

Abstract

Students in alternative strands with extended work-place practice – narratives on hopes and failures”.

Keywords: inclusion, VET- programs, students’ perspectives, narrative method

The discourses on drop-out from secondary education have been a core issue in European educational policy and in other parts of the Western world for some time (Janosz, Le Blanc, Boulerice, & Tremblay, 2000; Lamb, Walstab, Teese, Vichers, & Rumberger, 2004; Rumberger, 2004). To counteract secondary school drop-outs, the Norwegian government has developed alternative strand of courses within vocational training with extended workplace practice, for those students to whom the regular educational programs do not seem to be meeting their educational needs (Hernes, 2010). This paper is drawn from a three year research study on alternative strands of VET courses with extended workplace practice (Ohna & Bruin, 2010).

The research project consists of a series of sub-projects which involve various aspects of the alternative programs. The current paper draws on one of these sub-projects, which is a series of interviews with eight students who participate in the alternative strand of courses. This paper’s research question seeks to elucidate what the students’ narratives reveal about how the alternative program is of influence to the students’ representation of self and construction of identity.

With regard to the students’ experiences in primary education, their narratives can be understood as bearing witness of an “absence of identity in community” (Thomas & Loxley, 2007:134). Preliminary analysis (Bruin & Ohna, 2010) indicates that the majority of the participants in this study perceive the alternative strands as a turning point in their personal history. One way of interpreting the students’ statements is to see these in connections to how the alternative strands brings about a turn for the better in the students’ lives. The analysis shows that the students through the use of narratives as a meta-structure consequently perceive a change of identity, a different sense of self. From perceiving one’s self as being an outsider, the students perceive themselves as capable, competent and able to contribute. However, the alternative strand of courses with extended workplace practice does in itself not lead to a formal qualification. This seems to be unclear to the majority of the students, and this ambiguity brings about important questions regarding both ethical issues as well as institutionalized processes of exclusion and marginalization. The results of this study will be able to contribute to discourses regarding inclusive and excluding processes in secondary education.