

Proposal for conference “Transitions, career learning and career management skills”
Type of contribution: Paper presentation

“Policies of school-to-work transitions and VET in Sweden, Denmark and Finland”

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Intent of publication: high-quality scientific journal in the field of school-to-work transitions and vocational education and training (e.g. Journal of Education and Work,

Keywords: school-to-work transitions, transition policies, VET, Nordic countries

Connection to the conference theme: This paper closely relates to the conference theme as it compares and critically analyses the school-to-work transition policies in three Nordic countries.

General description on research questions, objectives and theoretical framework

Facilitating smooth school-to-work transitions and prevention of dropout have become more and more important topics on local, national and supranational political agendas across Europe including the Nordic countries. For example reducing the number of early school leavers and young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) is one of the key benchmarks of the EU education strategy. However, there are rather few comparative studies on European transition policies. Here the Nordic countries make an interesting group of comparison; while sharing rather similar histories of welfare and educational policies, they organize upper secondary education, including vocational education and training (VET), in different ways and try to support young people’s school-to-work transitions differently.

This paper aims to compare Swedish, Finnish and Danish policies concerning young people’s educational and school-to-work transitions, and, in doing so, puts a special emphasis on VET and dropouts. When comparing the country cases, we utilize a modified definition of youth transition policies by Eurofound (2012, p. 108). Hence, the analysis is based on comparisons of policy measures a) to prevent dropout in school, b) to complete upper secondary education when young people have failed to get an exam/complete grades, c) to facilitate transitions from school to work and stable employment.

We use the conceptual model of transition regimes (Walther 2006) as a starting point of comparison, but also critically discuss it in relation to our findings. System-wide typologies have been criticized for losing their explanatory power when trying to fit a large number of national systems into a limited number of types. Research has revealed that the heterogeneity of these countries is more significant than their common features. (Raffe 2014.) While research studies have identified similarities between Nordic countries in terms of youth transitions and overall educational equality (Iannelli & Smyth 2008; Eurofound 2014), they have also revealed

substantial differences within the Nordic countries in many aspects of education (Lundahl 2012; Bäckman et. al 2015; Yoon & Järvinen 2016).

Methods/methodology

We base the analysis on results from previous research, including our own, on youth transitions and transition policies in the Nordic countries. These studies include surveys and interview data, policy documents, and evaluations of recent programs and initiatives aiming at prevention of drop-out and management of transition and inclusion in Finland, Sweden and Denmark.

Expected outcomes

The notion of a ‘Nordic, universalistic transition regime’ is partly misleading, as there are not only considerable similarities between the three Nordic transition systems and policies, but also important differences. At a general level all three countries witness steps from *welfare* towards *workfare regimes*, a shift from priority on *citizenship* to *employability*, and emphasis on *choice and institutional individualisation* of pathways. The three Nordic transition regimes differ with respect to how VET is organised and run, in each case associated with both risks and advantages. Sweden and Finland have state-governed and school-based VET-systems with a strong institutional support for young people’s completion of upper secondary education, but they also display high risks in the transition to employment. Denmark has a corporatist work-based VET-system and shows high risks of dropout of upper secondary education, but also strong institutional support for the transition to employment.

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