

Christian Helms Jørgensenin ajatuksia ammattillisen koulutuksen tutkimuksesta ja Pohjois- maisesta yhteistyöstä

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1. Who are you, what do you do and what is your professional background?

I have a position at Roskilde University in Denmark as a research Professor in lifelong learning. My main research interest is initial vocational education and training, VET. I was initially trained as journeyman in the machine industry, where I worked for six years before shifting to become teacher in a vocational school. From there I became involved in teacher training and started in a master's programme at the university. Through my engagement in developmental work with industrial workers, I received a grant for a doctoral study, which gave access to a position at the University, where I am now. Like many people in my generation, I was engaged in international solidarity work, and that is one reason why I find international comparative education interesting.

2. How have you participated in Nordic research cooperation and how did your participation start?

For more than 10 years I have been involved in Nordic VET research. It started when I was invited by a Swedish colleague to participate in a study on school-to-work transitions for the Nordic Council of Ministers. I was happy to be offered a part-time position as guest professor in Stockholm, which was very inspiring. During my participation in the management of the Nordic research network for VET, *NordYrk*, I noticed a wide interest for Nordic collaboration in all countries. Nordyrk is an important network for the exchange of knowledge between Nordic VET researchers and practitioners. I have been fortunate to work as leader of research project, Nord-VET, funded by Nordforsk, with a group of very committed researchers. We are publishing two

books with Routledge on the Nordic VET systems later this year.

3. What do you think is the meaning and importance of Nordic cooperation for research on vocational education and training in the Nordic countries?

VET research has traditionally focussed strongly at specific national issues. I think Nordic cooperation has an important role to inspire and open VET research for studying common issues across borders. Spreading knowledge of the practices in VET systems in other countries can challenge the established 'truths' about VET in your own country. Learning about other VET systems, can make you aware of the strengths and weaknesses of your own VET system – and inspire innovation.

4. How would you characterise the place and position of research on VET in your own country? Whom do you consider to be the most interesting researchers, research units and projects in your country at the moment?

The position of VET research in Denmark has declined during the last 15 years. Cuts in the University budgets have made it difficult to retain young researchers who could add new energy to VET research. In addition, VET research does not appear as exciting for educational researchers as research in higher education. At present, we have no research departments, groups or even larger projects dedicated to VET research. What remains is carried out by individual researchers. The training of VET teachers lies with the University Colleges that have few resources for research. There seems to be a gap between the demands of policy makers for evidence based policy measures and VET research that asks critical questions and explores the complexities of VET. It is a bit of a paradox, since the Danish VET system is in a critical situation with decreasing enrolment and lack of research based knowledge of the challenges for VET.

5. What kind of challenges do you think there are for Nordic cooperation in researching VET?

Research funding is mostly aiming at national research, so it is a challenge to get funding for joint Nordic research in VET. However, I find the NordYrk and the Nordic journal for VET research encouraging for future cooperation.

6. "Lessons learned" – what kind of lessons could Nordic countries learn from one another with respect to VET and its research?

In general, I think that learning how VET can be organised differently in other countries, can be a great inspiration for developing your own VET system. In





the Nord-VET project we identified some common dilemmas for policy making in the field of VET. There is much to be learned from how these dilemmas have been managed in other Nordic countries. Currently, VET policies are mainly based on the balancing of interests of many diverse stakeholders. Policymaking could benefit from including research based knowledge of the unintended consequences of most policy measures. In addition, a range of innovative initiatives in the Nordic countries can inspire across borders. For example, the Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences that offer attractive progression routes for VET students. However, considering path dependencies and differences between the Nordic VET systems, direct transfer of policy or innovations is not likely to have success.

7. How do you see the future perspectives? How should Nordic collaboration for research in VET be developed?

My hope is that the occasional, separate Nordic research projects of the past will be replaced by more continuous Nordic research collaboration. That would require political priority, capacity building and institutional support across universities and university colleges.

*Maarit Virolainen ja
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