



Gender & Diversity in VET:

Some Norwegian experiences with deliberate educational choices

1 Introduction

Education and guidance with an emphasis on untraditional choices should be seen as a natural part of a good educational and career guidance traditions. However, it is necessary to handle this particular field precisely because it is so difficult for the individual learner to discover and to reflect on the untraditional opportunities. The untraditional opportunities can also be easy to forget for the individual career adviser or teacher. The gender perspective should be incorporated as a deliberate and explicit part of the school's work with educational and career guidance.

It is crucial that this work can be seen in context with other relevant projects and initiatives in the school, so that it will not come in addition to everything else. The work must therefore be rooted in the school's management and be included in the annual activity for the individual school. This ensures that the school management, career advisors, head teachers and subject teachers as well will be involved,

An important part of this work is to take special care of the learners who have chosen untraditional education, so they feel comfortable with the choice they have made and, in turn, become good role models for other young people and inspire them to choose untraditional as well.

An important condition for the promotion of untraditional educational and career choices is that it must be comprehensive and coherent: Chains of activities should start with information, testing and using role models in primary and lower secondary schools. Then they should continue with safeguarding and supporting the learners during upper secondary education/vocational training and in the transition to employment and apprenticeship.



It is furthermore important to put the spotlight on both genders; the majority of projects and initiatives related to the untraditional educational and career have focused exclusively on girls.

It is reason to assume that the two genders to some extent also call for various means. Gender sensitive means that are directed against the educational and career choices of males, therefore, may represent particular challenges. The results of testing and clarification of means towards females may therefore not be easily transferred to the situation of males.

A coordinator and driving force for this work is important to succeed in raising the level of education and career guidance and to facilitate cooperation between schools and industry.

2 Raising awareness and motivation of students in lower secondary schools

Students in lower secondary schools choose today at least as traditional as before when they move on to upper secondary education. To change this pattern of choices it is important that young people learn about alternative options. Young boys and girls must be shown that a number of studies and professions can fit for them. Even if untraditional studies and professions not immediately appear to fit with the young people's expectations for their own gender, they can at closer inspection prove to be just the right choice.

A major challenge in this work of motivation is to attract the attention of learners in lower secondary schools. They are young people who are still immature, often in opposition to both parents and teachers, and at the same time often insecure in their search for an identity and a meaning of their lives.

Experience indicates that this work must start as early as possible and no later than in the eighth grade. It is also possible to begin the process of educational choices already in

primary schools, for example, as a part of the work to get to know the local community, the people and work there. The possibilities for this are already in the curricula.



The experience of the project shows that the type of activities that have the greatest impact when it comes to engage and motivate students in lower secondary schools in this area, are

- Children's own experiences involving untraditional studies and occupations
- Use of young people from upper secondary schools and working life, who themselves have chosen innovative, as informants in the work of motivation and recruitment.

2.1 Pupils' own experiences

This first category includes all measures that give pupils in lower secondary schools the opportunity to make their own experiences; to visit upper secondary schools and companies, to participate in untraditional programmes in vocational schools and to work for one week in "untraditional" occupations. Such a week gives pupils the opportunity to try untraditional jobs in local companies, often combined with visits to workshops at the appropriate vocational school. The main objective is to give pupils the chance to get to know untraditional occupations through their own experiences.

After such a working week many pupils say that they have obtained increased awareness of untraditional choices of education and occupations. In fact, as many as every fifth pupil says that they in a stronger degree than before are assessed to choose a non-traditional education. Boys are in general somewhat less positive than girls. Some boys feel they have been "forced out" in what they perceive as a low status professions.

The precondition for a successful outcome of such a working week is directly related to a thorough process to:

- Motivate and inform pupils
- Provide good information to parents
- Include Educational offices as partners in this work of information
- Inform and motivate the participating enterprises to assigned the pupils to specific, untraditional tasks

Pupils could



- Write essays, such as: "An occupation I would like to have."
- Make cartoons, reporting from non-traditional labour weeks.
- Use drama about gender roles, education and career choices
- Visit male and female dominated enterprises, followed by discussions

2.2 Role models

Role models are experienced important in order to recruit young people to untraditional professions. Use of students from upper secondary schools and employees from enterprises as informants has proven to be successful

2.3 Parents can have an impact

Most surveys show that parents' opinions have great impact on young peoples' educational choices.

It is therefore important to establish good contacts with parents and provide them with information on upper secondary education, focusing especially on the opportunities in vocational training.

2.4 Safeguarding of those who have chosen innovative

If one succeed in getting more students to make innovative educational choices, one cannot automatically neither expect that they all will complete their education, nor that they will choose an innovative profession after the educational programme. For various reasons, dropout rates among those who choose innovative are higher than among those with more traditional choices. Some of them change to traditional fields during the process, and others have second thoughts even before they start at school

If the motivation work in lower secondary schools succeeds, it will have to be followed up by measures that are directed toward both the transition between secondary schools and

upper secondary schools, and measures that are intended to take care of untraditional students in the course of upper secondary education.



The experience from upper secondary schools that have succeeded in catering for those who have chosen innovative is that this implies an important marketing power for the individual school in relation to the recruitment from elementary school. These upper secondary schools have obtained a reputation for taking good care of students who have chosen innovative, and this motivates new learners to try untraditional fields at these schools.

Measures in secondary schools can and should often be different for boys and girls or for the traditional "female" and "male" subjects. The measures may include structural and physical arrangements, there may be social facilitation, and there may be measures for support to teachers and instructors.

3 Sources

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