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Philipp Gonon/ Katrin Kraus/ Jürgen Oelkers/ Stefanie Stolz (Hrsg.)

Work, education and employability

Studien zur Berufs- und Weiterbildung (SBW) / Studies in vocational and continuing education Band/vol. 4

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In December 2006 there was a conference titled “Work, Education and Employability” held in Switzerland. The initiation of this conference goes back to the observation that modern societies are characterised by the relation between work and education and that “[t]he social and economic structures of societies are influenced by labour division” (7) which is highly relevant for education. In order to grasp these far-reaching consequences a wide range of topics, for instance, gender segregated vocational education, employability, international and historical perspectives, has been covered by the speakers. Their presentations are the base of this volume.

Education at work is the topic which covers Paul Hager’s paper. He starts with explaining where the dichotomy work and education comes from, namely from Plato and Aristotle and discusses White’s (1997) understanding of the relations between work and education with which he disagrees. Hager continues with firstly, dealing with the relation education *through* work and here draws upon Kerschesteiner’s concept of a calling, again disagreeing with it and secondly, dealing with the relation education for work where he criticises the front-up model and the competence based approach. He finishes his discussion of those two relations between work and education with the conclusion: “Formal education as the main, or, in some cases, only, source of education, including vocational education. Formal education as the essential prerequisite for competent workplace performance” (30). Now he turns to the relation education at work and presents Dreyfus (2001) seven stage model of skill acquisition in the context of the ‘practical turn’ in the social sciences. This is followed by Hager’s appliance of Dreyfus’ model on empirical data. Here the reader would have wished to get more information about the source of the empirical data and the methods use for collecting and analysing the data. In addition, the term “four different examples” (41) confuses the reader as a few lines below Hager speaks of four different types which each of them have a varying number of examples. However, the appliance of Dreyfus’ model at the data gives a highly interesting insight into the relation of education and work, in this case education at work. In consequence, Hager derives at the conclusion that informal learning at work is also education.

Katrin Kraus deals in her article with the employability concept in the German context. This concept is of importance as the EU’s employability politics enforce it in all its member states, Germany being one of them. Germany is known for its concept of vocation, so the question to be asked is: What is the relation between those two concepts, i.e. vocation and employability? The author chooses the earning oriented pedagogy approach as the tertium comparationis in order to answer the aforementioned question. While this approach gets outlined and the three dimensions of the earning oriented pedagogy approach, i.e. expertise, general competences and earning orientations are presented, the reader takes delight in the reference to Elias’ figuration concept. This is followed by a brief chapter on the context of the German concept of vocation, namely the dual system. In the preceding

chapter the author elaborates the European context of employability in a quite detailed fashion, starting with the white paper "Growth, Competitiveness, Employment. The Challenges and Ways forward into the 21st Century" of 1993. This is followed by a concise chapter about the meaning of employability in the German context. Here the author succeeds in outlining the different conditions in which this concept has to be understood in Germany. Due to the sentence "Since nowadays both concepts (*vocation and employability*) are present as alternatives in the German context [...]" (72) the only question which remains open is, whether Kraus views both concepts as alternatives and if yes, in which way? The final chapter offers the comparison of the concept of vocation and the employability concept from the earning oriented perspective by using its three dimensions. With a well-arranged table the reader finds it easy and comfortable to follow Kraus' analytical findings. The concept of employability is transferred to the German context by focusing only on the third dimension, i.e. earning orientation. So, this concept is (well) integrated as the concept of vocation focuses on the first dimension, namely expertise. In her concluding remarks Kraus calls for a modification of the concept of vocation and the adaption of the vocational order to the conditions of the post-industrial service economy.

Besides the occasional missing of words Kraus presents an easy-to-read and well-structured article which has very valuable footnotes. In addition, she put the original text of her own translations in footnotes, which makes it comfortable and comprehensible for the reader to follow certain discourses, for instance, on the term employability.

The last article of the first part *Recent Changes in Work and Education* of the volume analyses the consequences of the transition to the service economy for the gender relations. Nickel shows how women are caught in the paradox that due to the transition to service economy there is a greater participation in the world of employment at the same time women are exposed to social vulnerability, i.e. for example through bad paid jobs. As the service sector is crucial for women's opportunities to get employment the sectoral segregation is strengthened. The author points out that women are pushed into 'bad' jobs due to the labour market strategy of 'any job is better than no job'. Here the article delivers an interesting though sad insight into the EU employment policy. It is the 'adult worker model' at which the EU employment policy is geared, meaning that there is no consideration of women's reproductive and care interests. The scandalous big gender gap regarding wages is one result of this policy. Another new insight into this matter is the author's reference to Aulenbacher's (2005) finding of the research gap "[...] the link between the subjectivisation of labour and the gender dimension [...]" (92). In the last part of her paper Nickel deals with corporate organisations which [...] foster the consolidation of, firstly, a strategy in *which gender is removed from the glossary* and, secondly, *greater equality is individualised*" (95). She detects the following two barriers to a corporate culture which would consider women's interests: 1) family policy seen as a favour, 2) male managers and female employees appraise things differently. Although the momentary picture regarding employment policy and corporate culture in respect to gender relations looks rather grim, Nickel is optimistic and calls for women who demand a labour policy at the workplace which takes greater note of their reproductive interests.

The articles in the second part of the volume are presented under the theme

Vocationalism and Apprenticeship. Grubb picks up the topic of vocationalism and deals with it in the context of “[a] new orthodoxy about the relationship between formal schooling and work [...]” (106) which he calls the Education Gospel as this relationship has become an article of faith. The major result of this is a shift regarding the purposes of schooling, now the purpose being one of occupational preparation, also known as vocationalism. Grubb continues with presenting the diverse consequences of the Educational Gospel. For instance, “Where academic secondary education becomes principally a route into universities and professional preparation, then a different transformation takes place: learning becomes subordinated to the competitive and instrumental process of enhancing university entry” (110). This is followed by a comprehensive outline of six processes which enforce vocationalism which offers a multi-perspective picture to the reader. The concise description of the conflicts generated by vocationalism surprises the reader with Grubb drawing attention to the often ignored link between the educational system and the nature of the welfare state. The upcoming comparative study conducted by the author is promising an in-depth investigation of that matter. Grubb concludes by pointing out the advantages, disadvantages and his ideal form of the Education Gospel and vocationalism. Beside the refreshing writing style (more authors should have the courage for “dropping” a humorous note) and the aforementioned facts, it is the occasional detail which makes this paper a readable one.

The low employer interest and investment in the VET as well as the general second-class status of vocational education in the UK are the context for Hyland’s remarks on skills, competences and work-based learning in the vocational education. Due to the new vocationalism education got re-defined as skills and competences in the UK in the 1970s/80s. Hyland starts with presenting three arguments against the indiscriminate use of skills/ competences in order to describe the results of education. Firstly, there is no clear-cut answer to the question of to which dimension of human activity (cognitive, affective, or psycho-motor) skills/ competences are applied to. Secondly, the role of knowledge and understanding in education is degraded and in Hyland’s view it is rather the opposite “[s]kills and competences require a foundation of knowledge and understanding [...]” (132). Lastly, knowledge is linked to personality in ways which skills are not. Hyland proceeds with a concise outline of the established NCVQ, its functions and outcomes, namely competence-based education and training (CBET) and NVQs before he describes the drawbacks of these outcomes. Here the author comes back to the beginning of his article: one drawback being that employers are ignorant or indifferent of the NVQs. Hyland judges that the NCVQ downgraded vocational education and he puts it rather bluntly in his rightly harsh conclusion “The fact that the NVQ system persists [...] can be explained by the aggressive marketing and commercialism of the international market for packaged VET commodities [...] combined with powerful political pressures concerned with face-saving [...] and the irresistible appeal of apparently quick and easy solutions to difficult educational and economic problems” (140). His final remarks show his solution, firstly, a qualification framework which values vocational and academic education equally and secondly, VET programmes which are founded in knowledge, theory and values. Hyland concludes, that work-based learning promises to be a valuable instrument for the development of such a system. Although the reader might miss the detailed elaboration of the potential and method how work-based learning could achieve this goal, this paper’s strength is also due to the well-chosen and placed references of colleagues in that field.

The final article of the part *Vocationalism and Apprenticeship* is Hilary Steedman's about the two apprenticeship models, demand-led and supply-led apprenticeship. Observing the rising uncertainty about future skill demands and job opportunities Steedman asks how people who will not go into higher education can be prepared for the ever-changing labour market. The answer starts with outlining the demand-led apprenticeship model (in German-speaking countries) and the supply-led model (Netherlands, France, England) and its differences, namely commitment of employer is high but the extent of how well the apprenticeship is integrated in the full-time education programmes is low in the demand-led model and vice versa in the supply-led model. Steedman arrives at the conclusion "[...] that a completed apprenticeship qualification results in improved employment outcomes relative to other school-based qualification outcomes at the same level" (158). To finish the clear and logical argument, she presents the needed points of improvement for both models and the reader discovers why the export of any of those models in another country will not succeed. Although the reader may struggle with getting the point of the first section of this paper, this article proves to be well-grounded in its argument and is enriched by the provided footnotes.

Recent Developments in Japan and their Impact on Education and Work is the overarching topic of the following two articles. Both papers have to be read in the context of the increasing problematic transition from school to work in Japan (in former years Japan was known for its brilliant transition). Eswein shows that although the economical situation has changed the Japanese employment pattern is consistent, though the youth unemployment rises and led to a split of 'typical' (full-time, permanent work) and 'atypical' (part-time, flexible work). Eswein further explains that the education and economic system understand employability differently – the reader would have like to get a more elaborated explanation of the differences and the author's understanding of employability – and that the education system only supports the employability of 'part-timers', although the 'full-timers' have the same need. Ito focuses in her article on so-called freeters and NEETs as results from the changed employment market. After giving a highly interesting insight – one should study the footnotes closely – into this group of young people who suffer from a highly problematic school-to-work-transition she presents four example of successful education career in Japan. Ito closes with an evaluation of the potential of education career and which changes in the education and employment system are needed in order to improve the transition situation.

The last part of the volume is contributed to the topic of *Historical Perspectives* on the relation between work, education and employability. Jürgen Oelkers focuses on the separation of work and learning in the 19th century in his article. He starts out with a description of the development of work school and its method of teaching – project work, for instance – and its relation to work, in this case "[...] 'work' was made educational, as part of learning [...]" (219). His second section investigates the development and legitimization of the vocational school and shows that now the relation between work and education is: "[...] learning comes before work [...]" Education is learning, not yet work [...]" (225). Furthermore, as the separation between vocational and general education has been institutionalised "[...] work has essentially become learning. Work means simply continuous problem-solving under ever changing conditions [...]" (227). The author pleas for innovations in the educational system and here mentions the rhetoric of the knowledge society and educational welfare state – two aspects which are worth to elaborate in more detail –

before he concludes with suggestions for the improvement of the educational system. This very informative article surprises with the wide range of perspectives and leads and the changed refreshing tone at the end of the paper gives it a lasting impression.

Quite enlightening is the contribution by Philipp Gonon who shows that the concept employability has already existed in the 18th/19th century. He raises the question whether the concept of employability erodes/replaces the concepts of education and vocational education. Gonon begins with a brief outline of Pestalozzi's work and understanding of education, namely the fostering of diligence, industry (as business), nation building and national education. Pestalozzi has a multi-perspective view of vocation which consists of honesty, culture, diligence, productivity, independence to name but a few. Furthermore, he understands diligence as the subjective side of the local and regional productivity, diligence as the ability to find employment and make a living. Gonon concludes – clearer answer to the raised question would have been helpful – with stating that the concept of employability does not substitute the concept of education.

Harney and vom Hau conduct a theoretical case study of vocational education in Germany focusing on the relevance of organisational membership for training and employment. Their study also considers the *Arbeitskraftunternehmer* from an institutional point of view. The authors start with explaining why for them apprenticeship is based on a transaction approach and conclude – not too convincingly - that it is this understanding of transaction which constitutes the motivation of firms to take on apprentices. This is followed by a very felicitous historical overview of the effects of industrialisation on the apprenticeship system, classifying them into internal and external dynamics. For instance, apprenticeship is linked with the emerging status of the employee; the various function of handicraft chambers, respectively. After a concise overview of the institutional evolution of the apprenticeship system, the authors conclude – the reader's doubt are less now – “The employer [...] invests in apprenticeship training to manage the transmission of workplace-specific competencies and to inculcate commitment and care among workers” (286). The comparison with the *Arbeitskraftunternehmer* leads to the understanding that the *Arbeitskraftunternehmer* threatens the apprenticeship system as its “[...] basic transaction revolves around the mechanism of prices, and not around organizational loyalty and reciprocity” (289).

The concluding article of this volume is Christine Mayer's highly enlightening contribution which deals with the investigation of the conditions and reasons for the gender-segregated vocational education system which unfortunately is still at work as current figures of the vocational education training situation show. Her empirical data derive from statistics about chosen occupation and employment of school leavers of three different types of schools in Hamburg from the late 18th till the early 20th century. It is not surprising that there is traditional employment for both sexes domestic service and apprenticeships respectively for that time. However, Mayer explains how different concepts of education for boys and girls have led to a complex system of school-based educational options, which was only affordable for fortunate families. Mayer summarises that “A dominant orientation along traditional lines combined with the goal to education towards a ‘female vocation’ created a one-sided education for girls and women, which significantly limited their employment and earning opportunities” (317). The long-lasting effects are perceivable in the most recent statistics of girl's and boy's choice of occupation and employment. This

paper's strength is the presentation of the numerous facets' of the problem discussed.

Work, education and employability achieves its aims in general. Many contributions have a multi-perspective view on the topic dealt with, for instance Oelkers and Mayer. All papers present a comprehensive analysis of different facets of the relation between work, education and employability; analyses range from empirical research, for example articles by Eswein and Ito to theoretical developments, like Hager and political analyses, for instance contributions from Kraus and Nickel. Most articles succeed in going beyond the recent agenda regarding their field of study, like Hager and Grubb and all show a broad understanding of the theoretical and historical impact of the thematic field. The order of the articles is deliberate though the concluding paper could have positioned as the first one of the last part of the volume in order to underline the importance of the discussed topic.

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