunger & Adolfsson, 2016; Göranzon, 1990; Janik, 1996). In the research tradition of Skill and Technology, case studies and narratives which show examples of when vocational knowledge has been exposed to particularly difficult situations have been used. However, by this it is not suggested that these examples can articulate a conceptual meaning, rather that they can contribute to the articulation of such practical concepts (Janik, 1996), and to the development of a more profound understanding of vocational knowledge. Obviously, not all aspects of vocational knowledge are tacit and there are other notions commonly used for expressing aspects of vocational knowledge, such as competence and qualification.

4.4 Competence, competency and qualification

Competence is a frequently used concept in vocational education and training and is sometimes linked to a technical rationality (Carlgren, 2015). Curricula

worldwide are adapting to competence based ideas (Mulder, Weigel, & Collins, 2007; Nzima, 2016; see also OECD, 2001). Notably, there are though many conceptual definitions of competence, and these are also developed in different theoretical traditions.

Ellström (1992) makes a distinction between qualification and competence. He defines competence as an individual's disposition to take action in relation to a specific situation or task at hand, whereas qualification refers to the formal requirements defined beforehand by employers; for example, for handling a particular practice or vocation. This definition of competence is quite similar to that of the Swedish curriculum. As noted earlier, knowledge is, in the Swedish curriculum, comprised of facts, skills, understanding and acquaintance, corresponding to information, execution, interpretation, and judgement. These aspects of knowledge make up the different subjects' specific competences, sometimes translated as capabilities. This implies that the competent person knows that (facts), how (skills), why (understanding) and what and when (acquaintance) (see, e.g., Carlgren, 2009). In this sense competence or capability is connected to the development of autonomy, whereas a qualification is connected to fulfilling a previously defined requirement.

A slightly different approach to competence is taken by the European Union, where the notion of competency is used. The European Union has outlined eight key competencies that are suggested to be needed by all citizens, as a *minimum*, for their active participation in society and their employability (Forsberg, 2009). The competencies involve, for example, the specific competency of communication in the mother tongue and the more general competencies of learning how to learn and social competency. Such key competencies are supposed to be transferrable between contexts and applicable in many different situations. They are given descriptors in a typology consisting of knowledge, skills, and attitudes (KSA-typology). The OECD is also involved in the development of a concept of competency. This is made up of nine individual key-competences considered necessary for a successful life, which implies an ambition of defining the *maximum* life chances to be the means of competency (Forsberg, 2009). The categories into which these competencies are divided are: interaction in socially heterogeneous groups, autonomous action, and the interactive use of artefacts (OECD 2001).

Mulder, Weigel, and Collins (2007) have investigated criticism from different countries raised against the unreflected use of competence. Examples of such criticisms are the lack of a coherent definition of competence across countries and stakeholders, the conceptual confusion surrounding the notion of

competence, the over-reliance on standardisation of competences which contradicts the requirement for context-embeddedness, and also that the knowledge components in different subjects are overshadowed by the use of generic notion of competence (Mulder, Weigel, & Collins, 2007). Thus, competence is not used and interpreted similarly in different countries, which has caused difficulties in the fulfilment of the intentions behind them (Mulder, Weigel, & Collins, 2007). There is apparently not much agreement about what it really means, and thus: "... competence is a moving target" (Eraut, 2004, p. 264). The introduction and the use of competence do not, for instance, automatically solve the issue of transfer¹³ between different learning contexts:

Nevertheless, the institutionalized use of competence in the development of vocational education is a recent phenomenon and appeared inter-mingled with other innovations like the introduction of self-managed learning, the integration of theory and practice, the validation of prior learning, and new theories of learning, such as authentic learning, social constructivism and knowledge construction. (Mulder, Weigel, & Collins, 2007, p. 68)

From the quote it is clear that the practice of validation appears in connection to other current education trends. In policy on validation, the reliance on the standardisation of learning outcomes which are given different levels in qualifications frameworks has become widespread. One intent is the harmonisation of higher and vocational education across the European Union such as through qualification frameworks and the ECTS (European Credit Transfer System in Higher Education), and for vocational education the ECVET (European Credit System for VET).

4.4 Learning outcomes and qualification frameworks

One main underlying idea of today's educational policy is that we live in a *knowledge society* underpinned by *lifelong learning*. The conceptual meaning of those two terms is vague. These terms are, though, very prominent, and have been so for quite a while, in many policy documents. The policy journey of the concept of lifelong learning can, according to Duvekot (2014), be represented as a pendulum swinging between social and economic objectives. He further notes that ideas about lifelong learning were first developed during

¹³ The issue of transfer is not explicitly addressed in this thesis, although it is a highly relevant matter in validation, and could be a topic for a thesis on its own. For a more developed description of transfer and transitions, see, e.g., Beach (1999).

the 1970s in a period of economic growth and rapid social change, with UNESCO as the originator of the lifelong learning message. Initially, the idea of lifelong learning was thus based on social premises and human empowerment, whereas later reconceptualisations have become more oriented towards labour mobility and economic growth (Duvekot, 2014). Another issue about lifelong learning is, according to Duvekot, that it is possible to make regulations for education but not for humans' learning. Still, lifelong learning has become an educational matter and a buzzword, not least in validation where lifelong learning has been given attention and, as such, has become increasingly regulated. Economic aspects of lifelong learning and knowledge have according to Werquin (2014), been increasingly emphasised, and

[e]ven in countries most committed to the value of learning for its own sake – typically the European Nordic countries – economic competitiveness and labour market performance are now at the centre of most decisions in the arena of lifelong learning. (p. 86)

Ideas of learning for its own sake have seemingly been replaced by a focus on labour market performance and economy. Thus, what matters is that which is beneficial for economy (Ozga & Jones, 2006). Consequently, attention has in later years been drawn to the potential of recognising and making use of all kinds of outcomes of learning that takes place in different contexts. The learning context is commonly emphasised and addressed in policy on validation through using the labels *formal*, *non-formal learning*, and *informal*, (see, e.g., CEDEFOP 2009; CEDEFOP 2015; CEU 2012; UIL 2012). The following descriptions are produced by the European Commission 2000, and quoted in Bohlinger (2012):

- *Formal learning takes place in education and training institutions leading to recognised diplomas and qualifications. It is intentional from the learner's point of view.*
- *Non-formal learning takes place alongside the mainstream systems of education and training and does not typically lead to formalised certificates (e.g., in the workplace). It is intentional.*
- *Informal learning is a natural accompaniment to everyday life. Is not necessarily intentional learning and so, may well not be recognised even by individuals themselves as contributing to their knowledge and results in implicit knowledge. (p. 288)*

From the above descriptions it is clear that the differences between these forms of learning are interpreted as a matter of the learning setting and the degree of intentionality to learn. A widely recognised label for what comes out of all these forms of learning is *learning outcomes* (in Swedish documents the term *läranderesultat* is used). The idea of learning outcomes is explicitly not dependent on how, when, and where learning has occurred, and is the basis for the development of validation (CEDEFOP 2015). In policy such learning outcomes are structured through the use of qualification frameworks.

In order to accommodate different countries and learning contexts the frameworks are empty of subject related content. In the European Qualification Framework (EQF), learning outcomes are defined as a statement of what a learner knows, understands, and is able to do on completion of a learning process (European Commission, 2006). In 2008, the European parliament agreed on the introduction of qualification frameworks for promoting equivalence, security, and mobility of knowledge between countries and learning contexts, and

[w]ith the introduction of qualifications frameworks, curriculum issues that used to be dealt with on an institutional level have become political issues on a national and even supranational level. (Karseth, 2008, p. 52)

In most countries which have adopted qualification frameworks the number of reference levels is eight, but the number of levels can differ between countries and spans from five to twelve (Bohlinger, 2012). Bohlinger further notes that the frameworks are expected to “promote accessibility and permeability between pathways and realising the learning outcomes orientation” (p. 281). These qualification frameworks describe levels for given different descriptors. The descriptors used in the Swedish Qualification Framework (SeQF) are, as in the European framework, knowledge, skills, and competence. The descriptors and this framework are, as mentioned earlier, used within the validation of vocational teacher applicants in Sweden. In Sweden these are described by The Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education (2015), and quoted in Panican (2016, pp. 15-16, my translation) as follows:

Knowledge is the result of the acquisition of information through learning. Knowledge is made up of facts, principles, theories and praxis connected to an area of work or studies. Knowledge can be experience based and/or theoretical. It may have been acquired in practical situations in daily life and work life or through different kinds of studies.

Skills are the ability to apply knowledge and evidence based experience to conduct tasks and solve problems. Skills are described as cognitive (which includes the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking and innovative solutions) or practical (which includes manual proficiency and the use of methods, materials and tools).

Competence is the ability to use knowledge and skills, to collaborate and take responsibility in situations in work or in study as well as in personal and vocational development. Responsibility and independence are central concepts.¹⁴

The same or similar descriptions of the KSC (knowledge, skills, and competence) typology can be found in transnational policies (see, e.g., CEDEFOP 2009; CEDEFOP 2015; CEU 2012; UIL 2012). However, the use of qualification frameworks is a well-intended way of securing a fair accreditation system, and these policy conceptualisations have been exposed to critique: One example is the fact that the explanations of knowledge are often presented as mere descriptions and are not further deepened, developed or exemplified. In such policy documents, it is suggested by Bohlinger (2012) that research based and sound definitions of knowledge are absent. It is also suggested that when concepts of knowledge are used in policy documents they often become charged with meaning and ideological and economic assumptions which blur the possibilities for an epistemic discussion (Gustafsson & Mouwitz, 2008). Much of the critique of developing equivalence between different forms of knowledge has been raised from the social realist position, sometimes also labelled *socio-epistemic* (Muller, 2009). It is suggested that the concept of learning outcomes, achieved through any given learning context, cannot sufficiently capture the complexity of vocational knowledge (see, e.g., Allais, 2012; Muller, 2009; Young, 2010). Critique of vocational knowledge is also dealt with from the perspective of educational sociology where it is often explicitly connected issues of social justice.

¹⁴ Kunskaper är resultat av tillgodogörande av information genom lärande. Kunskaper utgörs av fakta, principer, teorier och praxis som är kopplade till ett arbets- eller studieområde. Kunskaper kan vara erfarenhetsbaserade och/eller teoretiska. De kan ha förvärvats och utvecklats i praktiska situationer i vardagsliv och arbetsliv eller i olika studiesituationer. Färdigheter är förmåga att tillämpa kunskaper och beprövad erfarenhet för att utföra uppgifter och lösa problem. Färdigheterna beskrivs som kognitiva (som inbegriper användning av logiskt, intuitivt och kreativt tänkande och innovativa lösningar) eller praktiska (som inbegriper manuell skicklighet och användningen av metoder, material, verktyg och redskap). Kompetenser är förmåga att använda kunskaper och färdigheter, att samarbeta och ta ansvar i arbets- eller studiesituationer samt i yrkesrelaterad och personlig utveckling. Ansvar och självständighet är centrala begrepp.

4.6 The socio-epistemic approach

One important concern from the perspective of educational sociology, drawing on critical realism, is the social and historical distribution of knowledge among different groups for democracy and equity reasons (Muller, 2009; Wheelahan, 2009, Young, 2009). In drawing on Bernstein (1999), from this perspective it is argued that it is important for all citizens in society to have access to formal theoretical knowledge, for the possibility of imagining alternative futures and changes in society (Young, 2009). In relating formal theoretical knowledge to its importance for vocational knowledge and workplaces, these can be seen as becoming increasingly complex due to societal change and development of technology (Wheelahan, 2009). Such changes and developments will have consequences for vocational knowledge, vocations, vocational education, and curricula construction. One concern raised within this perspective in relation to current curricular trends is that content is to a large extent removed and replaced by a focus on generic competences or competencies (Muller, 2009; Wheelahan, 2009, Young, 2009), which are inevitably content free.

From this position, “[t]he dualism of knowledge – abstract and concrete, context-independent and context-dependent – is accepted” (Harris, 2014, p. 53). Muller (2009) has traced how different professions have developed historically, and their disciplinary roots, and how their knowledge base can be given curricular coherence. He differentiates between hierarchically and conceptually organised knowledge and the segmentally, context dependent curricular conceptualisation of knowledge, connecting these to Bernstein’s (1999) vertical and horizontal discourses. Furthermore, he takes a critical stance towards the unreflected application of learning outcomes and the use of qualification frameworks, which he claims: “...aimed to produce ‘equivalence’ and ‘articulation’, but of course did neither” (Muller, 2009, p. 222). Allais (2012) suggests that the reliance on these outcomes tends to flatten and equalise different forms of knowledge and learning, because:

[c]laims made about outcomes rest upon this idea that there is some ‘sameness’ across a wide range of knowledge areas and learning experiences which can be captured and understood through statements of learning outcomes. (p. 334)

The assumed sameness between knowledge areas makes discussions of different educational fields, often described as in binary terms such as hard/soft, pure/applied, and vocational/academic, seemingly redundant (Karseth, 2008). Learning outcomes embrace all forms of educational fields, in the sole focus on the results, which Young (2010) interprets as a

marketisation of education, although often argued for in terms of fairness. Young (2010) takes a critical stance towards this focus on results captured in the concept of learning outcomes and the idea that these are easily captured in frameworks, applying to just any kind of knowledge.

Under a banner of fairness and objectivity, they represent a shift in power away from those with specialised knowledge to those with the procedural or generic knowledge of the rules which are embodied in standardization. Whether such developments can in practice lead to either innovation or to fairer decisions, as they claim to, rather than to more compliance and control seems doubtful. (p. 7)

One issue at stake concerning validation, beside this kind of standardisation of vocational knowledge, of which Young is critical, is the question of who are those with specialised knowledge in the process of validation of vocational knowledge – an issue in this thesis related to the research question of agency.

4.7 Summary of conceptions of vocational knowledge

In summing up the conceptions and understandings of knowledge in this chapter's review of knowledge concepts related to vocational knowledge, it is apparent that there are a variety of terms and expressions. It is easy to become confused, and sometimes the same term is used to refer to conceptually different meanings. This is particularly obvious with regards to competence, and on other occasions different terms are used for the same or similar conceptual meanings. In this chapter I have identified three main positions for knowledge conceptions.

First, the practice based knowledge conception was addressed. The practice turn has guided an interest towards know-how, tacit knowledge, and dispositions. In terms of knowledge conceptions, this perspective implies a markedly context dependent view on knowledge, as knowledge is developed in a context – a practice. This position is mainly built on a philosophical stance of pragmatism and assumptions such as regarding thinking and doing as inseparable. Value and attention is given to tacit aspects of knowledge and to how people become knowledgeable. In taking the conception of knowledge in the Swedish curricula as an example, knowledge is taken to be the overarching category, and understood as being dependent on different aspects such as facts, skills, understanding, and acquaintance. This implies that a knowledgeable person in a situation knows that, how, why, and when to take action. As conceptualised in the Swedish curriculum, knowledge in all its

aspects is construed as the basis for the development of different competences (förmåga in Swedish) or may be labelled *capabilities* (to which the Swedish word förmåga is sometimes translated).

Second, the social realist or socio-epistemic position was addressed. From this position, the abstract-concrete differentiation, and the hierarchical and conceptual organisation of knowledge versus the segmentally, contextually dependent organisation of knowledge, are not only accepted but seen as important considerations, not least when considering curricula coherence and workplace development and education. The underpinnings are mainly sociological and historical, drawing on critical realism, and the roots of different disciplines are investigated along with their conceptual foundations, in terms of relevance for different vocations. One important concern is the distribution of knowledge among different groups of the population.

Third, in current global curricula with learning outcomes oriented conceptions of knowledge, the overarching category is lifelong learning. This learning comes from different contexts, across a lifetime, and results in learning outcomes. For the validation of such outcomes, these are linked to standards in terms of criteria for qualifications. Such a qualification is then divided into the descriptors of knowledge, skills, and competence, which are given at different levels in a qualification framework. The underpinnings of this perspective are rather unclear, but negotiated among different stakeholders across national borders, and seem to be based on both economic and practical considerations, such as fitting descriptors to national standards for the possibility of accommodating many different countries and learning contexts.

Within these three conceptions of knowledge there are some differences in terms of foundations, such as pragmatism or critical realism, and their main interest as being about the practices or curricular coherence, but there are also similarities. In the practice oriented perspective and the socio-epistemic perspective there is a common concern of acknowledging the differences across different subjects and vocations, whereas in the learning outcomes orientation the focus is on expected achievements (outcomes) and on similarities between different contexts or practices. Within the practice, grounded knowledge conception the focus is on the idiosyncrasies of each practice and the different processes of for example becoming knowledgeable. Within the socio-epistemic perspective such differences are more often construed as being dependent on different forms of knowledge in terms of context dependent or context independent. There are also attempts to combine these perspectives such as in the case of Brier and Ralphs (2009), described in section 3.4. They combined a pragmatic stance using Aristotle together with the critical realist position of Bernstein (1999). In so doing they connected

Aristotle's *techne* and *episteme* to Bernstein's vertical discourse. *Phronesis* they then defined as the link between the general and the particular. In addition to all of these attempts to settle the knowledge question, there is also much attention given to the concepts of competence and competency.

Closely connected to different conceptions of knowledge are the conceptions of competence and competency, which take on different meanings and are underpinned by different interests and concerns. It is noteworthy that the concepts of competence and competency are sometimes integrated in the above mentioned knowledge conceptions, but there are also other independent concepts of competency. Find a brief summary of those in table 2.

Table 2.

Overview of competence/competency conceptions.

Competence/ competency conception	The nature of competence/ competency	How competence /competency is linked to knowledge
Swedish curricula	Competence is seen as subject or vocation specific and dependent on the development of facts, skills, understanding, and acquaintance, related to the vocation or subject.	Linked to pragmatism and Bildung and autonomous dispositions to act, meaning knowing that, how, why, and when to take action in evolving situations.
European Union	Transversal key-competencies that are seen as needed by all citizens and thus these competencies are construed as a required minimum.	Competency is seen transferrable between contexts and the overarching concept in a typology of knowledge, skills and attitudes.
OECD	Key competencies for successful life and for maximising competence to achieve the best life possible.	Not explicitly connected to knowledge but divided into the categories of; interaction in socially heterogeneous groups, autonomous action, and interactive use of artefacts.
EQF	One descriptor and thus an aspect of a qualification, connected to responsibility and independence.	Competence as an aspect of a qualification, along the same line as knowledge and skills.

In the research on validation, as was described in section 3.4, a variety of conceptions and understanding of knowledge and competence were used. However, other and similarly pertinent issues in validation seemed to be related to institutional conditions and the agency of those involved. Accordingly, this study is framed within a new institutional perspective, supported by the theory of agency. These theories will be explained in the following chapter.

5. A NEW INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

In this section I present an overview of theories and concepts from new institutional theory that will guide the analysis of the empirical findings. First, I turn towards new institutional theory in order to describe its basic assumptions and how it has developed. Second, I will describe Scott's (2014) institutional pillars as these will provide the structure for the presentation of the empirical parts. Third, I turn towards organisational fields and processes of isomorphism within those fields. Fourth, the flow of ideas between organisations I will cover by addressing the so-called Scandinavian institutionalism, concerned with how ideas become fashionable and also how these travel and change. Finally, I present a theoretical perspective with the possibility of capturing the relational aspect between institutional influences and agents: the concept of agency.

5.1 New institutional theory

New institutional theory encompasses different approaches and concepts that seek to explain how organisations and actions within organisations are influenced by surrounding conditions and also by other organisations (Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2009). The new institutional perspective developed from a need to expand old institutional theories concerned with organisations' efficiency¹⁵. What makes it "new" is that it looks beyond rational, structural, and economic explanations for institutional change, behavior, and human actions (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Johansson, 2002; Mayer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 2014). Instead, new institutional theories focus on meaning making of rules, norms, and routines, and claim that legitimacy is essential for the formation and reformation of institutions (Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2009; Johansson, 2002; Scott, 2014). In order to gain legitimacy, institutions and organisations adjust to their surroundings. Somewhat paradoxical, organisations would normally, for competitive reasons, be striving for uniqueness but, instead, they become more similar and homogenous, in a

¹⁵ In the late 1970s the first ideas of the new institutional theory were formulated in a seminal article by Mayer and Rowan (1977). The intent of the article was to find out why organisations within the same organisational field tend to adjust to their institutional surroundings, rather than to rely on rational choices of action in order to reach certain goals and become efficient. Another concern was to find new solutions and answers to how an organisation becomes adjusted to the institutional surroundings. It was concluded that rationality within organisations is a myth, as gaining legitimacy is just as important or more important as being efficient and rational (Mayer & Rowan, 1977).

process labelled *isomorphism* (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Mayer & Rowan, 1977). Adjustments to surroundings are often based on what is stated in policy documents. This is, however, not to say that policy intentions are always enacted as expected. The gap between what is officially stated in policy and the actual conduct in practice is, according to Mayer and Rowan (1977), labelled *decoupling*. They further claim that: "...decoupling enables organisations to maintain standardised, legitimating, formal structures while their activities vary in response to practical considerations" (Mayer & Rowan, 1977, p. 357). The process of decoupling is most often not a question of either enacting policy exactly as intended or only taking practical considerations into account. Mayer and Rowan identify two main reasons for decoupling. First, decoupling may occur when internal efficiency demands are in conflict with institutional demands. Second, decoupling can result from conflicting institutional demands.

The central idea of institutions is that they are shaped and created by humans' sense making of their social reality (Berger & Luckman, 1967). According to Berger and Luckman, the process of institutionalisation starts with mutual typification of phenomena, which means that within different forms of social interaction we create meaning and standards for certain behaviours. From this perspective, institutions are human artefacts springing from a need for creating (and maintaining) order. This implies that the process of institutionalisation can be understood as: "...the process whereby things become institutionalised, which, in turn simply means that things are more or less taken for granted" (Greenwood, Oliver, Sahlin, & Suddaby, 2008, p. 15). Although institutions are normally stable, they may also change and disappear, and become *deinstitutionalised*, which means that they are no longer connected to any meaning. Institutions can on the one hand refer to obvious institutions such as prisons, mental hospitals, or monasteries (Goffman, 1991), and on the other hand relate to loose phenomena such as handshakes, marriages, and companies (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). Scott (2014) argues that an institution makes reality comprehensible. It provides meaning and stability, and is neither good nor bad, because "[i]nstitutional forces can liberate as well as constrain" (p. 220). According to Scott's (2008) definition of an institution, different elements have to be taken into account:

Institutions are comprised of regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive elements that together with associated activities and resources provide stability and meaning to social life. (p. 56)

Scott's (2014) definition of an institution and description of its different elements or pillars, as he also labels them, provide a framework for studying a

wide variety of institutional factors. This analytical framework will, in this thesis, provide a structure for the different empirical parts of the study. The pillars are further explained in the next section.

5.2 Institutional pillars

As mentioned above, Scott (2014) conceptualises an institution as being comprised of three pillars. These are the *regulative*, *normative*, and *cultural/cognitive* pillars. Each of the pillars could be viewed as connected to different traditions within new institutionalism. Rational choice scholars are mostly occupied with the regulative pillar, whereas the normative pillar is associated with scholars focusing more on prescriptive choices. The cultural/cognitive pillar is associated with the tradition of sociologists and anthropologists who emphasise meaning making, and hence cultural/cognitive aspects, of the institution. In combining these research traditions and pillars into one analytical framework, it provides a possibility for analysis of a broad spectrum of institutional aspects. In this sense the framework represents a continuum, from regulative aspects of an institution to cultural/cognitive ones. By the same token, the framework provided by Scott (2014) represents a whole spectrum of aspects, from structural, intentional, and controlled aspects of an institution to the human, unintentional, spontaneous, and the cultural. For analytical reasons these aspects are distinguished and separated into three different pillars. The first pillar described as the *regulative*, and:

Regulative processes involve the capacity to establish rules, inspect others' conformity to them, and, as necessary, manipulate sanctions, rewards or punishments – in an attempt to influence future behaviour. (Scott, 2014, p. 59)

The regulative pillar thus has an emphasis on rules, and gives an institution its formal and legal legitimacy. Thus, the legitimacy of the regulative pillar is based on rule following, of both formal and informal rules. Rules do not operate only through formal sanctions, strictly bound to laws. Individuals within an organisation produce rules and standards in alignment with their interests, and others follow in order to gain rewards or to avoid punishments. Punishments are not always strictly legal, but might have a less formal character and be manifested through some form of pressure for adjustment due to fear of the consequences of deviance. In this thesis the regulative pillar refers to formal regulation of validation. Elements of the regulative pillar have an instrumental logic and are connected to expedience. Here, the regulative pillar has to do with how the validation is supposed to be regulated in terms of criteria, frameworks, phases of validation, and the like.

The second pillar refers to normative elements of an institution, and has to do with the moral legitimacy of an institution.

Normative systems include both values and norms. Values are conceptions of the preferred or the desirable together with the construction of standards to which existing structures or behaviours can be compared and assessed. Norms specify how things should be done; they define legitimate means to pursue valued ends. (Scott, 2014, p. 64)

Norms, values, and objectives are thus at the core of the normative pillar. In an institution normative systems are, according to Scott, a system of relations between norms, values, and objectives. Normative systems are typically considered as imposing constraints on behavior, although these are not connected to rules or fear of legal sanctions. In that respect the normative pillar differs from the regulative pillar in so far that deviance from the norms and values of the institution is not connected to fear of sanctions, but instead to dishonour and shame. Adjusting to the normative pillar is rather expected than rewarded. Thus, the legitimacy of the normative pillar is based on a sense that things should be properly handled and conducted in the best way possible. It can also be connected to extrinsic rewards such as being useful and profitable. In this thesis, the elements of the normative pillar are manifested in ideas about the norms, values, and objectives that are involved in validation. Furthermore, the normative aspect also refers to the methods that are used in validation.

The cultural legitimacy of an institution is gained through the third pillar, the cultural/cognitive pillar. This pillar is connected to cultural and cognitive perceptions of what is right and what makes us better than others, and in that respect it relates to intrinsic values. This pillar has to do with “the shared conceptions that constitute the nature of social reality and create the frames through which meaning is made” (Scott, 2014, p. 67). In accounting for this pillar it is necessary to consider subjective interpretations. Important factors for such an understanding are cultural aspects found in symbols, words, signs, and so on (Scott, 2014); also cognitive aspects such as how information is processed, interpreted, and what information is given attention. Aspects of this pillar are often of interest to sociologists and anthropologists, and it includes what is taken for granted within an institution. In this thesis the cultural/cognitive pillar refers simply to what is taken for granted about vocational knowledge, in terms of for example how it is expressed and can be assessed. Such cultural/cognitive elements can be manifested in ideas about the organisation of validation in terms of how the vocational knowledge can be described and expressed. It is often the case with knowledge that its

assumptions are seldom scrutinised, but instead taken as shared. The validation studied in this thesis is complicated insofar as the HEIs are ultimately responsible for it, but it is conducted in collaboration with representatives from the trades. However, neither the academic institution to which all the HEIs belong, nor the trades are isolated from the influence of other organisations, such as those producing policy.

5.3 Organisational fields and isomorphism

The connection between institutions, organisations, and individuals, and their ideas can be seen as having a relational character. In this thesis, the process of potential institutionalisation of validation is in focus, a process involving agents from different organisations – organisations in the policy field, HEIs, and a trade. The different HEIs with responsibility for handling the admission procedure are organisations within the established academic institution, whereas the trades belong to the institution of work life. It would be very difficult to outline in advance what the specific characteristics of each institution are, and instead I made it more of an explorative endeavor. In this study the department within each of the HEIs is that of teacher education, but I refer to the HEIs more generally as belonging to the academic institution. In addition, all of the organisations in the study are more or less, as is society at large, influenced by New Public Management (NPM). Skålen (2002) studied how the idea of quality as connected to NPM was received in the healthcare sector within a county in Sweden. He described NPM as “...a management philosophy that, among other things, aims at making public organisations more businesslike.” (Skålen, 2002, p. 236). Such business-like aspects can be about reducing costs, increasing profit, having predefined evaluable goals, and more. The academic institution is still often assigned the characteristics that Humboldt (2000) connected it with, for example, free knowledge production for its own sake, for the virtue of individuals, and the betterment and intellectual development of society. Nowadays this institution is, however, increasingly adapted to NPM, governed by evaluable goals and economic motives. If the boundaries and characteristics of an institution are quite loose, as is the process of institutionalisation, those of an organisation are clearer. An organisation is defined by Kazungu (2016), drawing on Greenwald (2008), as:

...a body of individuals working under a defined system of rules, assignment procedures, and relationships designed to achieve identifiable objectives and goals. Organizations are created for a specific purpose and those who are within the organization have to fulfill the organization's interests. (p. 46)

The different organisations in this study are the relevant policy producing organisations (outlined in section 2.4), ten HEIs, and one trade. In order to explain the relation between institutions, processes of institutionalisation, and organisations, Kazungu (2016) further suggests that the institution (in this study the potential institutionalisation of validation) sets the rules of the game, while the organisations enact those rules (see also Scott, 2014), in the process of institutionalisation – an enactment that can of course be anything but straight forward.

The relational aspect between individuals and structures is accounted for in the sociology of Bourdieu (see, e.g., Bourdieu, 1992, 1996) who developed the concept of *field*. With regards to this thesis it is relevant to speak about the relational aspects between the institutional frame of policy producers and the organisations of HEIs and the trades. The concept of organisational field is frequently used by new institutional scholars (see, e.g., DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Emirbayer & Johnson, 2008; Scott, 2014). Emirbayer and Johnson (2008) note:

Because the institutions governing a given organization's structure and practices are often influenced by a wide variety of other organizations – a variety not adequately captured by organization theoretic concepts – the concept of organizational field has been of particular value to neo-institutionalist scholars. (pp. 2-3)

The wide variety of organisations involved in validation is particularly relevant in this study, and the academic institution and its organisations are likely to be influenced by other organisations, as are the trades. The transnational policy field can be perceived as the wider institutional frame. In the development of an organisational field there is increased interaction between organisations, through the sharing of information and the building of coalitions, briefly taking each other into account (Powell, 2007; Scott, 2014). These organisations differ in their missions and visions, but they all seem to share an interest in validation. It would be natural to assume that those differences between the organisations would make their contributions very different, but this is not necessarily the case.

As mentioned previously, DiMaggio and Powell (1983) argue that although organisations' aims would normally and naturally be about being unique, as an aspect of competitiveness, they instead tend to become more similar. They define this homogenisation as three isomorphic processes, which are the *coercive*, the *mimetic*, and the *normative*. Coercive isomorphism is related to regulations and standards that force organisations to become more similar.

Mimetic isomorphism refers to the uncertainty and the general fear of deviating too much as a reason for constantly looking at what others are doing and imitating their organisational behavior. Normative isomorphism is associated with professionalism, similar programs, common networks, meeting forums, and more conformity of people's ideas, which result in their organisations becoming increasingly similar. Panican (2016) drew on DiMaggio and Powell's isomorphic processes in order to understand why different companies adjust their validation practice to standardised systems although they are hesitant about their benefits. He concluded that one explanation is that they are influenced by what is stated in policy, and also by other organisations and their modes of organising validation, in a process of isomorphism. Thus, the flow of ideas becomes an important aspect of institutionalisation, and:

[a] common theme in research on organizational fields is the movement of ideas and modes of organizing from one field to another. (Scott, 2014, p. 251)

To account also for the dynamics and the movement of ideas and modes of organising, the synthesis of the different parts of this study will also be supported by Scandinavian Institutionalism, accounting for the dynamic of travelling ideas, for example, from policy to practice.

5.4 Travelling ideas

In older versions of institutionalism, the movement of ideas was labelled *diffusion* (Mayer & Rowan, 1977). Such diffusion was interpreted as being based on the initial strength of an idea, and it was assumed that ideas remained more or less unchanged. This view is challenged by later versions of institutionalism such as the Scandinavian Institutionalism. From this perspective it is argued that when an idea travels from one organisation to another it will be translated to suit the local practice (Czarniawska & Joerges 1996). The travel of ideas within an organisational field carries with them a potential for institutionalisation, as well as for change and transformation of the field in general (Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008). Ideas found for example in influential policy may, however, be interpreted differently among individuals, depending on what they expect to see, and also on what might be accessible due to different institutional backgrounds. The question of how ideas in policy are interpreted is highly relevant in this study due to the many different agents involved in validation coming from different institutional and organisational backgrounds.

One reason for organisations to adjust their practices to certain ideas is to gain legitimacy. Which ideas that gain legitimacy is not always due to the inherent properties of the ideas, but rather to how they are presented, which may make them fashionable (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996). Czarniawska and Joerges further suggest that for an idea to break through it needs to be embraced by a significant number of people over some period of time. They further suggest that when ideas travel they are translated, and converted into actions or objects in new localities. It should also be noted that the translation process is speeded up by new technologies. This gives organisations and individuals the opportunity to get fast and easy access to new and fashionable ideas, and to adjust their practices accordingly. The relation between fashion and institutions is rather complicated and paradoxical, as fashion is created when it is followed, and

...much as fashionability and institutionalization seem to be opposites, one standing for temporality and frivolousness and the other for stability and seriousness, it seems more fruitful to see them as interconnected and interdependent. (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996, p. 25)

Fashion is thus part of institutionalisation processes, and it may also revitalise already existing institutions. Fashionable ideas are more easily spread as organisations strive towards gaining legitimacy, and one way of gaining legitimacy is, of course, to be up to date. Furthermore, individuals within organisations are likely follow fashion and to adapt to new ideas (Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008). Sahlin and Wedlin, further note that when new ideas are adapted, translated, and transformed into a new context their time- and space-bound components are lost. Due to this loss, widely circulated ideas tend to become general and abstract. When new ideas are presented, the story behind them may be reconstructed, as attention is paid to practical aspects. In order to attract attention, new ideas are often labelled in ways that make them easy to grasp, talk about, and remember. For producing ideas and for grasping and talking about them, human agency becomes important.

5.5 Agency

Institutions and organisations influence individuals' ideas and identities, and make them act accordingly (Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008, Scott, 2014). This is not at least visible through new institutional theories like those of isomorphism, as a marker of how institutional forces make organisations and individuals act in similar ways (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Mayer & Rowan, 1977). However, individuals' sense making of their reality and ideas about it is what initially shapes institutions (Berger & Luckman, 1967). Therefore, attention needs to

be paid “to the ways in which both individuals and organizations innovate, act strategically, and contribute to institutional change” (Scott, 2014, p. 93). Thus, the agentic dimension and agents’ reflective and deliberate choices become important, and agency refers to individuals’ and organisations’ possibility of gaining influence by altering the rules of the game (Scott, 2014). As such, agency becomes a question of individuals and their relations to institutional conditions, which are seen as inseparable:

If structural contexts are analytically separable from (and stand over against) capacities for human agency, how is it possible for actors ever to mediate or to transform their own relationships to these contexts? (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 963)

It is thus suggested by Emirbayer and Mische that humans have a choice to take action, but that such decision making can be enabled or constrained by institutional conditions and forces. In previous research on validation it has been concluded that agency is a crucial aspect of validation (see, e.g., Cavaco, 2009; Cooper & Harris, 2013). The question of agency is particularly important when studying the kind of validation that is discussed in this thesis, which is undertaken in collaboration between HEIs and the trades, with influence from transnational and national policies. Interestingly, vocational education has a history of tensions in terms of different agents and organisations striving to achieve agency over its form and content (see, e.g., Hedan, 2001; Rudvall, 2001).

In assuming that validation is a potential institution in the making, when using institutional theories, it needs to be considered that new institutionalism has been criticised for not accounting for individuals and their agency. Neglecting the question of agency would be self-defeating as it must be seen as absolutely crucial in the kind of validation studied in this thesis, where the organisation of validation and the relevance of the applicants’ vocational knowledge is negotiated between the HEIs and the trades. As a response to the agency problem within new institutionalism, there are also studies about institutional entrepreneurs (e.g., Battilana, Leca, & Boxenbaum, 2009; Maguire, Hardy, & Lawrence, 2004). Institutional entrepreneurs refer to organisations or participants who create new arrangements (Scott, 2014). It is thus not only “about a single actor but a variety of roles and functions distributed across diverse players” (Scott, 2014, p. 199). Taking into account humans’ agency, sometimes called institutional entrepreneurship, opens up for studies of institutional conditions, decision making and arrangements. Maguire, Hardy, and Lawrence (2004) suggest that it is crucial to study:

Activities of actors who have an interest in particular institutional arrangements and who leverage resources to create new institutions or to transform existing ones. (p. 657)

There may be agents in an institution who are interested in change, new institutional arrangements, or in expressing something not aligned with the institution, but it may also be that those who wish the most for change are localised in the periphery (Hardy & Maguire, 2008). Those who benefit from existing institutional arrangements are more likely to have central positions within the organisation, which equips them with a higher degree of agency.

Emirbayer and Mische (1998) argue that human agency is an analytical category in its own right, with distinctive theoretical and temporal dimensions. They suggest that the theoretical concept of agency offers a solution to the old problem of free will and determinism, which implies that their perspective challenges the dichotomy between agents and the structure of institutional forces. They claim that:

...in examining changes in agentic orientation, we can gain crucial analytical leverage for charting varying degrees of manoeuvrability, inventiveness, and reflective choice shown by social actors in relation to the constraining and enabling contexts of action. (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 963)

For understanding the different organisations involved, the enabling and constraining factors for making reflective choices are important. In theorising agency, Emirbayer and Mische (1998) give a thorough historical background of the concept. They trace it back to the Enlightenment and the discussions about instrumental and rational actions versus norm based moral actions, and they place the concept of agency beyond the binary division of being either instrumental or normative. By also placing agency within a temporal frame, Emirbayer and Mische's intention is to account for nuanced combination of free will and determinism. In doing so, they turn to pragmatism and phenomenology, and conclude that human consciousness has the capacity for being in various systems simultaneously, both in terms of acting rationally and morally, based on earlier experiences in relation to the current situation and future possibilities. When Emirbayer and Mische (1998) disaggregate the concept, its conditions, and underpinnings, they come up with the following definition of agency:

...the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments – the temporal-relational contexts of action – which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and

judgment, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations. (p. 970)

Emirbayer and Mische define agency as being relational and temporal in so far that it is informed by the past, and directed towards the future, with the capacity of connecting the past and the future to the actual moment. This implies that the human consciousness has the capacity of being in various systems simultaneously. The different agents involved in validation may, for example, relate their understandings of vocational knowledge to past experiences. They may also connect their judgements to the current state of affairs, such as the instructions and the guidelines of the admission procedure, and thus the current situation of validation. Furthermore, decisions about vocational knowledge may be connected to future possibilities for those who have their vocational knowledge validated.

Emirbayer and Mische see the past as connected to *habit*, the future to *imagination*, and the combination of both in a particular moment to *judgment*. They describe these interrelated aspects as a *chordal triad of agency*. All three aspects of agency are interrelated, but not necessarily equally emphasised at the same time. Different agents' agentic choices may be more or less oriented to the past, the present, and the future. The aspect of past and habits refers to routines and past patterns and are, as such, an aspect of human identity partly produced by the institutional surroundings. The aspect of imagination is instead oriented towards the future and possible trajectories which are reconfigured by hopes and fears for the future. The third aspect, of judgment, refers to the capacity for making practical and normative judgments, and to choose between alternative decisions in response to demands and dilemmas in the present situation.

Emirbayer and Mische (1998) suggest that humans always have different opportunities to achieve agency in a certain moment. In this thesis, agency becomes an important concept for understanding different agents' decision making in the validation of vocational knowledge, either for producing policy or for the conduct of validation. For example, study counsellors at the HEIs have to consider the instructions for the validation procedures. In addition, they have to account for the recommendations from vocational experts outside the academic institutions. The vocational experts in their turn are likely to consider their own trades' ideas about validation and vocational knowledge. In this complexity of roles it is relevant to try to unpack who is actually achieving agency. To unpack who is achieving agency, along with the conceptions and understandings of knowledge within the institutionalisation of validation, calls for a methodology that can capture the relations and interplay

between organisations and institutional structures and agency. Such considerations of methods and methodology will be outlined in the following chapter.

6. EXPLORING VALIDATION OF VOCATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

In this section, I outline the methodological considerations made in this study. As a matter of transparency, I describe how the research proceeded and which phases and methods it involved. Furthermore, I account for the measurements taken for securing the trustworthiness of the study, and I also describe how ethics was an integral part of the research process. At the end of this section, I provide a table with an overview of the studies of this thesis, and the analytical tools used.

6.1 Methodology

The aim of this thesis is to understand the validation of vocational knowledge prior to entry into vocational teacher education in Sweden with regard to conceptions and understandings about vocational knowledge, and also how institutional conditions influence the content and form of the validation practice. In order to fulfil this aim, advantage is gained through using a new institutional perspective. In taking this perspective there is a potential for reflecting on the regulative, normative, and cognitive dimensions of an institution (Scott, 2014, see also, Kazungo, 2016; Mickwitz, 2011, 2015); also the relation between the practice and the wider institutional frame of validation. One important institution in this thesis is academia, as different HEIs are responsible for the validation prior to VTE. This validation does not take place in isolation, but is influenced by surrounding organisations such as those producing policy, and by agents coming from other backgrounds such as the trades and industries. Validation can, as earlier noted, be seen as a potentially developing institution of its own, with the purpose of bridging different institutional contexts. That the concept of validation is becoming institutionalised is an assumption made in this thesis, and the empirical parts represent different levels of this potential institutionalisation. For the combination of different levels of analysis a multi method approach (Spillman, 2014) was adopted. In using a multi methods approach there is an ambition to conduct the analysis in dialectic interplay, as suggested by Lund and Sundberg (2004), between involvements in significant situations in combination with interpretations of wider institutional processes. The wider institutional processes are framed and analysed by the means of influential policy on validation, which is the focus of the document analysis. The local practice of validation prior to the VTE in Sweden and its significant situations are studied through interviews with study counsellors, vocational experts, and applicants.

One challenge in a study concerned with conceptions and understandings of vocational knowledge is deciding what ontological and epistemological assumptions to make. As noted earlier, different agents in the validation process might have different epistemological assumptions themselves. It would not have been productive to pre-define vocational knowledge and then set out to investigate whether or not different agents agree upon this definition. In relation to the discussion about different knowledge conceptions in chapter 4, it is likely that there are different conceptions and understandings at play. What counts as relevant vocational knowledge in validation is a question which fits with the phenomenological sociology of knowledge, as:

...the phenomenological sociology of knowledge is not primarily concerned with questions of epistemology and methodology, nor with scientific knowledge, the specialized knowledge of intellectuals, or the history of ideas and ideologies, but with the process and conditions by which a particular spatially and historically embedded social field defines what counts as knowledge and truth--and what does not. (Meyer, 2008, p. 4)

In this thesis the institutional conditions within the field of validation are in focus, along with conceptions and understandings about vocational knowledge at play within this field. Thus, the intent is not to define knowledge or to decide what knowledge is. Simply put, the interest is turned to how people talk about, make sense of, and agree or not on what is relevant vocational knowledge in the plethora of possible conceptions of knowledge. The ambition is to explore how conceptions and understandings of vocational knowledge are expressed and negotiated in the policy and practice of validation. It is furthermore assumed that these understandings are essential for the organisation and institutionalisation of validation, which in turn may lead to new understandings. Accordingly, the focus is on how individuals come to share an understanding about phenomena in the world, in this case the validation of vocational knowledge. Institutions can be thought of as products of interactions and thinking among a group of agents (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Berger and Luckmann were among the first to label this process of shared understandings as the social construction of reality; as a process which has become important for new institutionalists. The label *social construction* has been debated and contested. One reason for this might be its connection to ideological assumptions rather than to the epistemological and ontological, and:

It seemed to be both obscure and overused. Social construction has been a truly liberating idea, but that which on first hearing has liberated some has made all too many others smug,

comfortable, and trendy in ways that have become merely orthodox. The phrase has become a code. If you use it favorably, you deem yourself rather radical. If you trash the phrase, you declare that you are rational, reasonable, and respectable. (Hacking, 1999, p. 7)

Beside the fact that the label social construction has become a code and charged with meaning beyond its ontological and epistemological underpinnings, it sounds like a bold claim that individuals actually construct reality. It would be more appropriate and modest to understand it as if they construct *social* realities (Czarniawska, 2005), such as institutions. This was also the intent of Berger and Luckman (1967). “They did not claim that nothing can exist unless it is socially constructed” (Hacking, 1999, p. 25). Instead, they were interested in the dialectics or relations between subjective and objective matters, which has come to play an important role for many new institutionalists (Emirbayer & Johnson, 2008). The discussion about objectivity and subjectivity, as well as about the nature of reality, goes back to the main and traditional ontological standpoints of idealism or materialism (Benton & Craib, 2011). Many new institutionalists assume no radical position in favour of either of these two standpoints; instead it is claimed about new institutionalism that:

It rejects both a radical materialist view that espouses that the only reality is a physical one, and also the idealist (and postmodernist) view that the only reality is in the human mind. (Scott, 2014, p. 76)

From an ontological perspective this study leans more towards idealism and it takes an interpretative approach. The two main interpretative approaches are those of hermeneutics and phenomenology (Benton & Craib, 2011). The sociological phenomenology of knowledge, which has inspired this study, seeks to investigate humans’ meaning making about a phenomenon; in this thesis about the validation of vocational knowledge, rather than the phenomenon of validation itself. Studies of phenomena are often connected to quantitative methods, and are normally considered as providing explanations, whereas qualitative studies seek to explore and to describe how humans make meaning about phenomena. A phenomenon such as validity was investigated by Stenlund (2010, 2012, 2013a, 2013b), taking a quantitative approach. These findings, amongst others, were used as an inspiration and a background description for this thesis. This fits with Spillman’s (2014) argument that quantitative studies can provide descriptions, although commonly associated with explanations. Following the same line of reasoning, Spillman argues that qualitative studies can sometimes produce explanations. Normally,

explanations are connected to quantitative generalisability due to the availability of a sufficient amount of data. The provisions of so called explanations and potential generalisability in this case study are made with support from theory. The ambition in this study is, however, not to be explicitly explanatory, but rather to explore and understand validation of vocational knowledge, taking the admission to VTE in Sweden as the case. With support of theories it is intended to connect this exploration to the broader aim, as stated in the opening sentence of this section, as well.

6.2 Case studies and the case of this study

The study takes the form of a qualitative case study. Traditionally qualitative case studies have been associated with mere descriptions (see, e.g., Small, 2011; Spillman, 2014). This view is now challenged, with discussions on how case studies can provide explanations and be potentially theoretically or empirically generalisable (see, e.g., Small, 2011; Spillman, 2014; Reed, 2011). One issue is, however, to define a case:

A case may be theoretical or empirical or both; it may be a relatively bounded object or a process and it may be generic and universal or specific in some way. Asking "What is a case?" questions many different aspects of social science. (Ragin, 1992, p. 3)

A case can be understood as an existing phenomenon, out there, to be found and defined by empirical investigation. Another view is to understand cases as pre-defined entities, already discovered and accepted, such as class and gender. Yet, another position is to view a case as a theoretical matter developed by previous research. Ragin (1992) suggests that all these conventional views are problematic insofar that the complex relation between theory and data is neglected. What he suggests is a more dynamic process which he labels *casing*, in which the case is made up by continuously problematising the relation between theory and data. In the process of casing of this study, I went through different phases which will be described in the next section. The process is, however, not as linear as it might appear through this description; instead the process involved a lot of reflection on the relation between the empirical findings and suitable theoretical approaches. In order to make it comprehensible, it is described as though it were a quite ordered process.

6.3 Research phases and design

In the initial *orientation phase* of research it had to be decided how conceptions and understandings of vocational knowledge and institutional conditions within validation prior to entry into VTE in Sweden could be investigated in the best way. One of the first ideas was to go through the applications, find an applicant, and ask for an interview. This idea turned out to be very difficult, as the applications included an enormous amount of information. Some consisted of up to forty pages or more, with both written narratives and a huge amount of vocational specific education certificates, as well as certificates of different employment periods. It would have been very time consuming to go through the material. In addition it would have been ethically problematic to go through personal documents, although this would have been legal according to the Swedish legislation on access to official documents. Furthermore, it would have been unfair to publish the applicants' sometimes limited narratives without relating these to the applicants' vocational knowledge in action, a mode of conduct that was considered too difficult in so far that the study would have grown in volume to a point which was not possible to cover within a reasonable timeframe. However, it was important to have explored some of those applications in order to gain a better understanding of the complexity of the application procedure. It was also helpful during the interviews with the study counsellors when they referred to the applications.

During the phase of orientation I also conducted several informal interviews and had daily conversations with vocational teacher students, study counsellors, and other university staff with connection to vocational teacher education and its admission procedure, among others. I told them that I needed information for my study, and took notes. This information has not been used explicitly in the study but it provided valuable background information. It was also useful in the search for literature and documents. For example, one study counsellor whom I met happened to have various European policy documents on the desk, which also turned out to be important according to previous research. It was the same study counsellor who said that "*Validation is so difficult so you'd better be a little religious to handle it*" (Field notes from informal discussion with a study counsellor). This statement alerted me to institutional theories as a potential choice. During the orientation phase I also visited a national World Skills Competition and listened to a lecture about validation in the trades, given by Alexandru Panican. He had used institutional theory for explaining why the trades introduced certain standards for validation even though they were hesitant about their benefits (Panican, 2016). This reinforced my conviction that new institutional theories could be a relevant choice for a study about validation. In sum, this broad orientation,

involving different contacts and informal interviews, was valuable for reflecting on different possible choices of both theory and method.

In the next step I conducted a *Literature review*, described in detail in the following section. The purpose of making a thorough search was to get a picture of the research field of validation, which was quite difficult due to the use of the different acronyms employed in validation. The literature review, and the books and articles found during this process, gave insights into influential policy, and also into how validation is connected to other current policy trends. It became evident that it was important to analyse not only policy connected to the admission procedure itself but also transnational policy on validation. This expanded the case both theoretically and methodologically, as it became evident that the application to the VTE in Sweden is not isolated from global policy. Thus, the theoretical choice of new institutional theory was further strengthened. It became obvious that it was necessary to choose a theory with the potential of grasping the complexity between policy and practice.

It turned out that validation within the admission of VTE takes different forms and is conducted by different agents, most often through digital correspondence alone. Thus, it was not so easy to follow and observe as I initially had assumed. This made it crucial to find key informants who could give information about the admission procedure and its validation. During the admission procedure the applicants might be in need of support such as information about what to include in the application. All HEIs with VTE have a study counsellor taking care of this. The study counsellors are also most often involved in later phases of validation. Even when ValiWeb takes care of the validation process, the study counsellors still provide support to the students, and they are often the ones who receive the recommendations from ValiWeb. The way in which the study counsellors play a crucial role, together with all the information in their possession, made them key informants. Thus, I decided to interview study counsellors at all HEIs providing VTE. From these interviews it became evident that the vocational experts also play an important role in the validation.

I decided to conduct interviews with vocational experts within two selected areas, hairdressing and building and construction. I started to make contacts and conducted a couple of interviews with vocational experts. They proved to be a very heterogeneous group. Some were vocational teachers and some were representatives of their trades. Some of the representatives had a background in the specific vocation whereas others had a completely different background and worked more as managers and administrators within their trade organisation. As one focus of this thesis is the conceptions and understandings

of vocational knowledge, I found it crucial that some of the studies should also involve persons with vocational backgrounds.

My next idea was to make two applications the topic of exploration, and to combine an analysis of those documents with interviews with vocational experts. As there is an ethical dimension going through such personal documentation, I chose to involve the applicant as well. Thus, I asked them for “permission” to read their application although, as noted above, it would have been legal anyway, according to Swedish legislation. Applications are official documents, so I selected two and asked the admission office at one of the HEIs to get copies of this documentation for my use. However, it was not possible to get information on who had been the actual vocational experts and assessors.

Thus, it was deemed impossible to follow cases within the admission procedure. As I considered it crucial to include someone with vocational knowledge, and thus the trade’s perspective, I chose to make one application the target of exploration. As there are more than 200 vocational subjects, connected to a variety of different trades, each of them with its own idiosyncrasies, it seemed relevant to focus on one trade and to produce a case within this case study. In the final empirical phase I investigated the instructions for the application, described and exemplified the content from a hairdresser’s application in terms of examples of types of certificates and narratives. This information was then combined with interviews with a vocational expert and an applicant.

As a concluding phase, a *synthesis* of the different studies was made.

6.4 Literature review and previous research

Due to the vast amount of research produced, systematic reviews are an emerging research method in their own right (Andrews, 2005; Gough, Thomas, & Oliver, 2012). The way in which the scope of investigation of earlier research is presented takes inspiration from the meta-narrative review. A meta-narrative review has the purpose of understanding the development within and across research traditions (Gough, Thomas, & Oliver, 2012), in this case of validation.

Initially, I started with research literatures in my possession and that were used in my previous workplace research, undertaken as a part of my licentiate thesis (see, e.g., Johansson, 2014, 2015). It was considered important to present some understandings and conceptions of vocational knowledge in relation to

the purpose and aim of the thesis, seeking to combine institutional factors and knowledge conceptions.

The search for previous research on validation was initially undertaken through the use of different databases in order to find relevant publications. Quite early in the research process I also discovered different handbooks published on validation (see, e.g., Andersson, Fejes, & Sandberg, 2016; Andersson & Harris, 2006; Harris, Breier, & Wihak, 2011; Harris, Van Kleef, & Wihak, 2014). These were valuable for understanding the emergence of validation as an independent research field. Due to all the acronyms used for validation, the search for scientific articles was initially rather challenging. The first search was done in Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC). From previous readings I had identified the term *prior learning* as possible search term. First, I used it as a subject term (descriptor), which yielded 4740 hits. Then, when I used it for free text search, the number of hits grew to 4983. As the free text search did not greatly increase the number of hits, I decided that prior learning could be understood as a specific subject, and was relevant as a descriptor. For limiting the search, the terms *validation*, *accreditation*, *assessment*, and *recognition* were added to the search. Yet another limitation was made by adding search terms as knowledge, vocation*, skill*, and competenc*. To further refine the search, as a limitation I chose peer-reviewed publications between 2006 and 2016. This resulted in 234, among which I chose 30, by reading abstracts, deemed as relevant for the purpose of this thesis. A complementary search was made in Web of Science. In total the whole procedure yielded about 50 publications considered relevant. It also happened that the search yielded hits concerning both policy and practice of validation. Finally, very few came to be relevant for the purpose of this study. The relevance was judged by the articles being seen as connected to either policy or practice of validation of vocational knowledge. Very few articles concerned the concept of vocational knowledge, and others with more general approaches to prior learning had to be selected. It should be noted that the only articles found to describe the particular case of VTE in Sweden were those written by Stenlund (2011, 2012, 2013a, 2013b), which were valuable in providing background information for this study.

6.5 Policy analysis

One issue in educational research is that policy and practice are often kept apart in research, for both epistemic and traditional reasons (Strandler, 2015). In taking a new institutional approach there is the potential for linking different levels of analysis theoretically, and to account for both the practice and the institutional frames. Therefore, I analysed the wider institutional

frames through influential policy on validation. Then, I connected this policy analysis to the analysis of the validation practice in the synthesis.

The policy analysis I made was based on ideas about how validation is supposed to be regulated and what normative ideas it involves, and also on ideas based on cultural/cognitive matters. A common way of analysing policy is through the support of discourse theories and discourse analysis (see, e.g., Winther Jørgensen, Phillips & Torhell, 2000). In comparing the difference between analysing policy with respect to ideas or with respect to discourses, the main difference is the assumption of what an idea is compared to a discourse. In distinguishing between ideas and discourses, the study of ideas is more focused on their content and meaning, whereas the study of discourses is more focused on what kind of reality and subjects various discourses construct (Schmidt, 2015). Andersson and Fejes (2005) have studied validation from a discourse perspective. This was done by analysing policy documents about validation, and construing validation as a governing technique in the Foucauldian sense, thus enabling them to explore how this governmentality constructs the subject:

The competent subject is constructed through the educationable subject, who is expected to take responsibility, to study and develop his/her competence. The focus of validation, on the other hand, is the competent adult who already has knowledge, although it has yet to be assessed and formally documented. (Andersson & Fejes, 2005, p. 601)

Andersson and Fejes concluded that the construction of the competent subject is made by means of, amongst other things, the technique of validation. It is clear from their conclusion that the focus of the analysis is to understand what subjects, and what reality and persons the discourse creates. In choosing ideas rather than discourses I had no explicit ambition to understand what subjects and what reality may be constructed in policy. Instead my intent was to understand better the relation between policy and practice, how policy ideas about the organisation of validation are or are not enacted in practice, and what this means in terms of conceptions and understandings of vocational knowledge.

The analysis of policy was structured in terms of ideas of how validation is supposed to be regulated in terms of criteria, frameworks, and the like. This kind of regulation is connected to Scott's (2014) regulative pillar. Then, the analysis of policy was also focused on what ideas about the objectives, values, and norms validation involved, which were related to Scott's normative pillar. Lastly, the focus was on what is taken for granted about vocational

knowledge, in terms of how it can be expressed and other shared understandings about it. These were regarded as elements of the cultural/cognitive pillar in Scott's framework. The analysis was also conducted with regards to what conceptions and understandings of vocational knowledge are entailed through the regulation of validation, and its normative and cultural cognitive underpinnings.

Because an assumption in this thesis is that the concept of validation is potentially becoming institutionalised, an additional analysis was made in order to explore whether this assumption is reasonable. The analysis of policy followed the steps below:

1. Selection of relevant policy documents related to validation of vocational knowledge.
2. Thorough reading of those documents.
3. Identification of ideas about validation – related to the regulative and normative pillars, and to the cultural cognitive pillar.
4. Identification of relations between different policy producing organisations in relation to similar ideas and cross references.
5. Analysis of similarities and differences between and changes in ideas of the organisation of validation
6. Analysis of the results through the means of coercive, normative, and mimetic isomorphism.
7. Concluding discussion of which conceptions and understandings of vocational knowledge are underpinned and entailed by such policy.

For the selection of documents see tables 3 and 4:

3.

International policy.

Title	Author and year	Organisation
Common European principles for validation of Non-formal and Informal learning	EC (2004)	The European Commission consists of commissioners from the member states and the role of the commission in the European Union is similar to that of a government of a country.
The Shift to Learning Outcomes	CEDEFOP (2008)	CEDEFOP is an agency within the European Union supporting the development of European vocational education and training (VET).
‘Council Recommendation 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning’	CEU (2012)	The European Council is responsible for identifying issues of concern in Europe, for setting the policy agenda and for suggesting actions in the European Union..
European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning	CEDEFOP (2015)	See above
UNESCO GUIDELINES for the Recognition, Validation and Accreditation of the Outcomes of Non-formal and Informal Learning	UIL (2012)	UNESCO, as a part of the United Nations (UN) has ever since before the end of WW2 worked for peace and international cooperation in education, science and culture, and for values such as equal access to education.

Table 4.
National policy.

Title	Author and year	Organisation
Validation Delegation – final report [Valideringsdelegationen slutrapport]	Validation Delegation (2008)	The first Validation Delegation, commissioned by the Swedish government.
Criteria and guidelines for validation of prior learning [Kriterier och riktlinjer för validering av reell kompetens]	Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education (MYH) (2014)	A state regulated organisation responsible for Higher Vocational Education in Sweden (HVE) and for analysing the needs of the labour market.
Validation with surplus value [Validering med mervärde]	Ministry of Education (2016:24)	The Swedish government.
A national strategy for validation [En nationell strategi för validering]	Ministry of Education (2017:18)	The second Validation Delegation, commissioned by the Swedish government.

6.6 Interviews

All the interviews in the studies of this thesis were undertaken as semi structured life world interviews, described by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) as:

A semi-structured life world interview attempts to understand themes of the lived everyday world from the subjects' own perspectives. This kind of interview seeks to obtain descriptions of the interviewees' lived world with respect to the interpretation of meaning of the described phenomena. It comes close to an everyday conversation, but as a professional interview it has a purpose and involves a specific approach to technique; it is semi-structured – it is neither an open everyday conversation nor a closed questionnaire. It is conducted according to an interview guide that focuses on certain themes and that may include questions. (p. 27)

The intention of using semi-structured interviews was to obtain descriptions of the interviewee's lived world and in this case their daily work with validation. A certain interest was directed towards their conceptions and understandings of vocational knowledge in relation to the organisation of validation prior to the VTE. The interviews came close to everyday conversation, without letting go of the purpose of the interview and the roles of the researcher and the interviewees, as proposed by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009).

Interviews are to be considered as the main method in this thesis, and were facilitated by the fact that I had prior experience of working in VTE. In using interviews as the main method it is relevant to consider what kind of information can be gained from these. Alvesson (2003) has written about the danger of being overly optimistic as well as being too pessimistic with regards to information gained from interviews. He suggests that interviews neither perfectly display the interviewee's organisational surrounding nor their inner beliefs. In making this suggestion he identifies three common approaches to interviews, and from their pitfalls he proposes an alternative stance. According to Alvesson, neo-positivists believe in making the interview neutral and free from bias by relying on the possibility of keeping the procedure strict and neutral. The romanticists, he claims, rely too heavily on the interview as genuine human interaction providing information about feelings, values, and inner beliefs of those who are interviewed. Those who Alvesson labels *localists* consider the interview as an isolated event giving information about nothing outside itself. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) also bring up the epistemic issues of interviews through the use of metaphors:

In the miner metaphor the knowledge is understood as buried metal and the interviewer is a miner who unearths the valuable metal. (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 48)

The *miner* metaphor can be applied to a positivist stance but also to a radical phenomenological stance, with heavy reliance on unfolding some kind of inner essences. As an alternative metaphor, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) propose the *traveler* metaphor in which the researcher is viewed as a traveler to a distant country of which a story is told. Storytelling has, though, special requirements and conditions in research, which will be discussed in the section on trustworthiness.

It is naïve to believe that interviews could produce a value free account of the organisational surroundings. It is similarly unrealistic to expect that the interviews would capture the informant's inner life. Also the extreme, localism, which Alvesson (2003) brings up and in which interviews are interpreted as having no relevance outside of themselves, is unproductive and

more importantly it implies an "...underestimation of seeing interviewees as potentially knowledgeable subjects able to communicate insights about their social reality..." (Alvesson, 2003, p. 17).

6.7 Study counsellors and ValiWeb

The interviews with the study counsellors were conducted on different occasions during 2017. All study counsellors at HEIs providing VTE (n = 10) were contacted by telephone. They were all, surprisingly enough, willing to participate. Some of them even made remarks such as "*this is such an important topic and I will gladly participate*" and "*finally, someone who takes a grip on these matters.*" I was also given a hint, already at this stage, of the complexity and difficulty surrounding validation when one of them said: "*I wish you good luck!*" After having conducted all the interviews I realised that ValiWeb was an important organisation within the validation prior to VTE, and it seemed relevant to include them as well. Many of the study counsellors at the HEIs, whether using ValiWeb or not, had comments about ValiWeb and their way of handling validation. Therefore, I contacted Valiweb and conducted an interview with representatives from this organisation. For anonymity reasons, they were promised to be given previews of any quotations likely to be published. I did, however, not need to include quotations from those representatives, as the issues brought up by them were already covered by the study counsellors' statements. Nevertheless, these interviews were both important and valuable for confirming comments that the study counsellors had made about Valiweb.

All the interviews were, as mentioned above, conducted as traditional semi-structured interviews supported by an interview guide (see, appendix B, C & D). The guide was actually quite detailed in comparison to how the interviews later came to be conducted. I avoided interrupting the interviewees, and chose to be sensitive to matters of importance to them but which I might not have included in the guide. The interview guide was still valuable in so far that it ensured that the themes related to the aim of the thesis were covered in all interviews. All interviews with study counsellors and with representatives of Valiweb were undertaken in their offices, which meant that I travelled all over Sweden to their locations. I considered this worthwhile in comparison to the cheaper and less time consuming alternative of conducting telephone interviews. The face to face interaction gave me a better opportunity to understand and to be attentive to the informants' reactions to my questions, and pose them differently where necessary. It was also possible to establish a relationship of trust and to be sensitive to the informants' level of comfort.

It should be noted that the study counsellors' roles differed insofar that only four HEIs handled the admission procedure within their institution. The other six HEIs had outsourced parts of the admission procedure to Valiweb. Still, all study counsellors were involved in counselling applicants. In total, ten study counsellors were interviewed. Out of these ten there were seven women and three men. Five had a formal education as study counsellors, two had backgrounds as vocational teachers, and the three others as teachers in other areas. The study counsellors' experiences of working with validation in different forms spanned periods from only a couple of months to over 20 years. Some were also involved in teaching tasks in the VTE, whereas others were working fulltime as study counsellors. The majority of them were involved in the final decision of accepting or rejecting applicants, either by themselves or in a group of colleagues in an admission board. Only two were not at all involved in the final decisions. Background information about work life experience and the like could have been interesting to connect to their responses. However, the interest in this section was directed towards the organisational level. In addition, the number of interviewees was limited and they were all public employees. Providing background information could potentially have revealed their identities and connected them to a particular HEI. Therefore, they have not even been given pseudonyms, which would have revealed genders and probably facilitated their identification and the possibility of connecting them to a certain HEI. Although most of them said that anonymity was not a problem, I had promised that the focus was on conceptions and understandings of vocational knowledge in validation and not on how a particular organisation or persons take care of the validation.

6.8 Vocational expert and applicant

To account for all possible vocations within the admission procedure would, as mentioned earlier, not have been possible. Even choosing a few trades out of the many possibilities for analysis would have been difficult. Each trade has its own history, trade specific regulations, norms, and vocation specific knowledge. Thus, in order to analyse the vocational experts' role in the admission procedure, it would be more beneficial to choose an example from just one trade. This is because it could provide more information about, and the kinds of consideration needed, in relation to the trades requirements for the admission procedure when vocational experts are assessing the applications. The trade chosen was hairdressing. This choice of the hairdressing trade was made out of practical considerations, such as my experience in working closely with a researcher from this trade. I decided to choose an application with which I already had some familiarity, due to my previous work as a teacher within the vocational teacher program and from contacts with study counsellors. I also decided to choose an application which was already

completed and the applicant already accepted, so I knew there had been no problems. My intent was not to question why someone had been admitted or not, but rather to understand the admission procedure from one applicants perspective. The applicant had applied a couple of years ago and had thus been accepted and had subsequently completed the VTE. It would have been interesting to choose someone in the midst of the application procedure, instead of someone who had already finished with it. However, I found it somehow unfair to bother an applicant working with his or her application, as it could mean interfering with the admission procedure. The application chosen can be viewed as one single individual case of what an application may contain in terms of trade specific and workplace certificates along with written narratives. As it was impossible to gain information about who had assessed this particular application, I made contact with vocational experts within the hairdressing trade, and chose one with whom I conducted an interview. Furthermore, I conducted an interview with the applicant. These interviews were semi-structured and followed the same ethical guidelines, and the same mode of analysis as those with the study counsellors.

6.9 Analysis of all interviews

Below I describe the different steps and considerations I made when analysing the interviews.

1. I listened to each interview just after it had been completed, made reflections on the situation, the informant, my own role and took notes.
2. All the interviews were transcribed verbatim, and were translated into English. In order to make the translation process transparent the Swedish original quotes are presented in footnotes.
3. I read through all the transcripts repeatedly and thoroughly, and was trying to do so quite unconditionally to get a sense of them and their main content in order to develop an overview.
4. In the first more systematic reading of all interviews I focused on ideas about the organisation of validation, related to Scott's three institutional pillars in a similar manner to the analysis of policy. I underlined statements related to the pillars, and noted similarities and differences, and grouped the statements accordingly.
5. I went back to the original transcripts and read these with regards to statements related to understandings of knowledge and took notes about similarities and differences. It turned out that statements about knowledge were not as easily identified, and appeared not only as responses to explicit questions about knowledge, but just as much connected to the ideas of how to organise validation. This made me

decide to keep the interview data arranged around the themes of the three institutional pillars.

6. After having sorted the data under each of the pillars I began to categorise this data with regards to emerging subthemes under each pillar. These categories were formed based on the way different issues were brought up by informant, either because they were emphasised, brought up often, or made an exception. This way of categorising based on the informants' statements, is similar to what is labelled a second order perspective in phenomenography (Marton, 1981), with the difference being that I decided to make the pillars the overarching and main structure, under each of which the subthemes of ideas about validation appeared. The advantage of this kind of analysis was that the structure was similar to that of the policy analysis, which could make comparisons and a synthesis of institutional conditions possible. One negative consequence was the risk of lumping together individuals' responses into a theme. Furthermore, some responses could be connected to more than one pillar. In those cases I started by placing them under more than one pillar, and later, when the number of themes and responses grew, I chose to keep the response under the pillar where the topic was not already covered by responses from other study counsellors.
7. In this study, as in phenomenography, it is not the individual responses that are sought, but relations to the phenomena – in this study, ideas about the organisation of validation and understandings of vocational knowledge.
8. The relation between the different accounts among the informants of conceptions and understanding of knowledge and institutional conditions was a matter of my interpretation and analysis. In presenting the results I briefly commented on statements, and at the end of each perspective (policy, HEIs, and the trade) I summed up briefly. Later in the synthesis I made a more comprehensive analysis, which I connected to the analysis of policy, theories, and earlier research.

6.10 Analysis of agency and institutional arrangements

One of the research questions concerns agency and another research question concerns institutional arrangements. The institutional arrangements may have sprung from a desire to gain agency, which makes these questions potentially related. As Maguire, Hardy, and Lawrence (2004) have noted, that to take into account human agency opens up an exploration and understanding of institutional arrangements. In the analysis of agency and institutional

arrangements, which forms a part of the synthesis, the interest is turned to negotiations and meaning making about validation of vocational knowledge at different levels of analysis. This is in order to be able to analyse which institutional arrangements emanate from the desire to gain agency over the admission procedure, and to help in defining and describing what is relevant vocational knowledge. In this respect agency is understood as an outcome of decision making among individuals and organisations (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Scott, 2014).

6.11 Trustworthiness

Traditional measurements of trustworthiness are validity and reliability, which are often used for quantitative studies. Bryman (2008) draws on Lincoln and Guba (1985, 1994) to provide alternative concepts for qualitative research; the corresponding notions in quantitative research are in parentheses. These are:

- creditability (internal validity)
- transferability (external validity)
- dependability (reliability)
- conformability (objectivity)

The internal validity in quantitative research has to do with the causal relationship between variables, whereas in qualitative research creditability refers to how well the theoretical frame fits with the empirical findings. To secure *creditability* I have oriented my theoretical choice with regard to the aim of the study, and the empirical findings. *Transferability* in quantitative research is often labelled *external validity*, and refers to the extent that the findings are valid outside the context in which the study was undertaken, or how well a sample reflects the population. The particular case of VTE in Sweden might appear as a very local case with no potential of transferability. Yet, there are many aspects of this study, such as ideas of how to organise validation of vocational knowledge, which are both relevant and transferable to areas outside this particular context. The transferability of this study is made possible through the use of theories of institutionalisation and of knowledge. *Reliability* corresponds in qualitative research to *dependability*. Dependability in this study has to do with the selection of relevant information during the empirical work and in the comparison of different findings, as well as in making the research findings transparent. A completely *objective* approach is not in alignment with the underpinnings of this study, which takes an interpretative approach. Measures to secure *conformability* were taken by means of having a reflexive approach, which meant reflecting on my background and on alternative analyses of findings. My ambition has also been to make this process as transparent as possible. Another important aspect

of the conformability and general trustworthiness of this thesis is, of course, honesty. Wacquant (2004) quotes, on the very first page, from the Marcel Mauss (1950) *Manuel d'éthnographie*: "Tell what you know, all that you know and nothing but what you know." Moreover, constantly reflecting on my interpretations of the results, sharing results with colleagues, and presenting parts of the results and analysis of studies at conferences (Alvunger & Johansson, 2017; Johansson & Klope, 2018) were ways of ensuring the trustworthiness of the study.

6.12 Ethical considerations

Within the research process there are also traditional and common ethical considerations to be made. The suggestions made by Bryman (2008), drawing on Diener and Crandall (1978), are similar to those produced by the Swedish Research Council (2017), which were followed throughout the work. The following ethical principles suggested by Bryman (2008) should be considered:

- whether there is *harm to participants*
- whether there is a lack of *informed consent*
- whether there is an *invasion of privacy*
- whether *deception* is involved. (p. 118)

To ensure that there was *no harm to participants*, I protected HEI personnel from being identified through seeing, for example, that they were not connected to a certain HEI. This would have potentially been harmful for them as individuals as well as employees. As they were few in number, and also official persons, the question of anonymity had to be handled with care. I informed them that their answers were to be used as general information, and I promised to take precautions so that their answers could not be connected to any particular HEI. If they had made any critical remarks, I was aware that these could give their employers negative publicity. Therefore, the information I provided about the study counsellors was made general and not personal. Similar considerations were made with regards to the vocational expert and the applicant.

All informants were given *informed consent* forms, with information about the project and contact information (see, appendix A). The consent form clearly stated their participation was voluntary, and that they could choose to withdraw at any time. It was furthermore stated that they would be anonymous.

No questions were posed which ran the risk of *invasion of privacy*. Of course I posed questions of a personal nature such as about work life histories. If those narratives revealed anything that could possibly be understood as private, I did not use it in the analysis.

Last, there was *no deception* involved in the study. In the consent form it was clearly stated what the study was about, and that participation was voluntary. Nor did I offer anything in return for volunteers' participation.

Thus, the ethical guidelines of the Swedish Research Council (2017) and Bryman (2008) were followed. However, ethics is more than following guidelines and checklists. There are many ethical considerations to make with regards to research, and probably even more so in social sciences:

The social sciences study human beings, and human beings are different from the objects of physics or chemistry – they know that they are being studied, they can understand what is being said about them and they can take scientists' findings into account and act differently. (Benton & Craib, 2011, p. 10)

This quote indicates that it is important not only to care about ethical issues within the research process, but also with regards to what comes out of it. In terms of what comes out of the research everything is not necessarily positive, because being critical, questioning what is taken for granted, highlighting inherent difficulties, and making thorough explorations are important aspects of trustworthy research. Furthermore, taking an interpretative approach means that I have interpreted different expressions to make an overall analysis. Important aspects of each individual interview may be lost in such an analysis or could possibly have been interpreted differently. However, to the best of my capability I have tried to be as transparent as possible, and the responsibility for the interpretations is mine.

I have constantly been negotiating such issues with myself as a matter of ethics. As a part of this reflection I kept asking myself: Would it have been better to just leave this admission procedure validation as it is, and to conclude that the people involved do it as well as they can, and leave to them to develop improvements as they see fit. To be honest, this question occurred to me when I realised all the difficulties and issues apparent in the process. It should be noted that it became clear early on that it is a very complex endeavor in which the informants are involved. In reflecting on this, I have reached the decision that just because of its inherent difficulties it is of importance to study it, not at least for recognising the difficulties that those involved experience, sometimes on a daily basis. Thus, instead of avoiding what is difficult, and probably also

delicate, I took it as an imperative for conducting the research, as it becomes important to get a better understanding of why it might be difficult. Validation is surrounded by huge expectations in society which put pressure on those involved. My basic position, from the start, has been that those involved in validation have the best intentions for being involved, and have gained important insights into it from actually working with it. This conviction has been further strengthened throughout the study. People are working hard and making progress in their ambition to make validation work. Still, difficulties in terms of tensions, negotiations, and conceptual confusion are likely to occur, and I found it important to shed light on this and to gain a nuanced and reasonable understanding of validation in relation to conceptions and understandings of knowledge and institutional conditions. However, in constantly reflecting on the research process in relation to those who are actually involved in validation, ethics became more than a checklist and was itself an integral part of the research process.

6.13 Overview of the studies and data analysis

In this section an overview of the different studies is provided, and also which research question(s) the different studies are linked to, and the methods used. In addition, the concepts of the new institutional theory utilised as analytical tools in the different studies are outlined. [The method used in each study is italicised.]

Table 5.
Outline of study one.

Study 1 – Title	Validation in policy
Theory and <i>method</i>	Institutional theories – <i>Policy analysis of ideas.</i>
Questions	<p>What ideas about the organisation of validation stand out in policy on validation?</p> <p>On what conceptions and understandings of vocational knowledge is the organisation of validation built and what do they entail?</p>
Analytical tools	<p>Scott's three pillars provide the structure for the analysis, and are thereby related to the process of institutionalisation. The results are also analysed through the concepts of coercive, normative, and mimetic isomorphism, for the sake of exploring the assumption that validation is becoming institutionalised. Also, a brief discussion of conceptions and understandings of knowledge is made.</p>

Table 6.
Outline of study two.

Study 2 – Title	Validation in HEIs
Theory and <i>method</i>	Institutional theories – <i>Semi structured interviews.</i>
Questions	What ideas about the organisation of validation stand out in the practice of validation? On what conceptions and understandings of vocational knowledge is the organisation of validation built and what do they entail?
Analytical tools	Scott’s pillars provide the structure for the analysis and are thereby related to the process of institutionalisation. Also a brief discussion of conceptions and understandings of knowledge is included.

Table 7.
Outline of study three.

Study 3 -- Title	Validation in a trade
Theory and <i>method</i>	Institutional theory – <i>Semi structured interviews, document analysis.</i>
Questions	<p>What ideas about the organisation of validation stand out in the practice of validation?</p> <p>On what conceptions and understandings of vocational knowledge is the organisation of validation built and what does it entail?</p>
Analytical tools	Scott's pillars provide the structure for the analysis, and are thereby related to the process of institutionalisation and institutional clashes with the trade. Also a brief discussion of conceptions and understandings of knowledge is included.

Table 8.
Outline of the synthesis.

Study 4 – Synthesis	Validation of vocational knowledge
Theory and <i>method</i>	<i>Synthesis</i> of the three empirical studies through support of institutional theories, theories of knowledge, and the theory of agency.
Questions	What ideas about the organisation of validation stand out in the policy and practice of validation?
	On what conceptions and understandings of vocational knowledge is the organisation of validation built and what do they entail?
	Who has the agency to describe and to decide upon vocational knowledge in policy and the practice of validation?
	What institutional arrangements appear in the practice of validation?
Analytical tools	The institutional pillars. The concept of travelling ideas. The institutional concept of decoupling is used, as is agency. Also, an analysis of prevailing and conflicting conceptions and understandings within the policy and practice of validation.

7. VALIDATION IN POLICY

Validation prior to entry into VTE in Sweden does not take place in isolation. Inspiration is taken from transnational policy. Writing from a new institutional position, such inspiration and thus the organisational field in which the process of institutionalisation is embedded is considered important. Therefore, in this chapter I will explore transnational and national policy on validation. Firstly, I outline important policy events and documents important for this study. Secondly, I will account for the results of reading policy through the structure of Scott's (2014) institutional pillars. After this I analyse the policy field by the means of the institutional concept of isomorphism. In doing so the basic assumption made in this thesis – that the validation is potentially becoming institutionalised – is explored. Then, I analyse ideas about the organisation of validation in terms of its regulative, normative and cultural/cognitive elements as accounted for in policy. Finally, I discuss what these ideas entail in terms of conceptions and understandings of vocational knowledge.

7.1 Important events and policy producers

Validation has been given increased attention since the Lisbon Strategy (CEC 2000). Many of the economic goals in the Lisbon strategy were not achieved. Thus, this strategy was replaced by the Europe 2020 (EC 2010), where one of the main goals was to increase employment rates and growth.

In 2004, the European Commission formulated the Common European Principles for Validation of Non-formal and Informal learning. Thus, documents published since this event has been selected. The principles for validation formulated by the European Commission (EC 2004) were further developed by CEDEFOP (2009) in European Guidelines for Validating Non-formal and Informal learning. In 2012, The Council of the European Union formulated recommendations concerning validation to the member states; this time with a very clear message that the member states should put in place arrangements for validation no later than 2018. In the same year, UNESCO's Institute for Learning (UIL 2012) published guidelines for validation. For the possibility of exploring whether there are some kinds of differences in the messages from the different organisations, this publication was also selected. A revised version of the guidelines and principles for validation European Guidelines for Validating Non-Formal and Informal Learning (CEDEFOP 2015), explicitly drawing on the council's later recommendations (CEU 2012) was likewise selected. As validation is explicitly connected to learning

outcomes, the document *The Shift to Learning Outcomes* (CEDEFOP 2008) was included in the selection as well.

The selection of national policy has focused on the same time span as the selection of international policy. In Sweden, validation has explicitly been discussed¹⁶ since the mid 90' (Andersson & Fejes, 2005). In 2001, an official report from the state titled *Validation of Adults' Knowledge and Competence* (SOU 2001:78), was published by the Ministry of Education. Yet, another official report, a memorandum titled *Validation and More – Continuing Development of Adults' Learning*, was published in 2003 (Ds 2003:23). As a result of these reports and the increased emphasis on validation in the public debate, a national delegation was commissioned in 2004, the same year as the European Commission formulated principles for validation. The task of this delegation was to promote the quality, fairness, and legitimacy of validation, and to support the development of methods for validation. The work by the commission resulted in a report *Validation Delegation – Final Report* (Validation Delegation 2008), which has been selected. One conclusion in this report is that there was a need for national coordination of the different validation initiatives. This task was assigned to the Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education. As this agency has become an important stakeholder in the development of validation in Sweden, the document *Criteria and Guidelines for Validation of Prior Learning* (MYH 2014) was also selected. Recently, a second Validation Delegation has been commissioned by the Swedish Government to follow, support, and coordinates development within the area of validation. This delegation is assigned the tasks of proposing a new national strategy for validation, ensuring that consensus on validation is reached, promoting the establishment of validation within the education system and working life, monitoring and analysing the results of validation, generating knowledge about best practices of validation, producing information about validation, finding solutions to strengthen the work with validation in education and at workplaces, and also proposing necessary changes in legislation. The Ministry of Education has published a memorandum titled *Validation with Surplus Value* (Ds 2016:24). This memorandum concerns the need for further development of validation systems and models, in cooperation with industry and different trades. It further emphasises the need for developing sustainable structures for validation in HEIs. This document was also selected. The last document to be selected was a official state report, from the second Validation Delegation, titled *A National Strategy for Validation* (SOU 2017:18).

¹⁶ The Knowledge Lift 1997-2002 (Kunskapslyftet) was a project founded by the Swedish Government with the objective of enhancing the level of education for the lowest educated. In a report by the The Knowledge Lift Committee (Kunskapslyftkommittén), validation as a concept was introduced for the first time in Sweden in the mid-90s.

7.2 Regulative elements in policy: Common principles

As earlier noted, validation refers to a practice which is supposed to make visible, recognise, and assess different forms of learning and the results thereof, irrespective of where and when the learning has taken place (Andersson & Fejes, 2014; Gustafsson & Mouwitz, 2008; Pouget & Osborne, 2004; Stenlund, 2011). In taking a new institutional perspective, such potential institutionalisation of validation is not based only on formal regulation but also on normative and cultural/cognitive matters (see, e.g., Mickwitz, 2015; Scott, 2014). Therefore, the result of the policy on validation is structured through the support of Scott's (2014) three institutional pillars; the regulative, the normative, and the cultural/cognitive. In this section the regulative aspects of validation are addressed. Scott suggests that these aspects involve the capacity to establish rules and also to reward others' conformity to those rules. It does not necessarily mean rules in a legal sense, and can be less formal although involving some kind of pressure to follow these rules.

In the Common European Principles and for Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (EC 2004) the European Commission highlights the need for common principles for validation within Europe is stressed. In addressing the Copenhagen Declaration in 2002 which emphasises the need for European cooperation in VET, the purpose is to strengthen comparability and transparency:

Lack of comparability makes it difficult for individuals to realise lifelong learning by combining qualifications and competences acquired in different settings, at different levels and in different countries. Generally speaking, common European principles must make it possible. (EC 2004, p. 3)

The importance of having common principles is emphasised for the sake of transferability and comparability of learning experiences, manifested in competences and qualifications across national boards and between different settings. In also inserting and emphasising the realisation of lifelong learning, the document indicates a wish to include learning outside the formal education system. It can also be taken as a sign that lifelong learning is something that does not occur spontaneously among individuals but needs to be realised by the means of validation and common principles. The common principles are suggested to be based on the existing European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) (EC 2004). In 2009, CEDEFOP published a first edition of the guidelines for validation, drawing on the common European Principles formulated by the European Commission (EC 2004). The guidelines published

by CEDEFOP were the result of the exchange of experiences among representatives from 20 European countries. The argumentation in the document emphasises that validation should be linked to or integrated into national qualification systems. Furthermore, it is suggested that standards for non-formal and informal learning should not deviate from those in formal education as this could give the impression that non-formal and informal learning are inferior (CEDEFOP 2009). To reach such comparability it is stated that validation should be supported by the provision of European benchmarks for qualification levels (CEDEFOP 2009).

Other regulations presented by CEDEFOP (2009) have to do with fundamental principles of validation, described as follows:

- *Validation must be voluntary.*
- *The privacy of individuals should be respected.*
- *Equal access and fair treatment should be guaranteed.*
- *Stakeholders should be involved in establishing systems for validation.*
- *Systems should contain mechanisms for guidance and counselling of individuals.*
- *Systems should be underpinned by quality assurance.*
- *The process, procedures and criteria for validation must be fair, transparent and underpinned by quality assurance.*
- *Systems should respect the legitimate interests of stakeholders and seek balanced participation.*
- *The process of validation must be impartial and avoid conflicts of interest.*
- *The professional competences of those who carry out assessments must be assured.*(CEDEFOP 2009, p. 70)

In both the European Principles from the European Commission (2004) and the guidelines from CEDEFOP (2009) the need for strengthening the comparability and transparency of validation is emphasised. In 2012, the Council of the European Union (CEU 2012) formulated new and stronger recommendation to the member states, including that they shall:

...have in place, no later than 2018, in accordance with national circumstances and specificities, and as they deem appropriate, arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning... (p. 3)

It is thus recommended and more firmly emphasised that member states should put in place arrangements for validation, but it is left to each state to do

so in considering what is deemed appropriate. It is at this point also suggested that validations should be arranged in alignment with the European Qualification Framework (EQF). In the glossary in the end of the document the different steps of validation are identified as: identification, documentation, assessment, and certification (CEU 2012).

In 2012, UNESCO also produced guidelines on validation. This publication was the result of cooperation between the member states in the UN, which implies that those ideas about validation reach beyond Europe, and can be considered global. In this document, matters such as inclusion and equity are emphasised. It is also suggested that the member states in the UN should facilitate the development of national standards and frameworks for validation connected to a shared understanding of learning outcomes. Again, the common principles, national standards, and learning outcomes are at the core of validation.

Sweden has also developed a national standard for validation. In Sweden the Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education is responsible for the coordination of national validation initiatives. This authority took the principles formulated by the European Commission (EC 2004) as the point of departure, and drew explicitly on the guidelines from CEDEFOP (2009). Thus, the European principles of validation, described above, were adopted in Sweden. In this document it is also predicted that a national qualification framework is going to play a crucial role in validation (MYH 2014), and a glossary, similar to those in the international documents (see, e.g., CEDEFOP 2009; UIL 2012) is presented. Descriptions of terms, such as validation, of learning outcomes (*läranderesultat* in Swedish) are more or less the same as in the transnational documents.

In 2015, CEDEFOP published another set of guidelines for validation. This document was the result of cooperation between members of the EU Council of Education Committee, members of the EQF advisory group, participants of the Mechelen European Conference, and also other stakeholders at European and national levels. The guidelines drew on the recommendation from the Councils of European Union (CEU 2012). In both these documents, the suggestions of common principles are taken one step further and are given a clearer outline. In the recommendation of the Councils of European Union (CEU 2012), it is emphasised that validation should be linked to National Qualification Frameworks (NQF), and that these should be in line with the European Qualification Framework (EQF). This recommendation is picked up by CEDEFOP (2015), where it is stated that:

The emerging NQF can be used to influence the way standards are formulated and used. Until recently, the description of national qualification levels have been implicit and based on duration and location of education and training programs. The rapid development and implantation of NQFs can be used to promote the development of explicit, coherent, learning outcomes-based standards for qualifications that could accommodate outcomes of learning in non-formal settings.
(pp. 28-29)

The shift from regarding qualifications as dependent on duration and location to the introduction of qualification frameworks which can promote learning outcomes based standards is highlighted. Also it is clear here that the focus is more on learning, particularly in settings other than formal ones, than on knowledge.

In considering the Swedish documents, the final report of the first Validation Delegation has a somewhat different character from the rest of the documents. This document summarises what has been done up to that point in time – it draw on earlier Swedish official state reports (SOU 2001:78; SOU 2003:21) – and suggests further steps and measures to take with regards to validation in Sweden. However, this final report also stresses the need for comparability between knowledge developed from work life experiences and national curricula. The document Validation with Surplus Value (Ds 2016:24) explicitly draws on the European Council's recommendations (CEU 2012) of having in place arrangements for validation no later than 2018. It also referred to national publications such as Validation Delegation Final Report (2008) and Criteria and Guidelines for Validation of Prior Learning (MYH 2014). In this document a stronger connection to the European recommendations of guidelines and frameworks for validation is suggested. Thus, the document proposes several changes in Swedish education legislation with regards to validation. However, this and all the other policy documents contain not only regulations and legislation with regards to validation, but also many normative matters, involving the values and objectives of validation. These will be addressed next.

7.3 Normative elements: Economic and social

In the previous section I described regulative matters in transnational and national policy on validation. Institutions and processes of institutionalisation are, however, not only dependent on regulations. Norms, values, and objectives may play an equally important role in this process. Berger and Luckman (1967) suggested that an institution develops when humans come to

share an understanding and reach mutual agreements about the social reality. Mutual agreements among agents and organisations are at the core of the institutionalisation process and, besides agreements on regulative matters; the agreements are also based on normative ones. According to Scott (2014) normative elements constitute one of the pillars of which an institution is comprised. Norms and values shed light on the preferred and desirable, and also why and how things should be done. Thus, in this section normative statements in policy on validation are outlined. Furthermore, this section briefly addresses how validation according to those documents is supposed to be conducted in terms of what agents and methods it involves.

In the Common European Principles for Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (EC 2004) it is stated that the policy:

[i]llustrates the crucial economic and social role to be played by validation of non-formal and informal learning, in particular in promoting social integration, employability and lifelong learning of the least qualified individuals, be these youths or adults, unemployed or employed, nationals or immigrants. (p. 2)

From this quotation it is clear that one important objective with validation is its economic and social role in society. In addition validation seems to concern all ages, all nationalities, and both employed and unemployed, but is particularly valuable for the least qualified. The document emphasises the needs of the labour market. In the first edition of guidelines for validation, CEDEFOP (2009) draws on the common European principles formulated by the European Commission (2004). In the summary of this document it is said that:

Validating non-formal and informal learning is increasingly seen as a way of improving lifelong and lifewide learning. More European countries are emphasising the importance of making visible and valuing learning that takes place outside formal education and training institutions, for example at work, in leisure time activities and at home. (CEDEFOP 2009, p. 11)

In this document validation is described as a promising opportunity, and as having a value for its contribution to the improvement of lifelong learning. Again the focus is on learning rather than knowledge, and with the insertion of lifelong and life wide learning the need for valuing learning that takes place outside the formal education institutions is emphasised. The value of learning outside formal education institutions is even more strongly emphasised in the

foreword of the second set of European guidelines for validation, where the objectives and benefits of validation are described as follows:

We are presented with opportunities to learn every day. Beyond the formal classroom setting, we can acquire the most valuable knowledge, skills and competences in our daily lives, be it at work, at home or during leisure time. Learning throughout life is a key route to personal development and acknowledging such learning can give greater value to citizen's achievements and their potential to contribute to society. Despite this, the influence of traditional forms of learning remains strong, with non-formal and informal learning often ignored and undervalued. (CEDEFOP 2015, p. 1)

This quote indicates how validation draws attention to the potential of recognising and making use of the knowledge acquired for example in work, at home and during leisure time. It is argued, in the guidelines from CEDEFOP that the current norm of giving traditional forms of learning primacy remains strong and that learning outside the formal system is undervalued.

Before the publication of the second edition of guidelines for validation (CEDEFOP 2015), the Council of the European Union had published recommendations on validation. The Council of the European Union is responsible for identifying urgent issues of concern in Europe and providing policy for counteracting those issues. In the initial paragraph it is said that:

At a time when the European Union is confronted with a serious economic crisis which has caused a surge in unemployment, especially among young people, and in the context of an ageing population, the validation of relevant knowledge, skills and competences has an even more valuable contribution to make in improving the functioning of the labour market, in promoting mobility and in enhancing competitiveness and economic growth. (CEU 2012, p. 1)

In this quote the crisis in Europe is emphasised, and how validation of relevant knowledge, skills, and competences can provide a solution for a way out of this crisis, in enhancing competitiveness and economic growth through increased participation in the labour market. The objective of increased employability and mobility is clear, and it seems as if this objective can be reached by validating the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in society:

The validation of learning outcomes, namely knowledge, skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning can play an important role in enhancing employability and mobility, as well as increasing motivation for lifelong learning, particularly in the case of the socio-economically disadvantaged or the low-qualified. (CEU 2012, p. 1)

In the same year as the council published these recommendations, UNESCO developed a policy on validation (UIL 2012). This document draws on UNESCO's vision of promoting education for all. In this document also, the validation of learning outcomes is presented as a solution to various societal challenges.

Today, in a complex and fast-changing world, it is necessary for individuals to acquire and adapt competences (knowledge, skills and attitudes) through all forms of learning to cope with various challenges. However, qualifications systems in many societies still focus on formal learning in educational institutions. As a result, a large part of individuals' learning remains unrecognised, and many individuals' motivation and confidence to continue learning is not well promoted. This leads to a huge under-utilisation of human talent and resources in society. Therefore, the learning outcomes that young people and adults acquire in the course of their life in non-formal and informal settings need to be made visible, assessed and accredited. (UIL 2012, p. 3)

In order to cope with challenges in society the recognition of informal and non-formal learning is suggested to play a significant role. Although UNESCO's mission is to promote education for all, from this quote it can be perceived that under-utilisation of talent is the problem rather than a lack of or a need for education. The objectives, values, and normative statements are basically the same in the national documents:

Human resource management is an issue of high priority for Sweden. Labor shortages exist in a large number of professions and both private and public employers have difficulties in finding the right skills. Meanwhile, unemployment rates are high among certain groups, especially among immigrants and people with little formal education. The lack of matching in the labor market is likely to impede growth. (SOU 2017:18, p. 19, my translation)

In this document there is also a societal concern, namely unemployment among those with little formal education. Thus, the objective is to increase employment rates and social cohesion. The Swedish documents are not only very similar to the transnational ones, but explicitly draw on the emergence of validation in the EU and OECD:

Validation is about making visible, evaluating, and documenting and giving recognition to people's prior learning and knowledge. In the EU and the OECD validation is highlighted and emerging as an important tool for lifelong learning, to increase employability and increase labour mobility. Validation can also contribute to the qualification for an education and for more effective education and training and also a more rapid establishment on the labour market. The implementation of validation is thus motivated for educational, labour market and finance political reasons. (Ds 2016:24, p. 9, my translation)

On a transnational, European and national policy level the messages of the objectives for validation are made quite clear. Validation can, according to these policy documents, increase learning, labour market performance, economic growth, equity, mobility, competitiveness, and more. Very little is said about knowledge.

In terms of how the values and objectives of validation are going to be realised, many of the policy documents address questions of how validation is going to be applied and by whom. The European Council (2012) listed a wide range of potential agents and stakeholders:

Employer organisations, individual employers, trade unions, chambers of industry, commerce and skilled crafts, national entities involved in the process of recognising professional qualifications and in assessing and certifying learning outcomes, employment services, youth organisations youth workers, education and training providers, as well as civil society organisations are all key stakeholders with an important role to play in facilitating opportunities for non-formal and informal learning and any subsequent validation processes. (p. 1)

In the later guidelines from CEDEFOP (2015) key stakeholders in validation are also addressed, here with some clarification with regards to what tasks stakeholders on European, national, regional, local, business, and voluntary sector levels can be assigned. It is briefly outlined that on the European level the task is to provide guidelines, on the national it is to provide legislation and

determine roles and responsibility, on the regional level it is about providing support to education and training institutions. Such institutions should have the task of carrying out the validation and providing support to individuals. It is also mentioned that both the business sector and voluntary sector can carry out validation. In the Swedish documents the complex division of agents, stakeholders and roles on a national level are also described (Ds 2016:24; MYH 2014; Validation Delegation, 2008).

As validation is supposed to account for all kinds of learning outcomes, and as noted involves many different agents and organisations, it calls into question how and with what methods all of these knowledge, skills and competences are going to be validated. CEDEFOP (2009) proposes a combination of methods which are sensitive to individuals' spikey profiles and different non-standardised learning experiences, and gives a list of examples:

- *debate: offers the candidate an opportunity to demonstrate depth of knowledge as well as communicative skills;*
- *declarative methods: based on individuals' own identification and recording of their competences, normally signed off by a third party, to verify the self-assessment;*
- *interviews can be used to clarify issues raised in documentary evidence presented and/or to review the scope and depth of the learning;*
- *observation: extracting evidence of competence from an individual while they are performing everyday tasks at work;*
- *portfolio method: using a mix of methods and instruments employed in consecutive stages to produce a coherent set of documents or work samples showing an individual's skills and competences in different ways. It is now possible to extend the classification to encompass some assessment methods that are common but not easy to classify using the five categories above;*
- *presentation: can be formal or informal and can be used to check ability to present information in a way appropriate to the subject and the audience;*
- *simulation and evidence extracted from work: where individuals are placed in a situation that fulfils all the criteria of the real-life scenario to have their competences assessed;*
- *tests and examinations: identifying and validating informal and non-formal learning through or with the help of examinations in the formal system. (p. 59)*

In the second set of guidelines from CEDEFOP (2015) it is stressed that a variety of methods should be used and combined in appropriate ways, and that the selected tools should be “fit for purpose” (p. 45). In the Swedish documents there are suggestions and concerns about what methods to use in validation. In the report from the first Validation Delegation it is stated that “measuring knowledge often means something different from assessing actual competence” (the Swedish term is *reell kompetens* meaning actual competence but it is often translated to prior learning). (Validation Delegation, 2008, p. 15, my translation). It is suggested that methods for validation, such as interviews and observations, need to be developed. The concern of what methods and models to use in validation is still an issue in the later documents where it is stated that Sweden has “...a wild grown flora of validation models...” (p. 54, my translation). Furthermore, it is stressed that there is a need for quality assurance of what methods to use in validation and also that those who conduct validation have both subject specific competence and validation competence.

In accounting for all kinds of outcomes of learning experiences, using a variety of methods with many different agents involved, it becomes crucial to figure out what is taken for granted about knowledge and in particular vocational knowledge. This will be done in the following section in a discussion of cultural/cognitive aspects of the potential institutionalisation of of validation.

7.4 Cultural/cognitive elements: Outcomes of lifelong learning

So far, the regulative and normative elements of the potential institutionalisation of the concept of validation have been addressed. In following Scott (2014), an institution is comprised of yet another pillar – the cultural/cognitive. According to Scott this pillar has to do with shared conceptions as well as frames for meaning making. In this thesis, it is suggested that this pillar highlights not only cultural values, actions, and symbols, but also prevailing understandings of knowledge, that are taken for granted. Normally, this pillar is associated with cultural/ cognitive matters in certain historical and cultural practices such as a for example workplaces. However, it is relevant to address this pillar at the policy level as well since there are explicit intents of harmonising conceptions and understandings of knowledge and thereby facilitate mobility of knowledge through the practice of validation. Thus, it becomes relevant to explore what is taken for granted about vocational knowledge. This will be done in this section.

The main assumption in most of the documents (more strongly emphasised in the later ones) is that all sorts of learning such as formal, non-formal learning, and informal all count. These different forms of learning result in outcomes. The learning outcomes are to be assessed with support of qualification frameworks, with different levels and the descriptors of knowledge, skills, and competences. In making this assumption the documents suggest that transparency and comparability are enhanced across Europe:

The gradual shift to learning outcomes currently taking place across Europe may support overall transparency and comparability as it (gradually) promotes a common way of expressing knowledge, skills and competences across different economic sectors and education and training qualifications. (CEDEFOP 2015, p. 15)

In the various policy documents on validation there is a strong emphasis on lifelong learning and the learning outcomes thereof. There are no explicit references to vocational knowledge, but rather normative statements that valuable learning is taking place everywhere, including in the workplace. Vocational knowledge must therefore, from reading these documents, be understood as one aspect of lifelong learning producing learning outcomes. The shift to learning outcomes is said to be a new and innovative approach and part of a new learning paradigm. This shift is defined and described in a report from CEDEFOP (2008). The concept was introduced during the mid-1980s to support employability. It turned the interest from input factors of learning, such as how the learning should be organised, with what methods, and what duration. Instead it is stated that there is no single correct way of learning, and that it is what comes out of it that is interesting (CEDEFOP 2008). This could be taken as a sign of how the interest is turned to the results of learning taken as meaning knowledge, but the question of knowledge is not addressed in this document.

In the report from CEDEFOP (2008) learning outcomes are also connected to a social constructivist view of learning. In this report, a distinction is made between the social constructivist approach to learning and the cognitivist and the behaviouristic approaches: the behaviouristic and cognitive approaches to learning are said to be based on ideas of one ideal way of learning, learning as an individual endeavour, and the belief that tacit learning is an inferior form of learning, along with the belief that learning is centered around the accumulation of facts (CEDEFOP 2008). It is further stated that the social constructivist approach, and hence active learning, is now widely accepted:

The point is that the cognitive approach tends to emphasise individual acquisition of certain kinds of learning, whilst

approaches based on ideas of active learning tend to emphasise the dynamic role of social relationships and the situations in which learning takes place. In the research and theory of Lave and Wenger (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1999), this is summed up by the importance given to communities of practice. The communities of practice concept is not a tabulation of outcomes, but is currently enjoying a strong influence on how learning takes place and, therefore, on outcomes. (CEDEFOP 2008, pp. 18-19)

It is interesting to note the argumentation for using the theory of communities of practice in which learning is regarded as situated in practice, heavily contextualised, and thus time and space dependent, for the validation of learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are explicitly not dependent on duration and location of learning (CEDEFOP 2015).

In relating the learning outcomes orientation in the transnational documents to the national ones, it is almost the same in the later Swedish documents. In these documents (Ds 2016:24; SOU 2017:18); there are strong emphasis on learning outcomes (in Swedish learning outcomes is translated to *läranderesultat* which means results of learning). A notable exception among the national documents is the final report from the first Validation Delegation. In this document there is a prologue in which the delegation's conception and understanding of knowledge is outlined through a description of a nursing aide's work. Josefsson (2008) refers in this prologue to a nursing aide's narrative about her work in an emergency unit at a hospital, selecting patients in need of emergency care. Relating to Aristotle, Josefsson further suggests that a knowledgeable worker needs different forms of knowledge. The first form is about knowing *that*, which requires knowledge about facts. The second form is that of knowing *how*, which means to have skills. Lastly, the knowledgeable practitioner needs to know *when* to take action or not to. When to take action refers to the form of knowledge which is often referred to as *phronesis*. Josefsson further notes that this form of knowledge is not scientific in so far that it always can be proven or generalised, but rather turns the focus towards for example intuition, judgement, and creativity. It is explicitly stressed that this view of knowledge had guided the whole delegation. In this document it is also stated that the validation of knowledge, irrespective of learning context, should be described in terms of facts, skills, understanding, and acquaintance which are the aspects of knowledge used in the Swedish curriculum. In the later Swedish documents the focus is turned to learning outcomes, which implies a slightly different knowledge conception, more in alignment with the European standard of learning outcomes. Thus, there are differences in conceptions and understandings of knowledge, but over time

there are increasingly more similarities between Swedish, European, and transnational documents. These similarities will be further discussed in the following section, through support of the new institutional concept of isomorphism.

7.5 Isomorphism in policy on validation

In this thesis it is assumed that validation is potentially becoming institutionalised, and the following explores whether this assumption is reasonable based on the results of the reading of policy documents on validation. The intention in taking a new institutional perspective is to account for how organisations tend to be influenced by other organisations (Emirbayer & Johnson, 2008; Di Maggio & Powell, 1983, Powell, 2007, Scott, 2014). In the process of institutionalisation an organisational field develops. According to Powell (2007), a developing organisational field is characterised by increased interaction among organisations in the field. Signs of this interaction are the emergence of patterns of coalition, an increase in the information load with which organisations must contend, and the development of a mutual awareness among participants that they are involved in a common enterprise. Scott (2014) also concluded that one important sign of an organisational field is that the different agents and organisations take each other into account. As a result of reading policy produced by different organisations, it is quite obvious that the organisations selected are taking each other into account, as they explicitly draw on one another's publications. For example, the Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education (MYH, 2014) draws explicitly on the European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning (CEDEFOP 2009). CEDEFOP in its turn took on the task of providing policy based on the European Council's (2004) recommendations. Furthermore, the later recommendations from European Council's (2012) resulted in new guidelines from CEDEFOP (2015). These guidelines and recommendations were also later referred to and adopted in the Swedish policy documents (see, e.g., Ds, 2016; SOU, 2017).

It is also noteworthy that there are many different kinds of organisations in the policy field of validation. There are organisations connected to the European Union such as CEDEFOP and other organisations such as UNESCO. UNESCO's mission is to work for peace, human rights, and equal access to education. Although this organisation differs from the others in its mission, on a policy level all organisations advocate for validation in a very similar manner. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) conclude that although organisations within an organisational field would be expected to strive for uniqueness, sometimes as a matter of competitiveness they tend instead to become more similar. Di Maggio and Powell identify different forms of homogenisation

captured in different isomorphic processes. The first form of isomorphism is coercive and related to regulations and standards which put pressure on organisations to become more similar. As the explicit intent of the policy on validation is to harmonise education, introduce benchmarks and common standards, and to include validation in this mission throughout Europe, it is not surprising that this form of isomorphism occurs in response to recommendations from the Council of the European Union (2012) to the member states of putting in place arrangements for validation.

The explicit intent with the policy on validation is to facilitate comparability between learning contexts and experiences and thus promote mobility of knowledge. This can be seen as a process of coercive isomorphism. Another form of isomorphism is by Di Maggio and Powell labelled normative isomorphism. The policy documents are also, as shown, pervaded with objectives and the benefits of validation along with the values and norms it involves. Thus, it can be claimed that there is a high degree of normative isomorphism with regards to what is expected to be achieved by validation. The normative isomorphism is connected and entwined in a mimetic isomorphism, as the way of expressing the promise of validation is very similar among the different policy producers, although the organisations might have different missions.

In summary, there are grounds for seeing validation as potentially becoming institutionalised and as being an institution in the making, at the policy level. It would be a bold claim, though, to say that validation is an established institution. Judging only from policy does not reveal whether or not the potential benefits of validation can be realised. Furthermore, the concept of validation is quite vague and has loose boundaries. The vagueness and the loose boundaries threaten its legitimacy and decrease the possibilities for a common understanding. A common understanding of the social reality is the very foundation of an institution. However, based on the previous discussions, to interpret validation as a potential institution in the making seems to be a reasonable assumption for the theorising of this thesis. Next I will discuss on what this institutionalisation process is built in terms of its regulative, normative, and cultural/cognitive elements.

7.6. Comparability as crucial

In terms of how validation is supposed to be regulated according to the different policy documents, there seems to be an agreement on the need for common standards and principles. For validation to become trustworthy and legitimate it needs to be based on common and transparent principles. The legitimacy of the regulative pillar is, according to Scott (2014) based on

standard setting and on rule following, of both formal and informal rules. This is apparent already in the early documents where the lack of comparability in common standards is expressed as a major concern. Furthermore, such comparability and common principles are suggested to be based on the existing ECTS. It is emphasised that it is important that the principles are the same for all kinds of learning outcomes otherwise informal and non-formal learning could be perceived as inferior (CEDEFOP 2009). In later documents this comparability and standard setting is stressed even more strongly, through the clearer directives of using national qualification frameworks and the use of the European Qualification Framework as the template. This is aligned with the legitimacy of the regulative pillar, often based on an instrumental logic (Scott, 2014).

One promising opportunity with the validation of knowledge developed outside the formal education institutions is that it must include workplaces. With the introduction of benchmarks and qualification frameworks, this value can be defined at a certain level and identified in terms of knowledge, skills, and competences. With clear and common principles, fairness and equivalence in validation of learning outcomes can be reached, as the suggested regulations also come with the promise of facilitating and making transparent the comparability of learning experiences also across institutional borders.

The ideas these regulations are based on assume that vocational knowledge can be compared along the same lines as knowledge gained in formal education institutions. However, one obvious problem is that the traditions and idiosyncrasies within various vocations are not accounted for. Another risk as suggested by Young (2010) would be that regulations, such as qualification frameworks, transfer the agency from those with specialised knowledge to those with procedural and generic knowledge about the frameworks. This concern becomes even more relevant, considering the master-apprentice tradition that is common in many vocations. Is a master capable of assessing whether an apprentice has vocational knowledge, or is someone with only procedural knowledge of the frameworks better placed? This question is connected to the research questions about agency and institutional arrangements and will be further explored later. Next the normative elements of the institutionalisation process will be discussed.

7.7 Market driven and progressive as normative elements

It is obvious from the reading of transnational and national policies that validation is expected to fill various societal needs, such as to increase economic growth and decrease social segregation. Many arguments for

validation have to do with the functioning of the labour market and expectations of economic growth. In this regard, there is a clear connection between national and transnational documents in this respect. The connection is not only a matter of formulation but also of explicit references like: “In the EU and the OECD validation is highlighted and emerging as an important tool for lifelong learning, to increase employability and increase labour mobility” (Ds 2016:24, p. 9). The need for labour becomes particularly evident in the later documents in which it is stated for example that; “Labour shortage exists in a large number of professions” (Ds 2016:24, p. 19). As Werquin (2014) suggests, economic competitiveness is at the centre of most decisions in the arena of lifelong learning. This is also the case in the Nordic countries which has earlier been known for an interest in learning for its own sake. In considering the legitimacy of the normative pillar which is, according to Scott (2014), connected to extrinsic rewards such as being useful and profitable, these can be seen as important arguments in the process of institutionalisation.

Beside economic motives for validation, there are social ones, which is yet another argument fitting with the legitimacy of the normative pillar. The social incitements for validation have an inclusive intention and include “all”, for example: “unemployed or employed, nationals or immigrants” (EC 2004, p. 2). Sometimes it seems as if validation is particularly valuable for “the socio-economically disadvantaged or the low-qualified” (CEU 2012, p. 1). With this rhetoric there is a risk of diminishing people and to make validation appear as an act of charity. In addition, if people really are low-qualified, more education could be a more relevant option than validation. There are also many normative statements in which the validation of learning outcomes is described as something modern, non-traditional, and as such seemingly opposed to formal education. It can almost be perceived that the arguments for validation in policy take a stance against formal education: “systems in many societies still focus on formal learning in educational institutions” (UIL 2012, p. 3), or how “the influence of traditional forms of learning remains strong, with non-formal and informal learning often ignored and undervalued” (CEDEFOP 2015, p. 1).

It is worthwhile reflecting on what these promising arguments exclude even though they give validation its normative legitimacy. Recognition might be connected to self-esteem, and not only to labour market performance. Profit and economic growth could be seen as dependent on finite natural resources and not only on increased employability. The arguments for equity are to a large extent based on economic growth linked to the labour market and never on the consequences of the contemporary economic distribution. As Young (2010) has argued, the arguments for the marketisation of education are often put forward with the support of claims of fairness. This implies that both the

economy and social equity converge into issues of the labour market. Instead of emphasising vocational knowledge as being valuable in its own right and absolutely crucial for most of us in our daily lives, validation is connected to the economy, the labour market, and to social disadvantage. To connect validation to both growth and equity makes it appear to fit all needs, and to be a solution to all thinkable societal concerns, in being both market driven and progressive. There is a risk that the interest paid to advanced vocational knowledge is overrun by social and economic imperatives. With this rhetoric, there is an obvious risk that the complexity of vocational knowledge is underestimated and replaced by a diminishing rhetoric of disadvantaged people. In line with what Gustafsson and Mouwitz (2008) conclude, attention to vocational knowledge is overshadowed by economical and ideological assumptions. Thus, epistemic and cultural discussions that would be of relevance for the validation of vocational knowledge are notable by their absence. This is in line with Bohlinger's (2012) suggestion that sound research based definitions and discussions about knowledge are virtually absent in most of the documents. Although the policy documents on validation are said to focus on learning outside the formal system, which includes workplaces, the overall concept of knowledge is not vocational knowledge, but that of learning outcomes, as discussed in the next section.

7.8 Learning outcomes applying to any knowledge

With few exceptions, the conceptions and understandings of vocational knowledge are built into the idea of lifelong learning and the potential of validating the learning outcomes thereof. However, it seems as if an informed discussion about the idiosyncrasies of vocational knowledge, and the potential difficulties in comparing knowledge across national as well as institutional borders such as those of academia and work life, is missing.

As a result of the reading of policy documents there are no explicit considerations of vocational knowledge, but instead descriptions of the terminology, similar to that presented in sections 4.2 and 4.3. Basically, the interest is turned to learning outcomes derived from formal, non-formal learning, and informal learning and the knowledge, skills, and competences developed through this learning. To sum up, in policy documents there are more justifications for validation and its regulations and objectives than examples, elaborations, and clarifications of knowledge. The idea of learning outcomes, which is supposed to include vocational knowledge, is strongly connected to the labour market and economic growth, as discussed in the previous section. Furthermore, there are many agents involved; often sharing

the conviction of validation and its potential, but they do so from different positions.

7.9 Conceptions and understandings of vocational knowledge in policy

The idea of learning outcomes, which is supposed to include vocational knowledge, is strongly connected to the labour market and economic growth, as shown in the previous sections. To conclude, the concepts and understandings about vocational knowledge in policy on validation are very general, vague, and conceptually weak, and vocational knowledge is treated just like any other learning outcome, ignoring its tradition, its specific conditions and contexts and different knowledge bases. In considering the question of knowledge, there is, in policy, more attention paid to different learning contexts and different ways to develop knowledge. Thus, in policy, the focus is on learning, rather than knowledge, not least on lifelong learning. The question of knowledge itself is more or less absent. In continuing to try to consider what is stated about knowledge, and to compare the national and transnational documents, it is relevant to turn to the learning outcomes orientation utilising the knowledge conception of the KSC-typology, and to compare it with the Aristotelian inspired Swedish curricula conception and the prologue in first Validation Delegation's report (2008).

In the knowledge conception of the Swedish curriculum the practice is considered as the point of departure for development of knowledge (see section 4.2). This practice oriented view is also visible in the prologue of the first Validation Delegation (2008) where the knowledgeable nursing aide is described, and also how being knowledgeable means to know *that*, know *how*, and know *when* to take action, related to Aristotles' concepts of episteme, techne, and phronesis.

Although there are not many explanations of the underpinnings of the KSC-typology (see section 4.4 for a description), the learning outcomes orientation is, in the document *The Shift to Learning Outcomes* (CEDEFOP 2008), said to be based on a practice oriented view of learning (knowledge is not described). Still, in the KSC-typology skills are identified as the ability to apply knowledge, potentially separating thinking from doing, a separation challenged in the practice turn. In the Swedish curriculum, skill is but one aspect of knowledge, together with facts, understanding, and acquaintance. Yet another difference is that competence (or capability) in the Swedish curriculum is subject- or vocation specific, and developed from the different aspects of knowledge; whereas in the KSC-typology competence is an aspect of a qualification at the same level as knowledge. From this line of reasoning,

autonomy and independence can be seen as built into the Swedish curricula conception of knowledge, and thus competence; whereas in the KSC-typology independence and responsibility are requirements stated in the competence descriptor.

The KSC-typology is used within the admission procedure of VTE, in line with what is suggested in the later national documents on validation. It is important, though, to have considered the knowledge conception of the Swedish curricula, as those involved in validation may be influenced by this as well. This kind of potential conceptual confusion leaves much of the responsibility to those involved in different kinds of validation, possibly relying on both national and transnational documents. It remains to be explored how and if the policy ideas about the organisation of validation and understandings of knowledge reflect the actual practice of validation prior to VTE in Sweden. The potential conceptual confusion should be explored rather than assuming that there are connections or whether any issues arising from it. The next section is therefore concerned with study counsellors involved in validation prior to the VTE at the organisational level of HEIs in Sweden.

8. VALIDATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

In this section the HEIs are addressed by presenting the results from the interviews with the study counsellors at each HEI responsible for validation prior to VTE. In the previous chapter, on policy, it was concluded that interpreting validation as an institution in the making is reasonable. Thus, the result of the interviews with study counsellors are structured through the support of Scott's (2014) pillars of an institution; the regulative, the normative and the cultural/cognitive in a similar manner to that in the previous chapter. After the presentation of ideas about the organisation of validation, related to each pillar, a brief summary and conclusion follow. Finally, I present a discussion about conceptions and understandings of vocational knowledge reveal the study counsellors' identities but to be able to differentiate between those who take care of the validation within the institution, they were named as: Study counsellors 1–4. The others were accordingly named Study counsellors 5–10.

8.1 Criteria and framework: A regulatory focus

An institution provides meaning and stability to actions and behaviours, within the institution, which also gives the institution legitimacy from outside (Eriksson-Zetterqvist, 2009; Johansson, 2002; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 2014). As was concluded in the previous chapter, there are signs of institutionalisation of validation and a common understanding of many of its benefits. A common understanding of the social reality is at the very foundation of an institution, although it is not evident that the policy intentions are altogether reflected in the actual conduct of validation within the admission procure. How this validation, prior to VTE, is conducted with regards to ideas of its organisation will be explored in this chapter. The validation within the admission procedure takes place in the established institution of academia, in collaboration with other agents such as vocational experts from the trades and industries. In the following section, the regulative elements of validation are addressed. As was the case in the chapter on policy, regulative elements refer for example to criteria and guidelines for validation.

8.1.1 Vocational knowledge turned into subject content

One of the changes which have been adopted in the current admission procedure is that of including vocational subjects. The Swedish Council for Higher Education has produced more than 200 criteria for different vocational

subjects. Examples of these were given in section 2.1. The applicants select vocational subjects for which they consider themselves to have relevant vocational knowledge. In order to prove this knowledge they submit workplace certificates and write narratives of their vocational knowledge. The assessment of these subjects is then supposed to be done in conjunction with the Swedish Qualification Framework (SeQF). I happened to say “vocation” instead of subject during some of the first interviews with study counsellors, but I was quickly corrected:

Study counsellor: *Not vocations but subjects!*

Interviewer: *Yes, subjects.*

Study counsellor: *There is a difference you know. This is subjects. So you have to pick and gather these in some way. But if it is a vocation that is much more...*

Interviewer: *It is extensive?*

Study counsellor: *Very extensive procedure...¹⁷ (Study counsellor 10 and myself)*

This dialogue sheds light on the shift from vocations or vocational areas to subjects, and also that those subjects can be seen as a reduction of what a vocation might include. The criteria are not based on vocations or vocational areas but subjects, similar to those found in formal education. According to the instructions the study counsellors have, the vocational knowledge shall be assessed with regards to a criterion expressed as such a subject. Many of the study counsellors had concerns about the criteria and one of them said:

... it is all the time emphasised that we do not think of anything else other than that it is those criterion lines of text which it is about, and it is, with regards to the knowledge that is stated there, but there is no real knowledge it's rather expressed as specialised...you know...so it is general as hell...¹⁸ (Study counsellor 4)

The criteria are obviously perceived as very general, which makes them difficult to interpret and use. I did not ask what should count as real

¹⁷ Studievägledare: Inte till yrken utan till ämnen

Intervjuare: Ja, ämnen.

Studievägledare: Där är en skillnad vet du. För är det ämnen. Då får man ju liksom plocka ihop på något sätt. Men är det ett helt yrke. Det är mycket mer.

Intervjuare: Det är omfattande?

Studievägledare: Mycket omfattande procedur: (Studievägledare 10 och jag själv)

¹⁸ ...det trycks hela tiden på att tänk inte på nåt annat än att det är dom här kriterieraderna som det handlar om, och det är det, utifrån dom kunskaper som står där som ska, men där står inga reella kunskaper utan det står liksom uttryck i specialiserade...du vet...så där allmänt som tusan...äh... (Studievägledare 4)

knowledge, but the concern about how general the criteria are may also have to do with the limited specific content related to vocational knowledge. One study counsellor had struggled with the criteria for years, and finally succeeded in making some sense of their meaning, and said:

I thought it was very difficult in the beginning, I must say. It was really tricky with these...yes, but they have to meet the criteria and I think our experts are struggling with it. I think it is because they are very academically written and I have noticed that many of our students in the vocational teacher program, they do by no means have this academic background...these criteria are thrown in their face directly, and of course this may make many of them consider 'what am I going to get myself into?'¹⁹ (Study counsellor 8)

The quote highlights the importance of and reliance on these criteria, but at the same time a concern is expressed. The concern is that they are academically written and therefore difficult to interpret, not least for the vocational experts. However, this in itself does not explain the study counsellors' own difficulties in interpreting the criteria. It is, though, not clear whether the problem is that the criteria are academically written, that there is too little content, or that it is not common outside of education institutions to organise content as subjects. There seem to be difficulties in using the criteria, and it must be seen as very problematic that they take study counsellors years to master. Those who are using the criteria for assessing vocational knowledge – or subjects thereof – are put into a difficult position, not to mention the applicants who are unlikely to have years to spend only on comprehending the criteria. The most common concern regarding the criteria, among the study counsellors, was however that they are fuzzy:

I think that these criteria of knowledge by UHR (Swedish Council for Higher Education, my comment)...we are trying to use them quite a lot or maybe really a lot but they are...I don't know...I think that's a bit difficult because in some ways they must be quite fuzzy but sometimes one wishes for more support from them.²⁰ (Study counsellor 7)

¹⁹ Jag tyckte det var jättesvårt från början det måste jag säga. Det var jätteknept det där med att dom...ja men dom ska uppfylla kriterierna och jag tror att våra bedömare har lite problematiskt med det här. Jag tror det för dom är ju väldigt akademiskt skrivna och jag märker ju att många av våra studenter som går yrkeslärarprogrammet dom har ju inte alls den här akademiska bakgrunden och då ser dom...det slängs ju i ansiktet på dom på direkten dom här kriterierna och det är klart det kan ju få flera att fundera på vad är det jag ska ge mig in i naturligtvis? (Studievägledare 8)

²⁰ Jag tycker att dom här UHRs kunskapskriterier...man försöker ju använda dom ganska mycket eller kanske väldigt mycket till och men dom är ju...jag vet inte...det där tycker jag är lite svårt för på ett

Again this points to the fact that the criteria are to a large extent accounted for and used. It is interesting that some fuzziness is regarded as inevitable or even desirable. It could be that this reflection expresses a concern for how difficult and extensive validation would otherwise be, if all vocations had very detailed criteria. When the criteria are too fuzzy and difficult to interpret, many of the study counsellors said that they use the syllabi for different vocational programs in Upper Secondary School where the content is much more elaborated upon and explicitly described. Also, when they are counselling applicants who find the writing of narratives difficult, in relation to the criteria, the study counsellors recommended the applicants to turn to the syllabi for vocational subjects in the curriculum for Upper Secondary School. As a way of tackling the situation in which the study counsellors and also the applicants find themselves, it can be perceived as a good idea to find a more detailed description of particular vocational knowledge and its content. It is, though, noteworthy that the syllabi in the curriculum are yet another recontextualised and educationalised form of vocational knowledge, in an admission procedure said to be based on increased attention to vocational knowledge in work.

Beside fulfilling the criteria, the validation of vocational knowledge prior to VTE is supposed to be done in conjunction with level five in the Swedish qualification framework, which has the descriptors knowledge, skills, and competence, as described in sections 2.1 and 4.4. The study counsellors' perceptions of those descriptors will be accounted for in the next section.

8.1.2 Difficulties with descriptors

All study counsellors talked at length, expressively, and engaged in relation to the applicants. They also gave many examples of the students' vocational backgrounds and their knowledge, and of the meetings and interesting discussions they had been involved in with the applicants. None of them brought up the subject of the knowledge-typology in the qualification framework spontaneously. My question about how they perceived the descriptors of knowledge, skill, and competence appeared to be difficult. Doubtless, the question of knowledge is difficult, but it also seemed delicate for some reason. The question appeared to make some uncomfortable, and I, myself, also became uncomfortable in posing it. For my part, I felt as if I were cross examining them with regards to how they followed the instructions, which was not my intention at all. One possibility, for the discomfort I perceived is that they actually felt cross-examined. Another possibility is that they found these descriptors difficult to use. One study counsellor expressed it like this:

sätt kanske dom måste vara ganska luddigt uttryckta men man skall ibland vilja ha lite mer stöd i dom.
(Studievägledare 7)

It is really not possible to divide up. It becomes just like one mess, and then you can catch certain aspects where you can see that they have the skill or the competence, even if they have not had the ability to explicitly express it.²¹ (Study counsellor 1)

Another response to this question was:

Knowledge that is...it's difficult...that's what is so hard because someone can say that they can, or there's a piece of paper which proves that they can and we can...we can succeed in recognising this...true or false we never know for sure, but skills and competences it is the ability to transform knowledge and most often in these kinds of vocation to some sort of doing and that we can never really...we'll never reach there.²² (Study counsellor 4)

From this quote competence and skills can be construed as connected to knowledge; and it is also mentioned that knowledge is often expressed in actions, which means that these aspects of knowledge are not possible to reach in this admission procedure. The responses indicated that it is difficult to divide vocational knowledge into those descriptors, where knowledge is understood as a category of its own, as is competence. Furthermore, in relying on certificates and written narratives for validation of vocational knowledge, some important aspects of vocational knowledge are not reachable, but instead rendered invisible.

Another way of expressing the difficulties of using the descriptors was simply by avoiding the question and by referring to meetings with networks of colleagues:

Knowledge it works...it can be defined by some means...but separating it from competence. I hope it will come out more during these meetings we will have because right now I do not take a stand on anything.²³ (Study counsellor 10)

²¹ Det går ju inte att dela upp det egentligen. Det blir bara en enda gröt av det och så kan man ju fånga upp vissa olika där man ser att det har den förmågan eller färdigheten liksom även om de kanske inte har uttryckt det explicit. (Studievägledare 1)

²² Kunskap är ju...det är ju svårt...det är det som är så svårt för någon kan ju säga att man kan eller det finns på papper att man kan och det kan man ju...det lyckas vi ju få fram...sant eller falsk det vet vi ju aldrig men färdighet och förmåga det är ju att kunna omsätta kunskapen och då oftast i de är yrkena till ett görande liksom och det kan vi aldrig riktigt...dit kommer vi aldrig liksom. (Studievägledare 4)

²³ Kunskap den går ju...den kan man definiera någotsånär...men att skilja den från förmåga. Jag hoppas att det kommer fram mer vi de här mötena vi ska ha för just nu tar jag inte ställning till någonting. (Studievägledare 10)

This study counsellor was hesitant as to whether it is possible to distinguish knowledge from competence. Furthermore, this study counsellor emphasised the need for discussing such issues with colleagues. The study counsellors also have regular meetings with representatives from the Swedish Council for Higher Education. On these occasions they also have separate meetings, divided into two groups. One group is those who use ValiWeb and the other is those conduct their own validation. Many of the study counsellors talked about these meetings and how the criteria, the framework and the like were brought up, discussed, and became clarified.

It may be that there are so many other issues within the validation procedure that the descriptors must be given a subordinate meaning. A sign of this is that one study counsellor seemed to simply be reminded of their existence, when I asked about them:

Yes, now the words were placed under spotlight for me. The words...yes, it will be as three different dimensions at this level (of the framework, my comment) in relation to these criteria.²⁴
(Study counsellor 3)

The typology of knowledge, skill, and competence is commonly used within higher education, and one study counsellor was hesitant whether this is right, and possible to adopt for vocational knowledge. Vocational knowledge was suggested be difficult to divide into those descriptors:

I have huge difficulties seeing this is about knowledge and understanding and I also think this is a desire to approach, so to speak, the national goals used in universities because there you have knowledge, understanding and so on...and evaluation, competence and attitude and skill and capability, and I do not know if it gets it quite right actually. I don't know. I'm hesitant. These are parallel, the systems, and to some extent you can see similarities between them but to some extent it's...it's a knowledge that's not...ah...easily divided, I think, into knowledge understanding, skill ability and value and attitude...well...at least we have not worked so much with it.²⁵ (Study counsellor 8)

²⁴ Ja, nu fick de strålkastarljus igen för mig. Orden...ja för det blir ju som tre olika dimensioner i den här nivån i förhållande till de här kriterierna. (Studievägledare 3)

²⁵ Jag har jättesvårt att se det här med kunskap och förståelse och jag tror också att det är en önskan att närma sig så att säga dom nationella målen i högskolan för där finns ju kunskap, förståelse och så vidare...och värderingsförmåga och förhållningsätt och färdighet och förmåga och jag vet inte om det blir riktigt rätt faktiskt. Jag vet inte. Jag är tveksam. Dom ligger ju parallellt dom här systemen och till viss del kan man se likheter i dom men till viss del så är det...det är ett kunnande som inte...äh...så lätt kan indelas i tycker jag kunskap förståelse, färdighet förmåga och värderingsförmåga och förhållningssätt...äh...vi har i alla fall inte jobbat så mycket med det. (Studievägledare 8)

From this quote, it becomes evident that there are many terms and notions of knowledge in circulation. This study counsellor mentioned, for example, understanding, which might appear foreign in relation to the descriptors in framework, but this is an aspect of knowledge in the Swedish curricula conception as described in section 4.2. There is also, in this quote, a descriptor such as attitude from other typologies, as for example that of the European Union's key competencies, described in section 4.4. This might be an indicator of how different conceptions and typologies are at play simultaneously in the validation of vocational knowledge. Actually, it can be seen as a very natural consequence of having at play the syllabi for vocational programs in Upper Secondary School, the criteria, and the qualification framework, and possibly also other typologies. That the question of knowledge is difficult is obvious from the study counsellors' accounts, and, as one of them said:

Well, this you can talk about for a long time. Well, I think like this, that knowledge, if one is going to try to divide it just quickly, knowledge is more about the theoretical I think. But you can develop knowledge through practical experience as well. Competence, competence it's like being able to do something. It's almost like explaining the concept of porous, because you explain it by using the word itself. So I mean the competence will be a bit like that. So competence is to know how to do something. You may be able to do something at a theoretical level, but you may not be able to perform it and I think that performance is the competence.²⁶ (Study counsellor 7)

This quote indicates that knowledge is connected to theories, and that knowledge also develops from practical experience. Competence is also linked to a holistic workplace performance and the distinction between practical and theoretical knowledge. This distinction seems to be yet another issue for the study counsellors. One possible reason for this difficulty might be found in the vocational subject criteria where the requirement is expressed as: *Specialised (experiential and theoretical) knowledge* (see, section 2.1). This first sentence is the same for the whole collection of vocational subject criteria, and is a formulation borrowed from the qualification framework. The term *specialised*

²⁶ Ja, det där kan man prata om länge. Ja, jag tänker väl såhär att kunskap om man nu ska försöka dela in det lite snabbt kunskaper handlar i så fall mer om det teoretiska tänker jag. Men man kan ha kunskap genom praktisk erfarenhet också. Kompetens, kompetens det är ju liksom att kunna utföra nånting. Det är ungefär som när man ska förklara begreppet poröst då förklarar man det med att använda ordet självt. Så jag menar kompetenser blir lite sådär. Alltså kompetens det är ju att kunna utföra nånting. Man kan kunna nånting på ett teoretiskt plan men man kanske inte kan utföra det och det där utförande det är kompetensen tänker jag. (Studievägledare 7)

refers to level five in the framework, and can be understood as the level of the relevant vocational knowledge required for gaining entry into VTE. In the criteria it is also stated that this specialised knowledge shall be both experiential and theoretical. Here, it becomes elusive as to whether *experiential* is a form of knowledge or refers to a process of learning, illustrated by the expression “*you can develop knowledge through practical experience as well*”. It is thus not clear whether this formulation – theoretical and experiential – refers to the process of learning and the learning site being described as formal, non-formal learning, and informal in policy (see, e.g., section 4.4), or if it should be understood as a dualistic knowledge conception. When I asked about the descriptors, the explanation from another study counsellor turned into this matter of theoretical and experiential:

(sigh) There are two in these criteria, the first is about knowledge. There it says that you should have specialised knowledge...but it shall also be theoretical and experiential, and we have discussed this in the network. Then we have the second paragraph which is about the ability to perform specialised tasks, and then it is stated in what area. Ah, I did not really answer your question right away, but I'll guess I get there maybe. But in this first paragraph, where it is said that they should be theoretical and experiential, we have talked about and agreed on how to interpret it. We have come to the conclusion that theoretical is not the same as academic or studies but theoretical knowledge means that you can put into words. It is not tacit knowledge. You have to be able to articulate what you have been involved in, if you can. I think that sounds reasonable too because you are going to work as a teacher, so it is not of much help no matter how much tacit knowledge you have if you cannot describe it or show it.²⁷ (Study counsellor 2)

This study counsellor had struggled with colleagues to understand what was meant by theoretical and experiential. This, once again, sheds light on the importance of meetings with colleagues for developing an understanding of

²⁷ (suck) Det är ju två stycken i dom här kriterierna den första handlar om kunskap. Där står det att man ska ha specialiserade kunskaper om...men dom ska också vara dom ska vara teoretiska och erfarenhetsbaserade och det har vi diskuterat i nätverket och sen har vi det andra stycket som handlar om att du ska ha förmåga att utföra specialiserade arbetsuppgifter och sen så står det inom vadå. Åh, nu svarade jag inte riktigt på din fråga direkt men jag kommer väl dit kanske. Men i det här första stycket där det står att man ska ha att dom ska vara teoretiska och erfarenhetsbaserade det har vi ju fått prata om och kommit överens om hur vi ska tolka det. Vi har kommit överens om att teoretiska INTE är samma sak som akademiska eller studier utan teoretisk kunskaper innebär att man kan sätta ord. Det är inte den tysta kunskapen. Man måste kunna formulera vad det är man har varit med om, om man kan. Jag tycker det låter rimligt också för ska du jobba som lärare så hjälper det inte om du har hur mycket tyst kunskap som helst om du inte kan beskriva den eller visa. (Studievägledare 2)

the requirements in the admission procedure. In terms of knowledge, theoretical here is connected to the possibility of verbal articulation. Tacit knowledge is also mentioned, and expressed as being problematic within the admission procedure, and notably, according to this study counsellor, for the teacher's career as well. The study counsellor argued for the importance of being able to communicate the tacit knowledge, with reference to the fact that this communication is crucial for those who intend to become teachers. The question becomes that of how the applicants would be able to communicate their tacit knowledge within the admission procedure, most often only through workplace certificates and written narratives. When they become teachers they should, though, have the opportunity to show their students what cannot be verbally articulated. The meaning of theoretical is quite clear, according to the discussion to which this study counsellor referred— something that is possible to articulate, and as such connected to propositional and explicit knowledge. *Experiential* is less clear as to whether it refers to a form of knowledge or a process of learning and the learning site. If it refers to non-propositional and tacit knowledge, it is questionable whether it would be possible for applicants to demonstrate and prove this kind of knowledge, as it is, by definition, difficult to articulate. Reflections on tacit aspects of knowledge occurred occasionally, without me asking. One of the responses to the question about the descriptors was particularly detailed and involved the question of tacit knowledge as well:

So, I, I think that...ah...so this about knowledge, skill and competence is really very difficult. First of all, one must be very clear about the difference between these concepts and that is not so easy, and I do not know if there are any explanations which all people agree on, that this is knowledge, this is skill and this is competence. After all, we also talk about capability and this is yet another concept into this. But I think what is problematic, that's why there is a problem and this is where the tacit knowledge shows up. Because if I'm thinking about this, if I'm taking a person who is a newly-graduated nurse and who's going to work with people in the terminal phase of life and they have never done that but they have studied it. They may have taken a 7.5 ETCS course on how to do it and then there might come a nursing aide who has done this for ten years and she has had all those difficult talks for ten years and she's doing it damn good, but what is it that she does, what is it that she can, so she has, she has more knowledge although her knowledge may not be very comprehensive, but she has the ability to apply what she knows. I mean theoretical knowledge she may not have in this area, but she certainly does it much better than the other person

*who has knowledge, evidently, at least theoretical knowledge and this is not easy to elicit, I mean from these narratives which consist sometimes of six lines or ten lines or whatever it is.*²⁸
(Study counsellor 5)

This study counsellor emphasised the need for an understanding of the descriptors, which was considered difficult to reach. The reason that I use both capability and competence in my translation is a matter of the translation of competence. There is a Swedish word for competence which is used as a descriptor *kompetens* in the Swedish qualification framework. In the Swedish curricula the corresponding term to competence is *förmåga* which I here translated as capability. Such translations have been an issue throughout this thesis, and it is likely to be an issue when importing guidelines and frameworks as well. It is clear that deciding about, describing, and valuing knowledge is a challenging endeavour. Some of the study counsellors left the interview by commenting on the question about the descriptors, and said that it was good to be reminded about those issues. One of them said: *"I have taken a note about it here."* (Study counsellor 3), and another said: *"I will have to read about this again."* (Study counsellor 6). This can be taken as a sign of these matters as being difficult.

The example above of an experienced nursing aide also called into question the difficulties in assessment, in terms of making decisions about who is the most knowledgeable and suitable to be a vocational teacher. This indicates that conflicts are bound to arise when knowledge developed in the workplace is supposed to be emphasised, when it is to a large extent tacit. Who is actually most suitable for taking care of people in the terminal phase of life, and hence for becoming a vocational teacher in this area? Is it the person who has this experience or the one who has studied these matters, but has less experience? In the case of vocational teachers, this discussion has opened up the possibility for nursing aides to become vocational teachers. The fact that nursing aides

²⁸ Alltså, jag, jag tänker att...ah...alltså det här med kunskap, färdighet och förmåga är ju jättesvårt. För det första måste man ju då ha väldigt klart för sig skillnaden på dom här begreppen och det är ju inte så himla enkelt och jag vet inte om det finns några förklaringar som alla människor ställer upp på, att det här är en kunskap, det här är en färdighet och det här är en förmåga. För sen pratar vi ju om kompetens och det är ju ytterligare ett begrepp in i detta. Men jag tänker att det är väl det, alltså det är det som är problem och det är ju här den tysta kunskapen dyker upp därför att om jag tänker såhär, om jag tar en person som är nyutexaminerad sjuksköterska och som ska jobba med människor i livets slutskede och dom har aldrig gjort det men dom har läst det. Dom har kanske läst en 7,5 hp kurs om hur man gör det och så kommer det en undersköterska som har gjort detta i tio år och hon har haft alla dessa svåra samtal i tio år och hon gör det jätligt bra men vad är det hon gör, alltså vad är det hon kan, alltså hon har ju, hon har ju mera kunskap och hennes kunskap är kanske inte jätteomfattande men hon har en förmåga att använda det hon kan. Jag menar teoretisk kunskap har hon ju kanske inte om detta men hon gör det ju säkert mycket bättre än den andra personen som har kunskap, bevisligen, åtminstone teoretisk kunskap och det här är ju inte lätt att få fram menar jag på dom här intygen som ibland är på sex rader eller tio rader eller vad det är. (Studievägleddare 5)

can be more knowledgeable in certain areas might contradict the traditional division of labour within the health care sector, and cause tensions in the validation procedure as well. In terms of working as a vocational teacher there is yet another issue, according to the study counsellors, which is that nursing aides will not be eligible for teaching the medicine oriented courses. One of the study counsellors made a remark on the discussions about nurses and nursing aides, and that she hoped that the vocational assessors were professional enough to be able to assess according to level 5 in the framework and not with regards to whether the applicant was a nurse or a nursing aide. The requirement of having vocational knowledge at level 5 in the framework was frequently emphasised by many of the study counsellors.

8.1.3 The level of the framework as important

If the descriptors described in the previous section were never spontaneously mentioned by anyone, comments about the levels of the framework appeared both spontaneously and frequently. The knowledge and experience *should be at level five*, many of them said repeatedly:

*However, we shall remember that it should be at level 5, whatever it is, not level 8. You do not have to be the best in Sweden, I mean.*²⁹ (Study counsellor 2)

There was, though, some hesitation about exactly what is meant by level five. In this statement, as in many others, there is an emphasis on the guidelines, frameworks, and criteria, in combination with hesitation and insecurity. Both criteria and qualification frameworks have obviously had huge impact, although they are perceived as difficult to understand. Notwithstanding how well-structured the framework appears with its levels and descriptors, there are obviously some issues when these are confronted with the practice of validation. One issue was described like this:

We're a few who have been asking for years now, that if we're going to work, if we're going to say that we demand a SeQF 5 what does it mean in the masonry industry or what is it in the hairdressing trade. It is not written anywhere what it is. There is no definition yet...if...if you work as a teacher in the Swedish language for example, you have your grading criteria to follow, but you also have comments on the grading criteria produced by the Swedish National Agency for Education...has given examples of a typical pass thesis for example and one typical example of pass with distinction thesis where it is explained why this is a

²⁹ Fast nu ska vi komma ihåg att det ska vara på nivå 5, vad det nu är, inte nivå 8. Man behöver inte vara bäst i Sverige liksom. (Studievägledare 2)

pass with distinction and why this is just a pass and so on. There is quite a lot where it is clearly written and expressed and which give profound insights of the grading criteria but we have nothing equivalent to it, what is level 5 in the masonry subject, if you say so? I do not know and those who assess have no measurements equal enough which makes it difficult. We have to say that when you finish Upper Secondary School and have done this course in masonry then are you at level 4 and now we need to get to level 5. This might be equivalent to the level of knowledge you have after having completed a higher vocational education program, well now it is not education we require but we require vocational experience so what is the corresponding vocational experience...³⁰ (Study counsellor 2)

From this this quote it can be noted that there is a lack of examples which could have made the levels clearer. There is also a lack of agreement on what level 5 is in different trades and industries. It is also noteworthy that the levels of the framework are related to examples of formal education such as primary school, bachelor's degree, and so on, which was brought up as problematic by many study counsellors. It seems as if the levels in the way they are described have taken formal education as the model. If vast experience should be given value, it seems necessary that it can be translated into a standard as for example a level of the framework. When this standard is expressed with the terminology and exams in formal education without a translation to what this would mean in work, it becomes difficult to recognise and value vocational knowledge. This was expressed by another study counsellor as:

It has rather been about reaching equivalence between those different scales in the different countries to make it work, and it works quite well as long as it is theoretical subjects. But when it

³⁰ Vi är några som har efterlyst i många år att säga om vi ska jobba om vi ska säga att vi kräver en SeQf 5 vad är det i murningsbranschen eller vad är det i frisörbranschen. Det finns ju inte nedtecknat någonstans vad det är. Det finns inte definierat än...äh...om man jobbar som lärare i svenska till exempel så har du dina betygskriterier att gå efter men så har du också kommentarer till betygskriterierna som Skolverket har tagit fram där man ger exempel på en exempeluppsats på ett G till exempel och en exempeluppsats på ett MVG där man också förklarar varför det här är MVG och varför det här bara är ett G och så vidare och ganska mycket där man skriver ut och ger en fördjupning till betygskriterierna men vi har ingenting motsvarande så att vad som är nivå 5 inom murningsämnet om man säger så. Jag vet inte och dom som bedömer har ju ingen lika måttstock heller så att det är svårt, mer att vi får säga att när man går ut gymnasiet och har läst den här kursen i murning då är man på nivå 4 och nu ska man upp i en nivå 5. Det kan motsvaras kunskapsnivåmässigt av man har gått en yrkeshögskoleutbildning fast nu är det inte utbildning vi kräver utan vi kräver yrkeserfarenhet så vilken motsvarar yrkeserfarenhet.... (Studievägledare 2)

comes to mechanics it is not that easy because they do not fit into that system.³¹ (Study counsellor 10)

When I asked about why the mechanics do not fit into the framework, the response was that it could have to do with tradition and that the knowledge in this tradition is developed through experience. There were many comments made about the framework as lacking translations between work life and academia:

But then what is level 5, it is not clear if I've understood correctly, it's a framework, a qualification framework and as such it has come from the academic world, that is, well studies, and you can measure levels of studies but it is not... There is no translation to what these levels would be in work life...³² (Study counsellor 2)

It was perceived by the study counsellors as though the frameworks are more suitable for academic studies. Another point, made by several study counsellors about the qualification framework, was that:

In addition, it is actually so that they are not really meant for individual management as I have understood it, they are meant to classify education. So, it is intended that you shall take a broad view on this. It is not intended to use these classification systems for each individual. That's not the point.³³ (Study counsellor 5)

The qualifications framework's usefulness for individual management is questioned, by this and several other study counsellors. Many of them claimed that the framework's usefulness was its potential for supporting comparisons of different education systems, and contexts such as countries. As I understand it, what the study counsellors lack is some concrete definitions from the trades, like for example a Journeyman's certificate is level 5, and with x years

³¹ Det har väl snarare handlat om att få en likvärdighet mellan de här olika skalorna i de olika länderna för att få det att fungera och det fungerar ganska bra så länge det är teoretiska ämnen. Men när vi kommer till fordonsmekaniker så är det inte helt lätt för de går inte in i det systemet. (Studievägledare 10)

³² Men sen vad nivå 5 är det är ju inte klart om jag har förstått det rätt också så är det ett ramverk, ett kvalifikationsramverk liksom då som har kommit ifrån den akademiska världen alltså då, ja studier, och att man kan mäta nivåer på studier men det är inte. Det finns liksom inte översatt till vad dom här nivåerna är i yrkeslivet... (Studievägledare 2)

³³ Dessutom är det ju så att dom är ju egentligen inte tänkt för individhantering som jag har förstått det utan dom här är ju tänkt för att klassificera utbildningen. Alltså det är ju tänkt att du liksom ska kunna se stort i detta. Det är ju inte tänkt att använda dom här klassificeringssystemen på varje enskild individ. Det är ju inte meningen. (Studievägledare 5)

of work it is 6. A Mastership certificate is seven, with x additional years of experience it is eight, and so on according to what is deemed appropriate by the trades, but as one of them said:

...not all trades have posted their trade designations in this SeQF because it is quite new so we have a quite a long way to go with this, I would like to say. I think so. Absolutely.³⁴ (Study counsellor 8)

Quite contradictory to what many claimed about the framework, as not being useful for vocational knowledge and for individual management, the framework is actually accounted for and used for individual management of vocational knowledge. It has probably even introduced a way of talking about vocational knowledge and experience. One example is that Upper Secondary School education is at level 4 in the framework, and many shared a concern that applicants who worked as vocational teachers in Upper Secondary School had not developed their vocational knowledge as they had been active in a *level 4 world*:

There are levels which you should relate to, and then it is like this that a student who has finished Upper Secondary School is at level 4 in this system and I think it goes from 1 to 8 or 1 to 9 and...at the top you are professor or associate professor... but we are assigned the task not to accept anyone who has a lower level than level 5 and it is then stated what is included in level 5 of having worked independently and having had a position of responsibility which is described as well. So we have to deal with that and that's why we do not consider having worked as vocational teacher or supply teacher with temporary employment as merits for becoming...when you are going to be admitted to education for vocational teachers because then you have been in a level 4 world, do you understand me?³⁵ (Study counsellor 4)

To be active only at this “*level four world*” of Upper Secondary Education is considered insufficient for the development of vocational knowledge. What is

³⁴ ... det är ju inte alla branscher som har lagt in sina branschbeteckningar i den här SeQF för det är ju ganska nytt då så att vi har nog en ganska lång väg att gå skulle jag vilja säga i det här. Det tror jag ju. Absolut. (Studievägledare 8)

³⁵ Det är ju nivåer som man ska förhålla sig till där och då är det såhär att en elev som går ut gymnasiet ligger på nivå 4 i det här systemet och jag tror det går från 1 till 8 eller 1 till 9 och i toppen där är man ju professor eller docent...men i vårt uppdrag så ligger det att vi ska inte anta någon som har lägre nivå än nivå 5 och så är det framskrivet då vad som ingår i nivå 5 av att ha jobbat självständigt i ansvarsposition är det beskrivet då liksom. Så det har vi att förhålla oss till och det är därför som vi inte tycker att ha jobbat som yrkeslärare, vikarierande yrkeslärare är ingen merit för att bli, när du ska antas till utbildning för yrkeslärare för då har du gått i en nivå (Studievägledare 4)

noteworthy is that after or above levels 4 and 5 it seems difficult to recognise vocational knowledge. One explanation might be that there is no formal vocational education corresponding to levels above 5, as these levels seems reserved for, or are at least exemplified by academic studies and titles like bachelor, master, doctor, and so on. Although the vocational knowledge is constantly developing in work, it seems difficult to elicit and express by the means of levels in the framework. The more developed vocational knowledge and the concern for how to relate it to the framework was by one how counsellor expressed as:

But then to insert the person that becomes a challenge. Then you can think that a person who has only studied in Upper Secondary education is at level 4 but the person may still have acquired other skills so that s/he has climbed higher in this framework and it is hard to elicit, I think.³⁶ (Study counsellor 7)

This study counsellor suggested that it should be possible to reach a higher level in a framework based on experience and more developed vocational knowledge, but it is difficult to elicit and determine with regards to the level. As an overall impression, the regulative elements of the validation within the admission procedure seem to be based on ideas related to formal education and thus to the academic institution, although validation is said to account for vocational knowledge developed in work life. In the next section, I will discuss these kinds of regulations in terms of the institutionalisation of validation.

8.2 Elusive, confusing, and instrumental

Before continuing with elements in validation connected to the normative pillar, in this section I will briefly sum up and discuss what the regulative elements of validation, described in 8.1.1–8.1.3 evoke in terms of its potential institutionalisation.

The study counsellors are obviously put in a position where their will and devotion to do a good job is sometimes in conflict with the regulative elements of the organisation of validation, and the instructions and tools they have at their disposal. As is noted and mandated in the discussion on transnational and national policy, the Swedish version of the European qualification framework is used. Other regulative elements in this validation are the insertion of criteria

³⁶ Men sen att sätta in personen så det blir liksom en utmaning. Då kan man tänka så att en person som bara har läst en gymnasieutbildning ligger på nivå 4 men den kan ju liksom ändå ha skaffat sig kunskaper på andra sätt så att den har klättrat högre i det här ramverket och det är svårt att få fram tycker jag. (Studievägledare 7)

for vocational subjects launched by the Swedish Research Council for Higher Education. These criteria are perceived as very general and fuzzy. Another problem with the criteria is that they are academically written and this puts applicants and assessors alike in difficult situations. Notably, the criteria are difficult for academics as well, as one of them said that it has taken years to come to understand the criteria. Despite the fact that the criteria are questioned and criticised, there seems to be a heavy reliance on them in assuming that the legitimacy of validation in its process of institutionalisation is gained through the reliance on such criteria. With regards to such general criteria, the elusiveness is understandable due to the fact that emphasis is put on the qualification framework as way of getting something to hold on to. With regards to the regulative elements, there are signs of how vocational knowledge should be made as similar as possible to knowledge developed in formal education. This is visible not least in the idea of vocational subjects, which can be understood as a significant transformation of vocational knowledge in the creation of a standard, rather than through any sensitivity to its idiosyncrasies.

As mentioned earlier, the study counsellors talked a lot about the qualification framework, and particularly level 5. There were, though, hesitations about what the levels actually meant within the trades. It was also emphasised by the study counsellors that not all trades and industries have put in place definitions of levels of vocational knowledge in the qualification frameworks. Many of the study counsellors claimed that the framework should be used for comparing education and educational programs between countries, rather than being used for individual management. Despite the many hesitations among the study counsellors, the framework was seen as important and the levels were often emphasised. It even appeared as if the use of framework might even have introduced a new way of talking about vocational knowledge. Examples of this way of talking include describing a vocational teacher as having been in a *“level four world”* or that it should be possible to *“climb the framework”* based on vocational experience. As a matter of institutionalisation, the framework can be seen as an attempt at developing a common understanding in order to reach equivalence, transparency, and comparability between different forms of knowledge. In considering the study counsellors’ accounts, one challenge is how it could be possible to facilitate applicants’ possibilities of making all of their vocational knowledge explicit, and thus assessable in this framework. It is doubtful whether this kind of knowledge would ever be fully possible to account for outside its practice or by someone not acquainted with the same practice – meaning someone other than the vocational experts. This means that such matters related to vocational knowledge are linked to the question of who is suitable for assessing

vocational knowledge and what methods should be used. This topic will be covered in sections 8.3.4 and 8.5.4.

As an overall and summarising conclusion concerning on what grounds the possible institutionalisation of validations is built, in terms of ideas related to regulative elements, it seems that it is based on imposed similarities. To express a vocation as a collection of subjects can be seen as a huge transformation of vocational knowledge. The criteria are also perceived by the study counsellors as general and vague. In the qualification framework the descriptors are not so much used as are the levels. The levels of the framework seem to have made quite an impact, and the understanding of vocational knowledge in the process of institutionalisation becomes elusive with regards to criteria, yet instrumental in regarding the impact of the qualification framework. The validation procedure may appear structured, but this structure is rather vague in terms of its content. Beside such regulative elements, normative ones are also important in processes of institutionalisation. These are presented next.

8.3 Objectives, norms and methods: A normative focus

In the previous section, I described regulative elements of validation as these are announced through instructions and perceived by study counsellors at different HEIs. As was outlined in the chapter on theory and concluded in the policy analysis, normative elements such as objectives, norms, and values play a significant role in the process of institutionalisation. Following Scott (2014), normative systems of institutions shed light on the preferred and the desirable, and also why and how things should be done. Normative systems are also connected to social obligations, profit, and the like. Thus, in the following section statements about the objectives, norms, and values that validation involves, according to the study counsellors at the HEIs, are described. Furthermore it covers how validation is conducted in terms of the methods it involves.

8.3.1 Social and economic opportunities

Policy documents are, as earlier concluded, pervaded with statements of objectives of validation and the benefits it is expected to bring about. During the interviews such matters appeared in a variety of ways without me asking. One example of such a statement was the benefit of validation as an opportunity for individuals to make life changes with regards to work, to the advantage of both individuals and society:

*There are many heavy vocations here, which are physically burdensome and then the body starts to get worn out and they can take on another job where the body is not used as much. This means that they will remain in working life, maybe until retirement and I mean then it is an economic benefit for society as well.*³⁷ (Study counsellor 10)

Concerns about the students, their life-histories and future possibilities were often present during the interviews. Also the issue that Sweden has a shortage of vocational teachers, to which the new requirements are a response, was mentioned:

*There is still a great lack of eligibility (lack of vocational teachers with teacher certificates, my comment), so the task is to push as many people as possible through the education.*³⁸ (Study counsellor 4)

These two quotes illustrate the potential pressure put on the study counsellors, as they want to support the students who might be worn out by their previous work, and they are also implicitly expected to accept as many as possible to the education, and to do so for the betterment of society as well. At the same time they are constrained by other aspects of validation, such as the regulative ones. As a theoretical construct, normative and regulative elements are separated, but in practice there are not such clear cut boundaries. It was described in different ways how validation is connected to many different values and objectives, not least that validation in general is connected to economic objectives:

*I am aware that this is recorded, but it's a bit like this...it has been my...that when validation has been a topic for discussion, that is, when the state wants reports or there is money for it, then the interest increases. But in between, the interest in validation is slightly decreased, I would say.*³⁹ (Study counsellor 5)

³⁷ Det är ju många tunga yrken de här, som är fysiskt tyngande och är det då så här att kroppen börjar bli sliten och de går in och tar ett annat jobb där kroppen inte slits lika mycket. Då innebär det att de kommer att vara kvar i arbetslivet, kanske fram till pensionen och jag menar då är det samhällsekonomiskt lönsamt också. (Studievägledare 10)

³⁸ Det är ju stor obehörighet fortfarande så uppdraget är att trycka igenom så många som möjligt i utbildningen. (Studievägledare 4)

³⁹ Jag är medveten om att detta spelas in men lite grann är det så här att, det har varit min att när validering har kommit på tapeten, alltså det vill säga när staten vill ha in redovisning, eller när det vankas pengar eller någonting, då ökar intresset. Men däremellan sjunker intresset för validering åtminstone lite grann, tycker jag då va alltså. (Studievägledare 5)

So, besides being involved in facilitating applicants' possibilities to prove and have their vocational knowledge validated, the study counsellors apparently perceived it as if they were part of a larger societal endeavour, with economic objectives. The most apparent overall impression from the interviews was, though, that validation could be quite difficult.

8.3.2 Complex, tricky, difficult: Views on validation

Validation of vocational knowledge is hard, extensive, and with very complex procedures, described by one study counsellor like this:

*After all, it is enormous, an enormous work to validate vocational knowledge, everything you have read and doing everything you can and how you can elicit it. What I think is that it is huge and difficult and you have to know what you are measuring.*⁴⁰ (Study counsellor 9)

The study counsellors frequently described validation, using words like *complex*, *tricky*, and *difficult* during the interviews. One of them even said “*I don't know how many times I have said it's difficult now...when you listen to the tape...*” (Study counsellor 1). The difficulties were described as having to do with criteria, methods, the limited time frame, different practical matters and, as described by the study counsellor above, to know what is actually being measured and hence validated. One study counsellor expressed the difficulties as:

*Firstly, we have a very extensive procedure and it is difficult for us who work with it on the inside, and it's very difficult for those who are going to relate to it by applying...to understand what we want them to communicate in terms of prior learning but doubtless with the criteria we have today and with the validation we do with regards to certificates and the narratives they write about themselves, that they get interviewed...all of what is possible, sort of, to do within the context of such a room...an office...it will not, it does not grasp the competence and skills acquaintance (of the applicants, my comment).*⁴¹ (Study counsellor 4)

⁴⁰ Det är ju jättestort, ett jättestort arbete att validera en yrkeskunskap allt man har läst sig och allt man kan och hur kan man påvisa det. Det jag tänker är att det är en stor svår grej och man måste ju veta vad man mäter.

⁴¹ För det första har vi en procedur som är väldigt omfattande och den är svår för oss som jobbar med det på insidan och den är jättesvår för dom som ska förhålla sig till den genom att söka..att förstå vad det är vi vill att dom ska förmedla av reell kompetens men helt klart är att med dom kriterier vi har idag och med den valideringen vi gör i form av intyg att dom skriver om sig själva, att dom blir intervjuade

The extensive procedure was mentioned many times, and one of the difficulties was found in concerns about what is measured and what aspects of vocational knowledge can be made visible within the context of an office. Although criteria, certificates, and written narratives should secure fair and equitable outcomes, the study counsellors expressed a concern that there is more to vocational knowledge than is possible to grasp within an office. Another difficulty seemed to be about conceptual confusion, a lack of coherent definitions about knowledge and more:

I was in contact with Finland in the late 90's and visited their validation and there it was vocational competence at adult level, so to speak. What they did there was that, they took on a national definition and a national way of working with validation, they nailed it. So, this is how we do in Finland, but in Sweden, we have had the idea of letting thousands of flowers blossom and then we will see if we can put together a pretty little bouquet of these. I mean we have been doing it for so many years now. It's almost 20 years that we have been doing this and I shall not say we have not come any further because we have, but it's still the case that we do not have a common model. We do not even have common definitions of these terms /.../ How should we, how could we then, how can we trust each other?⁴² (Study counsellor 5)

The metaphor used in this quote with the idea of a “*thousand flowers blossom*” and to get together a “*pretty little bouquet*”, summarise some of the difficulties the study counsellors expressed. Validation is surrounded by conceptual confusion, sometimes based on rhetorical arguments in policy which sound very good but which are seemingly of not very much help when it comes to the question of validating vocational knowledge. Although the study counsellors described validation as difficult, they also brought up many positive aspects and values connected with validation as well. One such value was suggested to be that validation opens up new pathways for non-traditional

allt som går att göra liksom inom ramen för ett sånt här rum på nåt sätt ...ett kontor...det kommer inte, det ringar inte in förmåga, färdighet, förtrogenhet. (Studievägledare 4)

⁴² Jag kom i kontakt med Finland i slutet på 90-talet och var och besökte deras validering och då var det av yrkeskompetens på vuxengymnasienivå så att säga. Det man gjorde där var att, att man, man satte en nationell definition och ett nationellt sätt att jobba med validering alltså man slog fast det. Alltså så här gör vi i Finland men i Sverige så är det ju det här med låt tusen blommor blomma och så får vi se om vi liksom kan få ihop nån liten nätt bukett av detta. Jag menar vi har ju hållit på nu i så många år. Det är snart 20 år som vi liksom har hållit på med detta och jag ska inte säga att vi inte har kommit längre för det har vi men det är fortfarande så att vi har inte en gemensam modell. Vi har inte ens gemensamma definitioner av de här begreppen/.../Hur ska vi, hur ska vi kunna då ta fram, hur ska vi kunna lita på varandra? (Studievägledare 5)

learners, and it is seen as challenging traditional norms and views on knowledge:

I think it is very positive. I think that it changes our view of knowledge a bit. We are a very theoretical country, with education and education levels and we have a specific hierarchy, which many times indicate that, if you do not have an education but just have a vocation, you are not that hot. So it's really interesting that you actually recognise... because of course you can get a lot of knowledge through work. And of course you get it. It's good that it is given recognition. Well, I think it's good and we need to develop it.⁴³ (Study counsellor 3)

This quote sheds light on validation and its value in challenging and changing existing views of knowledge. Theoretical knowledge is here connected to a traditional norm where formal education is the only way to develop knowledge, which suggests that the learning context is the centre of attention in many discussions. Be it about knowledge or learning contexts, it seemed as if validation involved tensions in terms of traditional norms and values as related to those embraced in validation. This was particularly apparent in discussions related to vocational knowledge within the healthcare sector.

8.3.3 Nurses as a special category of applicants

Nurses were a category of applicants who were often mentioned during the interviews. Although I did not pose any question specifically about nurses during any of the interviews, this group of students was brought up by many study counsellors. Nurses were for example considered as writing exemplarily good narratives. In some cases nurses did still need to go through parts of the validation phases:

⁴³ Jag tycker att det är mycket positivt. Jag tycker att det förändrar lite vår syn på kunskap. Vi är ett väldigt såhär teoretiskt land men utbildning och utbildningsnivåer och vi har en specifik hierarki vilket många gånger då säger att om du inte har utbildning utan bara har arbetet så är du liksom inte lika hot. Så det är jätteintressant att man faktiskt tar tillvara på...för givetvis så kan man få väldigt mycket kunskaper via arbete och givetvis får man det. Det är bra att det får ett värde. Jo, jag tycker att det är bra och att vi behöver utveckla det. (Studievägledare 3)

But then the health and care subjects, if we take the health and care subjects to compare, so if there is someone who is a nurse, and who has in addition, let's say, worked within the sector of psychiatry...so on one hand you have studied a lot of psychiatry, and on the other hand you have worked with it or you are maybe still working with it. /.../ I mean we have to draw a limit for what is reasonable also. Because it is as mentioned level 5, the required vocational qualifications, and if you have studied on an academic level it is at least 7, no 7 or 8 even.⁴⁴ (Study counsellor 2)

The nurses were given a special position within the validation procedure. One reason for this position might be their academic backgrounds. Probably, the nurses' way of writing the narratives is more in alignment with what is expected in teacher education. Their seemingly special position could also have to do with the fact that they already have a license from the National Board of Health and Welfare, which to some extent might be interpreted as more valid than certificates from trades and industries. In addition nurses have traditionally and historically had their own vocational teacher education, and nurses have been teaching nursing aides. In many other vocational programs it is common that the master and apprentice/ teacher /students are from the same vocational category. For example a painter, carpenter, or hairdresser teaches someone who is going to have the same vocation and title. It was suggested by one study counsellor that this form of education implied a decreased status for nurses. Another current, and possibly related, discussion about nurses and healthcare subjects was whether or not to accept nursing aides as vocational teachers:

For example, we have health care which is one, one about which we discuss very much and there are some assessors who think that you should be a nurse. Period! I would like to argue that many nursing aides who have worked for a long time, they have practised, they have become specialised, gone through competence development and I would like to claim...I mean that they have the competence to teach so to speak at a level where

⁴⁴ Men sen vårdämnen om vi tar vårdämnen för att jämföra också så är det nån som är sjuksköterska och som dessutom har jobbat inom psykiatri, säger vi.....så dels har man läst väldigt mycket psykiatri dels har man jobbat med det och man jobbar fortfarande med det kanske då går inte jag vidare med nån intervju eller så. Det behöver...alltså man får nog dra en gräns för vad som är rimligt också. För att det är som sagt på nivå 5 man ska ha yrkeskompetens och har man läst på akademisk nivå så är man uppe i 7, nä 7 8 till och med. (Studievägledare 2)

*you can say, you are on a SeQF 5 and can teach down towards four.*⁴⁵ (Study counsellor 8)

During the interviews many remarks were made about nursing aides as the ones who actually had experience of being in contact with patients suffering from dementia and the like. On the whole, health care seemed to be perceived as including more advanced vocations, and construed as more theoretical. One study counsellor phrased it like this:

*Just like those in Upper Secondary School would say that Child and Recreation programme and Health and Social Care Programme are more theoretical...theoretical programs than Building and Construction.*⁴⁶ (Study counsellor 7)

Probably it had to do with a consideration that the knowledge base within these programs comes from the academic tradition. Another possibility is that practical parts of programs such as Building and Construction are more often and to a larger extent not conducted within classrooms but rather in demonstration construction sites, which are a natural part of the education also within Upper Secondary School. To some extent it seems as if vocations or subjects perceived as theoretical are easier to handle within the admission procedure, as these are part of the academic tradition. At the very same time the ambition to account for knowledge developed in work is constantly present in validation.

When accounting for knowledge gained in work, certain values appeared. These values of, for example, familiarity with current and recent trends and employability become almost like implicit criteria, and are explored next

8.3.4 Familiarity with current and recent trends and employability

A topic that was brought up in many of the interviews was that of having familiarity with current and recent trends. The reason for considering this under the normative pillar and not the regulative is that there are no explicit demands made on the applicants in terms of how long was the work life

⁴⁵ Vi har till exempel vård som är ett, ett där vi diskuterar väldigt mycket och där är det ju så att vissa bedömare anser ju att man ska vara sjuksköterska. Punkt slut, och jag vill nog hävda det att många undersköterskor som har jobbat länge dom har gjort, dom har specialiserat sig, gått in och kompetensutvecklat sig och då vill jag nog anse att jag tycker att dom har en kompetens att kunna så att säga vara på en nivå där man kan så att säga undervisa man är alltså på en SeQF 5 och kan undervisa ner mot fyra. (Studievägledare 8)

⁴⁶ Precis som man på gymnasieskolan skulle säga att som Barn - och fritid och omvårdnadsprogrammet är mer teoretiska...teoretiska program än Bygg - och anläggning. (Studievägledare 7)

experience they need to have. One of the study counsellors gave an example of an applicant who had worked for 20 years within a vocation, but could not show or prove that their vocational knowledge was up to date. This applicant had applied for the vocational subject *Knowledge of craft*. This vocational subject is the same for florists, carpenters, and hairdressers, and, as all the other criteria, very general. In this criterion is included to indicate having knowledge about trends, and the student was rejected because their knowledge and experience of trends was missing, and the study counsellor explained:

*They should be up to date, not outdated in any way, and she could not show that or come up with any education that she has done since she got her Journeyman's certificate.*⁴⁷ (Study counsellor 2)

It seems to some extent as being familiar with current and recent trends has become an intrinsic value for vocational knowledge within the validation process, and as such an implicit criterion. On another note, not only familiarity with recent trends seems important but also the duration of vocational experience, although the requirements of duration are not explicitly mentioned. Lasting experience could even exceed the significance of having a certificate from the craft tradition, such as the Journeyman's certificate.

*It's about actual competence (sometimes translated to prior learning, my comment). You are really not particularly interested in if a person has a credential or a Journeyman's certificate because it doesn't say so much....you may have done a Journeyman's certificate right after Upper Secondary School. You don't need to have done your Journeyman's certificate but you may have had a hairdressing salon with four employees for twenty years...actual competence and there is an ongoing discussion in this group of higher education institutions who have meetings from time to time, and I know, for example, that ValiWeb relied a lot on this formal certificates, vocational certificates.*⁴⁸ (Study counsellor 4)

⁴⁷ Dom ska vara aktuella, inte förlegade på nåt sätt och hon kunde inte påvisa det eller komma in med nån utbildning som hon har gått alls sen hon tog sin gesäll. (Studievägledare 2)

⁴⁸ Det handlar ju om reell kompetens man är ju egentligen inte så intresserad av om en person har en legitimation eller ett gesällbrev för det säger ju ganska lite, jag menar du kan ju ha gjort ett gesällbrev alldeles efter gymnasiet du behöver inte ha gjort ditt gesällbrev men du kan ha haft en frisersalong men 4 anställda i 20 år liksom...reell kompetens och där pågår det ofta en diskussion i den här gruppen av lärosäten som ju träffas då och jag vet ju då till exempel att ValiWeb då, dom har ju gått en hel del på såna här formella kunskapsbevis, yrkesbevis. (Studievägledare 4)

The actual competence emphasised here could be interpreted as connected to the learning outcomes orientation where the interest is directed towards what a person really knows or can do. What a person really knows is obviously individual and not always connected either to lengthy experience or to formal documentation, which of course make judgements of such actual competence very difficult through the submission of certificates and narratives. As a comparison to knowledge gained in formal education, few would have their marks and grades from Upper Secondary School questioned because these were outdated. More generally, it is difficult to see why it would be easier to forget a craft such as how to do hair-cutting than how to solve quadratic equations. When the interest is turned to knowledge gained in work the contradiction appears that lengthy experience is sometimes valued as proof of knowledge, but on other occasions it is not, when the emphasis is instead on familiarity with current and recent trends. I did not pose any questions to follow this issue, but it is likely that some trades are more exposed to change due to new tools, methods, and technology than others. This could make the need for new knowledge and thus issue of familiarity with current and recent trends quite trade specific.

In a similar manner to the negotiations on the value of lasting experience, the trades' own regulations are sometimes given value, but at other times the criteria are given supremacy over such certificates. The significance of a workplace certificate and the like is, though, interpreted slightly differently within the HEIs. It seems as if those who use ValiWeb more often assign the certificates more importance than the others. This will be further explored in section 8.5.2. Another concern among the study counsellors was that the applicants are going to need to become employable, which in this context means to have a sufficient number of vocational subjects for fulfilling the needs the schools have for vocational teachers. One study counsellor said:

The broader they can get the better because that increases their employability. Then I have understood that it is enough with one subject to get eligibility to get into the education but it is not sure that it is so easy to get employment if they have only eligibility in one subject.⁴⁹ (Study counsellor 6)

The applicants are often recommended to apply for more than one subject. They are advised to take a close look at the criteria, and to search for criteria which fit with their knowledge and experience. This may make applicants

⁴⁹ Ju bredare man kan bli där desto bättre är det ju för dom sen för då blir dom ju bättre anställningsbara. Sen har jag ju förstått att det räcker ju med ett ämne för att dom ska kunna bli för att kunna gå utbildningen men det är ju inte säkert att det är så lätt att få en anställning om dom bara har behörighet i ett ämne. (Studievägledare 6)

anxious about not meeting the criteria for a sufficient number of subjects, which then makes them pick and gather as many subjects as possible. One study counsellor recalled:

You know I've had an applicant here who had, he spanned over the Electricity and Energy Programme, Business and Administration Programme and HVAC and Property Maintenance. He applied for and was assessed in 47 subjects.⁵⁰
(Study counsellor 4)

The example with the applicant in the above quote is not a common case, but most study counsellors shared a concern that it is possible to be admitted to the education with only one subject, which does not make the applicants employable as vocational teachers in the future. Obviously, there is a difficulty in getting sufficient but not too many subjects. The applicants must be validated in all subjects they apply for. To validate a variety of different vocational subjects also calls into question the methods that are applied in the validation procedure.

8.3.5 Different methods

When the HEIs or ValiWeb receive the applications an initial screening will be made. Then the applications are sent to a vocational expert who assesses the vocational knowledge. The vocational experts can choose to assess the application by reading the documents or to call the applicant for clarifications. The study counsellors are most often not involved in this process. When the HEIs receive the vocational experts' assessments and recommendations these experts are, though, often be part of the admission board which makes the final decision on admission. The above mentioned procedure is, according to the study counsellors, the most common way, but there were also alternative ways of taking care of the validation:

There are universities where they have also conducted interviews. They record interviews. What we have used on certain occasions when we have seen that this is a person, we can see that there is really a competence but the person may be young and the time during which this person has acquired the competence is short. Then we have used a practical vocational test and we have used vocational teachers who are experienced

⁵⁰ Du vet jag har haft en sökande här som hade, han spände över programmen el-och energi, handelsprogrammet och VVS och fastighet. Han sökte och blev prövad i 47 ämnen. (Studievägledare 4)

so the applicant has spent half a day or a day together with this teacher.⁵¹ (Study counsellor 4)

Using alternative methods such as interviews and practical tests was perceived as very positive and seen as a way of facilitating the assessment. It was also suggested that these methods are more reliable because you *get an answer*:

The practical tests have been fantastic, because they have been like this, yes! and the few we have done, have shown that these people have had the competences, which has made it easy as well. It could have turned out the opposite, but it would have been just as easy to relate to because you get an answer, I mean.⁵² (Study counsellor 4)

Some of the HEIs had conducted practical tests in particular cases when an applicant's documentation had not been sufficient. These methods were more or less described as the ideal situation, however dependent on time and the resources for doing such tests. Several study counsellors emphasised the benefits of the interviews and practical tests, although concluding that it would be expensive and time consuming to use as a standard method. They suggested that interviews can reveal much more compared to the written narratives and the workplace certificates. The methods chosen were, according to one study counsellor, also linked to fairness:

Eh...I think that in order to make a fairly equitable assessment of vocational knowledge, I think that individuals need to show up. We have encouraged our assessors to get in contact, to call the students. We have had assessors who have invited them to conversations to get explanations and I think that this is much much better for making the knowledge visible, being involved in a conversation /.../ To make the assessment in the field would have been very good.⁵³ (Study counsellor 3)

⁵¹ Det finns lärosäten som också har gjort intervjuer. Som spelar in intervjuer. Det som vi däremot har använt, vid vissa tillfällen när vi har sett att det här är en person som, vi kan se att det finns en reell kompetens men personen kanske är ung och tiden som den här personen har skaffat sig den här kompetensen är kort. Då har vi använt ett praktiskt prov i det här yrket och då har vi använt oss av oftast yrkeslärare som är erfarna och då har den här sökanden tillbringat en halv dag eller en dag tillsammans med den här läraren. (Studievägledare 4)

⁵² Dom här praktiska proven har ju varit fantastiskt bra för dom har varit sådär, det är bara och yes! liksom för dom få vi har gjort har visat att dom här personerna har haft dom här förmågorna så då har det varit enkelt. Det kunde ju lika väl ha visat tvärt om men då hade ju det varit enkelt att förhålla sig till man får ett svar liksom så. (Studievägledare 4)

⁵³ Åh... jag tror att för att göra en någorlunda rättvis bedömning av yrkeskunskap så tror jag att individer behöver få visa. Vi har ju uppmanat våra bedömare att kontakta för att få...ringa upp studenten. Vi har ju haft bedömare som också har tagit in dem till samtal för att få förklarat och det tror jag är mycket mycket bättre för att få fram kunskaper att man

This study counsellor suggested that workplace observations would be a much fairer way to conduct validation of vocational knowledge. Many other study counsellors reflected on how they would have liked it to be, which was, however, confronted by circumstances beyond their control, such as:

We have not always sent each one (application, my comment) away. There have been time aspects. The assessments have not been returned on time. Decisions must be taken. The assessor is occupied with his own grading (referring to a vocational teacher assessor, my comment) and does not do the work and we cannot get a new expert for this subject and so on... I cannot say that this has always been done as we wanted it to be done.⁵⁴ (Study counsellor 3)

Notably, there are many practical, economic, and organisational matters influencing the validation. These practicalities could be seen as threat to the quality and equitable outcomes of the validation. From a fairness perspective it is, though, difficult to make such a process completely fair, as one study counsellor remarked:

I think it can never get completely fair. I think it never gets completely equivalent because we are human beings.⁵⁵ (Study counsellor 3)

Even though it might not be realistic to make the assessment of the spikey vocational profiles of applicants completely fair, fairness is still crucial within validation, if it is going to gain legitimacy. Above all, such fairness is not least crucial for the applicants who are likely to be interested in whether lengthy experience is valued or not, and if workplace certificates take precedence over criteria.

8.4 A socio-economic project

As concluded in the analysis of policy on validation, policy documents are pervaded with ideas about the objectives, values, and norms of validation, and less concerned with questions of knowledge. Expectations and objectives of

⁵⁴ Vi har inte alltid skickat iväg alla. Det har funnits tidsaspekter. Bedömningar kommer inte tillbaka i tid. Beslut måste fattas. Den här bedömarens håller på med sin egen betygssättning och hinner inte och vi hinner inte få en ny bedömare för det här ämnet och alltså... jag kan inte säga att det här alltid har skötts såsom vi har velat att det ska skötas. (Studievägledare 3)

⁵⁵ Jag tror aldrig att det kan bli helt rättvist. Jag tror aldrig att det kan bli helt likvärdigt eftersom vi är människor. (Studievägledare 3)

validation are also apparent through the changed requirements for VTE. The new requirements are supposed to counteract the lack of vocational teachers in Sweden by paying attention to knowledge gained in work. Without my posing any explicit questions about such objectives, values, and norms connected to validation, these matters turned up frequently and by themselves during the interviews. The need for vocational teachers in Sweden puts pressure on those involved in validation to push as many applicants as possible through the education, the study counsellors said. In addition, it is emphasised by the study counsellors that those who enter the education should do so with the potential of becoming employable, which can be thought of as both a social and an economic objective. The students do not become employable as vocational teachers if they have eligibility in only one vocational subject, which is though possible with the current regulations. Furthermore, the vocational subjects can be seen as an institutional tension insofar that the applicants need to have a sufficient number of subjects to become employable – which is likely to be a foreign idea in work life.

The overall impression from the interviews was that the study counsellors were very committed in conducting the validation in the best way possible, and with engagement and concerns for the applicants. Intentionally or not, they seem to have become involved not only in validating vocational knowledge but also in a project with many other objectives, such as social and economic ones. If such ideas and values become very influential, there is a risk of overshadowing the attention that should be paid to vocational knowledge. Moreover, to be a knowledgeable carpenter, nurse, or hairdresser must be considered as having personal and collective value, and to be a source of pride beyond its economic benefit.

Among the study counsellors validation was also perceived as carrying the potential for supporting a change of existing views of knowledge and the traditional ways of valuing knowledge. To shift focus and pay attention to knowledge developed in settings outside formal education institutions, which is the ambition behind this new admission procedure, has good intentions but is obviously fraught with difficulties. Although the study counsellors seemed very committed, they were confronted with many difficulties beyond their control. There were also different areas of negotiation, such as whether to accept nursing aides as vocational teachers or not, whether to rely on workplace certificates or criteria, and whether to value lengthy work life experience or not. Among the ideas of how to organise validation, the questions of what methods to adopt and which assessors to choose becomes crucial. For this purpose, some HEIs have conducted interviews to elicit vocational knowledge, while others conducted practical tests, and these

methods were suggested to reveal more of the applicant's vocational knowledge.

One conclusion to draw with regards to the normative pillar is that vocational knowledge seems to be intimately connected to economic and social matters such as employability and social disadvantage, but not as often to values such as vocational pride. Thus, there might be a risk that neither economic expectations nor equity goals are likely to be reached if such matters are made the centre of attention at the expense of attention that should be paid to vocational knowledge. In terms of understanding vocational knowledge, it is described as complex and difficult to understand, which leads the different HEIs to adopt a variety of methods for the validation. There are also a variety of interpretations of how to value lengthy experience, the trades' regulations, and ultimately it seems as if the criteria are quite influential at the different HEIs. This puts high demands on the criteria, which are not likely to be upheld, when the responses given in section 8.1.1 concerning the inherent difficulties are considered.

8.5 Certificates and/or narratives: A cultural/cognitive focus

So far the regulative and normative elements within validation of vocational knowledge at the different HEIs have been addressed. In following Scott (2014), an institution and the process of institutionalisation is comprised of yet another pillar – the cultural/cognitive. This pillar has to do with shared conceptions and frames for meaning making, and simply what is taken for granted, in this case about vocational knowledge. In this section, the ways the study counsellors talk about vocational knowledge and how the applicants are supposed to show or prove their knowledge is explored; also the relation between academics and vocational experts.

8.5.1 Vocations and vocational knowledge

During the interviews with the study counsellors the discussion was generally about vocational knowledge, and did not focus on a particular vocation. This was due to the fact that the validation procedure involves all kinds of applications, no matter what vocation the applicant comes from and vocational subjects s/he applies for. To lump together a variety of vocations and talk about vocational knowledge is one issue in itself, and one of the study counsellors commented on this:

Mmm, well a vocation if you think of these twelve vocational programs that we have in Upper Secondary School, it's a

collection of vocations that don't always have too much in common. But if you try to look at some kind of commonality, it's often some activity embedded in these vocations and it is made up of a kind of skill and capability to organise so that you get a flow in it.⁵⁶ (Study counsellor 4)

This study counsellor emphasised the differences between all the vocational exits in the programs in Upper Secondary School. The reflection that the vocations do not have much in common is in stark contrast to the criteria of the vocational subjects in the admission procedure which are all very similar. What might be a commonality in different vocations, the study counsellor said, is that in many of those vocations there is some kind of embedded activity. To develop vocational knowledge is dependent on getting a flow in this activity, and also being able to collaborate and to organise oneself.

Many discussions during the interviews concerned the criteria and guidelines in the admission procedure and how these accounted for vocational knowledge. Besides asking about criteria and the like I also asked what the study counsellors perceived as being special about vocational knowledge. On several occasions the study counsellors also chose spontaneously to talk about vocational knowledge, taking different vocations as examples:

It's very much this ability to plan, the ability to see, to do the right thing at the right time...that you have some kind of capability to stand here and hammer a nail, and understand that when I stand here and hammer a nail that's what matters when the house has come a bit further, Am I doing the wrong thing now? I'll have to redo that again, because then it will be in the way. So it's both...for me it's very much an obvious feeling, a certain speed in the craft skills so that what you do will be straight and neat, but then there is much more to it such as to organise yourself on a construction site for example and to be able to organise yourself and to be able to organise yourself in relation to other carpenters and other craftsmen. /.../ Yes, and that you can say is very theoretical. You could go into a theoretical lecture room and describe it all but it is also a skill that has to be practiced in some way.⁵⁷ (Study counsellor 4)

⁵⁶ Mmm, alltså ett yrke om man tänker dom här tolv programmen som är yrkesförberedande program på gymnasiet så är det ju en samling yrken som inte alltid har så jättemycket gemensamt men om man ska försöka och titta på nåt slags gemensamt så är det ju att det ligger ofta görande i de här yrkena och det ligger ett görande en slags färdighetsförmåga att organisera görandet så att man får ett flow i det liksom. (Studievägledare 4)

⁵⁷ Det väldigt mycket det här förmåga att planera, förmåga att se, att göra rätt sak vid rätt tidpunkt...att man ha nån slags att både kunna stå här och spika och förstå att när jag står här och spikar så har det

The example above is illuminating for what vocational knowledge might involve in a particular vocational area, such as carpentry in this case. As made visible through this quote, vocational knowledge includes many aspects, such as having a feeling, a certain speed, accuracy, timing, consideration of aesthetic values, and also the collective values manifested in the capability to organise oneself in relation to others, and so on. However, there are also, as noted, many theoretical aspects of vocational knowledge. In emphasising the many different aspects and by connecting it to theoretical knowledge, it is clear that vocational knowledge is neither only manual nor only intellectual, but rather a combination that has developed with regards to getting certain touch and know how, also in relation to working with tools and with colleagues. The theoretical aspects are stressed here by the conclusion that this could have been described in a lecture room. Another comment regarding what is typical about vocational knowledge was that:

...the knowledge is in the hands, everything may not be possible to elicit through a theoretical test or so. I can think that it may require that you have seen what they have...for sure you can submit tasks, but it is somehow difficult to submit a whole house (laughter).⁵⁸ (Study counsellor 6)

Reflecting on vocational knowledge, this study counsellor suggested that it is in the hands, which could be interpreted as the know-how and the tacit aspects of vocational knowledge that are not always possible to articulate or demonstrate in the admission procedure. The results of such knowledge cannot be proven with a theoretical test. Although the interviews concerned vocational knowledge in general, many of the study counsellors chose to give examples of people with particularly interesting vocational knowledge. One such example was of the traditional craft of shoe making:

When the master taught the shoemaker apprentice how to sew a reed or whatever it might be called and first you try it out a couple of times and it's going to be a bit of cutting corners, but when you have done it a couple of times, then you understand

betydelse för när huset har kommit en bit längre fram för gör jag fel här nu så får jag göra om liksom för då sitter det i vägen eller så det är ju både, för mig är det väldigt mycket naturligtvis handlag, en viss hastighet i handlaget, färdighet så att det som du gör blir rakt och snyggt men sen ligger det väldigt mycket mer i det utifrån det här att kunna organisera sig på en byggarbetsplats till exempel och både att kunna organisera sig själv och att kunna organisera sig i förhållande till andra snickare andra hantverkare./.../ Ja, och det kan man säga är jätteteoretiskt. Man kan gå in i en teorisal och beskriva det men det är också en färdighet som måste övas upp på nåt sätt. (Studievägledare 4)

⁵⁸ ...kunskapen sitter ju liksom i händerna, allt kanske inte går att få fram genom ett teoretiskt prov eller så. Det kan jag ju tänka att det kanske kräver att man har sett vad man har...visst det kan man ju lämna in uppgifter på men det är svårt att lämna in ett helt hus liksom (skratt). (Studievägledare 6)

*and in some way, the hand and the brain understand, get some kind of common knowledge, I think.*⁵⁹ (Study counsellor 7)

In this quote vocational knowledge is also described as being in the hand, but it is added that the hand and the brain form a common knowledge. From this quote it can be seen that vocational knowledge is developed through the fusion of theoretical (or propositional) knowledge and tacit knowledge, and that it develops through practice. To account for tacit knowledge might be difficult in validation, particularly if the validation takes place outside its contextualised practice, and if parts of it are undertaken by others who lack the vocational knowledge. On the other hand, giving either the theoretical or the tacit aspects of vocational knowledge precedence runs the risk of not capturing the complexity of vocational knowledge. The same study counsellor said on another occasion during the interview that it *becomes a bit like weaving a fabric of theoretical knowledge and practical experience*. The issue of distinguishing between theoretical and tacit knowledge was brought up on several occasions:

*And in the guidelines it is stated that you can get theoretical knowledge based on experience. One cannot of course get experience from theory and that it is the experience based knowledge, the work life experience, which is as I interpret it, that is the most important criterion.*⁶⁰ (Study counsellor 3)

According to the instructions, experiential knowledge is the most important, this study counsellor said. As described earlier, the use of the term *experiential knowledge* may be misleading as it potentially relates to either the process and site of learning or tacit knowledge, or both in combination. The ambition to account for vocational knowledge and all of its aspects in the workplace seems difficult, as this validation is organised, assuming that both theoretical and tacit knowledge can be assessed with basically one and the same method. An interesting and illuminating example of assessing vocational knowledge was given when one of the interviews had ended:

I was in contact with a master painter, so I said how would you, how long would you need to determine if a person has vocational proficiency without giving a detailed description. Then he said

⁵⁹ När mästare lärde skomakarlärningen liksom hur man syr en läst eller vad det nu kan heta att man provar först några gånger och det blir väl lite sådär halvsnyggt men har man gjort det ett antal gånger så förstår man också tänker jag alltså att på nåt vis att handen och hjärnan förstår, får nån sorts gemensam kunskap, tänker jag. (Studievägledare 7)

⁶⁰ Och i riktlinjerna så står det att man kan få teoretiska kunskaper utifrån erfarenhet. Men man kan inte få såklart erfarenhet utifrån teori och de här erfarenhetsbaserade kunskaperna, arbetslivserfarenheten, den är ju liksom såsom jag tolkar det...det viktigaste kriteriet. (Studievägledare 4)

10 seconds. I asked him: How do you do it then? I asked him to take the brush in his hand, and if it's an amateur, he holds the brush in one way, but if it's a pro he holds the brush in another way. I do not know if that's true but I just thought well...⁶¹ (Study counsellor 5)

The ten seconds assessment procedure is certainly not in line with the criteria and guidelines which are introduced to secure fair, reliable, and valid outcomes in relying on criteria and frameworks. Criteria and frameworks can be seen as important for the legitimacy of validation, which is a crucial aspect of its institutionalisation. However, for the assessment of vocational knowledge, and not least its tacit aspects, it is difficult to imagine how anyone without this kind of knowledge would be asked to assess it. Probably, it is also difficult for us to rely on a ten second assessment, although we might have the perception of this master painter knowing what he is doing. We might be ill at ease when some of the most crucial aspects of vocational knowledge are not scientific in so far that they cannot be proven, but rather are a part of the judgement of a proficient vocational expert. For the sake of the legitimacy and trustworthiness of validation, slightly different means are used for validation within the academic context. One such means has been to reconstruct vocational knowledge and express it as subjects. One study counsellor commented on this and said:

Previously, you were accepted because of a solid background within the vocation very generally. But we are talking a little about to start looking if it would be possible to make clusters of subjects /.../ it could make it easier for the applicant group and the admission team, the external assessors and institutions of higher education to somehow return to the vocation and to what constitutes the vocation. We are into this so that house construction is [now] a subject. It is a subject like Swedish, English or Chemistry, so you have squeezed the vocational knowledge into a school context.⁶² (Study counsellor 4)

⁶¹ Jag var i kontakt med en målarmästare så sa jag hur skulle du, hur lång tid behöver du för att kunna avgöra om en person har en yrkeskompetens utan att i detalj beskriva. Så sa han 10 sekunder. Hur gör du då? Jag ber honom ta penseln i handen är det en amatör så håller han penseln på ett sätt, är det ett proffs så håller han penseln på ett annat sätt. Jag vet inte om det är sant men jag bara tänkte att ja... (Studievägledare 5)

Förr var det ju att man blev antagen, för att man hade en gedigen bakgrund i det yrket väldigt generellt. Men vi pratar lite om man skulle börja se på om man skulle göra kluster av ämnen/.../ det skulle göra det lättare för sökandegruppen och bedömargruppen, de externa bedömarna och lärosätena att nån slags att man går tillbaka till mot yrket liksom vad är det som konstruerar yrket. Man är ju inne i det här att husbyggnad det är ett ämne. det är ett ämne precis som svenska, engelska eller kemi så man har ju man har ju pressat in liksom dom här yrkeskunskaperna i en skolkontext. (Studievägledare 4)

It seems from this study counsellor's perspective as if something gets lost – as for example what constitutes the vocation – when a vocation is divided into many subjects, and thus squeezed into a school context. What constitutes the vocation, and its knowledge is embodied in the master painter, just knowing in ten seconds, yet possibly with difficulties in explaining exactly how and why he knows. In the academic context such explanations are often crucial. It is also taken for granted that areas of knowledge are organised as subjects, with the bonus that they often can be expressed verbally. The statement made by this study counsellor about what constitutes a vocation suggested that the particular practice where the vocational knowledge has developed is not sufficiently accounted for, although the expectations on validation are to specifically account for knowledge developed outside the formal education system.

That it is possible to adequately describe vocational knowledge in written text alone, is one assumption within the admission procedure. In addition, the applicants are going to write these descriptions on their own, for the narratives to be read later by people not acquainted with the practice of the specific vocation and its vocational knowledge. To prepare such descriptions must be seen as a challenge for the applicants and for their employers who write workplace certificates and recommendations. The applicants are supposed to complement their workplace certificates with written narratives about their vocational knowledge, in order to meet the criteria of vocational subjects and to prove that the required level in the framework is reached. In the next section, the study counsellors' perceptions about the certificates are addressed.

8.5.2 Certificates

Many study counsellors shared a concern about insufficient workplace certificates, which give no more information than that the person has been employed in a particular workplace:

*It does not say much just because you have worked in particular location, it has to be described in these certificates on the basis of their employment, it must be described what kind of things they have done.*⁶³ (Study counsellor 7)

In order to assess the applicants they say that they need to know what kind of tasks and positions the applicants have had. Yet, another concern was whether documents at all can be taken as a proof of vocational knowledge. One study counsellor explained:

⁶³ Det säger ju inte så mycket bara för att man har jobbat på ett visst ställe utan man måste ju beskriva i dom här intygen utifrån deras anställning behöver det ju stå vad dom har gjort för nånting. (Studievägledare 7)

But documents do not really say anything about whether you have the knowledge. They just say that you've done something. Sometimes these documents are such that I think that an expert who looks at these documents may think that if you have worked with these matters or if you have been welding within such a company then you can do this and this and this...it is reasonable to believe that....but we do not really know if this individual can do this and this and this /.../ well, when you think like this, if you have worked and been employed at Intersport and you have had a team leader responsibility at Intersport then I know a vocational expert somewhere and who has worked a lot with this. Then I know that those who do this, they do this and this and this and that's all good. That's one thing but now you should not forget that it's going to be level 5 on this.⁶⁴ (Study counsellor 5)

Besides expressing hesitation with regards to what kind of information can be gained from reading the document, the importance of having vocational knowledge on level five was mentioned again. Yet, another concern was that those in the trades and industries know for themselves what it means to have worked in a particular workplace, but it is harder to know for the study counsellors. In addition the trades and industries have a lot of licenses, certificates, and documented competence development steps. This kind of documentation is easily interpretable for vocational experts, but not as evident for academics:

We notice when we talk to the different industries and trades that rely heavily on certificates and licenses, and you can also see those who have gone through different levels of competence so to speak or...well, what kind of competence development and within which areas... do they (vocational experts, my comment) assess this based on their vocational knowledge so to speak.⁶⁵ (Study counsellor 8)

⁶⁴ Men dokument säger ju egentligen ingenting om du har den kunskapen. Det säger bara att du har gjort nånting. Ibland är dom här dokumenten på det viset att jag tänker att en expert som tittar på dom här dokumenten rimligtvis kanske tänker såhär att om man har jobbat med dom här frågorna eller om man har varit svetsare på en sån här firma då kan man det här och det här och det här men vi vet inte egentligen om den här individen kan det här och det här och det här /.../ Alltså där man tänker såhär om du har jobbat och varit anställd på Intersport och du har haft ett gruppleदारansvar på Intersport då vet jag som ämneskunnig nånstans och jobbat mycket med sånt här. Då vet jag att dom som gör det dom gör det här och det här och det här och det är gott och väl, det är en sak men nu ska man inte glömma att det ska vara nivå 5 på det här. (Studievägledare 5)

⁶⁵ Det märker vi när vi pratar med dom här olika branscherna att man förlitar sig väldigt mycket på certifikat och licenser och man kan se också på dom som har gått olika kompetenssteg så att säga eller ja nån form av fortbildning och så vidare och vad dom har fortbildat sig inom och så där och då ser

The importance given to the certificates of different kinds was an issue where there also is some sort of divide between those who use ValiWeb and those who don't, as exemplified with the following quotes:

In case that the employer's certificates or work certificates are good and clear so that we can understand, then they can...they don't outweigh the written narratives, of course not, but they may not need to be as sharp as if there are no certificates.⁶⁶
(Study Counsellor 1)

At the HEIs where they are taking care of the whole validation procedure, the narratives are considered as important, according to this study counsellor, more important than workplace certificates. Those who use ValiWeb do not assign the narratives the same importance, but rely on the certificate, which was explained by another study counsellor:

There are universities where they assign the written narratives great importance, whereas I would say that I want to see certificates.⁶⁷ (Study Counsellor 7)

From this quote it appears as if the study counsellors at the different HEIs do not assign the different forms of documentation similar importance. So although they receive the same instructions, these are interpreted in different ways. Generally speaking, those who use ValiWeb consider the workplace certificates the most important whereas the others assign the written narratives greater importance. Perceptions about the narratives will be explored next.

8.5.3 Narratives

Some of the difficulties the study counsellors experienced in their work with validation were the narratives being too superficial and insufficient. It was suggested that the applicants were having difficulties in understanding the validation procedure and to make their applications assessable:

You can see those who understand and those who do not understand. You can look at the applications. One semester I had, then I had 225 applications and then you can even start

ju...dom bedömer ju det här och kan ju göra det utifrån sin yrkeskunskap så att säga. (Studievägledare 8)

⁶⁶ Är det så att arbetsgivarintygen eller arbetsintygen ändå är bra och tydliga så att vi kan förstå. Då kan de ju...de överväger ju inte självbeskrivningen, givetvis inte, men självbeskrivningen kanske inte behöver vara lika vass som i det fall där det inte finns intyg. (Studievägledare 1)

⁶⁷ Det finns lärosäten som lägger väldigt stor vikt vid självvärderingarna medan jag skulle säga att jag vill se intyg. (Studievägledare 7)

*gasping for breath until you realise how few are serious.*⁶⁸
(Study counsellor 10)

Many of the study counsellors mentioned how insufficient the applications were. They also mentioned how the students expressed feeling unsettled with regards to the requirement of writing narratives. Many examples were given about students who had questioned this part of the procedure, referring to the fact that they had worked in a particular area for ten years or more, and wondered why that was not enough. It is also noteworthy that this requirement may reject applicants, who potentially could have relevant vocational knowledge, but which they find difficult to describe and prove. The difficulties in understanding and following the instructions had consequences insofar that applicants are rejected before even getting to the validation:

*There are many who are rejected because they do not finally present a material that can be assessed.*⁶⁹ (Study counsellor 3)

Many of the study counsellors mentioned that too few applications were assessable. One commonly described insufficiency of the applications was that the narratives were too short or even absent:

*Surprisingly many just leave it empty. It is not often actually, that I get the question – Can you help me out with how I shall write? Either they write something super short, they write, well I do not exaggerate six rows sometimes. I have worked as a carpenter all my life and would like to become a vocational teacher. And then you read the instruction and you realise that was not what was said in the instruction. It is clearly stated what you are supposed to do but very few do so and I think it is because they find it difficult, too gruelling and they do not get the point of doing it.*⁷⁰
(Study counsellor 2)

⁶⁸ Man kan ju se de som förstår och inte förstår. Det kan man se på ansökningarna Jag hade en termin när jag hade 225 ansökningar och då kan man ju börja flämta efter luft liksom så tills man får klart för sig hur många det är som är seriösa. (Studievägledare 10)

⁶⁹ Det är många som går bort för att de i slutändan inte presenterar ett material som går att bedöma. (Studievägledare 3)

⁷⁰ Så förvånansvärt många bara lämnar det tomt. Det är inte så ofta jag får frågan: Kan du hjälpa mig hur jag ska skriva? Faktiskt, utan antingen så skriver dom nånting jättekort. De skriver, alltså jag överdriver inte, sex rader ibland. Jag har jobbat som snickare hela mitt liv och jag skulle vilja bli yrkeslärare och så läser man instruktionen och så tänker man alltså men så står det inte alls att du ska göra. Det står väldigt tydligt vad du ska göra för någonting men det är väldigt få som gör det och jag tror att det är för att dom tycker det är för svårt, för ansträngande och förstår inte vitsen med det. (Studievägledare 2)

Some study counsellors mentioned the restricted narratives as the major weakness in the validation procedure. They considered the students wrote too little or something that they were not expected to write. The writing of narratives seemed to favour those with an academic education:

If I shall generalise, but I do want to emphasise and this is not how it looks everywhere, but it is easier for those who have a higher academic background to describe their knowledge according to the criteria and the guidelines, if you are trained in recognising correlations it is of course easier to get an application together, which is also easier to assess. They do not necessarily need to have better vocational knowledge.⁷¹ (Study counsellor 3)

The different levels of comprehensiveness of the written narratives were brought up by several study counsellors. In academic institutions writing skills have a prominent position, which might be one explanation for applicants with such a background being able to write better narratives. Having an academic background does not say anything about the vocational knowledge, as this study counsellor remarked. Academic studies seemed however to be an advantage in writing the narratives:

This is written by people who have at least three years of academic education and are used to expressing themselves in this way, this you should then compare with someone who may have gone to elementary school, so what is it, what are we looking at, what are we measuring with the written words?⁷² (Study counsellor 5)

In order to pass the screening phase, and be forwarded to the assessment phase the application needs to be complete with workplace certificates and narratives. It is, though, mentioned and questioned by many of the study counsellors as to what is actually being measured by the written word, both with regards to narratives and workplace certificates. Furthermore, they stressed that how well the narratives are written does not necessarily correspond to similarly good vocational knowledge. Many of the study

⁷¹ Om jag ska generalisera men jag vill poängtera att jag inte, det är inte så det ser ut överallt men det är ändå säga att det är lättare så många som har en högre akademisk bakgrund att beskriva sina kunskaper utifrån de här riktlinjerna och kriterierna. Är man övad på att se samband så är det så klart lättare att få fram en ansökan som är lättare att bedöma de behöver nödvändigtvis inte ha bättre yrkeskunskaper. (Studievägledare 3)

⁷² Det här är ju skrivet av människor som har minst tre års akademisk utbildning och är van vid att kanske uttrycka sig på det viset det ska du ju då jämföra med någon som kanske gått grundskola, alltså vad är det, vad är det vi tittar, vad är det vi mäter med det skriva ordet? (Studievägledare 5)

counsellors had met students who explicitly expressed that they found the writing of narratives odd or difficult:

Because I mean it can also be like that, because I meet several vocational teachers who call me and say, this is going to be difficult for me because I cannot write such things. I don't know what to write. I cannot do it. Couldn't I speak about it? That is why I mean and am constantly thinking of, if you look at the written words, then something more is added, we look at your ability to express yourself in writing.⁷³ (Study counsellor 5)

Besides the doubtfulness with regards to the possibility of capturing vocational knowledge through narratives, the narratives were also questioned for credibility reasons:

If one shall bring it to a head then you can say that these narratives could be written by anyone with experience of that vocation. It does not necessarily have to be written by the applicant. It may be written by someone else and I don't think that the narratives alone are enough to elicit the knowledge. I don't think so and what we have noticed these years when we have worked with these narratives is how hard it has been for us to get good narratives.⁷⁴ (Study counsellor 5)

It seems from what was suggested by this study counsellor that the narratives cannot capture all aspects of vocational knowledge. The same study counsellor later added that it is difficult for all of us to know what we can do, and that this is one reason for why it is hard to describe. As previously mentioned, there were some differences between the different HEIs concerning the reliance on narratives. In some HEIs these were seen as important, whereas others were becoming increasingly hesitant about their benefits. One study counsellor had initially considered the narratives as very helpful, but later changed their mind, and said:

⁷³ För jag menar det kan ju vara så att, för jag möter ju flera yrkeslärare som säger att, eller som ringer och säger, det här kommer jag att få svårt med för jag kan inte skriva sånt här. Jag vet inte vad jag ska skriva. Jag kan inte göra det. Kan jag inte få berätta? Därför att jag menar eller jag tänker alltid om man tittar på det skrivna ordet så lägger man ju till nåt mer vi tittar på det är ju din förmåga att uttrycka dig i skrift. (Studievägledare 5)

⁷⁴ Ska man dra det här lite till sin spets så kan man ju säga den egenbeskrivningen kan vem som helst skriva som har erfarenhet av det yrket. Det behöver ju inte vara skriven av den sökande. Det kan vara skrivet av någon annan och jag tror inte att egenbeskrivningen i sig räcker för att få fram kunskapen. Det tror jag inte och vad vi har märkt dom här åren när vi har jobbat med dom här egenbeskrivningarna det är hur svårt vi har att få fram bra egenbeskrivningar. (Studievägledare 5)

Now I have more and more come to think that they are actually really worthless, those narratives.⁷⁵ (Study counsellor 7)

This can be contrasted to a statement from another study counsellor about workplace certificates presented in section 8.5.2 “*they don’t outweigh the written narratives*”. Relating certificates and written narratives to the master painter who need ten seconds to distinguish a professional from an amateur call into question who is going to assess and decide what relevant vocational knowledge is, and by what means. The issue of involving both vocational experts and academics in the validation will be the topic of the next section.

8.5.4 Vocational experts and academics

The Swedish Council for Higher Education has, as earlier mentioned, taken over the responsibility for coordinating the admission procedure on a national level. In order to secure fair and equitable outcomes of the admission procedure, they have instituted a national bank of vocational experts. Previously, the HEIs and ValiWeb had their own experts, respectively. The experts who were previously connected either to a HEI or ValiWeb have now been gathered in the national vocational assessor bank. Previously, the HEIs had to search for their own experts and one study counsellor described what back then guided their decisions:

We say that we need someone who still has a foot left in the industry who has good insights and relations with the industry, someone who is loyal no not loyal, that is the wrong word but someone who delivers, works well, someone who we can trust and someone who is a good vocational teacher and who has a foot left in the industry so that you know that it is someone who has the ability of understanding verbal expression and writing and explaining why someone gets rejected, formulate and write, explain why someone gets a rejection or not. So you need someone with this competence as well.⁷⁶ (Study counsellor 2)

It is obvious that the vocational experts need many qualities. Being a teacher is seen as an advantage, by some study counsellors. However, the perceptions of who is seen as the most suitable vocational expert differ between the study

⁷⁵ Nu har jag mer och mer börjat tänka att dom är rätt värdelösa egentligen dom där självvärderingarna. (Studievägledare 7)

⁷⁶ Vi säger att vi behöver ha nån som fortfarande har en fot kvar i branschen som har god insyn och kontakt med branschen fortfarande idag, nån som är lojal och som eller lojal det var fel men nån som levererar, jobbar bra, nån som man kan lita på och nån som alltså man är en duktig yrkeslärare och man har en fot kvar i branschen så att man vet, det är den saken man ska kunna formulera sig och skriva, motivera varför nån får ett avslag eller inte. Så att man behöver ha en sån förmåga också. (Studievägledare 2)

counsellors. One opinion is that it is better to choose vocational teachers. Another opinion is that the most important quality assurance of the vocational experts is that they are trusted and respected by those in the trades. Trust is also seen as important in the relation between academics and vocational experts:

I mean that this is where I have to trust the vocational expert, that this person understands that when the other person describes that this is what I have done with a car, then he understands that the one who is able to do that with a car is damn good. But I don't get that. I don't know how much more difficult it is to change this or that in a car or to produce that thing. I cannot know that. No, but then I think that I, must think that the vocational expert knows this, even though it is not stated in the certificate.⁷⁷ (Study counsellor 5)

Another remark stresses the differences between assessors coming from school and those coming from industry:

Then it becomes somewhat that the assessors from the trades they, they don't assess with regards to criteria but they assess according to their experience, their backpack so to speak. Because they know what is included in the vocation. So the criteria they get, they are there but they get some sort of subordinated meaning, as I feel.⁷⁸ (Study counsellor 4)

It is suggested by this study counsellor that experts from the trades relate the assessment to their vocational experience and overlook the criteria. Considering the concern the study counsellors had about the criteria, their fuzziness and lack of explicit content, it may be understandable that some vocational experts overlook the criteria. In the search for suitable assessors, one study counsellor had called an industry and remembered:

So when I said having proficient vocational knowledge I got two or three proposals, and then when we continued talking about

⁷⁷ Jag menar att det är ju där jag också får lita kanske på den här yrkesbedömaren, att den förstår att när den här personen beskriver att det här har jag gjort med bil så förstår han att kan man göra det med en bil så är man jäkligt duktig. Men det fattar ju inte jag. Jag vet ju inte vad som. Jag vet ju inte hur mycket svårare det är att byta det eller det på en bil eller framställa den grejen eller den. Det vet ju inte jag ju. Nä, men då tänker jag att man får kanske liksom tänka sig att den här yrkesbedömaren begriper detta. Även om det inte framgår i intyget. (Studievägledare 5)

⁷⁸ Då blir det ju lite så att dom här bedömare speciellt dom från branschen dom, dom bedömer inte utifrån kriterierna utan dom bedömer utifrån sin erfarenhet, sin ryggsäck liksom. För dom vet vad som ingår i yrket. Så kriterierna dom får, dom finns där men dom har nån slags underordnad betydelse, känner jag. (Studievägledare 4)

what is needed, that it is someone how can assess the level, and then there was one left.⁷⁹ (Study counsellor 3)

This difficulty of finding suitable assessors was addressed in different ways during the interviews. According to the study counsellors, the assessors need both solid vocational knowledge and general assessment competence. The fact that some vocational experts chose to overlook the criteria does not necessarily have to do with a lack of assessment competence. It might as well have to do with how appropriate the criteria are. Another difficulty is that the documentation and the criteria of vocational knowledge should be understood by both vocational experts and academics, as the validation involves both categories. Thus, another area of tension is that vocational experts are assessing the applicants' vocational knowledge but each HEI is responsible for taking decision of admission or rejection:

So, the vocational knowledge is assessed by vocational experts. This is not assessed by us but because we have...because we are the ones who sign the papers and we have the authorized responsibility, so we must also look at the applications and ask ourselves if this is reasonable.⁸⁰ (Study counsellor 5)

As the HEIs have the responsibility to make the final decisions this means that they have to go through the applications and the experts' assessment and recommendations. This is not always easy, as one of the study counsellors explained:

What do I have, which knowledge about, for example electricity or the construction industry. /.../ So normally, I trust the assessors' opinions and assessments. It's rare, but occasionally I'm changing the experts' judgment.⁸¹ (Study counsellor 7)

Most often the HEIs follow the recommendations made by the vocational expert, but, as can be noted, sometimes they go against the recommendations. In order to increase the quality of the assessment and secure the outcomes, one study counsellor suggested:

⁷⁹ Så då när jag sa duktig i sitt yrkeskunnande jag fick jag förslag på två tre och när vi då pratade vidare om att det ska vara någon som kan bedöma nivån och då blev det en kvar. (Studievägledare 3)

⁸⁰ Alltså yrkeskunnandet bedöms av yrkespersoner. Dom bedöms ju inte av oss men eftersom vi har...eftersom det är vi som skriver under papperna och det är ju vi som har myndighetsansvaret så måste vi också tycker jag titta på ansökningarna och ställa oss frågan är det här rimligt. (Studievägledare 5)

⁸¹ Vad har jag för liksom kunskap om till exempel ellära eller byggbranschen /.../ Då litar jag på branschbedömarnas utlåtande och bedömning, vanligen. Så det är sällan men det händer att jag ändrar experternas bedömning. (Studievägledare 7)

I could think of the possibility of distributing the same application to two reviewers.⁸² (Study counsellor 5)

The difficulty of finding appropriate experts and the gap between the assessment and the decision of admission, both in terms of being different persons but also belonging to different institutional contexts, is further strengthened by this statement:

So we have had some internal assessors, which means that we haven't sent away all, which has actually been very positive because they have been familiar with levels, current trends, and criteria from UHR (The Swedish Council for Higher Education, my comment). They have had the knowledge of the guidelines and documents.⁸³ (Study counsellor 3)

It was suggested by this study counsellor that it was an advantage to have internal experts as they know the guidelines and documents. It should be noted that this was only the case for vocational subjects where assessors could be found within the university, such as for example in the health care sector. Also the question of who is suitable as an expert divides those who have ValiWeb from the rest. ValiWeb has been more likely to choose experts who are trusted by their trades. Other HEIs are more likely to prefer vocational teachers or internal assessors. This is, however, not clear cut, as they all also have assessors who are either vocational teachers or trade representatives. In addition, according to the new guidelines they will no longer be able to choose their assessors but rather be assigned assessors from the national assessors' bank. The vocational experts are, though, doubtless important agents in the validation process, even if they are not a homogenous group with a general assessment competence:

That is what is so complex because we have persons who have to assess this strictly. The assessors are not a homogenous group with assessment competence. Then they have to, according to criteria, which do not describe more than they do, explain what is missing (in case admission is not recommended, my comment). The assessors do not speak the same language as UHR (The

⁸² Jag skulle ju kunna tänka att man skulle kunna dela ut samma ärende till två bedömare. (Studievägledare5)

⁸³ Så vi har haft en del interna bedömare så vi har inte skickat iväg alla vilket faktiskt har varit positivt eftersom de har varit ganska väl insatta i nivåer, aktualitet, kriterier från UHR. De har haft kunnandet i liksom dokumenten som styr. (Studievägledare 3)

*Swedish Council for Higher Education). It is to some extent vague from the beginning to the end.*⁸⁴ (Study counsellor 4)

Having a procedure where the assessment and the decisions are separated, not only in terms of different persons but also in coming from different institutional contexts, is a challenge. The criteria and frameworks are of course introduced for the possibility of breaking through this barrier and to make the procedure fair and transparent. Still it was perceived by this study counsellor as “*vague from the beginning to the end*”, and the explanation for this is that the criteria and the experts do not “*speak the same language*”. Although the study counsellors share a commonality in describing validation as difficult, they also express that they have learnt a lot from being part of this procedure. They said they can judge in advance, during the screening phase, whether an application is sufficient or not:

*But for me as a study counsellor who relies on documents to a large extent it is tremendously difficult. It is an abstract world and I haven't the subject knowledge in that sense from the beginning. But you learn a lot from this kind of informal validation, or what we shall call it. You learn a lot about...you get some frames of reference so that you get better and better in making these judgements eventually but in the beginning you are completely lost.*⁸⁵ (Study counsellor 1)

From being completely lost to have gained a sense of it and some frame of reference, is how this study counsellor described the experience of being involved in validation. One study counsellor at an HEI using ValiWeb mentioned that in using ValiWeb they lose insight into the whole process of validation, and that it would have been interesting to follow it from start to end and learn more about validation:

⁸⁴ Det är ju det som är så komplext för vi har ju personer som ska bedöma dessa strikt. Bedömnarna är ingen homogen grupp med bedömningsförmåga. Sen ska man utifrån kriterier som inte beskriver mer än de gör beskriva vad som saknas. Bedömnarna pratar inte samma språk som UHR. Det är liksom vagt från början till slut. (Studievägledare 4)

⁸⁵ Men för mig som studievägledare som går väldigt mycket efter papper är det ju oerhört svårt. Det är en abstrakt värld och jag har ju inte ämneskunskapen på det sättet heller från början. Man lär ju sig väldigt mycket genom sån informell validering, eller vad man ska kalla det för. Man lär ju sig väldigt mycket om...man får liksom nån slags rammall som man kan använda så att man blir bättre och bättre på att göra de här bedömningarna så småningom men i början är man ju totalt lost. (Studievägledare 1)

*In a way it is a pity that we have ValiWeb, but they are so fantastic at what they are doing. I have great confidence in them. They do it all day long. It is a professional company. They do this all day long. I don't think I would do the job half as well as they do it.*⁸⁶ (Study counsellor 9)

At the same time as this study counsellor would have liked to be more involved in validation, doubts were expressed whether it was possible for the HEI to do validation as well as ValiWeb. In different ways those who used ValiWeb expressed that they assign the company confidence and trust. One study counsellor even suggested that if they could not use ValiWeb they would have to close down the program, because taking care of the whole process within the institution would have been too difficult. In a similar manner those study counsellors at HEIs where they took care of the whole process argued for the necessity of having this insight into and of owning the whole process.

It becomes obvious that there are various kinds of negotiations bound to appear when vocational knowledge crosses institutional borders, is assessed by assessors coming from different institutional settings, and when validation is sometimes outsourced and sometimes handled within the HEIs. What is taken for granted may differ between different agents and settings.

8.6 Vocations and their related knowledge lost in academia

When the study counsellors were asked or talked about vocational knowledge which is the overarching concept in the admission procedure, a variety of rich examples appeared. There seemed to be a concern among many of the study counsellors that something gets lost in the admission procedure, such as for example what constitutes the vocation. What constitutes a vocation is lost when vocational knowledge is expressed as subjects. This is one sign of how validation is institutionalised under the premises of the academic institution, which was expressed as vocational knowledge being squeezed into a school context. Another sign of validation being institutionalised under the premises of the academic institution is the requirement for writing narratives. This part of the application was described as being particularly difficult. Those who used ValiWeb were more hesitant regarding the benefits of those narratives, but the others also had concerns about the narratives. There were questions as

⁸⁶ På sätt och vis är det synd att vi har ValiWeb men de är ju så himla bra på det dom gör. Jag känner stort förtroende för dom. Dom gör det dagarna i ända. Det är ett proffsigt företag. Dom gör ju det här dagarna i ända. Jag tror inte att jag skulle göra jobbet hälften så bra som dom. (Studievägledare 9)

to what is actually measured with the written word. Another doubt expressed was that well written narratives did not automatically imply better vocational knowledge.

It was also noticed that the admission procedure rejected many students as they were not able to present an assessable application. The study counsellors also expressed how the writing of narratives favours students with academic backgrounds, quite the contrary to what was intended with this new admission procedure. The prominent position of written communication is evident in the academic institution, which is not always the case in workplaces. Thus, it is questionable whether it is possible to capture in writing vocational knowledge of for example a carpenter, a nursing aide or a hairdresser, since it is well known that such vocational knowledge is to a greater or lesser degree tacit. Continuing this requirement for writing in the admission procedure follows the risk of carelessly jumping to conclusions that those without academic backgrounds have some lack of writing skills, which is not necessarily the case. It may actually have to do with the task being too difficult or impossible to complete.

The example of the master painter who needed only ten seconds for judging whether it was a professional or an amateur provides an interesting reflection on what it means to have vocational knowledge and to be able to assess others' vocational knowledge. This kind of tacit knowledge and vocational judgement of an expert is not in alignment with the validation procedure which is supposed to be legitimate, transparent, and secure. For this reason guidelines and criteria are put in place, although these are apparently not fully providing the clarity and security that was intended. Instead, the different parts seem to be under constant negotiation, even dividing the different HEIs into two groups. Beside the criteria there are notably a number of different certificates, licenses, and so on within each trade that the experts know of but not the study counsellors. This means that the study counsellors need to trust the experts, while at the same time they express a concern that the experts do not follow the criteria but rely on their experience of the particular trade. The question that arises is, of course, whether it would have been more reasonable to have criteria or standards better suited to the trades certificates and licenses.

One conclusion to draw is that when vocational knowledge is validated within the institutional context of academia it appears to lose the connection to the vocation, its traditions, certificates, licenses, and more, and becomes like any other academic subject. As such it becomes perceived as possible not only to describe but also to assess by the means of written narratives. This potentially puts those with vocational knowledge in a position of not being able to write a satisfactory narrative to fully capture their theoretical and tacit knowledge and

experience. There seem to be a risk that what a knowledgeable master painter knows can get lost when written narratives are to be assessed and negotiated between academics and vocational experts, based on subject oriented criteria and a qualification framework which are not in alignment with trade specific certificates and standards.

8.7 Conceptions and understandings of vocational knowledge

Vocational knowledge is intimately connected to the vocation in which the knowledge has developed for specific purposes, associated with certain artefacts, and bound to its practitioners. The shift to vocational subjects partly erases this connection and this was expressed as a concern for a loss of what constitutes the vocation when transforming vocations into subjects. This concern can be seen as a wish for an understanding of knowledge more grounded in practice, rather in the logic of expedience. Such practice oriented understanding of knowledge is apparent in the Swedish curriculum. In this curriculum knowledge is the main and overarching conceptual category which is construed as being dependent on and made up of different aspects, namely facts, skills, understanding, and acquaintance. The development of these aspects of knowledge results in different competences or capabilities. Within the admission procedure the learning outcomes oriented knowledge conception is adopted. For many of the study counsellors it was difficult to divide the vocational knowledge into the descriptors of knowledge, skills, and competence. One explanation for these difficulties might be the fact that there are different knowledge conceptions at play. In discussing the descriptors it became difficult to distinguish between the terminology used in the Swedish curriculum and in the qualification framework, and I was mistaken myself on some occasions. Suddenly terms such as understanding, acquaintance, and the like turned up. The terminology itself can be seen as an issue, not only in playing with words, but also for assessors in reaching a common conceptual understanding of what the discussion is about.

It seemed particularly difficult to describe competence, which was, when taken together with skill, often understood as an ability to transform knowledge into performance in work. Knowledge was described as being more about the theoretical, but at the same time it was emphasised that theoretical knowledge might be developed in work as well. Part of this difficulty of relating theoretical knowledge to the learning site might be found in the criteria where it is stated that the knowledge shall be theoretical *and* experiential, implying a dualistic knowledge conception. This division was difficult to handle, as it could also be interpreted as meaning that theoretical knowledge is developed in formal education whereas experiential is developed

in work. This issue caused the study counsellors problems in acknowledging what they seemingly wanted, namely that theoretical knowledge is not a matter of the learning site but a form of knowledge. Furthermore, the understanding of knowledge as being either theoretical or experiential is at odds with the conceptualisation in the Swedish curriculum, where knowledge is knowledge, and the development of knowledge can take place in any learning site. There were also remarks made by the study counsellors that theoretical knowledge is not academic knowledge, but is knowledge which is possible to articulate in contrast to tacit knowledge. Here, theoretical is connected to propositional knowledge. Tacit knowledge seemed to be yet another area of confusion, not least how it should be handled in the admission procedure, and to what extent it was possible to account for, under the existing guidelines. One study counsellor emphasised that the applicants are going to become teachers so they must be able to communicate their tacit knowledge. Another study counsellor took the example of a nursing aide working with patients in the terminal stage of life, and having done so for a long time, and rhetorically asked: what is it that she can do? The very nature of tacit knowledge implies that it is difficult to grasp, to articulate, particularly outside of the practice where it has developed. In order to gain an understanding and an example of a practice, or at least a particular vocation, the hairdressing trade is addressed in the next chapter.

9. VALIDATION IN A TRADE

As was concluded from the interviews with the study counsellors, described in the previous chapter, the applicants have spikey profiles and the vocational experts are a very heterogeneous group of people. In order to provide a concrete case of a vocation and vocational knowledge, as perceived by those in the trade, one specific trade was chosen – the hairdressing trade. One applicant and one vocational expert were interviewed. Furthermore, the empirical material in this chapter is gathered from the Hairdressing Trade Association (Frisörföretagarna) home page (Hairdressers' Trade Association, 2018) and education material. In this section one application which has been subject to validation within the admission procedure is described, along with the guidelines the applicant was provided with. Furthermore, reflections made by the applicant and the vocational expert are accounted for. This chapter will be structured in the same manner, using Scott's pillars as a structure, as in the chapters of policy (chapter 7) and the organisational level of HEIs (chapter 8).

9.1 Presentation of the two interviewed hairdressers

The applicant Cecilia (pseudonym) applied to the VTE four years ago, which means that she today has finished her education and works as a vocational teacher. The decision to become a vocational teacher was informed, as she explained, by the fact that:

I have been working as a hairdresser at a salon for many years and have had a lot of students and felt like it was great fun to supervise them and show them the vocation and to pass on the knowledge I have. /.../ It was the students at the salon who brought me to the education.⁸⁷ (Cecilia)

As is obvious from the quote it was a positive choice, which also may have been grounded in her initial decision to become a hairdresser:

⁸⁷ Jag har ju jobbat som frisör på salong i många år och har haft en hel del elever och kände liksom att det var jätte roligt att handleda dom och visa dom yrket och förmedla dom kunskaperna man har. /.../ Det var eleverna på salongen som tog mig till utbildningen.

*I have always thought since I was a child that I wanted to become a hairdresser. And so I did so it was a dream come true. Absolutely.*⁸⁸ (Cecilia)

The vocational expert Johnny (pseudonym) did not actively decide to become a vocational expert but took over the task from a former colleague. When he introduced himself during the interview he said: –“*I am a hairdresser with a Mastership certificate in hairdressing!*”. He also explained that he was educated as a vocational teacher, and had worked as a vocational teacher for six years. He had also worked within the hairdressing trade association and as a self-employed hairdresser with employees. Notably, both Cecilia and Johnny are working or have worked as vocational teachers. As such this period of education may to some extent have changed their perceptions of both the trade and the education system. However, it would not have been possible to interview someone within the trade, without any knowledge about the admission procedure, as the instructions for the application would make no sense. Cecilia remarked on the fact that she had changed during her vocational teacher education, and also that she would have needed to know what she knows today when she applied – an issue that I will return to. First, the admission procedure will be described along with reflections made by Cecilia and Johnny.

9.2 Criteria and framework: A regulatory focus

At the policy level it was concluded that in terms of regulations, and thus as an aspect of Scott's (2014) regulative pillar, it was seen as important to have common principles, manifested through the use of qualification frameworks. The idea of common principles was also apparent at the organisational level of HEIs where the qualification framework was used, and complemented with criteria for more than 200 vocational subjects. In this section these regulative aspects will be outlined and described more concretely in terms of instructions to the applicants. As an example of what an application might include, the content of Cecilia's application is presented. In relating the criteria and guidelines of the admission procedure to the trade itself, the requirement made on hairdressers that are prevailing in the trade will be accounted for. Furthermore, reflections on the application and the regulations from Cecilia and the vocational expert Johnny will be explored.

⁸⁸ Jag har alltid tänkt sedan jag var barn att jag ville bli frisör. Det blev jag också så det var en dröm som gick i uppfyllelse. Absolut. (Cecilia)

9.2.1 The application and the guidelines

The instructions for the applicants applying for VTE at one of the HEIs⁸⁹, are basically the following:

- Send in a formal application based on general eligibility, as with all other education programs.
- Read the criteria thoroughly for the vocational subjects you want to teach and compare with your vocational knowledge. (Note that your vocational knowledge can be relevant for more than one subject!)
- Specify the subjects you are applying for.
- Make a list of experience relevant to each vocational subject. Attach copies of certificates, if possible including work task descriptions.
- Make a list of completed education qualifications, which are relevant for each of the vocational subjects.
- Make a list of other relevant certificates.
- Describe the work tasks where you have used the required vocational knowledge within the frame of each vocational subject.
- If you work or have worked as a vocational teacher list this too.

After having decided to become a vocational teacher Cecilia booked an appointment with a study counsellor. During this meeting she received information about the admission procedure, and chose to apply for two subjects, the subject *Craft* (see section 2.1) and the subject *Knowledge of craft*. Examples of other subjects within the Handicraft program are: *Entrepreneurship, Sales and Customer Service, Trade, Purchasing and Logistics*, and more (UHR, 2016) She said during the interview that she did not realise at the time she was applying that she could have applied for more subjects, such as those listed above. This was a pity, she said, because otherwise she could have gained eligibility to teach more subjects. Both choosing what subjects to apply for and writing narratives about her vocational knowledge would have been easier if she had had more knowledge about the education system, at that point in time, and she said:

By then I stood in a salon and did the application to the vocational teacher program so I did not have a clue of how the education was structured with courses and curricula, with central content, grades and assessment, so I did not have the insight, but you just wrote on the basis of everyday life.⁹⁰
(Cecilia)

⁸⁹ For those who are applying to a HEI connected to ValiWeb the application is made by filling in a web form, where options and choices made by the applicant lead to the next step in a web form.

On the basis of what she knew at that time, the instructions, and the recommendations from a study counsellor, she put together her application. Going through Cecilia's application together with her, it contained:

- Grades from the Upper Secondary School's handicraft program with the vocational exit of hairdresser year 2005.
- License of agreement of completing education of 1500 hours (this was a requirement by then to do after Upper Secondary School).
- Journeyman's certificate from 2006.
- Certificates from different courses such as hair studies, hair extension, colour, and more.
- Workplace certificate with a letter of recommendation.
- Cecilia's narratives of her vocational knowledge and experience.

The different documents are very trade specific. Furthermore it becomes obvious that the trade has its own regulations, such as the Journeyman's certificate. In the next section some idiosyncrasies from the hairdressing trade are explored.

9.2.2 Idiosyncrasies of the hairdressing trade

There are basically three ways to become a qualified hairdresser according to the Hairdressers' Trade Association (2018) in Sweden:

- (a) Handicraft programme at Upper Secondary School + working 3000 hours as an apprentice.
- (b) Private school + working 3000 hours as an apprentice.
- (c) Working 5000 hours as an apprentice.

As can be noted from the different pathways of becoming a hairdresser, time is of significant importance within the trade and is counted in terms of working hours. After each of these three pathways those who want to become hairdressers must then take the test for the Journeyman's certificate⁹¹. According to the trade association, the Journeyman's certificate shows that you have passed the trade's requirements. It dates back to the 17th century. In the hairdressing trade, this old document is still valid as proof of vocational proficiency within the trade.

⁹⁰ Då stod jag på salong och gjorde ansökan till yrkeslärarprogrammet och hade ju ingen koll på hur utbildningen var upplagd med kurser och läroplan alltså med centralt innehåll, betyg och bedömning alltså man hade ju inte den insynen utan man skrev ju bara utifrån sin vardag. (Cecilia)

⁹¹ The Journeyman's certificate has become divided into two tests. Parts of the tests from the Journeyman's certificate are currently done earlier, sometimes within Upper Secondary School, and this test is called the subsample (Delprovet).

The test for the Journeyman's certificate consists of one practical part and one written test. The practical part consists of at least 16 different practical tests, made on time, involving different hairstyles (different haircuts, colours, perm, and hair designs) to be performed on a model within a time limit such as for example 60 minutes. The written test includes, amongst other things, hairdressers' work environment, hairdressers' economy, hairdressers' technique and taxes, and chemistry for hairdressers. All the tests are examined by examiners selected by the trade. Each test has detailed criteria and is graded from A to F. The grading system A – F is the same as in Upper Secondary School with the difference that C for the lowest is considered as pass, A – B pass with distinction and E – F as fail. The grading criteria are as for one of the tests done for the Journeyman's certificate: shape and balance, sustainability and choice of technique, volume and indentation, the result is as desired and described before start, the texture is smooth, and the entire length is formed. At least four of the criteria have to be fulfilled to pass the test. If all criteria are fulfilled the grade is an A. Johnny's and Cecilia's reflections on the regulation in the admission procedure are presented next.

9.2.3 Reflections on the regulations

When I asked about the qualification framework, Cecilia did not know about this at the time when she applied. Johnny said:

SeQF is a good frame of reference for different things, but because each vocation is unique, this template does not fit all industries or trades. So I would really like UHR (Council for Higher education, my comment) to have better cooperation with the trades around these questions and they try to, but they just see that...yes, they want the same template for all vocations and absolutely, I understand that. It's no wonder, but I wish you could regard each trade a bit more based on existing conditions or what the trade looks like. This would make it much easier for us to make this validation based on the trade's needs.⁹² (Johnny)

In different ways Johnny, almost immediately during the interview, expressed a concern that the trade's needs were to some extent given a subordinate meaning within the admission procedure. However, he also recognised that the Council for Higher Education had tried to cooperate with the trades, but that

⁹²Seqf är en bra referens för olika saker men eftersom varje yrke är så unikt så passar inte den mallen för alla branscher eller alla yrken. Så jag skulle egentligen vilja att SHR hade ett bättre samarbete med branscherna just kring dom här frågorna och dom försöker det men dom ser ju bara att...ja, dom vill ha en och samma mall för alla yrken och det absolut. Jag förstår det. Det är inget konstigt men jag skulle önska att man kunde se varje bransch lite mer utifrån dom förutsättningar som finns då eller hur branscherna ser ut. Det skulle göra att det var mycket enklare för oss att göra den här valideringen utifrån branschens behov.

they wanted to have the same template for all vocations. He also emphasised that there were advantages to have a qualification framework, but questioned the idea of fitting different vocations into the same template. When he said *template*, he referred, as I understood it, to both the criteria and framework as a whole.

Another concern Johnny had was that political decisions and the new admission procedure had forced the trade to lower their demands:

Since one and a half years back, the UHR (Swedish Council for Higher Education, my comment) is responsible for all validations, and then the schedule looks a bit different. Now there are some other criteria for assessment that puzzle us and our trade a little bit. To me it has been quite easy before when we could have higher demands from the trade. Back then, to start with we demanded a Journeyman's certificate and that you had once done a vocational test showing that you have knowledge from the trade. Before, we said that you should have at least six years of vocational experience and then if it was seven or eight years ago, we even demanded a Mastership certificate from the hairdressing trade /.../ Then Björklund (the former Minister of Education, my comment) made an inquiry about vocational teachers and there were too few vocational teachers and then the trade was asked to lower the requirements a little bit and then we said yes okay maybe it is too high that you must have a Mastership certificate and we said a Journeyman's certificate and at least three years' vocational experience.⁹³ (Johnny)

From the quote it is obvious that the demands from the trade, according to Johnny, have been subject to change due to different societal circumstances and also changes within the admission procedure. When I asked him about the descriptors of knowledge, skills, and competence he said:

Yes, but then it's about being able to show that you can, and have knowledge, then you should be able to show specialised

⁹³ Sedan ett och ett halvt år tillbaka så är det ju UHR som har ansvaret för alla valideringar och då ser det ju ordningen lite annorlunda ut. Då har det kommit lite andra kriterier för bedömning som förbryllar oss och vår bransch lite grann. För att för mig har det varit tämligen enkelt tidigare för att vi kunde ställa lite högre krav från branschen tidigare. Vi krävde då att till att börja med hade ett gesällbrev att man nån gång har gjort ett yrkesprov som visar att man har kunskap i branschen. Längre tillbaka så sa vi att man ska ha minst sex års yrkeserfarenhet och då om det var sju eller åtta år sen till och med, sju år sen var det då krävde vi till och med att man hade mästarbrev i frisöryrket. /.../ Sen gjorde Björklund en utredning om yrkeslärare och då fanns det ju för få yrkeslärare och då bad man branschederna att sänka kraven lite grann och då sa vi ja okej då kanske det är för högt krav att man måste ha ett mästarbrev och då sa vi att ett gesällbrev och minst tre års yrkeserfarenhet. (Johnny)

knowledge, for example within a field of work...yes...and then I cannot really judge if I have not seen the person in work. I cannot judge it if I do not see that somewhere you have passed a vocational test that...yes, showing that you have the knowledge. So that makes it quite complicated and then...I cannot make that assessment in that case. If you do not, you cannot show both the knowledge and the skills then I really have to meet that person and ask them to do x number of different tasks and this is not how it works.⁹⁴ (Johnny)

In getting the question about the descriptors, Johnny's response turned into a concern for the difficulties he experienced in assessing vocational knowledge based on documents in the case the applicant had no Journeyman's certificate. He later continued to talk about the Journeyman's certificate, and in doing so he then related the vocational test included in the Journeyman's certificate to the descriptors:

*That's why I think it's so nice that we have a vocational test in our trade – the Journeyman's certificate because it shows that you have **knowledge**, you have **skills** and you have the **competence** to execute these tasks basically, and then you can have worked for a long or short time. It does not matter, but then you've also somewhat showed that I know all parts of the hairdressing vocation, and then I think there is ground for teaching others.⁹⁵ (Johnny, my boldning)*

When Johnny talked about the vocational test he did so using the descriptors, of which we had talked just before. He also said that time is not important. It should, though be noted that there is a time component already included in the Journeyman's certificate, as a certain amount of working hours is required before the test can be taken. When I asked Johnny about the criteria for

⁹⁴ Ja, men då handlar det om kan visa, eller kan alltså kunskaper då ska man kunna visa specialiserade kunskaper till exempel inom ett arbetsområde...ja...och då kan ju inte jag egentligen inte bedöma det om jag inte har sett den här personen arbeta eller jobba. Jag kan ju inte heller bedöma det om jag inte ser att det finns någonstans att man har avlagt ett yrkesprov som...ja, som visar att man har dom kunskaperna. Så att det gör ju att det blir ganska komplicerat och då...jag kan ju inte göra den bedömningen i det fallet då. Så har man inte, kan man inte på det sättet visa både kunskaper och färdigheter då måste jag egentligen träffa den personen och be dom göra x antal olika moment och det funkar inte så.

⁹⁵ Det är därför jag tycker det är så skönt att vi i vår bransch har ett yrkesprov – gesällprovet för det visar att man har en kunskap, man har en färdighet och man har en kompetens att utföra dom här momenten som en grund liksom sen kan man ha jobbat lång tid eller kort tid. Det spelar liksom ingen roll men då har man liksom någonstans visat att jag kan alla delar i frisöryrket och då tycker jag att det är en grund för att sen undervisa andra. (Johnny)

vocational subjects, he considered these as being taken from the courses in the handicraft program in Upper Secondary School.

It's somehow interpretations from the courses or subjects as it is called now.⁹⁶ (Johnny)

He also added that the courses in Upper Secondary School involve much more than the criteria of vocational subjects in the admission procedure and that it is difficult to account for that much in just a few lines.

When I asked Cecilia about the guidelines and criteria, and if she remembered how she related to the instructions when she applied, she did not know of the qualification framework and nor did she remember the criteria:

Well, not what I can immediate recall, but it seems like I might have done it or? I also did not know anyone who worked in the hairdressing program at this point time.⁹⁷ (Cecilia)

On several occasions during the interview Cecilia returned to the fact that she would have needed to know then what she knows now after having become a vocational teacher when she applied. This can be taken as a sign of how the education system is taken as the norm; quite contrary and possibly inadvertently, to what was intended by the introduction of this new admission procedure. As some time had passed since Cecilia applied, I asked her how she remembered it, and she said:

It was as I remember it such forms that you filled in. There were on one hand fixed options and then there was a written part where you were supposed to describe your working day or work process. I do not know if I sent some three or four pages at least. I sure did that and it was quite tricky. Then there were diplomas and also courses and certificates and...⁹⁸ (Cecilia)

Cecilia wrote comprehensively, detailing her vocational knowledge and work tasks, although she remembered it as tricky. Johnny said that he could not rely on narratives because, as he argued, you can of course describe how to do a

⁹⁶ Ja, det är ju liksom tolkningar från kurserna eller ämnena som det heter nu då. (Johnny)

⁹⁷ Nä, inte vad jag kan plocka fram ur minnet men det verkar som att jag kanske har gjort det eller? Jag kände ju inte heller någon som jobbade i frisörprogrammet vid denna tiden. (Cecilia)

⁹⁸ Där var ju vad jag minns såna här formulär som man fyllde i. Dels var där ju fasta alternativ och sen var där nog en skriftlig del där man skulle beskriva sin arbetsdag eller arbetsgång. Jag vet inte om jag skickade en tre fyra sidor i alla fall. Det gjorde jag säkert och det var ju klurigt. Sen var det ju diplom och ja kurser och intyg och... (Cecilia)

haircut, but you cannot do much more than that. There might be different perception of knowledge at stake here, between academia and the trade. Understanding of knowledge within the trade will be further explored in section 9.4. Before turning to this, some aspects of normative matters in the trade will be explored in the next section.

9.3 Objectives, norms and methods: A normative focus

Scott's (2014) normative pillar describes what is desirable, and why and how things should be done. Normative systems of an institutionalisation process focus on objectives, values, and norms. In the policy chapter and from interviews with study counsellors it was concluded that there are many normative matters involved in validation, such as the objective of validation as being beneficial for the society and economy. In the particular validation prior to entry into VTE in Sweden, validation is suggested to counteract the lack of vocational teachers which puts pressure on those involved in validation to get as many as possible through the validation and education. It is likely that normative matters are of importance in the trade as well, and these will be described in this section. This is covered, in a similar manner as in the policy analysis, and by interviews with study counsellors concerning how validation is conducted in terms of what methods it involves.

9.3.1 Fortune-seekers and the trades norms and needs

When interviewing both Cecilia and Johnny, it became evident without me explicitly asking that normative matters are present in the trade as well. These matters are worth considering as they may influence how those from the trade perceive validation: whether such objectives, values, and norms are in conflict with the trade. One pertinent issue in the trade is that there is appropriate number of hairdressers, as too many would influence both salaries and the possibilities for establishing oneself as a hairdresser. Too few would threaten the survival of vocation, and Johnny said:

Only five years ago, there were actually too many hairdressers who graduated but after introducing this GY11 (the latest curriculum, my comment), this shifted quite quickly and it may be so for different reasons. Many people believe it is because of the removal of general subjects from vocational education, but I think that it depends just as much on society itself that it is not attractive to pursue vocational education anymore. It's nothing you long for, having a job and struggling everyday between nine and six. It should be faster to reach the goal. It should be faster

to get to a higher salary /.../ Many Upper Secondary Education programs are shut down due to that they have too few applicants.⁹⁹ (Johnny)

There is apparently a lack of hairdressers in Sweden today, and one explanation, according to Johnny, is that it is hard to become one. He explained that after having finished Upper Secondary Education with the vocational exit of hairdressing the students need to work for 3000 hours as trainees with a low salary. He suggested that the time and the effort it takes before getting a higher salary could be one explanation for why young people are not choosing vocational careers. As can be seen from the quote a common explanation is also that in the latest curriculum the amount of general subjects was reduced, with the consequence that vocational students are no longer automatically gaining eligibility for higher education. This was the case in the previous Swedish curriculum. Today, vocational students in Upper Secondary School are instead receiving more hours of subjects related to their vocational exit.

Although the trade obviously had a concern that there are too few hairdressers, they still want to have control of the vocation and its practitioners. Johnny explained:

In our trade there are those who are somewhat fortune-seekers and do not have much experience and education. This being said, you could open a salon tomorrow. There are no constraints on you to do that. Then if you cannot cut it does not matter. You have the opportunity to start a salon and customers may come there but they may not come back because you cannot cut. But as a consumer you have no idea. It might be a fancy salon that you have opened but you have no knowledge, but this is not known by the consumer. So we have taken this one step further in the hairdressing trade. We have developed a license for hairdressers. It is based on the fact that you have a Journeyman's or Mastership certificate or are a vocational teacher. They have also got their own letter in this license. It has become incredibly big and it is not that we want to replace the

⁹⁹ Bara för fem sex år sedan var det egentligen för många frisörer som utbildade sig men sen man införde den här GY11 så vände det här ganska snabbt och det kan beror på olika orsaker. Många tror att det beror på att man tog bort kärnämnen från de yrkesinriktade utbildningarna men jag tror att beror mycket på samhället i sig självt att det inte är attraktivt att gå en yrkesutbildning på det sättet längre. Det är liksom ingenting man längtar efter att ha ett jobb där man står mellan nio och sex och sliter på dagarna. Det ska gå snabbare att nå målet. Det ska gå snabbare att komma upp till en högre lön. /.../ Många utbildningar på gymnasiet läggs ner p.g.a. att de har för få sökande.(Johnny)

Journeyman's and Mastership certificate, but quite the contrary we accentuate the hairdressers' vocational pride by developing our license. The idea is that it should be on the hairdresser's mirror where it is apparent that you have education and knowledge in your vocation and it has become incredibly big and many other trades look very much on our license and especially other countries. Both Norway and Finland and some countries in Europe are really interested in our hairdressing license.¹⁰⁰
(Johnny)

In order to protect and control the vocation a license has been introduced in the hairdressing trade. The letters Johnny talked about are different kinds of eligibilities within the license: A-Approved sub-sample, B-Journeyman's certificate, C-Mastership certificate, D-Serious entrepreneurship, E-Vocational teacher, F-Barber, where it is possible to get letters corresponding to education and experience. The license could be seen as more of a regulative aspect, within the trade. However, in relation to the admission procedure it becomes as much a normative matter, with the objective of protecting the trade and the vocational pride. In the admission procedure, the new instructions for validation prior to entry into VTE have been deployed to counteract the lack of vocational teachers in Sweden, which has potentially lowered the demands made on applicant, according to Johnny. This may clash with the trade's desire for controlling and protecting the vocation, and not least the vocational pride among its practitioners. This concern is also visible through a reflection from Cecilia:

We have segregation in the trade which one was not fully aware of before. Then there were more like low-price salons and normal-price salons. But when I look at the salons today, I see that those who have so-called low-priced treatments, they are not hairdressers but they are barbers. They have an inherited

¹⁰⁰ I vår bransch så finns det dom som är lite lycksökare och inte har så mycket erfarenhet och utbildning. Som sagt, du skulle kunna starta en salong imorgon. Det finns inget hinder för dig att göra det. Sen om du inte kan klippa det spelar ingen roll. Du har möjlighet att starta en salong och kunderna kanske kommer dit men de kanske inte kommer tillbaka för du kan ju inte klippa men som konsument har man ingen aning om det. Det kanske är en jättesnygg salong som du har öppnat men du har ingen kunskap men det vet ju konsumenten inte om. Så vi har gått ett stag längre då i frisörbranschen. Vi har tagit fram en licens för frisörer. Det bygger på att man har ett gesällbrev, ett mästarbrev eller att man är yrkeslärare till exempel till exempel. Dom har också fått en egen bokstav i den här licensen. Det har blivit jättestort och det handlar inte om att vi vill ta bort gesäll och mästarbrev utan tvärtom så lyfter vi det men vi stärker frisörens yrkesstolthet genom att vi har tagit fram en licens. Tanken är att den ska sitta på frisörens spegel där det framgår att man har utbildning och kunskap inom sitt yrke då och det har blivit otroligt stort och många andra branscher tittar jättemycket på vår licens och framförallt andra länder. Både Norge och Finland och vissa länder i Europa tycker att det är jätteintressant med vår frisörlicens. (Johnny)

*vocation from their home country. They do not have colour theory at all, as we have here. Most often they do not have women's haircuts. So they do not have the entire technical part on the women's side and not the colour theory, which means that today we have a shortage of hairdressers because there are too few who educate themselves.*¹⁰¹ (Cecilia)

Cecilia said that it may appear as if there are many hairdressing salons in Sweden, but she suggested that some of those with low-price treatments are actually barbers and not hairdressers. Hairdressers need to have all the technical parts, and also colour theory, she said, which means a broader range of knowledge or at least kinds of knowledge other than barbers. It is noteworthy that she mentioned barbers as there seems to be a reawakened fashion and interest for beards, and thus barbers, in society. Barbers have also their own letter in the license for hairdressers of which Johnny talked. Yet, another concern seems to be a possible price-dumping if there are too many low-price salons, which can make it difficult to make your living as a hairdresser in a so called normal price salon.

Another significant issue within the trade is that of time. As was shown in section 9.1.2, time is counted quite precisely in the number of hours before a candidate is allowed to take the test for the Journeyman's certificate. Time was, in different ways, also brought up during the interviews and will be addressed next.

9.3.3 Time and familiarity with current and recent trends

Both Cecilia and Johnny emphasised the need for and the value of practice for perfection, to become a hairdresser, which requires a lot of time.

*To get good, it takes extremely much practice on different tasks. /.../ All vocations take time to learn.*¹⁰² (Johnny)

To practice a lot and to work hard were brought up by both Cecilia and Johnny. The significance of time also becomes apparent through the trade's requirements for becoming a hairdresser, as outlined in section 9.2.2. The constant need for working hard and the time it takes to become a good

¹⁰¹ Vi har en segregation i branschen som man inte riktigt var medveten om innan. Då var det mer liksom lågprissalonger och normalprissalonger. Men när jag tittar på salongerna idag så ser jag att de som har så kallade lågprissalonger idag, de är ju inte frisörer utan de är barberare. De har ett ärvt yrkes med sig från hemlandet. De har inte alls färgteorin som vi har här ofta har de inte damklippning. De har alltså inte hela den tekniska biten på damsidan och inte då färgteorin med sig, vilket gör att vi idag har en brist på frisörer för det är för få som utbildar sig. (Cecilia)

¹⁰² För att bli duktig så krävs det extremt mycket träning inom olika moment. /.../ Alla yrken tar tid att lära sig. (Johnny)

hairdresser, makes hairdressing, they said, a demanding and difficult vocation. Cecilia emphasised this and said:

Hairdresser is not an easy vocation! A vocational program does not mean an easy pick but somehow one has got this view in society, as a study counsellor and as a parent that this is easy to complete but many of the competences we have are hard to learn, such as social competence, the touch, and know-how. It needs to be practiced to get elicited. That is not something you can get automatically.¹⁰³ (Cecilia)

Cecilia expressed frustration because of the common view in society that a vocational education is easy, and something chosen by those who could not choose a higher education preparatory program in Upper Secondary School. The competences, the touch, and know-how that a hairdresser needs take effort and time to develop, and is anything but easy, Cecilia firmly stressed.

In relation to the time aspect of developing vocational knowledge, and as a vocational expert Johnny also emphasised the need for vocational knowledge that is up-to-date:

...and of course I see as a prerequisite that you have vocational knowledge and experience that are up-to-date, and that you can show that you are active in the vocation and have been so lately, so it's not enough that, that if you had your Journeyman's certificate in 1979, but you have not worked as a hairdresser since. Then you are, then you do not become a good vocational teacher, but it should vocational knowledge that is up-to-date.¹⁰⁴ (Johnny)

The issue of familiarity with current and recent trends turned up during the interviews with the study counsellors as well. This seems to be an implicit criterion also within the trade itself, as it is in the admission procedure. It is seen by Johnny as important that those who become vocational teachers are active in their vocation. For applicants to prove that they are active in the trade

¹⁰³ Frisör är inget lätt yrke! Ett yrkesprogram betyder inte ett lätt yrket men där har man nånstans fått synen i samhället som syvare och förälder att det är lätt att gå men många utav de förmågorna som vi besitter det är svårt att lära ut, alltså social kompetens, ett handlag. Det behöver övas för att komma fram. Det är inget man får per automatik liksom. (Cecilia)

¹⁰⁴ ...och så självklart ser jag det som en förutsättning att man ska ha aktuella yrkeskunskaper och erfarenhet och att man ska kunna visa att man är aktiv i yrket och har varit det inom den senaste tiden så det är inte så att om man tog sitt gesällbrev 1979 sen har man inte jobbat som frisör. Då är man, då blir man ju inte en bra yrkeslärare utan det ska vara aktuella yrkeskunskaper. (Johnny)

or have been so recently, they must submit workplace certificates and other documents that are assessed by a vocational expert.

9.3.4 Methods for validation

It was concluded in section 8.3.5 that different methods were used at the different HEIs. However, it was obvious that the most common was that the vocational experts were reading from the documents. I asked Cecilia what methods that were used when she applied. She did not recall this very well, but said that she received a phone call from someone who was reading her application. When I asked Johnny how and with what methods he conducts the validation, he explained:

When UHR (The Council for Higher Education, my comment) took over responsibility for all forms of validation of vocational knowledge, they wanted all to use the same template and then it suddenly turned into EQF 5 or SeQF 5. It may be the case that there is someone who has not done the vocational test, and then I should validate the vocational knowledge without knowing that this person really has basic knowledge and then it becomes much more difficult and there I have a very huge resistance from all in our trade because it is still a basic requirement that you have to do the vocational test for the trade. What the whole trade wants contradicts what UHR wants me to do.¹⁰⁵ (Johnny)

Johnny said that the intention, according to his instructions, is not to meet the applicants but assess from documents. He was at pains trying to do so when the applicants had not taken the Journeyman's certificate. The very idea of validation of learning outcomes, also in the admission procedure, is to account for knowledge irrespective of where and how it has developed. This, Johnny found difficult not being in contact with the applicant and if the applicant did not have the Journeyman's certificate. He also added that his task is not to have an opinion but to assess the vocational knowledge, according to the instructions.

I find it difficult to use UHR's (Council of Higher Education) model based on SeQF 5 in the way they want it to be, so that it becomes clear and simple and I can understand their vision, but

¹⁰⁵ När UHR tog över ansvaret för all from av validering av yrkeskunskap så ville ju dom att alla ska använda samma mall och då blev det plötsligt EQF 5 eller SeQF 5 då som man ska gå efter och då kan det ju vara så att det är nån då som inte har gjort sitt yrkesprov och då ska jag validera yrkeskunskapen utan att veta att den här personen har egentligen grundkunskaper och då blir det mycket svårare och där har jag ju ett väldigt stort motstånd från hela våran bransch för det tycker man ändå är en grundläggande behörighet att man ändå ska ha gjort yrkesprovet då för branschen. Det strider lite då vad hela branschen vill och vad UHR vill att jag ska utföra. (Johnny)

there, as I have said, I have the whole trade against me if I should accept someone, say someone that we do not consider as a eligible hairdresser. But according to UHR, it is my task to assess them with regards to SeQF and I think I cannot make an assessment out of these criteria in that way. I cannot assess vocational knowledge with these criteria. So we have different opinions. It's not my task to have opinions but to validate vocational knowledge, but I'm having difficulties doing it based on their way of seeing it.¹⁰⁶ (Johnny)

Johnny found it very difficult to use the qualification framework without being in contact with the applicant. He also expressed that the criteria are not suitable for the hairdressing trade. According to his instructions he was not supposed to be in contact with applicants:

I'm not supposed to be in contact with the applicant I'm going to validate, but it will be handled by UHR (Council of Higher Education, my comment), and then I have to ask questions and maybe ask that this person do these tasks in some in a way and it will be very complicated.¹⁰⁷ (Johnny)

I asked Johnny whether he could immediately see if a person is a good hair dresser. He answered:

Yes I can! Actually! Because if you have experience of that from working as a teacher, and when you are working in a new class, maybe the first week, you can already see that some have the touch and know-how and some do not. BUT, it may be the one who does not have a good touch and know-how from the beginning but practices it, who can be the best student so it is of course something you can learn.¹⁰⁸ (Johnny)

¹⁰⁶ Jag tycker att det är svårt att använda UHRs modell utifrån SeQF 5 på det sättet så vill dom att ska vara så att det blir tydligt och enkelt och jag kan förstå deras tanke där men där som sagt har jag hela åran bransch emot mig om jag skulle godkänna någon som vi säger inte är behörig frisör. Men enligt UHR så är det min uppgift att bedöma dom utifrån SeQF och jag kan tycka att jag kan inte göra en bedömning utifrån dom kriterierna på det sättet. Jag kan inte bedöma yrkeskunskaperna med dom kriterierna så. Så att där tycker vi lite olika helt enkelt. Det är inte min uppgift att tycka utan validera yrkeskunskaper men jag har svårt att göra det utifrån deras sätt att se det. (Johnny)

¹⁰⁷ Jag ska ju inte vara i kontakt med den som jag ska validera utan det går ju då igenom UHR och då måste jag därigenom ställa frågor och kanske be om att den här personen gör dom här momenten på nåt sätt och det blir väldigt komplicerat. (Johnny)

¹⁰⁸ Ja, det kan jag! Faktiskt! För att det har man erfarenhet som lärare och man jobbar med en ny klass kanske första veckan redan så ser man att vissa har handlaget och vissa har det inte. MEN det kan vara den som inte har ett bra handlag från början men övar upp det som kan bli den bästa eleven så det är självklart någonting man kan lära. (Johnny)

Johnny referred to his earlier experience as a vocational teacher to explain that he can easily see if a hairdresser has the touch, but again he stressed the need for practising a lot. A lot of practice and hard work can outweigh the initial touch know-how. Once again, the hard work and a lot of practice were stressed. That a lot of practice is needed to become a good hairdresser seems to be taken for granted in the trade. Other aspects of the hairdressing vocation that seem to be taken for granted by those in the trade are presented in the next section.

9.4 Hairdressing and vocational knowledge: A cultural/cognitive focus

According to Scott (2014), the cultural/cognitive pillar of an institution pillar has to do with shared conceptions and frames for meaning making, and as such taken for granted. As has earlier been noted it is suggested in this thesis that this pillar highlights not only cultural values, actions, and symbols, but also prevailing conceptions and understandings of knowledge. In this section Cecilia's and Johnny's responses to questions like what it means to be a good hairdresser and what kind of knowledge is important for hairdressers will be described, as an aspect of what is taken for granted about vocational knowledge within the hairdressing trade itself.

9.4.1 A craft requiring knowledge and technical skills

When I asked Johnny about the vocational knowledge of a hairdresser, he said:

*Well, but firstly, it's a craft if you think like that. It takes quite a lot of knowledge to be able to know all the parts within the hairdressing vocation. In Sweden, it is the case that you are expected to have a broad range of knowledge in many areas. And especially today, when the hairdressing vocation is a lot about chemistry, that is, that you use quite a lot of strong chemicals on customers' hair and it requires that you have quite a lot of knowledge about that. So the focus of the hairdressing trade is the craftsmanship and knowledge about that.*¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Nä men för det första så är det ett hantverk om man tänker så. Det krävs ganska mycket kunskap för att kunna alla delar inom frisöryrket då och i Sverige är det så att man förväntas ha en bred kunskap i många områden. Och framförallt då så idag handlar ju frisöryrket mycket om kemi det vill säga att man använder ganska mycket starka kemikalier som man använder på kundernas hår och det krävs att man har ganska mycket kunskap kring det så fokus på frisöryrket är ju hantverket och kunskap kring det. (Johnny)

Hairdressing is first and foremost a craft, Johnny said. Furthermore it is, from what Johnny explained, clear that the craft requires a broad range of knowledge. The emphasis he put on chemicals is also interesting as it highlights that also traditional crafts such as hairdressing are changing in terms of times, fashion, and technical development. When I later asked him to elaborate on the fact that hairdressing is a craft he continued:

*It is the combination of the craft and what shall I say...it's a lot of technique. It's about being technically capable of doing a task and no customer is the same, so this technique has to be transferrable, no head, no hair is the same so you have to be technically flexible so to say. Then the next step is that you have the touch and know-how of the vocation. You can learn a technique, but it may not become so good after all if you don't have a feeling. That is of course something you can learn, but for some it is easier whereas for others it's difficult. Some of those who become educated as hairdressers will never fully develop vocational knowledge because they may not have the ability to see what's going to be nice or lack a feeling for shape. There are many things, many components that must be combined to make you a good hairdresser.*¹¹⁰

In a craft such as hairdressing the material is important and to choose techniques according to the material. In the hairdressing trade, according to Johnny, it is important to be technically flexible as the main material – the hair – can differ significantly between customers. It is not however, enough only having technique. No matter how good technique a hairdresser has, it is not of much use if it is not connected to a feeling for shape. The knowledge and skills of the craft and its technique are, according to Johnny's description interdependent, and as such difficult to separate. In combining knowledge and skills it is also necessary to be analytical and being able to plan, Cecilia explained:

You have a thought from start to finish, and maybe planning for a future, so a customer does not just come and wants a haircut fixed right now. But you may have a plan to let the hair grow. In

¹¹⁰ Ja, men det är ju kombinationen då hantverket då det är ju vad ska man säga...det är ju mycket teknik. Det handlar om att du tekniskt ska kunna utföra ett moment och ingen kund är ju lika dan så det här tekniska måste man ju kunna flytta, inget huvud, inget hår är lika så att man måste vara flexibel i sin teknik så att säga och sen så nästa steg är ju också att man har ett handlag för yrket. Det vill säga att du kan lära dig en teknik men det kanske inte blir så snyggt i alla fall för att du inte har rätt känsla för det och det är ju självklart något man kan lära sig men andra har lättare för det och för andra är det svårare. Vissa som kanske utbildar sig till frisörer blir aldrig duktiga yrkesutövare för att de kanske inte har den förmågan att se vad som blir snyggt eller inte och formkänsla. Det är många saker, många komponenter som ska stämma för att du ska bli en duktig frisör. (Johnny)

the long term, you want to have a different colour of your hair and then I as a hairdresser must be able to plan for that. Okay, I do this colour today but in four months s/he wants another colour change. What is the preparation I put in my hair today? How will it look further on? You have to be very analytical as a hairdresser in order to give the customer an overall picture and a whole outlook further on. Then it's when you can combine and see colour and shape and put it together into a nice whole because it's not just about the hair itself being nice or the colour for itself that should be nice but it should be in harmony for the whole person. When you work and when you train others then you also think about how is the style of the customer, well is it classic, is it a neutral, is it dramatic? Thus you read by the person and you have a knowing of the person based on what the customer describes, how s/he looks and how s/he speaks and so on. From there you create your whole and you put it together also accounting for the sustainability of the hairstyle. You may create something, but in three weeks it has grown and looks miserable /.../ then you may not have enough proficiency to get a good hairstyle. Then it falls apart a bit earlier. It may be difficult to style for the customer. Then you do not really have the proficiency as hairdresser.¹¹¹ (Cecilia)

Cecilia emphasised the need for being analytical and being able to plan with regards to the customers' wishes in relating these to what kind of preparations and chemicals that are used now, and what will have to be used later on. In a similar manner to Johnny, Cecilia talked about shape, and added that it is not only the shape of the hair-style but shape in relation to the customers' looks. In addition Cecilia talked about colours and harmony and to create this for the satisfaction of the customer. In the creation it is, Cecilia stressed, important to

¹¹¹ Du har en tanke från början till slut och en planering kanske längre fram i tiden alltså en kund kommer ju inte bara och vill ha en frisyr fixad just nu. Utan man kanske har en plan man ska låta håret växa. Man vill på sikt ha en annan färg i håret och då måste jag som frisör kunna planera. Okej jag gör den här färgen idag men om fyra månader vill den ha en annan färgförändring. Vad är det för preparat jag sätter i håret idag? Hur kommer det att se ut längre fram? Man måste vara väldigt analytisk som frisör för att kunna ge kunden en helhetsbild och en helhet längre fram. Sen är det när man kan kombinera och se färg och form och få ihop det till en snygg helhet för det handlar inte bara om att håret i sig själv ska vara snyggt eller färgen för sig själv ska ju inte vara snygg utan det ska vara i harmoni för hela personen. När man jobbar och när man utbildar så tänker man ju också på hur är stilen på kunden alltså är den klassisk är den liksom neutral, är den dramatisk? Alltså man läser ju av personen och man har alltså en personkänedom utifrån vad kunden beskriver, hur den ser ut och hur den talar och så. Därifrån skapar man sin helhet och kan man få ihop det tillsammans med att frisyren är hållbar för det är också en bit. Man kan ju skapa något men det på tre veckor har du vuxit ut och ser bedrövt ut /.../då har man kanske inte tillräckligt många skickligheter för att få en bra frisyr liksom. Då fallerar den lite tidigare. Den kanske är svårstylad för kunden. Då har man inte riktigt den yrkesskicklig frisör. (Cecilia)

consider the style of the customer. For the customers it is also important to create a sustainable hair-design in order for the customer to take care of the hair at home. Many of these, technical, creative, and aesthetic considerations were based on caring for the customer and knowing the customer. To know the customer, and keep the customer satisfied occurred frequently during the interviews, and also how it required social competence.

9.4.2 Social competence and the customer in focus

After having described hairdressing as first and foremost a craft, Johnny continued:

Then, focus number two, the hairdressing vocation is very social. If you are to be able to make your living out of hairdressing it's 50% that you take care of your customers, listen to them and make sure they feel good and not just that they get a good haircut, but it's very much about customer relations.¹¹² (Johnny)

The customers not only want a haircut, they want to be taken care of, Johnny said. To take care of customers and make them feel comfortable requires social competence. The social competence was emphasised over and over again, also by Cecilia:

Social competence is one of the most important, somehow when customers are coming one must be able to talk about everything. Sometimes it's enough to touch the customer's hair, and then the whole family story and the separation and deaths will turn up, so you have this aspect while at the same time happy aspects that they are happy and grateful to get there and get a good hairstyle. You may have a bride to make a set. It's their happiest day and there are lots of tensions as well.¹¹³ (Cecilia)

To be socially competent and be able to talk about everything is, according to Cecilia crucial for being a hairdresser. Later in the interview she even said that those who know the state of affairs in the world are hairdressers and taxi drivers. When customers relax they may talk about what is on their mind. To

¹¹² Sen fokus nummer två är att frisöryrket är väldigt socialt. Ska man kunna livnära sig som frisör så är ju 50 % att man tar hand om sina kunder, lyssnar på dom och ser till att dom mår bra och inte bara att de får en bra frisyra utan det handlar väldigt mycket om kundrelationer. (Johnny)

¹¹³ Den sociala kompetensen är väl den som är det allra viktigaste, liksom att kunder kommer dit och man måste kunna prata om allt. Ibland räcker det att man tar i kunden hår så kommer hela familjehistorien och separationen och dödsfallen och allt sånt så den biten har man samtidigt som man har glädjebiten att de är nöjda och tacksamma för att komma dit och bli fina i håret. Man har kanske en brud som man ska göra en uppsättning på. Det är deras lycklogaste dag liksom och det är väldigt mycket spänningar. (Cecilia)

create this well-being and relaxation was considered, by Cecilia, as crucial for being a hairdresser:

Well to be an active hairdresser is to create well-being for the customers. Customers will not only come to get a job done. They come for a pleasant moment of relaxation. Of course, they come there to get their hair fixed, either with color or cutting or shaving or whatever it's in their salon, which put high demands on hairdressers. Absolutely! And you identify yourself with a salon. You look at the looks, what is the price list, what are the treatments and then you may choose your salon.¹¹⁴ (Cecilia)

Cecilia returned to the need of creating well-being in combination with satisfying the customers' desires and demands for having a haircut, a shave, or colour treatment. There are, as Cecilia said, high demands on hairdressers. This was reinforced by Johnny who once again pointed to the combination of knowledge and technical skill, but also to how social competence could be seen as a prerequisite for even getting the work, and making use of the knowledge of the craft:

It does not matter how good a hairdresser you are if you cannot take care of your customers, you will not get any customers anyway. So it's a combination and it may be that the hairdressing vocation attracts those who are creative, but you must also have the basic knowledge, the technique and craftsmanship and there are a variety of different aspects. It's not just cutting hair. There are, as mentioned, a lot of chemical treatments which is one aspect, styling is an aspect that you must be able to master, so it's essentially cutting techniques, styling techniques and theoretical knowledge about the chemicals used in, for example, dyeing or perm treatments.¹¹⁵ (Johnny)

¹¹⁴ Alltså att vara verksam frisör är ju att skapa ett välbefinnande för kunderna. Kunderna kommer inte bara dit för att få ett jobb gjort. De kommer dit för att ha en behaglig stund en avkoppling. De kommer givetvis dit för att få sitt hår fixat, antingen med färg eller klippning eller rakning eller vad det nu är man erbjuder på sin salong, vilket gör att det är höga krav på frisörer. Absolut! Och man identifierar sig med en salong. Man tittar på utseendet, hur ser den ut vad är det för prislista, vad är det för behandlingar och därefter väljer man kanske sin salong. (Cecilia)

¹¹⁵ Det spelar ingen roll hur duktig frisör du är. Kan du inte ta hand om dina kunder får du inga kunder i alla fall. Så att det är en kombination och ofta är det kanske så att frisöryrket locka dom som är kreativa men du måste ju också ha grundkunskapen i den tekniken i den hantverksteknik och det är en rad olika moment. Det är inte bara att klippa ett hår. Det förekommer ju som sagt en hel del kemiska behandlingar och det är en del styling moment som man måste kunna behärska så det är i huvudsak klipp teknik, stylingteknik och teoretisk kunskap kring de kemikalier som man använder vid till exempel färgning eller permanentbehandlingarna. (Johnny)

In addition to knowledge, technical skills of the craft, and that of social competence, hairdressing requires creativity. Cecilia also mentioned to what extent hairdressing also involves bodily and sensual aspects:

*It's not just a doing and a craft because it's so much more and I do not really think that people realise that hairdressers need to have incredibly many competences to be a good and attractive hairdresser. What is striking is that when you work as a hairdresser you have so many senses connected, you have the feeling, the smell, the sight and your hearing, so when customers say something, you remember that very well because you have so much connected at the same time. So you can sometimes know more about your customers and remember more about your customers than about your friends because the customers are so close and you work so intensively with them and you have many senses connected.*¹¹⁶ (Cecilia)

That the craft of hairdressing required so many senses, had been striking for Cecilia herself, when she sometimes had realised that she could remember more about her customers than about what her friends had told her. These sensual and bodily aspects made me ask about tacit knowledge, and the responses will be presented next.

9.4.3 Tacit knowledge of hairdressers

When I asked Johnny how he perceived the notion of tacit knowledge in relation to the hairdressing trade, he explained:

I usually compare it with learning how to drive a car. If you have been driving a car for a long time, you can do it and it is in the body and you do not even have to think about how to switch or how to drive or turn or anything else. All of a sudden, you shall teach someone to drive a car and it is in your body and you know how to do, but to translate it into text or into words it's quite difficult. Like that I can describe the hairdresser's vocation too, once you've learned the basics, it's just there. You can do that. It is in your fingers. You do not even have to think about rolling up a permanent curl or cutting a particular haircut. It's just there,

¹¹⁶ Det är inte bara ett görande i hantverket för det är så mycket mer och det tror jag inte riktigt man tänker på att frisörer behöver ha otroligt många förmågor för att vara en bra och attraktiv frisör. Det som är slående är att när man jobbar som frisör så har man så många sinnen inkopplade du har känseln, lukten, synen och du har hörseln så när kunder säger nånting så minns du det väldigt väl för därför du har så mycket som är inkopplat samtidigt. Så man kan ibland veta mer om sina kunder och komma ihåg mer om sina kunder än om sina vänner för man är så nära och man jobbar så intensivt med dem och man har många sinnen påkopplade. (Cecilia)

*but you're going to teach it to someone else and then it will get a little tricky. It is in the hands and it is in the head and it can be difficult to elicit that knowledge so there is much tacit knowledge in our vocation.*¹¹⁷ (Johnny)

There is much tacit knowledge in the hairdressing vocation, Johnny said, and added that *"it is just there"* in the hand and in the brain. I posed the same question, about tacit knowledge to Cecilia, and in a somewhat similar manner she described it:

*I think that tacit knowledge is the kind that is hard to put in words, and it's what you see when you put in a clip and get a sustainable hairstyle. Well, you just see it should be placed right there and nowhere else to become a part in the whole of the hairstyle, but for that you need to...you have to work to get it /.../ But sometimes you see that the tacit knowledge comes in when you need to show something. When I cannot explain what I am doing, I have to show them (referring to students) that this is the way you do it. Once it's done, it can be about a blow-dry for example, they are not able to get the volume and you explain and so on, but when you actually do it then you can sometimes express it, but sometimes you cannot you just have to well do like this...*¹¹⁸ (Cecilia)

Cecilia had reflected that some kind of demonstration can facilitate putting into words what was just previously tacit. However, there are occasions, Cecilia said, when there are no words but it is just about doing it. The difficulty of putting some aspects of vocational knowledge into words is of course also an issue in conducting this interview as well. Such difficulties

¹¹⁷ Jag brukar jämföra det med att lära sig köra bil. Har du kört bil länge så kan du det och det sitter liksom i ryggmärgen och du behöver inte ens tänka på hur du växlar eller hur du kör eller svänger eller sådär. Plötsligt ska du lära någon att köra bil och det sitter i din ryggrad och du vet hur du ska göra men att översätta det i text eller i ord det är ganska svårt. Så kan jag beskriva frisöryrket också att har du en gång lärt dig grunderna så sitter det där. Du kan det. Det sitter i fingrarna. Du behöver inte ens tänka på hur du rullar upp en permanentspole eller hur du klipper en viss frisy. Det sitter där bara men ska du lära ut det till nån annan och då blir det lite klurigt. Det sitter i händerna och det sitter i huvudet och det kan vara svårt att förmedla den kunskapen så det är mycket tyst kunskap i vårt yrke. (Johnny)

¹¹⁸ Jag tänker att den tysta kunskapen är den som är svår att sätta ord på och det är den man ser när man sätter i en klämma och får en hållbarhet i frisyren. Alltså man ser att den ska vara placerad där och ingen annanstans för att den bli en liten del i ett större sammanhang men det behöver man...man måste ju jobba för att få det /.../ Men där ser man ibland att den tysta kunskapen kommer in när man ibland behöver visa. När jag inte kan förklara vad det är man gör utan jag måste visa dom liksom att det är ju såhär du gör. När det väl har gjorts det, det kan handla om en föning till exempel att dom får ju inte upp volymen och man förklarar och så men när man sen väl gör det då kan man ibland sätta ord på det men ibland kan man inte det heller då måste man bara du ska göra så här... (Cecilia)

might be among many conflicts bound to arise when discussions of vocational knowledge cross institutional borders. Possible institutional clashes will be addressed next.

9.5 Institutional clashes

When agents from different institutions meet, and vocational knowledge crosses the institutional borders between work life and academia, there may be clashes. Different institutional contexts gain their stability and legitimacy on different grounds. The first obvious institutional clash between trades and the academic institution within the admission procedure is in terms of regulative elements. Within the academic institution the insertion of vocational subjects can be seen as a way of ordering knowledge and content, to uphold the legitimacy of the academic institution. General criteria are increasingly common in the academic institution, and also in transnational policy on validation of learning outcomes. As such these general criteria and frameworks clash against the trades' use of very distinctive and detailed criteria and knowledge claims. For example, the Journeyman's certificate not only contains a vast amount of specified knowledge of the craft of hairdressing, but is part of a tradition and as such a source of vocational pride. The Council for Higher Education wants to have the same template for all vocations, Johnny remarked, and added that it is understandable although very difficult with regards to the uniqueness of each vocation.

Within the wider institutional frame of validation, which is that of policy, one obvious objective behind the ideas of validation seems to be based not on a particular interest in vocational knowledge, but rather on the potential for stimulating growth and social cohesion. Of course the trade itself is built on making profit. However, such profit in the trade is based on its legitimacy of being an association of crafts people, and cannot be realised though validation of hairdressers (in this case) with such loose and general criteria as in the VTE admission procedure. The trade wants to make sure that its practitioners have the necessary knowledge. Otherwise, its reputation, profit, competitive conditions, and its legitimacy might be threatened. In the admission procedure and in the institutional context of academia, the study counsellors feel pressure to push as many applicants as possible through the education to counteract the lack of vocational teachers. This becomes yet another institutional clash, as the trade wants to protect and control the vocation, but also in terms of the quality and number of hairdressers.

Another institutional clash concerns the perception of the significance of time. Time seems to be of significant importance in the trade. In order to make the Journeyman's test and receive the certificate, a certain amount of working

hours is a requirement. This clashes with the institutional frame of policy on validation and the learning outcomes agenda. Learning outcomes are explicitly not dependent on the duration and location of the learning.

In the institutional context of academia, written text has a prominent position which is not similarly emphasised in the trade. For Johnny to assess vocational knowledge, he said that he needed to see and assess for himself or needed to know that the person has passed the trade's vocational test. Having passed this proves that someone from the trade has assessed the vocational knowledge in use. To only write and talk about vocational knowledge has its limitations, and is also a matter of conceptions and understandings of knowledge. This topic will be covered in the next section.

9.6 Conceptions and understanding of vocational knowledge

Both Johnny and Cecilia are hairdressers but they are also vocational teachers which makes both of them acquainted with the education system. This can, in this study, be seen as both a limitation but also a prerequisite for discussing the admission procedure which is evidently to a large extent built on the premises of the education system.

When I asked Cecilia and Johnny to elaborate on the vocational knowledge of hairdressers, a couple of notions came up frequently, namely those of *craft*, *knowledge*, *technical skills*, and *social competence*. It is a craft, they mentioned at first, and on several occasions, which implies that the doing, know-how, and touch in the craft are considered to be at the core of the vocation. However, they both, right after having stated this, added that it is much more than a craft. It is very much about being technically proficient and flexible within all parts of the vocation. Both emphasised that knowledge of hairdressers' chemistry is important, and Cecilia added that analytical capabilities and planning are also crucial for a hairdresser. Obviously hairdressing is an aesthetic vocation, and both mentioned creativity and a feeling for shape and colour. Both Cecilia and Johnny described that knowledge, technical skills, and feeling for colour and shape were mutually dependent: That it does not matter how much knowledge you have and how technically proficient you are if you lack a feeling for shape, they said. By the same token, creativity was considered by both as crucial; and that the vocation attracts creative people. However, Johnny's and Cecilia's accounts also revealed that creativity is worth little if not grounded in knowledge. Altogether, they described hairdressing as a holistic performance being dependent on a variety of aspects, not least a range and depth of knowledge.

To some extent, many aspects of the vocation seemed to be embedded in the Journeyman's certificate, whose content was very evident for both of them.

A concept that stood out was that of social competence, which they emphasised as a prerequisite for being and becoming a hairdresser. Social competence was construed as necessary for the sake of making use of the knowledge of the craft. The notion of competence is used slightly differently from in the qualification framework, and also in a different way compared to the Swedish curriculum. In their accounts, social competence is not only a prerequisite and as such a minimum of a generic competence similar to those described by the European Union (described in section 4.4), but also an aspect of the holistic vocational performance and as such connected to the vocation.

When conducting the interviews with Cecilia and Johnny, the most striking thing I perceived was that they were not only talking *about* vocational knowledge and hairdressing – they *were* hairdressers. This manifested itself as an overall impression of vocational pride, such as when Johnny introduced himself; *"I'm a hairdresser with a Mastership certificate in hairdressing"*. Another example was when Cecilia referred to her choice of becoming a hairdresser as something she had known that she wanted ever since she was a child. To become a hairdresser was for her *"a dream came true"*. Cecilia and Johnny also talked extensively about the worth and function of their vocations as creating well-being and good hair-designs for the customers.

10. VALIDATION OF VOCATIONAL KNOWLEDGE: SYNTHESIS

In this thesis, I have explored validation of vocational knowledge from the different perspectives of policy, HEIs, and one trade. More exactly, the aim was to understand the validation of vocational knowledge prior to entry into VTE in Sweden with regards to conceptions and understandings about vocational knowledge, and also how institutional conditions influence the content and form of the validation practice. An important feature of an institution is that it provides comprehensiveness, order, and stability to humans' actions, and in upholding order it gains its legitimacy from the outside (Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2009; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Johansson, 2002; Scott, 2014). In the process of institutionalisation, modes of conduct become taken for granted (Greenwood, Oliver, Sahlin & Suddaby, 2008). Increased interaction between organisations, through the sharing of information, building coalitions, and briefly taking each other into account, can be seen as signs of this process of institutionalisation (Powell, 2008; Scott, 2014). The way of organising the validation prior to entry to VTE in Sweden is thus not an isolated phenomenon, but rather influenced by other organisations, not least policy producing ones. Writing from a new institutional position, it is accounted for how ideas, in terms of modes of organising and the like, move between contexts such as between policy and practice or between organisations (Scott, 2014). In the Swedish version of new institutionalism such movements are labelled travelling ideas (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996; Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008). In this chapter, I will conduct a synthesis in connecting the results from the different perspectives and levels explored with support from new institutional theory. I will do this by making an analysis of how the validation practice is regulated, what objectives, norms, and values it involves, and the cultural and cognitive aspects of what is taken for granted, within each perspective. After having described those institutional elements of validation, I will move on to the concepts and understandings of vocational knowledge on which this process of institutionalisation is built and which it entails. Furthermore, I will address the question of what these results imply in terms of who is gaining agency for deciding about vocational knowledge and what institutional arrangements are created.

As a brief summary of the results connected to regulative elements in validation, these are based on fairness and equivalence as reached through an assumed sameness between different forms of knowledge and learning experiences, which means that vocations and vocational knowledge has been transformed to fit a frame similar to knowledge developed in school. Within

this validation prior to the admission of VTE in Sweden, this transformation is taken one step further by using very similar criteria, appearing as school subjects in place of vocations. In terms of norms and values, it appears as if validation is more of a social and economic project than one of accounting for vocational knowledge. The focus is on economic growth rather than distribution, and on social inclusion rather than vocational pride, or other norms and values that could be seen as connected to vocations and vocational knowledge. As a cultural/cognitive matter of validation it seems as if what is taken for granted about vocational knowledge differs quite significantly between agents involved in validation, such as representatives from the trades and academia. Furthermore, these representatives use different terms for and concepts of knowledge, and hence a conceptual confusion is built into the guidelines of validation prior to VTE. This conceptual confusion blurs the boundaries between knowledge, learning, and learning context. In this complexity different negotiations and arrangements appear in terms of how to conduct the validation. Sometimes arrangements and the formation of groups are based on a sense of belonging, either to academia or to the particular trade. The tension between academia and the trade sheds light on the importance of who is given agency for deciding about vocational knowledge. It appears as if those who actually have vocational knowledge are not accorded agency. On these findings I elaborate more fully under each heading below.

10.1 Regulation by the same principles

In this section I elaborate on the results connected to the regulative pillar (see table 9). The regulative pillar concerns rules and standards in the process of institutionalisation. In this thesis, it is manifested in the regulations of validation such as the frameworks, criteria, phases of validation, and the like. The legitimacy of this pillar is based on the following combination of such formal and informal rules and standards.

Table 9.
Elements of the regulative pillar at the different levels of exploration.

Policy	HEIs	Trade
Common principles	Criteria for vocational	Trade specific
The European	subjects	regulations such as
Qualification	The Swedish	Journeyman's
Framework (EQF)	Qualification	certificate
	Framework (SeQF)	The Swedish
		Qualification
		Framework (SeQF)

In transnational and national policy on validation, the focus is on learning rather than knowledge, and it is explicitly stated that all forms of learning should count (see, e.g., CEDEFOP 2015; CEU 2012; Ds 2016:242012; SOU 2017:18; UIL 2012). In this sense validation is connected to the idea of lifelong learning and the learning outcomes thereof. To validate learning outcomes implies that it should account for what a learner knows and can do on the completion of a learning process (European Commission, 2006). To account for and validate knowledge from all sorts of thinkable learning experiences, and to make this process trustworthy and legitimate, is of course a challenge. In the early documents the need for common principles for validation were stressed. It was also suggested that those common principles should not deviate from those of formal education as this could give the impression that learning outside the formal system is inferior (CEDEFOP 2009). In the later documents the common principles were more firmly expressed through the launching of the European Qualification Framework, including eight levels of qualifications using the descriptors of knowledge, skills, and competence, which can be seen as increased attention to what Scott (2014) labels regulative elements. Since the European Commission stated that member states should put validation arrangements in place, Sweden is also in the process of implementing and developing guidelines for validation arrangements (see, eg., Ds 2016:24; SOU 2017:18). As an aspect of the regulative pillar (Scott, 2014), Sweden has also changed the legislation in accordance with recommendations from The European Union, and created a Swedish Qualification Framework, based on the same principles as the European Framework.

In light of the fact that the framework aims at identifying qualifications achieved in, for example, working life, it is not surprising that this type of common principle of validation has also been adopted in the validation of vocational knowledge gained prior to entry into the VTE. When ideas, modes of organising, and core set of conduct are imitated and picked up in new contexts (Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008) they may change. In the new context they are translated to suit the local practice (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996). When ideas travel, and are picked up in new contexts their time and space bound components may get lost. In the case of the qualification framework, the very idea behind it is that it is independent of time and context (Bohlinger, 2012). Sahlin and Wedlin (2008) have suggested that the most widely circulated ideas are those which are general and abstract. In the case of the qualification framework this is already general and abstract, which could even be one explanation for its wide circulation and huge impact. In order to be able to use the framework in connection with validation prior to entry into the VTE, there has instead been a need to contextualise it and to create instructions that fit this particular admission procedure. For this purpose, the Swedish Council for

Higher Education has launched criteria for parts of a vocation, which has resulted in a collection of more than 200 subjects. To replace the emphasis on vocations with school subjects can be seen as a huge transformation of vocational knowledge. To present vocational areas as school subjects implies a rather different logic. The legitimacy of the regulative pillar is though based on expedience and instrumentality (Scott, 2014), and not on issues of sociocultural significance such as specific characteristics of different vocations.

The vocational subjects are supposed to be assessed based on level five in the Swedish Qualifications Framework. When these tools – the framework and the criteria – are dealt with on an organisational level, the vocational knowledge is transformed to suit the logic of expedience, rather than sensitivity to trade specific vocational knowledge. That being said does not suggest that the study counsellors find the use of criteria or frameworks irrelevant. Some kind of standard is needed and, quite the contrary, they talk about criteria and framework as relevant and as a necessity, although wishing for more support from them. The study counsellors sometimes seem to be ill at ease using the criteria and frameworks, although they consider these tools to be useful and inevitable, in particular the level of the framework. According to my interpretation this emphasis is related to the ambition of making sure that a selection of high quality vocational teachers is made. Very much attention is given to discussion about the framework, its use, its relevance and whether or not it can, or should be used for individual management. The study counsellors' way of talking about vocational knowledge in relation to the framework illustrates new ways of talking about vocational knowledge. Formulation is a process through which certain ideas are picked up and given labels (Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008). Sahlin and Wedlin further suggest that such labels make ideas easier to talk about. The framework and its levels have introduced new ways of expressing vocational knowledge and experience such as: *“we demand a SeQF 5”* or *“being in a level four world”* or *“climbing the framework”*. The framework itself is often labelled and mentioned as the SeQF (Swedish Qualification Framework). For describing that an applicant has the necessary vocational knowledge for teaching in a vocational program in Upper Secondary School, one study counsellor said; ‘you are on a SeQF 5 and can teach down towards 4’. This assumes that vocational knowledge assumes new labels, and is formulated referring to the framework which makes it easier to talk about.

In turning to interviews with the vocational expert and the applicant, they emphasise the trades' regulations, such as in the case of hairdressers – the Journeyman's certificate. However, the idea of regulating by the means of a qualification framework has reached the trade as well. The vocational expert

from the hairdressing trade considered the framework to be a good frame of reference but was still hesitant about whether it could fit all trades. In comparison to the framework and the very general criteria in the admission procedure, the criteria for the journeyman's certificate for hairdressers are very clearly outlined in terms of its requirements for a significant number of tasks and tests to be passed. A prevailing discussion in validation prior to VTE, both by study counsellors and the vocational expert, seems to be whether or not the trades have assigned their trade specific certificates a level in the qualification framework. As was noted by the study counsellors and in the Panican (2016) study, some trades have introduced the frameworks whereas others have been reluctant. It can be concluded that the regulations of validation in terms of qualification frameworks and criteria are made with good intentions and as a way of facilitating comparisons and discussions of knowledge over institutional borders. However, the trades already had their regulations before the qualification frameworks were introduced, and it is questionable as to whether this kind of regulation provides better opportunities for the validation of vocational knowledge than do the trades' own regulations. To assign workplace regulations and certificate levels as part of the framework would be one such possibility. One issue here is that it is considered by many as if the possibility of developing vocational knowledge is limited to levels five or six. If so, the intention of reaching equivalence between different forms of knowledge cannot be achieved. Instead, vocational knowledge is subordinated when there is no way of reaching highest level in the framework, exemplified with a doctoral degree. Thus, the intent of achieving fairness through assuming sameness between different forms of knowledge is seemingly quite unfair (Allais, 2012), and in the case of the admission procedure it is a huge transformation of vocational knowledge. In the organisation of validation and the process of institutionalisation, vocational knowledge is transformed in terms of being regulated in a similar manner to knowledge developed in formal education. So, instead of perceiving vocational knowledge as valuable with regards to its own preconditions, this transformation gives the perception of advanced vocational knowledge as being the same as knowledge developed in formal education, although being simpler as it does not fit with the higher levels in the qualification framework. Furthermore, vocational knowledge seems, in this process of institutionalisation, to be subordinated to different objectives, values, and norms apparent in this process of institutionalisation. These will be explored in the next section.

10.2 Validation and its objectives, values and norms

In this section, I elaborate on the results connected to the normative pillar (see table 11). The normative pillar concerns systems of relations between objectives, values, and norms. Such systems are often connected to elements of profit and social obligations, as guiding the process of institutionalisation. Within the frame of the normative pillar, I also discuss the methods used for validating vocational knowledge.

Table 10.

Elements of the normative pillar at the different levels of exploration.

Policy	HEIs	Trade
Validation as a valuable tool for promoting growth and preventing social exclusion	Validations as a way of accounting for knowledge gained at work and reducing the shortage of vocational teachers in Sweden	Protection of the vocation Vocational pride

In policy, validation carries with it a range of hopes, expectations, interests, and norms, for example economic growth, social equity, and a challenging of traditions and more, discussed in chapter 8. The expectations on what the validation of the learning outcomes of lifelong learning can achieve are huge, implying that validation is beneficial in all sorts of ways and for all sorts of individuals. All of its benefits are often argued for using the codes of lifelong learning and the knowledge society. This makes validation appear as a modern, progressive, profitable, and desirable institution, taking a stand against traditional forms of learning and embracing equity, lifelong learning, and prosperity. The outcomes of this lifelong learning are supposed to supply the knowledge society with a qualified labour force. As an aspect of institutionalisation, Czarniawska and Joerges (1996) write about fashion, which can be seen as the opposite of an institution, in that fashion is continually evolving and changing whereas institutions are stable. However, they argue that fashion and institutionalisation are interdependent, as fashion supports institutionalisation processes because people and organisations want to follow fashion, to be modern and up to date. This line of reasoning can be applied to lifelong learning and the knowledge society, as these labels are commonly used in policy merely as fashionable buzzwords, and their conceptual meaning is vague, elusive, and often totally absent. Furthermore, in using the concept of lifelong learning, the boundaries between knowledge and learning become blurred, as will be discussed more in detail in section 10.4. These fashionable buzzwords linked to validation can also be understood as an

increased focus on learning outcomes and thus measurable and targetable goals. This kind of thinking is prominent in New Public Management, where both public and private organisations are, in a similar manner, directed and organised towards predefined evaluable goals to achieve, regardless of the organisation's initial core objectives and values (Skålen, 2002).

This rhetoric about validation may make us believe in the potential of validation not only for recognising knowledge but indeed for solving societal issues. Ideas and modes of organising and how they move between organisations are at the core of the processes of institutionalisation (Scott, 2014). The idea of validation in policy as solving societal issues has been picked up in the admission procedure to VTE in Sweden, on a national level. As earlier noted, ideas travel and while they travel they change (Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008). In putting in place the new admission procedure, one important societal issue intended to be solved was to increase the number of applicants admitted to the VTE. The idea of the social and economic benefit of validation has also travelled and reached the study counsellors, who are, though, confronted with different and potentially conflicting demands. They are in contact with applicants and care for them and their possibilities of changing career. They are also exposed to an implicit pressure to get as many applicants as possible into the education, but they have their guidelines to follow, and the needs and wishes from the trade to consider. The legitimacy of the normative pillar is connected not to sanctions but to fear of deviance, dishonour and shame (Scott, 2014). For the study counsellors this is connected to not fulfilling the social obligations towards the applicants, their obligations towards the academic institutions of trustworthy assessment within a limited frame of possibilities, and to society for increasing the number of vocational teachers.

The notion of validation as involving conflicting interests and objectives was found in Cavaco's (2009) study. Validation seems appeal to both those interested in economic growth and those who have social equity as their main concern. These arguments may not be mutually exclusive but the same arguments are often put forward by different agents. This implies that these aspects are both a source of conflict and tension and underlying agreement, which pave the way for a complexity in terms of underpinnings. This complexity of ideological assumptions may influence the practice of validation and, as Cavaco (2009) concluded, the tension between different ideologies was built into the actual practice of validation. The underpinnings were, according to Cavaco's findings, based on a humanist ideology based on recognition, whereas the target was geared towards a different ideology which was that of individualism and the economy. Such underpinnings seem to

matter in validation, and might even be highlighted when validation involves the trades as well.

The trades have an interest in protecting the vocation, its practitioners, its traditions, norms, and values. In the trade there are also obvious and explicit economic objectives which are connected to the survival, protection, and thus the status of the vocation. The hairdressing trade tries to protect the vocation and its reputation and counteract price dumping by excluding “*fortune-seekers*”, which in the hairdressing trade means not being a ‘real’ hairdresser, and not having a journeyman’s certificate and/or a license. Academia is also becoming increasingly adapted to New Public Management, and the HEIs are also exposed to a pressure to deliver, here in terms of getting as many as possible through the education. In the admission procedure this is in conflict with the norms and objectives of the trades’ wish to control the vocations. This could be one explanation for why academic institutions were more generous in giving admission in comparison to what the vocational experts had suggested, as found by Stenlund (2013a). Yet another explanation might be found in the understandings of vocational knowledge, which will be further explored in section 10.4.

Yet, another conflict related to different normative elements was that of accepting nursing aides as vocational teachers. The healthcare sector has traditionally been hierarchically organised and still is. Historically the nurses’ trade union has organised their own teacher education, implying that some qualified at a higher level in this hierarchy educated those beneath (Rudvall, 2001). In this regard the program for nursing aides in Upper Secondary School differs from most vocational programs where students are educated by someone at the same ‘level’, meaning having the same vocational background.

In terms of the methods that are used for the assessment, this differs between HEIs. To use different methods fit for purpose is stressed in the policy documents (CEDEFOP 2015). There are also a variety of suggestions about what methods to use in validation, such as portfolios, interviews, observations, simulations, tests, and more (CEDEFOP 2009). The most common method in the validation procedure prior to VTE is that the vocational knowledge is assessed based on readings of the documents of the applications, sometimes complemented with phone calls to applicants for clarification. However, the idea of methods fit for purpose has also travelled and reached the admission procedure. The difficulties of assessing by only reading from documents were mentioned by many. In order to better be able to account for the applicants’ vocational knowledge when the narratives were too scarce or the workplace certificates were incomplete, other methods were deployed. At one HEI they had started to record interviews, others had encouraged the assessors to

conduct interviews with applicants, and yet others had also designed practical tests. To conduct interviews is in line with the finding of Breier and Ralphs (2009) who concluded that interviews could reveal more information than written narratives. Also those who had conducted interviews suggested that these reveal much more information than the written narratives and workplace certificates. The kinds of methods that are used is also a matter of time and money, the study counsellors said. This implied that sometimes the validation was not conducted with the quality they might have wished for. It seems as if the ideas of how to organise validation that are the most widely circulated are those which are seemingly possible to implement, an aspect of travelling ideas noted by Sahlin and Wedlin (2008). Doubtless, the question of what methods to use are intertwined with what is taken for granted about vocational knowledge, and how it could and should be expressed.

10.3 Different ways of expressing vocational knowledge

In this section I elaborate on the results connected to the cultural/cognitive pillar (see table 11). The cultural/cognitive pillar concerns subjective interpretations of symbols, words, and signs connected to an intrinsic value for those who belong to the institution (Scott, 2014).

Table 11.
Elements of the cultural/cognitive pillar at the different levels of exploration.

Policy	HEIs	Trade
Considered as any learning outcome	Expressed by the means of vocational subjects and assessed through written elaborations of vocational knowledge. Manifested in workplace certificates. Vocational knowledge related to traditional crafts	I am a hairdresser The journeyman’s certificate is the proof of mastering a craft, requiring a lot of knowledge The customer is my centre of attention

With few exceptions vocational knowledge is not explicitly mentioned in policy, but is instead included in the concepts of lifelong learning and learning outcomes. In considering travelling ideas (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996; Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008), the learning outcomes orientation has been picked up in the admission procedure insofar that the outcomes of work life and vocational experiences are described as criteria of vocational subjects, assessed using the Swedish Qualification Framework. To prove eligibility for

those subjects the applicants submit workplace certificates and written narratives. Although the explicit intent of the admission procedure is to not take the academy's quality criteria as the norm (SOU 2008:112), but instead to be attentive and account for the complexity of the wide range of vocational knowledge and experiences, those with academic backgrounds seem to be favoured. This is particularly visible when it comes to the writing of narratives. Good written communication skills have a prominent position within the academic institution, and the study counsellors were bothered by the scarce narratives. The study counsellors remarked frequently on this, but they also found it problematic to use written narratives as good narratives do not automatically imply specialised vocational knowledge. They also often considered the workplace certificates as difficult to understand and interpret. The study counsellors were also reflecting on their understandings of vocational knowledge in relation to applicants, whom they had met. They also brought up other understandings of vocational knowledge, turning to examples of traditional crafts and other vocations, and added how they had gradually developed a competence in relating vocational knowledge to certificates and other requirements. This could be understood as that they had developed some sort of general validation competence. The main elements of the cultural/cognitive pillar are, among other things, to have shared understandings, and assigning certain symbols, actions, and interpretations significance in a similar way, and thereby focusing on "what makes us better than others" (Scott, 2014). Thus, it is understandable if it can be challenging for the study counsellors to not take their own institutional settings' quality criteria as the norm. They have for example difficulties in overlooking the scarcity of the written narratives, although they have a sense that there are some issues involved in the requirement for written elaboration on vocational knowledge.

Turning to the trades, it was obvious in the accounts of the vocational expert and the applicant that it is important to value the craft, traditions of the trade and traditional regulations as well, such as the Journeyman's certificate. Clearly, policy ideas of validation and for example the qualification frameworks are also travelling into the trade. Abstract and general ideas are, as mentioned, the most widely circulated (Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008). From the trade representative's perspective, the idea of such general abstractions contradicts their very specific requirements, and the uniqueness of their vocation and tradition manifested in the journeyman's certificate which dates back to the 17th century. As I described in section 9.6, the overall impression was how the hairdressers talked not *about* hairdressers but *as* hairdressers as a matter of vocational pride, and assigning importance to the same aspects of the vocation. They talked about how their knowledge was connected to a feeling for shape, touch, sensual engagement, creativity, and customer relations – all

of which seemed embodied and taken for granted when considering their similar accounts on these matters. This is aligned with Klope's (2015) findings of how intimately connected the development of vocational knowledge is with the process of gaining a vocational identity. Also Janik (1996) suggests that practical knowledge is not something you have but something you are. The hairdressers said that they could recognise someone with the vocational knowledge in hairdressing in a similar manner to the master painter who needed ten seconds to distinguish an amateur from a professional. It becomes obvious that this master painter knows something that has been developed over several years, and involves many different aspects. This knowledge is so profoundly incorporated in his body and mind, and as such it is much more than knowing how to paint: he is a painter, and he can recognise another painter. The story about the master painter told by a study counsellor was an example of how study counsellors tried to negotiate between the admission requirements and their reflections on vocational knowledge into which they had gained insight through being involved in validation. Some aspects of vocational knowledge have to do with how a vocation is perceived, as for example in the definition by Billet (2011) in which a vocation is reflected in its practitioners' interests, carries worth for them and the community, and has developed in culturally and historically derived activities through a diversity of practices. Vocational knowledge has developed through such practices, and there are reasons for addressing the knowledge question itself, as one underlying concern is what happens to the understandings of vocational knowledge when it is subjected to validation within the academic context.

10.4 Conceptual confusion

As have been described in the previous sections, validation can be perceived as potentially becoming institutionalised – as a desirable institution in the making. In this process of institutionalisation there are three pillars – regulative, normative, and cultural/cognitive – on which the institutionalisation can be seen as being based. In the process of institutionalisation, the interests and foci are directed towards many different issues and the question of knowledge, in particular vocational knowledge, is sometimes overridden or neglected in this process. One important question concerning knowledge in relation to validation is whether validation should be thought of as a way to recognise different pathways leading to the same knowledge, or as different pathways to different forms of but equally valuable knowledge. As validation is organised and institutionalised it appears as though it is about different ways to the same knowledge, which will have consequences for the understanding and recognition of vocational knowledge, as was discussed in section 10.1. In addition there are several understandings and conceptions of knowledge at play simultaneously. The main findings were

that difficulties in terms of confusions are bound to appear when importing knowledge concepts because these have different underpinnings. There is also confusion concerning the boundaries between knowledge and learning; also that the notions of competence and tacit knowledge take on quite different meanings. On these findings I will elaborate in this section. (See table 12)

Table 12.

Conceptions and understandings of vocational knowledge at the different levels of exploration.

Policy	HEIs	Trade
Learning outcomes	Learning outcomes The Swedish curricula conception of knowledge Theoretical and experiential knowledge Tacit knowledge	Generic competences, e.g., social competence Craft and knowledge Tacit and embodied knowledge

In policy on validation, learning processes and learning sites are emphasised over knowledge, which is at odds with the idea of assessing knowledge on one particular occasion. The later Swedish documents have adapted to this knowledge conception, where learning outcomes is translated to *läranderesultat* in Swedish. As was discussed in 8.7, this conception differs from the knowledge conception in the Swedish curriculum. When reading policy on validation it is a challenge to distinguish knowledge from learning, as the notion of learning outcomes itself is ambiguous in terms of relating to either learning or knowledge. Obviously it is connected to lifelong learning and the idea that outcomes derived from any context count. However, if the boundaries between knowledge and learning are blurred there is a risk that formalised, theoretical, and propositional knowledge is connected to formal education and learning, whereas tacit or non-propositional knowledge is connected to workplaces and non-formal and informal learning, which means that there is a risk of diminishing the status of vocational knowledge.

The study counsellors struggled with expressing the idea that vocational knowledge, even if it has developed from experience can also be theoretical. Some of these difficulties can be found in the formulation of the criteria of vocational subjects where each criterion starts with “*specialised (experiential and theoretical) knowledge*” (see section 2.1). This can be confusing and understood as if yet another knowledge conception suddenly appears. The distinction between experiential and theoretical is sometimes interpreted as if theoretical refers to propositional knowledge and experiential to non-propositional knowledge. On other occasions these are interpreted as if

theoretical refers to formal education, and experiential to workplace learning through gaining experience of practice.

To add to the confusion, the concept of tacit knowledge appeared in different disguises during the interviews with study counsellors, as was also the case in previous research, described in section 4.5. Furthermore, the concept of tacit knowledge takes on slightly different meanings in different traditions. For example, it is considered as a bodily knowledge in the Polanyi tradition (Carlgren, 2015; Janik, 1996; Polanyi, 1983). In this tradition it is suggested that some aspects of tacit knowledge are possible to communicate. The Wittgenstein tradition of tacit knowledge is more oriented towards language and language games, and there are aspects of knowledge of which we cannot speak (Carlgren, 2015; Janik, 1996). Thus, a challenge is how it would be possible to facilitate applicants' possibilities for making this kind of knowledge explicit and thus assessable, and by whom. It is doubtful whether this kind of knowledge would ever be possible to fully account for outside its practice or by someone not acquainted with the same practice. In relating to Panican's (2016) study and the informant talking about the 'animal-eye' as crucial for those who will become animal keepers and racers, and added 'I have an animal-eye so I can see directly if a person is good at this', this suggests that those with the same tacit knowledge are the only ones who can assess it. Also, those from the trade bring up the subject of tacit knowledge, and one suggested that tacit knowledge is a kind of knowledge that is sometimes possible to communicate if it is stimulated by something, such as actions and demonstrations. Cecilia explained that sometimes when she grabs the blow-dryer to show the students how to get volume in the hair, she can suddenly also express verbally what she wanted to say, but had difficulties to explain in words alone. However, some aspects will remain tacit, according to Cecilia, and then the only way is to show them.

For the sake of simplifying the question of knowledge, and hopefully contributing with some clarity, it is relevant to go back to some basic assumptions. Knowledge can be either propositional, and as such connected to truth and objectivity and possible to articulate, or it can be non-propositional and connected to subjective interpretation and not fully possible to articulate. As Polanyi (1983) noted, tacit knowledge appears in any knowledge development. Also theoretical or propositional knowledge appears to varying degrees in any development of knowledge. It should also be noted that the boundaries are not clear cut between the forms of knowledge, but these are instead mutually dependent, found in the expressions from the hairdressers that creativity (non-propositional) is underpinned by knowledge (propositional).

Hairdresser chemistry, mentioned by both hairdressers, can be taken as an example of the mutual relation between propositional and non-propositional knowledge. In order to make hair colour, some knowledge of chemistry is needed. To make the mixture of colour suitable for specific kind of hair, means that adjustments are probably necessary. Johnny emphasised the need for being technically flexible as hairdressers' working material – hair – differs quite significantly between different persons. Then there are a wide range of other considerations, including about the customer, a feeling for shape and colour, planning for the next treatment, and more. What chemicals to use for hair treatment can also be tacit knowledge at first, and later develop into propositional knowledge of formal chemistry (Eva Klope, personal communication). Eva, who is a hairdresser, told me that she had knowledge of how to mix chemicals for colouring hair, knowing exactly what to do for changing nuances of colour, to get the perfect tone for the particular customer. Later, when she became vocational teacher, she developed theoretical knowledge of chemistry for the sake of being able to explain to others what she already knew. Thus, it is neither obvious nor necessary that propositional knowledge precedes its tacit twin but it is more likely that these are mutually dependent for the sake of development.

Within the trades, the notion of competence is frequently used, and trades seem to embrace generic competences (Panican, 2016). Such generic competences were also seen as important by the hairdressers in this study. They repeatedly emphasised the need for social competence within the hairdressing trade. Being socially competent, here exemplified by making sure that the customer is the focus, making the customer feel good, being able to talk about everything, and so on. This competence can be seen as both specific for the trade and generic. There are markers of how the hairdressers consider such generic competences not only as important but as a prerequisite for being able to use their vocational knowledge, and thereby develop it. It is to some extent described as a necessary minimum of competence as in the European Union's key-competencies, which were described in section 4.4. It is noteworthy that in the Swedish curricula competence or capabilities take the meaning of something that is developed from knowledge, rather than being a prerequisite for developing knowledge. The meaning of competence in the Swedish curricula is in alignment with Ellström's (1992) definition of competence which is related to the disposition to respond to evolving situations and work tasks. Such dispositions are dependent on knowledge in all of its different aspects. None of the informants mentioned competence as connected to a predefined ability to take responsibility, as is the meaning outlined in the descriptor of competence in the qualification framework. When the same term – competence – is used with different conceptual meanings, it becomes in Eraut's (2004) words "a moving target". Mulder, Weigel, and

Collins (2007) also investigated the concept of competence and found criticism from different countries of the unreflected use of the term. In relation to these findings it is understandable that the study counsellors at the HEIs found competence difficult to describe, and the hairdressers interpreted it with reference to conditions in their trade. However, as was the case with knowledge, there are apparently different conceptions of competence at play. In Panican’s (2016) study of validation in the trades there were concerns that it is not possible to distinguish competence from skill and knowledge in the qualification framework – which is another issue, probably connected to the different meanings of competence in Swedish curricula compared to the qualification framework. In many of today’s curricula there are great expectations on what reliance on competences can achieve (Mulder, Wiegel, & Collins, 2007; Nzima, 2016, see, also, OECD 2001). There are, though, problems in fulfilling those expectations as there are no coherent definitions of what competence and competency really refer to in the particular settings where these concepts are used.

10.5 Vocational knowledge and agency

As was described in section 5.5, Emirbayer and Mische (1998) argued that agency should be considered as an analytical category in its own right. In this thesis this theoretical concept opens up for the possibility of gaining information about agents at the different levels of analysis and their “degrees of manoeuvrability, inventiveness, and reflective choice” (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 963), in relation to validation of vocational knowledge. In this section I will analyse the results from the different levels regards to the agency among those involved, and on what it seems to be based.

Table 13.
Agency amongst different agents at the different levels of exploration.

Policy	HEIs	Trade
Policy producers	Swedish Council for Higher Education	Vocational experts
Decision making based on a desired future of growth, labour market performance and inclusion	Decision making based on the criteria and the applicants’ future work as teachers	Decision making based on personal experience in relation to vocational knowledge and the trades needs and wishes

In terms of agency, it is very difficult to decide from policy documents coming from the various organisations which of these have agency to decide on issues of validation of vocational knowledge. First, vocational knowledge as a concept does not appear in documents on validation in general. Second,

policy documents do not always have explicit authors, but are rather the result of cooperation between groups of people and organisations. It is, though, clear that educational and curriculum issues have become transnational political issues (Karseth, 2008), judging from the vast amount of policy produced. The European Union obviously has a significant share of agency in terms of educational decisions (Mickwitz, 2015), not least in validation, as most documents draw on recommendations from organisations connected to the European Union. This was also mentioned by some of the informants in Panican's (2016) study of validation in different trades. They perceived validation to be steered top-down from the EU. It is, though, comprehensible that the European Union wishes to facilitate comparisons of knowledge for increased mobility over national and institutional borders. A sign of this is the EU recommendation to the member states of putting in place validation systems (CEU 2012), implying that the EU has a considerable amount of agency in terms of ideas of the organisation of validation. As earlier noted, there are no explicit considerations about work life traditions, or vocational knowledge and its historical development in the policy documents. One exception here is the first Validation Delegation (2008). In the prologue of the delegation's final report there was an example of a nursing aide's work. Josefsson, the author of the prologue, was connected to the research environment Skill and Technology, described in section 4.3. In comparing this document with the later national ones it appears as if the agency of this research environment had been replaced by a greater focus on transnational policy and the current policy trends of learning outcomes and qualification frameworks. Thus, agency can be seen as an important aspect of processes of institutionalisation where different individuals or organisations in the policy field can be innovative, act strategically, and so on, and thereby change the institutional conditions (Scott, 2014). This assumes that agency over validation is not static, but changes over time.

Considering the agentic dimension of the organisations connected to validation studied in this thesis, the Swedish Council for Higher Education has become very influential. They have received a considerable amount of agency in describing and transforming vocational knowledge into a collection of over 200 subjects. Maguire, Hardy, and Lawrence (2004), note that it is important to study such institutional entrepreneurs for the understanding of the leverage of resources in processes of institutionalisation. The study counsellors as representatives of the HEIs are supposed to use these resources when they are responsible for the final decisions, and thus have the formal agency of accepting or rejecting applicants, based on the criteria from Swedish Council for Higher Education, and indeed the qualification framework. Cooper and Harris (2013) suggested that agency was a crucial factor for those involved in working with validation. Sometimes the study counsellors in this study

seemed to be at troubled when making their judgements according to criteria, which they found difficult. The most constraining factor for the agency of the HEIs study counsellors would though be that they most often lack vocational knowledge. As Young (2010) has argued, there is a risk that the current policy trend with learning outcomes and frameworks removes the agency from those with specialised knowledge in favour of those with procedural knowledge of criteria and frameworks.

There is an inherent agency problem within this validation procedure as there are so many organisations involved, each having different objectives with their involvement. In turning to the theory of agency, as expressed by Emirbayer and Mische (1998), they define it as temporal and as relating to past experiences, the current situation, and future possibilities, through the interplay between habit, judgement, and imagination. It is likely that the ideal situation for decision making is to have access to past experience, the current situation, with an understanding of the possible future. In relating such ideal agency to the different levels of analysis, the agency dilemma inherited in the validation prior to VTE becomes visible. From the policy perspective there are no accounts of the past or of vocational knowledge, the current situation is described as undergoing a societal crisis, and the future possibilities are constructed as being about growth and social cohesion in general. At the HEIs, considerations of the past are limited due to the fact that they lack experience of vocational knowledge; they are, though, well informed about the current situation and its guidelines. Their future perspective is likely to be based on considerations of the education and the applicants' future work as teachers. This become visible through applicants' expressions about the fact that they are hoping to become teachers, they must become employable, and so on. Finally, the question becomes that of where does this kind of validation leave the agency of those with vocational knowledge. In the case of Johnny, he is very confident with regards to the past and his experience of hairdressing, and the trade's own regulation which he would like to have seen as the requirement. His imagination in relation to the future is a concern for the trade. According to the current situation and his judgement of the admission requirements, his agency decreases as he feels uncomfortable in using the criteria and the framework when not being in contact with the applicants. The agency by those from the trade is thus constrained by the fact that the trade's common ways of assessing vocational knowledge is in conflict with the instructions in the admission procedure. This was also mentioned by one of the study counsellors, that the vocational experts overlook the criteria because they know what is included in the vocation.

Cecilia, the applicant, was also confident with regards to her experience as a hairdresser, but her agency was also reduced by the fact that she had no

experience of the education system at the time when she applied. The requirement of elaborating in writing on her knowledge which is to a large extent tacit, relating it to general and vague criteria, is an obvious loss of agency.

In relation to earlier research on validation, two different models are identified. These are the credit exchange model and the learning and development model. In the first model applicants are supposed to demonstrate their knowledge against criteria (De Graaff, 2014; Stenlund, 2011). The development model is often conducted through the development of a portfolio (Conrad, 2008). This holds a more open and reflective aspect (De Graaff, 2014; Stenlund, 2011). The validation prior to the VTE can be viewed as a hybrid of the two models. It is organised as the credit exchange model in terms of criteria, but has a seemingly open-ended character in the elaboration in writing on the vocational knowledge at stake. In earlier research, the elicitation of vocational knowledge is suggested to be facilitated through the use of narratives and examples (Alvunger & Adolfsson, 2016; Göransson, 1990; Janik, 1996; Lindqvist & Nordänger, 2007; Nordänger & Lindqvist, 2012). This potential of elicitation of vocational knowledge is picked up in the admission procedure through the production of narratives. However, when this production of narratives is not really open-ended and facilitated and stimulated by joint reflection but rather directed by the means of meeting the criteria, it becomes something else. The many remarks on the scarce narratives suggest that it is not easy for applicants to produce such narratives. Instead of having the potential for eliciting their vocational knowledge, they potentially position applicants as having difficulties in writing. These difficulties might well have to do with the vocational knowledge that they are supposed to describe being difficult to articulate, for reasons discussed in chapter 4. Furthermore, in an assessment situation the narratives were questioned for credibility reasons, and the insecurity of those who have written the narrative.

If validation is supposed to build a bridge between work and academia, the question of agency and the power balance between the traditional institutional contexts of work life and academia are important to consider. As Hardy and Maguire (2008) have suggested, those who benefit most from existing institutional arrangements are likely to have central positions within the institution. Agents who want to express something not aligned with the existing institution are more likely to have a peripheral position. In this admission procedure it is those with vocational knowledge who seem to be in a subordinated position on the periphery. At the same time ValiWeb has a considerable amount of agency within the admission procedure, probably due to their relations with the trades. Also those HEIs working with ValiWeb assign this company great confidence and trust. As mentioned earlier, there are

signs that the HEIs are divided between those using Valiweb and the rest, and maybe such an institutional tension creates certain arrangements. This will be explored next.

10.6 Trusting academia or the trade

Sahlin and Wedin (2008) have suggested that when ideas travel those which are possible to implement are the ones that will be picked up. Sometimes the ideas of modes of organising are not at all possible to implement, and, as Meyer and Rowan (1977) concluded, practical considerations do not always follow formal structures. Quite the contrary, Meyer and Rowan claim that in order for organisations to maintain legitimacy and get the work done, practical considerations are made so the actual conduct differs from what is stated in policy or guidelines, in a process labeled *decoupling*. In the case of the admission procedure this is apparent when for example the study counsellors refer to their network of colleagues or to ValieWeb. They chose to make their considerations based on what could be labelled *institutional belonging* rather than following the instructions.

One sign of decoupling, based on belonging, is when study counsellors are assigning either workplace certificates or written narratives importance. The written narratives at some HEIs are seen as less important than certificates, and by others as outweighing the certificates. Thus this can be seen as a strategy of decoupling, where different emphases are put either on the workplace certificates or the narratives, and there is a divide between those who use ValiWeb and the rest.

In relying on either narratives or certificates, the level of the framework is seen as important at all HEIs. In using the narratives there is an ambition to catch important aspects of vocational knowledge. The advantage considered by the HEIs using ValiWeb and who are more likely to rely on certificates, is that the certificates are issued and signed by someone in the trade and who enjoys trust in the trade. In case of the hairdressing trade, they were very clear that they assign great importance to the journeyman's certificate. There are, however, trades and vocations which have nothing corresponding to the journeyman's certificate. In those cases the experts have to rely on other workplace certificates. One disadvantage of using only workplace certificates has been that they are not always written in a manner which fits with the requirement of the admission procedure, such as for example the criteria for the vocational subjects. Thus, when neither the narratives nor the workplace certificates have been sufficient, some HEIs have used alternative methods for finding out about the applicants' vocational knowledge, such as interviews and practical tests. As concluded by Van Kleef (2014), the establishment of an

environment that fully and accurately gives opportunities for applicants to demonstrate their knowledge is crucial in validation. In alignment with this, Cooper and Harris (2014) concluded that institutional practices and commitment were just as important as affordances in validation as understandings of knowledge. In the case of validation prior to VTE, the tensions between different institutional practices are obvious.

Different kinds of tensions between academia and work life or between agents within vocational education are not a new phenomenon, but have been present ever since the first institute of vocational pedagogy in Sweden was founded in 1918 (Hedman, 2001; Rudvall, 2001), and most likely prior to that as well. The existence of those signs of divisions, between for example work life and academia, is though interesting because validation of vocational knowledge is supposed to build a bridge between the institutional settings of academia and work (De Graff, 2014). To create this bridge, the learning outcomes orientation together with qualification framework and criteria were introduced; but, instead of creating a seamless connection, the discussions tended to move from the vocational knowledge to be about different issues such as the framework itself. As noted by one study counsellor, “...*criteria and the assessors do not speak the same language*”. The same study counsellor said that “*it is vague from the beginning to the end*”. The learning outcomes orientation of the qualification framework can be seen as a response or an attempt to counteract such vagueness, but it does not seem either to solve the institutional tensions or to facilitate an understanding of vocational knowledge, even though some kind of standard must be seen as crucial in the validation process. It would though be reasonable to have a standard fitted with the trades and their vocations. Thus, although those involved in validation are working hard, there are issues to be resolved and developments to make. Such issues and developments and summarising conclusions will be discussed next.

11. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

The aim of this thesis was to understand validation of vocational knowledge prior to entry into VTE in Sweden with regard to conceptions of and understandings about vocational knowledge, and also how institutional conditions influence the content and form of the validation practice. Related to this aim there was an underlying concern and a broader purpose which was to explore what the organisation, and potential institutionalisation, of validation do to vocational knowledge, and the public image thereof, and how validation positions those applicants with vocational knowledge. My ambition with this thesis was thus to try to unpack the ideas that the organisation of validation is built on, in order to better understand the conceptions and understandings of vocational knowledge on which it is built and which it entails. Furthermore, I was interested in who is gaining agency to decide on vocational knowledge and which arrangements are created when different agents are striving for agency. In the previous section I have presented the synthesis of the results of the different studies. To understand how validation is supposed to be organised, and how it is actually organised, I used Scott's (2014) institutional pillars as the analytical structure. I assumed that validation is potentially becoming institutionalised and, as such, taken for granted as a valuable practice. No matter how promising validation may seem at the policy level, at the organisational levels – the HEI and the trade – validation was perceived as being very difficult by those involved. There is thus a considerable gap between what validation promises and what it delivers. Rhetorically and in policy, there seems to be great confidence in what validation can actually achieve. In this chapter, I will discuss the limitations of the thesis, discuss some summarising conclusions, and point to possible ways forward and topics for further research.

11.1 Limitations of the thesis

One limitation with this thesis is that it is a small scale qualitative case study, using policy analysis and interviews as its methods. In terms of the methods and conduct, I could have selected more or other policy documents, although the ones accounted for were considered to be of significant importance, giving an overview of the policy field. Another choice could have been to actually select fewer documents and go into more depth with each of them. However, I assumed it to be important to choose both transnational and national documents for the possibility of analysing how the ideas of the organisation of validation travel. It could be argued that, throughout the thesis, I chose breadth at the expense of depth in order to be able to draw the bigger picture of ideas

circulating in and around validation. In terms of the interviews made in the studies, there are always factors of insecurity in relying on these. Firstly, as a researcher I may have influenced the interviewees in ways that I was not aware of, in spite of taking all possible precautions and considerations as outlined in chapter 6. Secondly, there is by necessity a selection of information from the interviews based on my interpretation of which were the most relevant results, while every person interviewed could have made different interpretations. It should also be noted that the admission procedure and the validation studied in this thesis have been exposed to many changes over time in terms of the instructions, agents, and organisations involved. It is thus likely that there will be further changes after this study is completed. This means that it is difficult to find some final answers about validation prior to VTE, as it continues to change and evolve.

Yet another and important limitation is that of choosing only one trade, one vocational expert, and one applicant. My reason for doing so was that I considered it important to include a trade's perspective and it would have been impossible to include too many trades, as each has their own regulations and idiosyncrasies. In terms of applicants I also chose only one. My argument for this choice is that applicants all are unique and the selection of others would still have yielded only very specific individual accounts. It could though have been interesting to focus only on applicants, their vocational knowledge and experiences of the admission procedure, but that would have been another study. Furthermore, the choice of the hairdressing trade might be regarded as special or atypical in terms of being an old trade, relying heavily on traditional regulations such as the Journeyman's certificate. This may make the hairdressing trade potentially stronger in negotiations, and in relation to the instructions of the admission to VTE. There are of course many other trades with completely different histories, regulations, and idiosyncrasies. For example, there are very new trades that have not yet put in place any regulations at all; not to mention all those applicants who are more or less autodidactic but who have very proficient vocational knowledge nevertheless.

Having accounted for these limitations there are still good grounds for drawing some conclusions in relation to the research questions. In section 11.2, I will draw some conclusions and briefly discuss ideas about the organisation of validation and the conceptions and understandings of vocational knowledge. In section 11.3, I will draw conclusions and discuss matters related to agency and institutional arrangements. In section 11.4, I will offer the final discussion which is that of relating the conclusions to the broader purpose of the thesis, namely to explore what the organisation, and potential institutionalisation, of validation do to vocational knowledge, and the

public image thereof, and how validation positions those applicants with vocational knowledge.

11.2 Validation as an institution

The overall conclusion concerning which ideas about the organisation of validation stand out in the policy and practice of validation is that very little attention is paid to vocational knowledge. Instead, much else is going on, putting questions of knowledge into the background. Vocational knowledge becomes subordinated to the very same regulations as those for knowledge developed in formal education. This means, for example, that vocational knowledge can never reach a level higher than six in the qualification framework, which is one of the most common regulating principles in validation. Stopping at level six implies that vocational knowledge is inferior as it for other kinds of knowledge is possible to reach level 8. In terms of the normative ideas of the organisation of validation, economic and social motives stand out. Vocational knowledge becomes interesting for its potential of increasing growth, which is obviously a powerful argument. The social arguments, somewhat paradoxically, give an impression of validation as some kind of charity for those with vocational knowledge. This makes applicants appear much weaker in terms of their economic benefit than the relevance of the knowledge they have actually developed indicates. When it comes to ideas related to cultural/cognitive matters, these differ between the agents and organisations involved, which is not surprising as such matters have to do with the historical and cultural factors of which members of a certain group have a shared understanding. The prominent position of the written word in academia is less likely to be of relevance in the hairdressing trade when, for example, preparing a bride's coiffure.

Throughout the thesis, I have argued for the relevance of seeing validation as a potentially developing institution, situated between work life and academia. This has been a theoretical construct and, as such, valuable for reaching the results of the thesis. It is, however, doubtful whether validation in practice can be considered as an institution, as it does not uphold the stability that is often associated with institutions. In reflecting on the above conclusions and the difficulties in terms of different and sometimes conflicting ideas in validation, it might have been beneficial to actually develop validation as an independent institution and not as in this thesis for analytical purposes, but in practice. This would have been particularly relevant in relation to conceptions and understandings of vocational knowledge. One conclusion to draw from the results of the studies in this thesis is that the validation of vocational knowledge is built on both national and transnational knowledge conceptions,

which makes it difficult for those involved in validation to talk about vocational knowledge and to develop a common understanding.

Although I have to a large extent highlighted the difficulties in validation, I do not suggest that validation is bad or that it should not be used. Considering validation as an institution on its own, as suggested above, its purpose could be about supporting relations between different institutional contexts such as academia and work. Consequently, an independent validation institution should involve agents from both, with the opportunity for direct cooperation and joint research in order to promote a fairer share of agency. If validation of vocational knowledge takes place in academia under the rules and quality criteria of the academic institution, there is a risk that the traditions and idiosyncrasies of each vocation and its related knowledge cannot be sufficiently accounted for, because they have been developed within another institution. However, academia has an important contribution to make in terms of theorising, for example, policy, knowledge, and more. If validation is left to the trades alone, there is a risk that concerns for future employees and profit will be foregrounded. However, the most important features for validating vocational knowledge are, by necessity, found in the trade in terms of involving persons with vocational knowledge, who are also acquainted with the vocation, its traditions and regulations, and its traditional methods for assessing vocational knowledge, and more. To develop more refined methods for the validation of vocational knowledge would be another relevant topic for further and joint research, rather than assuming that different forms of knowledge can be compared along the same lines and assessed with basically one and the same method. Thus, there is a need for further research in, for example, more suitable validation methods, how to handle different knowledge conceptions within the same practice, how to facilitate communication across institutional borders, and how to build or relate existing standards of the trades to, for example, a qualification framework – just to mention a few.

11.3 Academia, trades and agency

In terms of agency in describing and deciding upon vocational knowledge, it is difficult to make a clear cut conclusion. The desire for gaining agency is resulting in constant negotiations. First, there are at the policy level both national and transnational agents and organisations. In this respect transnational organisations are gaining more and more agency, with the risk of crossing over into and decreasing the agency of national organisations which have insight into national conditions. Second, there are, in the practice of validation studied in this thesis, negotiations between academia and the trades. The HEIs have the formal agency of deciding whom to accept and reject for

VTE. The vocational experts have their share of agency as well, as they make recommendations about admitting or rejecting applicants, recommendations which are most often followed. In this case of validation, the agency of those with vocational knowledge is restricted by the instructions they have at their disposal. The criteria for vocational subjects given in the admission procedure are not sensitive to the trades' regulations, which mean a loss of agency for those from the trades. It would be relevant if the trades were to become more involved in defining their desirable standards, and also in writing solid workplace certificates with more useful information, and the like. This would facilitate the validation of vocational knowledge which takes the trades into account.

The most striking loss of agency is among the applicants who are supposed to put in writing not only their vocational knowledge in all of its aspects, material and non-material, but also in relating their knowledge to the general criteria. Thus there is an inherited agency problems in validation, which promote the various negotiations needed to create arrangements based on overcoming problems of institutional belonging. This means that rather than providing the possibility of bridging the gap between work life and academia, those arrangements consolidate this hiatus. As was suggested in section 11.2, better cooperation must be considered the only option for bridging this gap. Furthermore, as I argued in section 11.2, it would probably be beneficial to see validation as an independent institution in its own right.

It is also noteworthy that the learning outcomes orientation, which dominates both transnational and national policy, influences both the trades and academia. Even though the explicit argument for the learning outcomes orientation is based on economic growth and equity, and is oriented towards the labour market, it seems to some extent self-defeating. The reason is that this orientation blurs the boundaries between knowledge and learning and between economy and equity. Just any knowledge and learning experience can count, and the relevance of time and location is downplayed. This implies that hard work and lengthy involvement in a vocation does not pay off in terms of being valued. Such neglect of this need for lengthy experience for the development of vocational knowledge is problematic due to the nature of vocational knowledge, clearly dependent on practice for perfection. So, even though the explicit argument for the learning outcomes orientation is based on economic growth, equity, and the labour market, it seems to promote neither equity nor, in the long run, growth. For the benefit of equity, growth, and the labour market, solid vocational knowledge should be given attention¹¹⁹. Along

¹¹⁹ On another note, this would also make the involvement of trade unions crucial in these kinds of discussions. What does it mean to the members of a trade to be assessed based on the learning

the same line of reasoning, I would argue that if the interest is turned to vocational knowledge itself, there would be better opportunities for cooperation as this should be of interest for both parties. Nobody benefits from not taking questions of content, knowledge, traditions, and the like seriously.

11. 4 The public image of vocational knowledge

Vocational knowledge is connected to a vocation, its history, traditions, and the like. Furthermore it is linked to identity, self-worth, personal development, and as such connected to *Bildung*. From the various accounts – from study counsellors, the vocational expert, applicant and previous research – vocational knowledge is often advanced, but also to various extents tacit. The equity arguments that are put forward in policy are related to the social disadvantages of not having a job. Such disadvantages are not likely to be overcome by understanding vocational knowledge and its tacit or non-propositional aspects as targetable and measurable by the same methods and standards used for propositional knowledge. It seems as if such equity arguments are misguided and can in fact result in inequity, although inadvertently, insofar that the most salient aspects of vocational knowledge are ignored. This may also have consequences for the positioning of those with vocational knowledge, as for example not being able to express themselves in writing. With this follows another risk, which is that people may be regarded as thinkers or doers. This may lead to the perception of vocational education as a second hand choice, suitable for doers. If we want high quality vocational teachers to educate future proficient practitioners, we do most certainly need to pay more attention to vocational knowledge in its own right, and to those who have developed it.

outcomes standard and in what way does experience matter for promotion, wage development and more. I would argue that validation vocational knowledge is a pertinent issue for trade unions as well.

SWEDISH SUMMARY/SVENSK SAMMANFATTNING

Den här avhandlingen handlar om validering av yrkeskunskaper, i samband med ansökan till yrkeslärarutbildning, en process som har visat sig vara komplicerad av flera skäl. Eftersom avhandlingen är skriven på engelska följer här en svensk sammanfattning av dess huvudsakliga innehåll.

I **kapitel ett** redogör jag för bakgrunden till avhandlingen och de förutsättningar och antaganden som ligger till grund för de olika ingående studierna i den.

Sverige har brist på yrkeslärare. I en av statens offentliga utredningar identifierades antagningsproceduren som en möjlig orsak till denna brist. Mot bland annat denna bakgrund har antagningsreglerna till yrkeslärarprogrammet och utbildningens organisation förändrats. Utredningen föreslog också att ett större fokus i antagningen skulle ligga på den kunskap som har utvecklats i arbetslivet istället för att använda universitetets kvalitetskriterier som norm. I högskoleförordningen anges att de sökande ska ha kvalificerade och relevanta yrkeskunskaper. För att kunna bedöma detta har Universitets och högskolerådet (UHR) lanserat över 200 kriterier för olika yrkesämnen. De som söker till yrkeslärarprogrammet söker i vanlig ordning med allmän behörighet, precis som till alla andra program. Utöver detta ska de sökande visa att de har särskild behörighet, som i yrkeslärarnas fall består av att de har kvalificerade och relevanta yrkeskunskaper. Detta sker genom att skicka in arbetsgivarintyg/betyg samt skriftligen beskriva sin yrkeskunskap utifrån de olika kriterierna för yrkesämnena som UHR har tagit fram. Detta utgör underlaget för valideringen av yrkeskunskapen, vilket också är avhandlingens studieobjekt.

På de tio lärosäten i Sverige som anordnar yrkeslärarutbildning ser valideringen lite olika ut eftersom sex lärosäten anlitar en extern aktör (ValiWeb) medan fyra genomför valideringen i egen regi. Oavsett i vilken regi valideringen genomförs består processen av en första kartläggning som genomförs av studievägledare. Därefter görs en bedömning av en yrkesexpert utifrån detta underlag. I nästa steg skickar yrkesexperten sitt utlåtande tillbaka till lärosätet som tar det slutliga och formella beslutet om att anta eller avslå den sökande.

Det finns ett flertal svårigheter inbyggda i valideringen som till exempel att de sökande förväntas kunna beskriva sin yrkeskunskap, i skrift, trots att den i

stora delar utgörs av tyst kunskap. Dessutom ska relevansen av yrkeskunskapen förhandlas över institutionella gränser eftersom både yrkesexperter och akademiker är inblandade i valideringen. På detta sätt hamnar validering i ett slags ingenmansland, mellan traditionellt etablerade institutioner som akademi och arbetsliv, och tolkas i avhandlingen som en potentiellt framväxande institution. En institution kan förenklat beskrivas som ett socialt system med regler och normer för mänskligt handlande. Institutionalisering syftar då på den process i vilken sådana regler och normer växer fram och blir tagna för givna. I den nyinstitutionella teoribildningen som utgör den teoretiska inramningen i avhandlingen betonas också hur organisationer påverkar och påverkas av varandra. Inom skandinavisk nyinstitutionalism beskrivs denna påverkan som att idéer reser mellan organisationer. I denna avhandling handlar det om idéer om på vilket sätt validering bäst bör organiseras. Den validering som görs inför antagning till yrkeslärarprogrammet är inte ett isolerat fenomen utan är influerad av andra organisationer som till exempel policyproducenter. I sådan policy omnämns ofta kunskapssamhället i vilket det livslånga lärandet betonas. Trots detta tydliga fokus på kunskap och lärande är den begreppsliga innebörden av kunskap och lärande ofta oklar eller helt frånvarande. Som en del i kunskapssamhället har dock validering kommit att spela en viktig roll och bli föremål för uppmärksamhet i såväl policy som forskning. Validering innebär att synliggöra, bedöma och ge erkännande åt lärande och dess resultat oavsett i vilket sammanhang lärandet har skett.

Hur yrkeskunskap förstås, begreppsliggörs och vem som kan bedöma den i valideringen är centrala problemområden i denna avhandling. Frågor om hur yrkeskunskap begreppsliggörs och förstås är också kopplade till hur valideringen organiseras, i den potentiellt framväxande institution, som validering antas vara i avhandlingen. Därför riktas det teoretiska intresset mot institutionella villkor och agens. Med agens avses i detta sammanhang mandat att beskriva och besluta om yrkeskunskap.

Det övergripandesyftet i avhandlingen är att utforska vad organisationen och den potentiella institutionaliseringen av validering gör med synen på yrkeskunskap samt hur den positionerar dem med yrkeskunskap. Mer konkret är målet med denna avhandling att förstå validering av yrkeskunskap för antagning till yrkesutbildning i Sverige när det gäller begrepp för och förståelse av yrkeskunskap samt att förstå hur institutionella villkor, såsom idéer om hur man organiserar validering, påverkar innehållet och formen av valideringspraktiken. Utifrån detta övergripande syfte och mål utvecklades följande forskningsfrågor:

- Vilka idéer om organisering av validering utmärker sig i valideringspolicy och i dess praktik?
- Vilken förståelse av och vilka begrepp för yrkeskunskap är organisationen av validering byggd på och vad medför dessa?
- Vem har agens att beskriva och besluta om yrkeskunskap i validering?
- Vilka institutionella arrangemang uppträder vid validering?

Genom att besvara dessa frågor är förhoppningen att avhandlingen ska kunna bidra med en fördjupad diskussion om validering av yrkeskunskap och vad som händer med yrkeskunskapen och synen på denna i validering. Vidare är avsikten att belysa situationen för människor som validerar och blir validerade när de försöker genomföra valideringen på bästa sätt med en uppsjö av kunskapsbegrepp och idéer om hur valideringen ska organiseras. Att på detta sätt fördjupa förståelsen för yrkeskunskap och validering av densamma är av vikt både för yrkesutbildning men också i förlängningen för samhället i stort.

I **kapitel två** ger jag en kort historik om antagningen till yrkeslärarutbildningen, till vilken det har funnits såväl olika antagningsregler som utbildningsanordnare. Denna genomgång ger vid handen att det alltsedan det första yrkespedagogiska institutet instiftades i Sverige 1918 har det funnits spänningar och diskussioner angående vem som ska anordna yrkesutbildning och därmed också få agens att definiera yrkeskunskap. Vidare beskriver jag i kapitel två den utveckling som har lett till att yrkesutbildningen idag är en integrerad del av gymnasieskolan samt går mer noggrant igenom vilka antagningskrav som gäller inför dagens utbildning. Valideringen som görs inför antagningen till yrkeslärarprogrammet vägleds av UHRs kriterier för yrkesämnen i kombination med nivå fem i det svenska kvalifikationsramverket (SeQF). Kvalifikationsramverket är tomt på ämnesrelaterat innehåll och organiserat utifrån åtta olika nivåer av kvalifikationer samt deskriptionerna kunskap, färdighet och kompetens, den så kallade KSC-typologin. Kvalifikationsramverket är också kopplat till den europeiska referensramen för yrkesutbildning (ECVET). En uppenbar svårighet att formulera kriterier för olika yrken eller som i detta fall yrkesämnen är att kunskapen har utvecklats i olika miljöer, utifrån skilda traditioner och med olika kunskapsbas. Kriterierna för yrkesämnen är sinsemellan mycket likartat formulerade och i vissa fall delar flera yrken på ett kriterium såsom i fallet med frisörer, båtbyggare och florister som alla delar kriteriet hantverk. I andra fall utgör många olika kriterier ett yrke.

När det gäller de sökande till yrkeslärarprogrammet så utgör de en heterogen grupp med högst varierande bakgrunder. En del arbetar redan som yrkeslärare men saknar behörighet och lärarlegitimation. Andra arbetar som anställda i

sina respektive yrkesområden, men har blivit utslitna av arbetet. Ytterligare någon är kanske egenföretagare och har haft lärlingar och kommit på att det är roligt och meningsfullt att lära ut och föra vidare sitt yrke. En del av de sökande har akademisk examen som till exempel sjuksköterskor som också har en legitimation från Socialstyrelsen. Andra har utvecklat sitt yrke i huvudsak på arbetsplatsen och har licenser som är välkända inom branschen men möjligen inte med officiell status utanför yrket. De sökande från traditionella yrken som till exempel frisör kan ha gesäll - och mästarbrev.

Det finns alltså en mängd olika aktörer som är direkt och indirekt inblandade i valideringen inför antagningen till yrkesläraryrket. UHR är ansvariga för den nationella samordningen och kriterierna i yrkesämnena. För utförandet av valideringen ansvarar lärosätena och ValiWeb samt yrkesexperter. Myndigheten för yrkeshögskolan är ansvarig för det svenska kvalifikationsramverket och kan på det sättet också betraktas som indirekt inblandad i valideringen. Kvalifikationsramverket är dock importerat från transnationella utbildningsaktörer vilket betyder att organisationer på denna policyarena också inkluderas i studien. Tankarna bakom dagens antagningsprocedur ligger tydligt i linje med de förväntningar som finns på validering i allmänhet vilka är att synliggöra, bedöma och ge erkännande åt olika resultat av lärande oavsett var och hur lärandet har skett. Med denna ambition kommer validering, i policy, också med många löften såsom att vara en brygga mellan akademi och yrkesliv, samt att bidra till rättvisa, stimulera tillväxt och anställningsbarhet. Intresset för validering märks också genom att det börjar växa fram ett forskningsfält om validering.

I **kapitel tre** går jag igenom detta framväxande forskningsfält och tidigare forskning om validering med avseende på valideringsmodeller, kvalitet och validitet samt olika svårigheter som uppstår i validering. Jag beskriver också i detta kapitel svårigheten att definiera och navigera i forskningsfältet då ett flertal olika akronymer för validering används i olika länder. Utvecklingen av validering skiljer sig också åt mellan olika länder och ingriper en mängd olika forskningsinriktningar som till exempel kommunikation, makt, genus, styrning, validitet, kunskap, lärande m.fl. I forskning om validering används olika teorier som till exempel kritiska teorier, postmoderna teorier, socialrealistiska teorier, teorier om erkännande och även socio-materiella teorier. Det används också i denna forskning olika metoder även om kvalitativa metoder tydligt dominerar forskningen. Vidare finns olika motiv för att genomföra validering som till exempel att ge tillträde till en utbildning, att korta längden på en utbildning eller att få meritpoäng. Validering används också på arbetsplatser i samband med anställning eller som ett led i arbetsplatsutveckling. Ett annat område där validering har fått stor betydelse är för att stödja nyanländas möjligheter till etablering i det nya landet.

Det finns också olika modeller för validering. En modell går ut på att validanden ska demonstrera sina kunskaper mot på förhand givna kriterier. En annan modell syftar till att ha en mer utvecklande funktion och ett öppet förhållningsätt mot validandens alla möjliga kunskaper. Den senare modellen stöds ofta av skapandet av en portfolio. Ibland relateras olika former av validering till olika slags bedömning. Det talas om konvergent bedömning som syftar mot att bedöma mot uppställda kriterier och divergent bedömning som innebär en förutsättningslös bedömning med ett helhetsperspektiv på validandens kunskap. I relation till dessa två modeller kan antagningen till yrkeslärarprogrammet sägas utgöra en hybrid. Det finns på förhand givna kriterier samtidigt som de sökande, ganska fritt, ska producera berättelser om sin yrkeskunskap.

En del studier om validering behandlar frågor om kvalitet, reliabilitet och validitet och hur valideringen ska organiseras för att ge validanden de bästa förutsättningar för att demonstrera sin kunskap. De enda studier som enligt min vetskap har gjorts på antagningen till yrkeslärarprogrammet handlar om just validitet. I dessa konstaterades att det fanns validitetsproblem på grund av att kunskapen hos validander som har problem att tolka instruktionerna kunde underskattas, att valideringsproceduren var så tidskrävande att det ledde till att en del inte fullföljde sin validering och det var också oklart vad som validerades samt på vilka grunder valideringen gjordes. I en annan studie framkom validitetsproblem i termer av att yrkesexperter och lärosätena var oeniga i sin bedömning av de sökandes yrkeskunskap. Det visade sig att lärosätena var mer generösa i sina bedömningar. En annan skillnad var att lärosätena tenderade att gynna dem som redan var verksamma som yrkeslärare medan yrkesexperterna var mer fokuserade på yrkeskunskapen. Vidare som verkade män vara gynnade i antagningen. I ytterligare en av dessa studier istället rörde reliabiliteten i antagningen till yrkeslärarutbildningen drogs slutsatsen att det fanns brister i reliabilitet så till vida att det var låg korrespondens mellan olika bedömare och vid bedömningar vid olika tillfällen.

I den systematiska genomgången av tidigare forskning var det svårt att hitta studier som specifikt berörde kunskapsfrågan och ännu svårare att finna sådana som berörde kunskapsfrågan i relation till institutionella villkor. Av detta skäl valde jag ut några få studier som tangerade dessa områden. På olika sätt framkom det i de granskade studierna att det fanns uppenbara svårigheter att jämföra och validera kunskap över institutionella gränser. Vidare identifierades spänningar mellan ekonomiska och sociala aspekter som betydelsefulla eftersom dessa inverkar negativt på genomförandet av validering då det ledde till förvirring i fråga om vad valideringen gick ut på.

Dessutom användes en mängd olika termer och begrepp för kunskap i de olika granskade artiklarna. Utifrån den studerade litteraturen, ligger relevansen av denna studies syfte i att med ett helhetsperspektiv analysera kunskapsfrågan i relation till institutionella villkor och agens. Den potentiella institutionalisering av validering som antas ske bygger på att all slags kunskap värderas.

Det blev tydligt i tidigare forskning om validering att kunskapsfrågan är allt annat än enkel eftersom ett flertal olika termer och begrepp används i validering och för att underlätta senare analys gör jag i **kapitel fyra** en genomgång av kunskapsfrågan och relaterade begrepp som tyst kunskap och kompetens. Utöver det går jag igenom det kunskapsbegrepp – learning outcomes eller läranderesultat – som är rådande i dagens nationella och transnationella policy om validering. Vidare tar jag upp kritik som riktas mot detta vanligt förekommande kunskapsbegrepp.

I validerings- och utbildningssammanhang kommer kunskapsfrågan in från många olika håll. Det kan handla om den rent filosofiska frågan om vad kunskap är. Ibland kan det också handla om pedagogiska och psykologiska frågor och om hur människor utvecklar kunskap samt hur denna bedöms. Vidare finns sociologers intresse för kunskap som ofta handlar om hur kunskap fördelas i olika delar av befolkningen. Som grundläggande uppdelning i frågan om vad kunskap är kan man skilja mellan propositionell och icke-propositionell kunskap. Med den förstnämnda avses påståendekunskap vilken relaterar till sådan kunskap som kan bevisas vara sann eller falsk. Den icke-propositionella kunskapen kan exemplifieras med att kunna cykla. Genom tiderna har det funnits olika definitioner av kunskap. Till exempel menade Platon att kunskap är sann beprövad tro. Hans avsikt med denna kunskapsdefinition var att skilja tro vetande från tro, det sanna och beprövade från doxa. Platons definition av kunskap saknade koppling till människors handlingar i olika praktiker. I Aristoteles kunskapsbegrepp inkluderades istället människors praktik och även deras kollektiva och moraliska handlande. Han definierade olika former av kunskap som; episteme, techne och phronesis, där i korthet episteme handlar om teorier, techne om handlag och teknisk skicklighet och phronesis om omdöme och urskiljningsförmåga i en viss situation. För att koppla resonemanget om kunskap till vad ett yrke är så kan ett yrke förstås som ett personligt uttryck och ett varaktigt intresse som manifesteras i historiska och kulturella praktiker, vilka skapar värde både för utövare men också för det omgivande samhället. Genom att förstå ett yrke på detta sätt kopplas det också till värdighet, identitet och inte minst yrkesstolhet.

I utbildningsvetenskaplig forskning finns sedan 1990-talet ett nyuppväckt intresse för Aristoteles och pragmatismen. Detta har lett till ett ökat intresse för människors olika praktiker. I samhällsvetenskapen i allmänhet benämns detta som praktikvändningen. Den svenska läroplanen är i stor utsträckning influerad av Aristoteles och denna praktikvändning som för med sig ett icke-reduktionistiskt kunskapsbegrepp. Med detta görs ingen egentlig åtskillnad mellan teori och praktik eftersom teori involverar handling liksom praktik involverar tänkande. I den svenska läroplanen beskrivs kunskapens olika former som fakta, färdighet, förståelse och förtrogenhet. Utvecklandet av kunskapens olika former resulterar sedan i en rad olika förmågor. Både i praktikvändningen och särskilt när det gäller yrkeskunskap i synnerhet pratas det ofta om tyst eller oartikulerad kunskap. Under 1980-talet i Sverige fick detta begrepp stor uppmärksamhet. Denna uppmärksamhet kom bland annat som en reaktion mot vad datorisering och artificiell intelligens (AI) skulle kunna innebära för erkännandet av mänskliga handlingar och till exempel yrkeskunskap. I forskningsmiljön Yrkeskunnande och teknologi, som bland annat utgjordes av ett samarbete mellan Kungliga tekniska högskolan och Dramatiska institutet utvecklades dialogseminariemetoden som syftade till att i dialogens och berättelsens form få ökad förståelse för yrkeskunskap och dess tysta dimensioner.

Två huvudspår kan urskiljas i uttolkningen av tyst kunskap. I det ena ses den tysta kunskapen först och främst som en kroppslig kunskap och i det andra utgörs den av olika språkspel och regelföljande, ett regelföljande som bygger på att bli förtrogen med en praktik. All yrkeskunskap är såklart inte tyst och andra vanligt förekommande termer för att beskriva yrkeskunskap är kvalifikation och kompetens. En kvalifikation kan beskrivas som en på förhand definierad kravspecifikation för till exempel ett yrke eller en anställning. Kompetens beskrivs ofta som en individs disposition att handla i en given situation. Det finns dock ett flertal olika kompetensbegrepp i omlopp där de i några fall tar sin utgångspunkt i kunskap och individens förmåga att agera självständigt i en specifik situation. I andra fall beskrivs kompetenserna som generell och överförbar mellan olika situationer, och definieras som ett minimum av vad varje medborgare behöver. Ytterligare en definition beskriver kompetenser i termer av ett slags maximum som är tänkt att ge de bästa möjliga förutsättningar i livet. I det kunskapsbegrepp som finns i instruktionerna till valideringen inför antagningen till yrkeslärarutbildningen i Sverige är kompetens en deskriptor, som tillsammans med kunskap och färdighet utgör en kvalifikation. Detta bygger på att läranderesultat från formellt, informellt och icke-formellt lärande kan beskrivas med hjälp av dessa deskriptorer på åtta olika nivåer i ett kvalifikationsramverk.

Såväl användningen av kompetensbegreppet med dess olika innebörder och betoningen på läranderesultat i dagens transnationella policy har blivit föremål för kritik från forskningshåll. Kritiken kommer inte minst från anhängare av det kunskapsbegrepp som benämns det socio-epistemiska. I detta betonas skillnader mellan kontextoberoende kunskap som är uppbyggd av hierarkiskt sammanhängande begrepp och kontextberoende kunskap som är uppbyggd av segment. Flera anhängare av detta perspektiv menar att användningen av generella kompetenser och betoningen på läranderesultat i själva verket är en marknadsanpassning som grundar sig på ett felaktigt antagande om likhet mellan olika slags kunskap och lärande. Det argument som framförs är antagandet om likheter mellan olika slags kunskap och lärande leder till en förflackning av kunskap och också i förlängningen en orättvisa. Orättvisan på samhällsnivå uppstår i de fall man antar att yrkesarbetande endast behöver generella kompetenser som inte grundas i kunskap. Eftersom avhandlingen inte bara behandlar kunskapsfrågan i validering utan också dess institutionella villkor så görs en genomgång också av teorier relaterade till valideringens institutionaliseringsprocess.

I kapitel fem går jag igenom den nyinstitutionella teoribildningens utveckling och går också närmare in på de olika teorier inom denna som används i avhandlingen. I den tidiga institutionalismen sågs ekonomiska och rationella motiv som vägledande för handlande inom organisationer och institutioner. I senare varianter, och i det perspektiv som ofta benämns nyinstitutionalism, betonas istället organisationers strävan efter legitimitet och hur denna strävan också innebär organisationers ömsesidiga påverkan på varandra. En institution kan beskrivas som ett relativt stabilt, ordnat och varaktigt socialt system för handlande. Som exempel på totala institutioner finns fängelser och mentalsjukhus men termen institution kan också beteckna betydligt lösare hållna sociala system som till exempel handskakningar, äktenskap och liknande. Institutioner är som sådana vare sig bra eller dåliga men ger en slags stabilitet och begriplighet åt mänskligt handlande. Inom en institution kan det finnas ett flertal organisationer. En organisation utgörs av ett antal individer som arbetar med att uppfylla vissa uppgifter och mål vilka är skapade med ett bestämt syfte för organisationen. Enkelt uttryckt kan man säga att en institution skapar de övergripande reglerna medan en organisation operationaliserar dessa. I avhandlingen betraktas akademien och arbetslivet som två etablerade institutioner mellan vilka den potentiellt framväxande institutionen validering förväntas kunna bygga en slags bro. De organisationer som beaktas är de olika lärosäten där valideringen genomförs samt branschorganisationer som i denna avhandling utgörs av exemplet frisörbranschen. Till detta kommer den institutionella inramningen som utgörs av alla de organisationer som producerar policy om validering på det som också kan betecknas som ett policyfält.

I den nyinstitutionella teoribildningen betonas som nämnts inte bara ekonomiska rationella faktorer utan framförallt regler, normer, rutiner, meningsskapande, hur institutioner får legitimitet och hur organisationer påverkas av varandra genom att olika idéer kommer i omlopp. I den tidiga institutionalismen antogs att institutioner och organisationer följer riktlinjer, som finns till exempel i policy, men i senare versioner betonas ofta det praktiska handlandet i en organisation som isärkopplat från riktlinjerna i policy. Skälet till denna isärkoppling är att organisationer inom en institution ska kunna upprätthålla effektivitet och sin legitimitet. Tvärt emot vad man skulle kunna anta, att organisationer strävar efter att vara unika i konkurrenssyfte, så tenderar de istället att blir mer lika varandra. Organisationer sneglar helt enkelt på vad andra gör och försöker hålla sig ajour genom att efterlikna varandra. Denna process benämns isomorfism och det finns olika grund för denna. Det kan handla om regelstyrd och därmed tvingande isomorfism, normativ isomorfism som grundar sig på att man tar över värderingar och härmande isomorfism som innebär att organisationer rätt och slätt gör som andra.

I den skandinaviska nyinstitutionalismen som beskriver hur idéer reser gör man upp med den tidiga institutionalismen där det antogs att en idé spridning baseras på dess ursprungliga styrka. I den skandinaviska institutionalismen beskrivs istället förutsättningar för idéer som reser och hur de transformeras för att passa de olika sammanhang där de tas emot. Det har alltså funnits och finns olika inriktningar inom nyinstitutionalism. I det ramverk som används som analytisk struktur i denna avhandling sammanförs olika perspektiv och en institution, eller institutionaliseringsprocess som det handlar om i denna avhandling. I detta ramverk förstås en institution som uppbyggd av tre pelare. Den första pelaren är den regulativa och avser de regler som skapas inom ramen för institutionen. Den andra pelaren är den normativa vilken handlar normer och värden, till exempel sociala och ekonomiska och som förknippas med institutionen. Den tredje pelaren är den kulturellt/kognitiva och handlar om vad som tas för givet, med andra ord delade uppfattningar om den sociala världen. Genom denna analytiska struktur analyseras idéer om hur valideringen ska organiseras. Till detta kommer senare en analys av vilka kunskapsbegrepp dessa idéer bygger på och vilka uppfattningar av yrkeskunskap som de medför.

Eftersom det i syftet också ingår en fråga om vem som får rätt att besluta om yrkeskunskap, en rätt som benämns agens, så presenteras också en teori som handlar om individers och organisationers handlingsutrymme. Handlingsutrymmet eller agensen baseras inte enbart på vare sig rationella eller moraliska motiv, fri vilja eller determinism utan utgörs av en kombination. Individer och organisationer har frihet att handla men denna kan

begränsas av institutionella villkor. Dessutom har agensen temporala dimensioner eftersom det mänskliga medvetandet har kapacitet att befinna sig i eller relatera till olika sammanhang samtidigt. De temporala dimensionerna utgörs av de vanor och erfarenheter som har gjorts i det förflutna, men också av omdömet och förmågan att tolka den aktuella situationen i relation till en möjlighet att föreställa sig framtida scenario. I organisationer och institutioner så har de institutionella ramarna påverkan på människors möjlighet till agens. Ofta har de som har en perifer roll i en organisation mindre agens och därmed sämre möjlighet att påverka organisationen och bidra till dess förändring. Med det helhetsgrepp som tas i avhandlingen på kunskap, institutionella villkor och agens krävs en metodologi som kan synliggöra alla dessa aspekter.

I **kapitel sex** redogör jag för avhandlingens metodologiska utgångspunkter, liksom de metoder – intervjuer och policyanalys - som har använts i det konkreta genomförandet av studierna. Vidare tar jag upp etiska aspekter som har beaktats och frågor om studiens tillförlitlighet. Eftersom syftet med avhandlingen är explorativt i fråga om till exempel kunskap och idéer om validering skulle det vara ofruktbart att ha en väldigt bestämd epistemologisk utgångspunkt. Istället tar studierna i enlighet med den nyinstitutionella teorin inte en radikal ståndpunkt till förmån för tydligt realistisk eller tolkande ansats även om den lutar mer åt det senare. I fråga om tolkande ansatser har avhandlingens metodologiska utgångspunkt kopplingar till sociologisk kunskapsfenomenologi och behandlar alltså såväl idéer om hur valideringen organiseras, vem som får agens i denna process, men också vilka kunskapsbegrepp som används eller förståelser av yrkeskunskap som följer av organiseringen av validering.

I detta kapitel beskriver jag också den process som legat till grund för det fall av validering som studeras i avhandlingen. I korthet innebär denna beskrivning att det inte fanns ett bestämt teoretiskt ramverk från början utan det tillkom genom reflektion över den insamlade empirin, tidigare forskning och tänkbara teorier. Jag redovisar också den systematiska litteratursökning som genomfördes. Vidare redovisar och motiverar jag de valda metoderna, vilka utgjordes av semistrukturerade kvalitativa intervjuer med studievägledare, representanter från ValiWeb, en yrkesexpert och en sökande samt idéanalys av policy. Jag går också igenom de olika stegen i analysen av intervjuerna, vilka liksom policy främst sorterades utifrån de tre institutionella pelarna. Avhandlingens tre delstudier är för det första en policyanalys, för det andra en intervjustudie med studievägledare vid de lärosäten i Sverige som anordnar yrkeslärarutbildning samt kompletterande intervjuer med representanter från ValiWeb och slutligen intervjuer med två personer från frisörbranschen, en bedömare och en sökande. Vidare redogör jag i metoddelen för de olika mått och steg som vidtagits för att säkra studiens

tillförlitlighet. Slutligen tar jag upp frågor om forskningsetik. Förutom att ha följt gängse etiska riktlinjer från Vetenskapsrådet och metodlitteratur har frågor om etiska ställningstaganden varit en integrerad del av studien. Etik förstås på detta sätt inte enbart som att säkerställa att alla riktlinjer följts utan också att beakta vad som eventuellt kommer ut av studien såväl som att kontinuerligt reflektera över etiska ställningstaganden under hela studiens gång och under skrivprocessen.

I **kapitel sju** gör jag en analys av transnationell och nationell policy. I detta kapitel går jag först igenom betydelsefulla policyhändelser. Därefter beskriver jag idéer om hur valideringen organiseras utifrån de tre institutionella pelarna. Vidare undersöker jag avhandlingens antagande om att validering kan betraktas vara i en pågående institutionaliseringsprocess med hjälp av begreppet isomorfism. Jag analyserar också vad de regulativa, normativa och kulturellt kognitiva elementen i validering innebär på policynivå. Slutligen för jag en diskussion om vad dessa idéer för med sig i termer av kunskapsbegrepp och förståelsen av yrkeskunskap.

Validering har fått ökad uppmärksamhet efter Lissabonfördraget och senare även med strategin Europa 2020. Viktiga aktörer på policyfältet är Europeiska kommissionen som redan 2004 formulerade principer för validering i Europa. Dessa omformulerades senare av Europeiska rådet 2012. En annan viktig aktör är CEDEFOP som är EU:s organ för yrkesutbildning, som både 2009 och 2105 publicerade riktlinjer för validering. Även UNESCO har publicerat rekommendationer och riktlinjer för validering. På nationell nivå i Sverige kom validering först på tal i samband med det statliga projektet Kunskapslyftet i slutet på 1990-talet och i början på 2000-talet. Därefter tillsattes en valideringsdelegation som publicerade slutrapporten av sitt arbete 2008. Genom denna rapport uppmärksammades behovet av nationell koordination av validering, en uppgift som kom att tilldelas Myndigheten för yrkeshögskolan. Idag har regeringen tillsatt ännu en valideringsdelegation som arbetar vidare med nationella valideringssystem.

Utifrån regulativa aspekter betonades betydelsen av gemensamma principer för validering i de tidiga europeiska dokumenten. Den kunskap som har utvecklats utanför det formella utbildningssystemet skulle inte betraktas som underordnad. Därför föreslogs att validering skulle kopplas till samma meritssystem som övrig europeisk utbildning. I senare europeiska dokument skärptes skrivningarna och det kom tydliga rekommendationer från europeiska rådet att medlemsstaterna utifrån sina förutsättningar skulle ha nationella valideringssystem på plats senast 2018. I de senare dokumenten kom också tydligare riktlinjer för hur de gemensamma principerna skulle uttryckas, nämligen genom det europeiska kvalifikationsramverket (EQF). Dessa idéer

om hur validering ska regleras har plockats upp i de nationella dokumenten, vilket har lett till förändringar i den svenska lagstiftningen och även till utvecklandet av det svenska kvalifikationsramverket SeQF, vilket är mycket snarlikt det europeiska.

Vad det gäller argumentation av normativ karaktär i policy så finns det stor överensstämmelse mellan dokumenten. Förutom att validering ska synliggöra kunskap som tidigare inte har getts erkännande förväntas validering också få en betydande roll i samhället och bidra till ökad anställningsbarhet och ekonomisk tillväxt. Det framstår genom dessa argument som om validering både bär med sig ett tydligt ekonomiskt perspektiv, men också en progressiv rättvisetanke. Vidare framstår det, genom de formuleringar som görs i policy, som om validering är särskilt värdefullt för personer som saknar formell utbildning och som är utsatta eller sårbara. Med dessa formuleringar om sårbara och utsatta individer finns det en risk att den kunskap som utvecklas av yrkeskunniga personer förminskas. När det kommer till det mer konkreta utförandet ifråga om vem som ska validera och med vilka metoder valideringen ska genomföras ges en mängd olika förslag i de olika policydokumenten. Dessa förslag är så allmänt hållna att det verkar som att validering kan göras med vilka metoder som helst, genomföras av vem som helst och passa för alla, i synnerhet personer med kort eller ingen utbildning, trots att just utbildning möjligen vore ett bättre alternativ i dessa fall.

I fråga om vad som tas för givet, alltså de kulturellt/kognitiva elementen i policy om validering så betonas skiftet till learning outcomes, som översätts med läranderesultat i de svenska dokumenten. Begreppet learning outcomes introducerades under 1980-talet och hade då som syfte att öka anställningsbarheten. I begreppet learning outcomes finns en glidning mellan kunskap och lärande inbyggd, såtillvida att resultatet av allt tänkbart lärande ska beaktas. Learning outcomes är uttryckligen inte beroende av var lärandet har skett eller av lärandets varaktighet, och beskrivs som ett alternativ till en behaviouristisk och kognitivistisk syn på lärande. Vidare kopplas learning outcomes ofta till det livslånga lärandet. Dessa tankar har på ett tydligt sätt införlivats i de svenska dokumenten med ett markant undantag, nämligen den förra valideringsdelegationens slutrapport. I denna beskrivs redan i prologen att en praktikgrundad kunskapssyn har väglett delegationens arbete och den ansluter sig också till den svenska läroplanens kunskapsbegrepp med fakta, färdighet, förståelse och förtrogenhet. I de senare svenska policydokumenten om validering har man dock helt övergått till läranderesultat och kvalifikationsramverket.

I institutionaliseringsprocesser börjar organisationer beakta varandra, utbyta information, samarbeta och på så sätt medvetandegöra en delaktighet i ett

ömsesidigt projekt. I sådana institutionaliseringsprocesser uppstår ofta, istället för konkurrens, en ökad likhet mellan organisationer. Denna likhet blir väldigt tydlig när det gäller policy om validering. Dokumenten har en mycket likartad retorik och refererar också uttryckligen till varandra. Dessa likheter kan förstås med det institutionella begreppet isomorfism. Tvingade isomorfism kommer naturligt av Europeiska rådets rekommendationer att medlemsstaterna ska anordna nationella valideringssystem. Som en aspekt av den normativa isomorfismen handlar argumentationen i policy ofta om ekonomisk tillväxt och social rättvisa, en argumentation som är i det närmaste identisk i de olika dokumenten. I fråga om den härmande isomorfismen så ansluter sig också denna till de normativa aspekterna av validering och till mestadels retoriska uttalanden om kunskap som tenderar att handla mer om lärande och innebär att alla resultat av lärande är lika värdefulla i det livslånga lärandet.

Sammanfattningsvis handlar regleringarna av validering i policy om jämförbarhet, både mellan länder och institutionella kontexter. På detta sätt förväntas yrkeskunskap kunna jämföras på samma villkor som formell akademisk kunskap. De normativa aspekterna tycks vara både marknadsdrivna och progressiva, vilket gör att dessa argument konvergerar mot arbetsmarknadsfrågor som ökad anställningsbarhet och tillväxt. Diskussioner om kunskap för sin egen skull och i sin egen rätt eller att rättvisa inte bara handlar om anställningsbarhet utan även om ekonomisk fördelning utesluts genom denna argumentation. Learning outcomes kommer helt enkelt med löftet att ha relevans för allt slags lärande och kunskap – i en slags förförisk retorik om det livslånga lärandet. Det livslånga lärandet och learning outcomes är inte begreppsligt särskilt utvecklat i policy utan beskrivs endast i termer av hur formellt, informellt och icke-formellt lärande resulterar i kvalifikationer som kan beskrivas med hjälp av deskriptorerna kunskap, färdighet och kompetens. Ifråga om kunskapsbegrepp och vilka tolkningar av yrkeskunskap som görs uppstår det en krock mellan vissa nationella dokument och de transnationella. I validering i Sverige används ett kunskapsbegrepp och i läroplanerna för grundskola och gymnasium ett annat.

Om den förvirring som kan skönjas i policy verkligen leder till problem i praktiken undersöker jag närmare i **kapitel 8**. I detta kapitel presenterar jag resultat av intervjuer som har genomförts med studievägledare, involverade i validering och verksamma vid de lärosäten i Sverige som har yrkesläroplaner. Intervjuerna strukturerades utifrån de tre institutionella pelarna på samma sätt som analysen av policy. Slutligen analyserade jag också vilka kunskapsbegrepp och vilken förståelse av yrkeskunskap som kommer i omlopp i valideringen.

I intervjuerna med studievägledarna framkommer att deras vilja och ambition att göra ett bra arbete ibland står i konflikt med de instruktioner de arbetar efter. Många tycker att kriterierna, för de över 200 yrkesämnen som UHR har lanserat, är luddiga, svåra att förstå sig på och att dessa egentligen inte uttrycker något kunskapsinnehåll. Ibland väljer då studievägledarna istället att titta i gymnasieskolans kursplaner, en rekommendation som också sökande får av vägledarna när de ska beskriva sin yrkeskunskap. Detta beror på att eftersom är tydligare uttryckt i dessa kursplaner. Det kan tyckas paradoxalt att gå tillbaka till skolans läroplan i en antagningsprocedur som har som syfte att beakta kunskapen såsom den har utvecklats i yrkeslivet

När det gäller deskriptorerna i det svenska kvalifikationsramverket råder viss förvirring, vilken möjligen är förklaringen till att dessa också verkar ha fått en underordnad betydelse i jämförelse med till exempel nivån i ramverket. Det betonas frekvent av studievägledarna att yrkeskunskapen måste ligga på nivå fem. Deskriptorerna däremot väljer flera bort att försöka beskriva. I en del fall blandas terminologin ihop med den som används i den svenska läroplanens kunskapsbegrepp. Det är svårt att hålla isär och jag gör själv denna sammanbaldning vid några tillfällen under intervjuerna. I intervjufrågorna om deskriptioner och kunskap kommer även andra begrepp in än de som härrör från kvalifikationsramverket som till exempel tyst kunskap och av studievägledarens svar framstår denna som betydelsefull men inte bedömningsbar för dem. Som tidigare nämnts har dock kvalifikationsramverket fått stort genomslag, inte minst när det gäller kunskapens nivå. Det görs flera uttalanden där detta genomslag blir tydligt som *"han har klättrat i ramverket"* eller *"har gått i en nivå fyra värld!"* och *"är på nivå fem och kan undervisa ner mot fyra"*. Det görs således många försöka att verkligen använda instruktionerna samtidigt som dessa framstår å ena sidan som väldigt diffusa och luddiga men å andra sidan väldigt instrumentella i relation till nivåer och deskriptorer. Kriterierna för yrkesämnen verkar helt enkelt inte föra diskussionen närmare yrkeskunskapen utan snarare sker en transformering av yrkeskunskapen till att efterlikna skolämnen.

De normativa aspekter av validering som är tydliga i policy tycks också få visst genomslag i antagningsproceduren. Någon studievägledare nämner att validering ofta kommer på tal när det är kopplat till ekonomiska motiv. Även i förhållande till de sökande beaktas sociala och ekonomiska faktorer med hänvisning till att de sökande kan ha blivit utslitna av sitt arbete och om de nu får möjlighet till omskolning så kan de stanna i yrkeslivet, till nytta både för individen och samhället. Just anställningsbarheten dyker upp frekvent under intervjuerna. Även denna fråga kopplas till kriterierna för yrkesämnena då det är möjligt att bli antagen med behörighet i endast ett ämne. En sådan

begränsning, att bara ha behörighet i ett ämne, kan innebära att dessa personer sedan kan ha svårt att få anställning på skolor som ofta är i behov av lärare som kan undervisa på större delar av ett yrkesprogram och inte bara i enstaka yrkeskurser. Trots att de sökande alltså mycket väl formellt skulle kunna antas till yrkeslärarprogrammet tar vägledarna hänsyn till att de också ska kunna få en anställning som yrkeslärare och råder dem att söka tillräckligt många ämnen.

Det finns inte några explicita krav på ett visst antal års arbetslivserfarenhet i antagningen. Dock verkar det finnas ett implicit kriterium som innebär att yrkeskunskapen ska ha aktualitet. Detta kan innebära att trots att någon till exempel har ett gesällbrev och lång erfarenhet så kan den sökande avslås med hänvisning till att yrkeskunskapen inte är tillräckligt aktuell. Det finns också uttalade normer och värderingar om vissa yrkeskategorier, där sjuksköterskor är en sådan kategori. Nästan samtliga studievägledare nämner spontant sjuksköterskor som en grupp som har lätt för att skriva berättelser om sin yrkeskunskap. Det förklaras ibland med att sjuksköterskeutbildningen redan ligger på en hög nivå i kvalifikationsramverket. Denna grupp sökande är också speciell såtillvida att sjuksköterskor traditionellt har utbildat undersköterskor. Detta kan jämföras med övriga yrkesprogram där utbildning ofta sker av någon med samma befattning som den som utbildas. Till exempel utbildar en erfaren snickare (mästaren) en oerfaren (lärling). Samtidigt har diskussioner om kunskap i yrkeslivet och tyst kunskap lett till att ökat intresse för vad undersköterskor kan, inte minst ifråga om demensvård och liknande. Dessa diskussioner har öppnat möjligheten för undersköterskor att bli yrkeslärare, en möjlighet som många välkomnar, men som en del ställer sig tveksamma till. Tveksamheten grundar sig i att undersköterskor inte kan få behörighet i att undervisa i medicinkurser i gymnasieskolan.

I fråga om vilka metoder som kan och bör användas i valideringen råder det också delade meningar. På en del lärosäten betonas betydelsen av de skriftliga berättelserna, medan på andra ges yrkesbevis av olika slag större tyngd. Något lärosäte har börjat göra intervjuer, vilka uppfattas ge mer information än de skriftliga berättelserna. Sammanfattningsvis kan det konstateras att studievägledarna verkligen försöker utföra sin uppgift på bästa tänkbara sätt, men de har ibland ett delvis omöjligt uppdrag. Utöver att validera yrkeskunskap har de också blivit inblandade i ett slags socialt och ekonomiskt projekt där olika värden ibland står emot varandra. Precis som i policy är fokus på sociala och ekonomiska aspekter av valideringen och dessa tränger ofta undan andra värden, som till exempel yrkesstolthet.

När det gäller kulturellt kognitiva aspekter av validering av yrkeskunskap och alltså vad som tas för givet om yrkeskunskap påverkar riktlinjerna och

förhandlingarna om dessa möjligheten att genomföra valideringen. Trots att kriterierna är väldigt lika sinsemellan så tar några av studievägledarna upp att det i antagningsproceduren finns en mängd yrken som egentligen inte har så mycket gemensamt. Vidare konstateras det av någon att dessa yrken pressas in i en skolkontext och vad som konstituerar yrket går därmed förlorat i antagningsproceduren. Denna förlust har också att göra med hur de sökande förväntas visa sin yrkeskunskap, vilket huvudsakligen sker genom arbetsgivarintyg och skriftliga berättelser. Vilket sätt som är det mest lämpliga för att visa yrkeskunskap delar studievägledarna i olika grupper. De som anordnar valideringen på lärosätet lägger mer vikt vid berättelserna medan de som överlämnar valideringen till ValiWeb lägger större vikt vid intygen. Många av studievägledarna, även de som lägger vikt vid berättelserna, ifrågasätter samtidigt vad som egentligen mäts med det skriva ordet. En del påpekar också hur dessa berättelser gynnar sökande som har en akademisk bakgrund. Frågan som uppenbarar sig är om det inte hade varit lämpligare att använda kriterier eller en standard som är bättre anpassad efter branschernas villkor. Med de svårigheter som finns i antagningsproceduren tycks diskussioner om yrkeskunskapen trängas undan av förhandlingar om annat.

Gällande kunskapsbegrepp och vilken förståelse av yrkeskunskapen dessa leder till blir det tydligt, i intervjuerna, att kunskapsfrågan relateras till både kunskapen som sådan men också till lärandekontext. En möjlig förklaring till denna förvirring är att det finns flera kunskapsbegrepp i omlopp. Det finns både det kunskapsbegrepp som är kopplat till kvalifikationsramverket men kunskapsbegreppet i den svenska läroplanen. En faktor som ytterligare komplicerar det hela är kriterierna för yrkesämnen där det i den inledande meningen görs en distinktion mellan teoretisk och erfarenhetsgrundad kunskap. Det finns möjlighet att tolka denna formulering som att ännu ett kunskapsbegrepp plötsligt dyker upp, där teoretisk kan förstås som kunskap från formell utbildning och erfarenhetsbaserad som kunskap från arbetslivet. På detta sätt blir frågan om vad som är relaterat till kunskap och vad som handlar om lärandekontext än mer oklar, och yrkeskunskaper riskerar därmed att förstås som mindre avancerade än de är.

I intervjuerna med studievägledarna blev det tydligt att de sökande har väldigt varierande profiler och likaså det finns många branschspecifika dokument. I **kapitel nio** valde jag därför att belysa branschperspektivet med ett exempel på en sökande och en yrkesexpert i frisörbranschen, båda utbildade yrkeslärare. Den sökande har alltså redan blivit antagen och genomfört utbildningen till yrkeslärare vid tidpunkten för intervjun. Även branschperspektivet på validering strukturerar jag utifrån de tre institutionella pelarna.

I fråga om regulativa aspekter är dessa tydliga i frisörbranschen och finns beskrivna på Frisörföretagranas hemsida. Det finns tre huvudsakliga sätt på vilka man kan bli frisör i Sverige idag:

- Gymnasieskolans hantverksprogram inriktning frisör och därefter arbeta 3000 timmar som lärling.
- Privat godkänd utbildning och därefter arbeta 3000 timmar som lärling.
- Arbeta 5000 timmar som lärling.

Efter utbildning och lärlingstid avlägger frisörer gesällprov för att få sitt gesällbrev, vilket idag kan delas upp i två delar där den ena görs före lärlingstiden och det andra efter. Gesällprovet består av 16 praktiska prov och ett teoretiskt. Dessa har mycket utförliga och detaljerade kriterier och görs på tid. Proven bedöms av examinatorer från branschen och betygsätts.

I intervjuerna med sökanden och yrkesexperten från frisörbranschen framkommer en skepsis i förhållande till valideringen inför antagningen till yrkesläroutbildningen. Yrkesexperten tycker att det är svårt att bedöma endast utifrån skriftliga berättelser och arbetsgivarintyg. Från branschens perspektiv skulle det därför vara relevant att ställa krav på att sökande har gesällbrev, menar yrkesexperten. Han argumenterar för att gesällbrevet, även om det inte mäter allt, ändå är branschens garanti för såväl relevant och godkänd utbildning som yrkeserfarenhet och yrkeskunskaper. Han påpekar också att även om han kan förstå tanken med kvalifikationsramverket och kriterierna är det inte möjligt att passa in denna ram på vilket yrke som helst. Från den sökandes perspektiv så hade hon, när hon sökte, behövt ha mer kunskap om utbildningssystemet för att kunna förstå vad som förväntades, menar hon. Det menar jag indikerar att det som premieras i nuvarande antagningsprocedur inte nödvändigtvis är yrkeskunskaper utan yrkesämneskunskaper liksom kunskap om utbildningssystemet och skriftligt kommunikativ förmåga.

I fråga om normativa element i branschen talar båda de intervjuade från branschen om lycksökare och att vem som helst kan öppna salong. Detta menar de hotar branschen och kan leda till en uppfattning om att det finns många frisörer, medan de menar att de i själva verket finns en brist. Denna brist syftar då på frisörer med av branschen godkänd utbildning och gesällbrev. Vidare pekar de på risken för prisdumpning. Bland branschens normer och värden märks alltså en önskan om att kontrollera dess utövare, både till antal, utbildning och prissättning. För detta ändamål har också Frisörföretagarna tagit fram en licens för frisörer som ska hjälpa till att urskilja utbildade frisörer från de som saknar, av branschen godkänd utbildning. På denna finns olika bokstäver som står till exempel för gesällbrev, yrkesläroare,

barberare, seriöst företagande m.fl. Denna licens kan alltså ses både som en normativ aspekt av frisöryrket såtillvida vad som räknas som frisör i branschen men den kan naturligtvis också uppfattas som en regulativ aspekt.

När det gäller den kulturellt/kognitiva aspekten av frisöryrket är kanske det mest slående hur de båda intervjuade personerna från branschen pratar inte bara *om* yrkeskunskap hos frisörer. De *är* frisörer, vilket märks genom deras sätt att berätta om sitt yrke. Yrkesexperten presenterade sig direkt med att han är frisörmästare. Den sökande sa att hon ända sedan hon var barn hade velat bli frisör och att det var *"en dröm som har gått i uppfyllelse"*. Båda betonar också att frisöryrket är ett hantverk. Samtidigt tillägger de att det också är så mycket mer. Det handlar, menar de, om att vara tekniskt skicklig och flexibel eftersom inget hår är det andra likt. Vidare pratar de om betydelsen av att ha känsla för färg och form och att ständigt öva. De är också viktigt, menar de, att arbeta hårt för att utveckla yrkesskickligheten. Likaså pratar båda om det sinnliga och kreativitetens betydelse för frisörens yrkeskunskap, men tillägger båda att kreativiteten måste grunda sig i gedigen kunskap för att kunna utvecklas. Något som båda också ständigt återkommer till i intervjuerna är att ha kunden i centrum och behovet av att vara socialt kompetent, för att överhuvudtaget kunna få kunder.

I fråga om kunskapsbegrepp och förståelsen av yrkeskunskap är denna hos frisörerna i stora delar en del av deras identitet och på något sätt för dem, förborgad i gesällbrevet. Ett begrepp som sticker ut är social kompetens, som i deras berättelser kan förstås som något som är en förutsättning för att kunna utöva yrket, och på detta sätt påminner deras uppfattning om kompetens delvis mer med transnationella aktörers tolkning av begreppet än den svenska läroplanens. Där byggs kompetens (eller förmåga) upp av kunskapens olika aspekter och är inte en förutsättning för att utveckla kunskap.

I kapitel tio gör jag en syntes av det som framkommit i de olika studierna med hjälp av olika institutionella teorier. Sammanfattningsvis resulterar denna syntes i följande:

Utifrån institutionaliseringens regulativa element har yrkeskunskap transformerats för att passa inom ramen för den akademiska intuitionen. Från policy reser idén om att ha gemensamma principer för all kunskap, till svenska policyaktörer där dessa omtolkas för att passa den aktuella kontexten. I antagningen till yrkeslärarutbildningen i Sverige har detta tagits ett steg längre där yrken har blivit yrkesämnen på samma sätt som skolämnena. Just denna förmodade likhet krockar med de olika yrkenas särart och olika kunskapsbaser.

När det gäller institutionaliseringsprocessens normativa element tycks validering vara mer ett ekonomiskt och socialt projekt än ett som på allvar fokuserar på yrkeskunskap eftersom normer och värden kopplade till denna såsom till exempel yrkesstolthet och andra traditioner kopplade till respektive yrke kommer i skymundan.

När det gäller vad som tas för givet om yrkeskunskap och alltså de kulturellt/kognitiva elementen skiljer sig detta markant åt mellan policy, lärosäten och bransch. Utöver detta omgärdas validering av yrkeskunskap av en omfattande begreppsförvirring. Denna begreppsförvirring gäller särskilt distinktionen mellan kunskap och lärande, samt mellan kunskap, lärande och lärandekontext. Vidare tycks antagningen vila på antagandet att all slags kunskap kan valideras med i huvudsak samma metod. Denna förvirring leder till att det bildas grupperingar, eller institutionella arrangemang. Dessa grupperingar kan förklaras med en slags institutionell tillhörighet, antingen till akademien eller till yrkeslivet. I fråga om vem som får agens är det inte de som faktiskt har yrkeskunskap, som till exempel yrkeskunna personer från branscherna, utan snarare policyaktörer och UHR. Den största förlusten av agens är den hos de sökande som mot uppställda kriterier skriftligen ska redogöra för kunskap som i stor utstäckning är tyst och av den anledningen svår att artikulera.

I **kapitel 11** diskuterar jag vilka slutsatser som kan dras av dessa resultat och beskriver områden för vidare forskning.

Den övergripande slutsatsen är att validering av yrkeskunskap handlar om väldigt mycket annat än just yrkeskunskap. Det tycks snarare som om yrkeskunskap kommer i skymundan när motiv för validering hålls fram. När yrkeskunskap ska bedömas med samma måttstock som annan kunskap och därmed inte kan nå högre än till nivå sex i kvalifikationsramverket är det lätt att felaktigt få uppfattningen att det handlar om en kunskap som i någon bemärkelse är enklare eller underordnad den som har utvecklats i det formella utbildningssystemet, alltså tvärt emot vad som egentligen är intentionen med validering. Likaså blir yrkeskunskap underordnad när den på akademins premisser bedöms i skrift. I den akademiska institutionen har den skriftligt kommunikativa förmågan en framskjuten position, en förmåga som inte är lika relevant i alla yrken, exempelvis då en frisör ska göra en frisyr på en brud.

Genom hela avhandlingen har jag argumenterat för att validering kan förstås som varande i en slags institutionaliseringsprocess. Denna argumentation och detta antagande var mycket användbart som en analytisk konstruktion för att kunna strukturera och analysera det empiriska materialet. Om valideringen däremot skulle kunna liknas vid en etablerad institution i praktiken är mer

tveksamt. Däremot skulle detta kanske kunna betraktas som önskvärt. Det skulle behöva finnas ett sammanhang där representanter från akademi och yrkesliv kan mötas för direkt samarbete och vidare forskning. Om validering lämnas helt till branscherna finns risken att deras vinstintresse överskuggar i valideringen och när den lämnas till akademien är risken uppenbar, nämligen att förståelsen, och också kunskap om, yrkeskunskap saknas. Viktiga områden för vidare forskning skulle t.ex. kunna vara hur man kan utveckla relationen och kommunikationen mellan institutionella kontexter, en utveckling och förfining av de metoder som används för att validera yrkeskunskap, samt hur branscher som saknar tydlig standard skulle kunna ta fram en sådan och inte minst hur olika kunskapsbegrepp inom samma praktik kan hanteras.

Andra viktiga slutsatser i avhandlingen är att strävan efter att få agens också överskuggar de möjligheter med validering som skulle kunna finnas om ett bättre samarbete var möjligt. Det finns i valideringen ett inbyggt problem med agens, i synnerhet eftersom de som har yrkeskunskap i låg utsträckning får agens. Agensproblemet leder också till att det bildas olika grupperingar och arrangemang som till en del grundar sig på en känsla av institutionell tillhörighet, antingen med branschen eller med akademien. Dock är både bransch och akademi influerade av orienteringen mot learning outcomes vilken betonar tillväxt och rättvisa, men det tycks tveksamt om denna orientering leder till vare sig tillväxt eller rättvisa om inte kunskapsfrågan tas på allvar. Det skulle därför i tänkt institutionen för validering vara centralt att ge yrkeskunskap i sin egen rätt uppmärksamhet. Detta skulle möjligen också ge bättre förutsättningar för samarbete eftersom det ligger i allas intresse att bättre förstå ett yrkes innehåll, dess traditioner och kunskapsbas.

Om man inte tillräckligt beaktar yrket och dess förutsättningar finns risken att det i samhället uppstår en skev bild av yrkeskunskap. Yrkeskunskap är kopplat till ett yrke som har en historia och tradition. Vidare är det kopplat till identitet, egenvärde och personlig utveckling och på det sättet också till bildning. Många gånger är yrkeskunskap avancerad kunskap som är svår att artikulera. Om denna kunskap bedöms utifrån artikulerbarhet, riskerar personer med yrkeskunskap att uppfattas som om svårigheten att artikulera kunskapen har med deras skriftligt kommunikativa förmåga att göra. I förlängningen riskerar befolkningen på felaktiga grunder delas in i teoretiker och praktiker. Det gör också att yrkesutbildning kan uppfattas som ett andrahandval. Om vi vill ha riktigt skickliga yrkeslärare som kan utbilda framtidens yrkesutövare, som det finns ett så stort behov av, måste vi ge yrkeskunskap uppmärksamhet på dess egna premisser, och likaså dess utövare.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Interview guide study counsellors

Personal and background information

Would you like to tell me a little about yourself and your professional background?

Would you like to tell me a little about your current professional role?

What is included in your current duties?

In what ways are you involved in the institution's work on validation?

In what ways are you involved in the validation of applicants to VTE teachers?

Validation in general

For what purposes does the institution carry out validation?

Which methods are used in validation?

What documents and guidelines (local/national) are used for validation?

What opportunities and limitations do you see for validation?

Validation prior to VTE

What does the admission procedure to VTE look like at the university?

How is the validation of vocational knowledge carried out?

On what grounds are the vocational experts selected?

How do the vocational experts receive information about their assignment?

In what ways is the validation of vocational knowledge special in relation to other forms of validation?

Knowledge, learning, criteria and qualification framework

Can you describe how you perceive the concept of learning and what is meant by formal, informal and non-formal learning?

Can you describe how you perceive the concepts of knowledge, skill and competence?

What do you think about the possibility of using qualification frameworks as support for validation?

How do you perceive the criteria for vocational subjects?

What is your overall impression of how validation of vocational knowledge works?

Applicants

What questions can you get from those who intend to apply for the vocational education program?

What advice can you give when it comes to describing their vocational knowledge?

Vocational knowledge

What do you think is special about vocational knowledge?

What similarities and differences can you observe between different vocations in terms of knowledge?

How can you notice that a person is a knowledgeable practitioner?

Sometimes it is claimed to be difficult to put into words certain aspects of vocational knowledge. What do you think about this claim in relation to validation?

Is there something that I have forgotten to ask or something else that you would like to add?

Appendix B – Interview guide vocational expert

Vocational background

Would you like to tell me a little about your vocational background?

What kind of positions have you had?

What kind of education and experiences do you have that are of relevance for your vocational knowledge?

The vocation

Would you like to tell me a little about what it means to be a hairdresser?

What work tasks are included in the vocation?

How do you learn the vocation?

Vocational knowledge

What kind of knowledge is important in your trade?

How do you notice that a person is knowledgeable hairdresser?

Sometimes it is claimed to be difficult to put into words certain aspects of vocational knowledge. What do you think about this claim in relation to your vocation?

Knowledge and criteria

Can you describe how you perceive the concept of learning and what is meant by formal, informal and non-formal learning?

Can you describe how you perceive the concepts of knowledge, skill and competence?

How do you perceive the criteria for vocational subjects?

Kriterier och validering

Can you tell me a little about your work as vocational expert?

How did you get the assignment to be an expert?

What kind of education or information have you received about the assignment?

What documents and guidelines do you follow in your assignment?

In what ways can you give applicants the opportunity to clarify their professional skills?

Can they give examples of something that can be difficult to determine in terms of professional knowledge?

How do you determine if an applicant has sufficient professional knowledge?

If you are considering this criterion (shows an example), how well do you think it reflects what is included in this subject?

How do you view the possibility of using the qualification framework during validation?

What is your overall impression of how the validation of professional knowledge works?

What do you think is important for the validation to be of high quality?

What do you think is important for the validation to be fair?

Appendix C – Interview guide applicant

Vocational background

Would you like to tell me a little about your vocational background?

What kind of positions have you had?

What kind of education and experiences do you have that are of relevance for your vocational knowledge?

The vocation

Would you like to tell me a little about what it means to be a hairdresser?

What work tasks are included in the vocation?

How do you learn the vocation?

Vocational knowledge

What kind of knowledge is important in your trade?

How do you notice that a person is knowledgeable hairdresser?

Sometimes it is claimed to be difficult to put into words certain aspects of vocational knowledge. What do you think about this claim in relation to your trade?

Knowledge and criteria

Can you describe how you perceive the concept of learning and what is meant by formal, informal and non-formal learning?

Can you describe how you perceive the concepts of knowledge, skill and competence?

How do you perceive the criteria for vocational subjects?

The actual validation

Could you tell us a little about how it worked when you did your validation?

How did you do to describe your vocational knowledge in your application?

In what ways were you contacted after you had sent your application?

What is your overall impression of how the validation worked?

Is there something that I have forgotten to ask or something else that you would like to add.

Appendix D – Consent

Department of Pedagogy

Växjö October 2016

Maria C. Johansson

Study on the validation of vocational knowledge – Written consent

To: Name, workplace

My name is Maria Johansson. I am a PhD student in pedagogy at Linnaeus University, and I am conducting a study on the validation of vocational knowledge. Your knowledge and experiences are of great importance for such a study. Therefore, I would like to conduct an interview with you. Below you can read briefly what the study is about and the conditions for an interview.

About the study

The study is part of my doctoral thesis. The purpose of the study is to explore the validation of vocational knowledge. One central question is how conceptions and understandings of knowledge are translated between policy and practice. The study combines analysis of policy documents with interviews. Those who are interviewed are study counsellors and vocational experts who participate in validation. In addition, interviews are conducted with those who have had their vocational knowledge validated. The study will contribute with a discussion about how validation is related to different conceptions and understandings of knowledge. Furthermore, the study will highlight conditions for education located between work life and academia, such as, for example vocational teacher education.

Conditions for the interview

The interview will take about an hour. In good time before the interview, I will contact you and we will decide jointly where the interview will be carried out. The interview will be recorded. What is said during the interview will only be used for research purposes, and as a basis for analysis. The study follows the ethical guidelines stated by the Swedish Research Council. All information will be treated confidentially. All documents (such as recordings and prints) will be stored and inaccessible to unauthorised persons. Participation in the study is completely voluntary and as a participant you can withdraw your participation at any time during the study. If you have any questions please feel free to contact:

Maria C. Johansson maria.c.johansson@lnu.se 0470-76 75 83 or 0733-12 01 27 or my main supervisor, Professor Per Lindqvist per.lindqvist@lnu.se 072-5728111

I want to participate in the study and allow the interview to be recorded:

Signature

Printed name

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