Paper

Title: Between a rock and a hard place – Career learning in Danish upper secondary school

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Abstract and 3 – 5 keywords

Preliminary analysis from my PhD point towards a didactical construction of career learning in a tension field between a political articulation and a practical skepticism. Teachers have difficulty integrating career learning in to their practice – one reason for this is that they see career learning as a political tool to pressure students, which does not correspond with the teacher professional understanding of the purpose of upper secondary school. It is an argument, that career learning from a social justice perspective bears a great potential in accommodating the two central goals of Danish upper secondary school; ‘preparation for higher education’ and ‘bildung’. In this paper, the links between the two goals and career learning from a social justice perspective is analyzed in relation to data conducted on three different Danish upper secondary schools in relation to the construction of career learning as a didactical matter.

Career learning, didactics, upper secondary school.

Relation to the conference theme

In the context of Danish upper secondary school ‘career learning’ – and the articulation of ‘career’ in general – is new. For that reason, there is little knowledge on how teachers interpreted the theme into their teaching practice and general understanding of the purpose of upper secondary school, and how this is linked to social justice.
General description on research questions, objectives and theoretical framework

Ever since the establishment of Danish upper secondary education ‘preparation for higher education’ and ‘bildung’ – in various formulations - has been part of the overall purpose.¹ In a political attempt to reinforce the goal of preparing students for higher education and to modernize bildung, the 2017 educational reform of Danish upper secondary school sought to strengthen the foundation of knowledge, skills and competences within all subjects (Undervisningsministeriet, 2016). As the government wrote in 2016 prior to the 2017 educational reform: “The foundation of upper secondary education is a strong understanding of skills and competencies and a modern general education (bildung). The education must equip the students to take a higher education, and at the same time, the students must be prepared to participate in the society and learn to relate to their own personal development.” (Regeringen, 2016, p.23, my translation)

One way to do this was by introducing four new general competencies that teachers should integrate within and across all subject fields in upper secondary education. One of these was career competencies through career learning². A Danish research project from 2016, concluded that through a thorough didactical framing of career learning, teachers in upper secondary school where to a certain degree able to strengthen the students’ knowledge about choices and clarification, which to some extend can be linked to ‘preparation for further studies’. The project was to a lesser extent successful in accommodating the career learning potentials related to ‘bildung’. (Katznelson, 2016)

However, the overall purpose of upper secondary education and, in this case, career competencies is interpreted in practice may vary, since the teachers have methodological freedom, autonomy of teaching and different teacher therefore attach and associate different meaning to the given matter (Hopmann, 2007). Nonetheless, den Boer & Bakker, states that “For career learning to succeed, it must first be given meaning by teachers. The latter currently possess a series of workable, trusted routines, which form the core of the working community, as these routines have been tried and tested in practice. Changing these routines requires re-negotiation with professionals about their professional identity.” (den Boer & Bakker, 2009, s. 163)

In a continuation of the results from the above mentioned research, this paper will investigate how actors on the political and practical curricular level construct, communicate and practice career learning as a practical didactical matter and how this is linked to their understanding of the goals of upper secondary education. In addition, the paper investigates how career learning, in a social justice perspective, can be linked to the overall purpose of upper secondary education.

¹ In this paper Bildung refers to the whole person, and is a holistic way of understanding the overall purpose of education. “When we refer to a person as educated (gebildet) (…) we mean at least that this person has succeeded in establishing a certain degree of order in the whole of his existence (…) (Bildung) for any state of mind of a person which puts himself in a position to impose order upon himself, as well as upon his relations to the world.” (Gundem & Hopmann, 1998, p. 19)

² The other competencies was; innovative competencies, digital competencies and global competencies- However, these are not included in this paper
The theoretical foundation originates from the German/Nordic didactical tradition, as formulated by Stefan Hopmann (1995, 2007). Here didactics is seen as a matter of ‘order’, ‘choice’ and ‘sequence’ at three interdependent curricular levels; the political, the programmatic and the practical (Hopmann, Künzli, & Jacobsen, 1995). In this theoretical framework didactics require “an irreducible commitment to Bildung, a founding belief in the educative difference of matter and meaning, and a strong conviction that teaching and learning are necessarily autonomous activities.” (Hopmann, 2007, s. 121) In addition, I draw on Wolfgang Klafki’s didactical theory, where the importance of bildung as a didactical matter is emphasized through the epochal typical key problems as a core part of any curriculum. (Jank, 2009) (Klafki, 2011)

**Methods/methodology**

Knowledge about how ‘career learning’ is constructed, communicated and practiced on the political and practical curricular level is sought out through an ethnographic empirical investigation using qualitative methods across the two levels, including policy analysis, interviews and observations. The data collection on the practical curricular level will take place at three Danish upper secondary schools located in different settings – an urban, a provincial and a rural district. During the fieldwork, interviews will be conducted with practitioners and students as well as extended observations in the classroom, faculty lounge and the school premises overall. In addition, a systematic literature review of career learning from a social justice perspective will be conducted. In the literature review, knowledge about how career learning can be interpreted in relation to the concept of ‘bildung’ will be sought out, drawing on the theories mentioned above.

When combined, the systematic literature review of career learning from a social justice perspective will be used to inform the interpretation of career learning at the political and practical curricular level. The literature review will serve as the foundation (codes) for the analysis of the articulation of the goals for upper secondary school.

The data from both the systematic literature review and the ethnographic empirical investigation will be analyzed through Reinhart Kosellecks semantic theory (Koselleck, 2007), while drawing on the above mentioned theoretical foundation.

**Outcomes/ expected results**

Preliminary findings from my Ph.D.-project shows that teachers have difficulty integrating career learning into their practice. Or said in other terms, the teachers have difficulties articulating and integrating the “for whom”, “for what”, “how” and “why” of career learning into their practice. The teachers see career learning as a political disturbance in which ‘policy’ dictates a particular way of representing career in teachers’ practice, that make it impossible for the teachers to attach meaning to the given matter. The teachers express frustration on how politicians tend to focus to much on choices
and pressuring the students through an extensive focus on ‘preparation for higher education’, which does not correspond with the teachers’ wish to focus on ‘bildung’. When interpreting career learning in a social justice framework (Hooley, 2015; Hooley, Sultana, & Thomsen, 2018) the paper intend to bridge the practical didactical construction of career learning to the two goals of upper secondary education.

The relevance of this project is twofold. On one hand it refers to the practitioners, whose skepticism towards the theme of career as a didactical matter affects their construction of and their ability to attach meaning to the matter. On the other hand, it refers to practitioners, who are willing to integrate the theme into their practice, but who are struggling to make it a relevant theme in their didactical practice and make it relevant to their students learning and ‘bildung’.

References


