



*Research landscapes in Vocational  
Education and Training (VET).  
National enquiries and cross-  
national concerns. An introduction*

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*Panorama de la investigación en formación  
profesional. Indagaciones nacionales y preocupaciones  
transnacionales. Una introducción*

By guest editor:

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## 1. An introduction

This special issue attempts to present in a concise way the variety of research problems, theoretical frameworks and methodological paths within research in Vocational Education and Training (VET). A complex endeavor given the nature and diversity of the research conducted in this field. Contributors are scholars doing research within VET in contexts with contrasting cultural and socio-economic characteristics.

In an article entitled *Vocational Education & Training at a Crossroad. New times, new challenges and `new` responses?* (Moreno Herrera, 2016) I highlighted the increased awareness, within and beyond the European socio-economic space, about the importance of VET as a key to sustainable development of society, social cohesion, employability and individual personal fulfillment. Indicating this relevance the *EFA (Education For All) Global Monitoring Report of 2012* focused on the third goal of Education For All, that is to ensure that all young people have the opportunity to acquire skills. According to the report the urgency of reaching this goal has sharpened acutely since 2000 as a consequence of a global economic downturn impacting on unemployment.

“One young person in eight across the world is looking for work. Youth populations are large and growing. The wellbeing and prosperity of young people depend more than ever on the skills that education and training can provide. Failing to meet this need is a waste of human potential and economic power. Youth skills have never been so vital.” (Bokova, 2012, p. i)

The *Global Monitoring Report* is a valuable reminder that education is not only about making sure all children can attend school, but also about setting young people up for life, by giving them opportunities to find decent work, earn a living, contribute to their communities and societies, and fulfill their potential. At the wider level, it is about helping countries nurture the workforce they need to grow in the global economy.

According to the scholars in VET field Felix Rauner and Rupert Maclean (2008, p. 13) the variety of research questions and development tasks at the levels of vocational education and training systems (macro level), the organization and design of vocational training programs and institutions (meso level) and the analysis and shaping of education and learning processes (micro level) leads to the integration of different scientific disciplines and research traditions. Research within this field can therefore be organized only in an Interdisciplinary way, notably through the participation of disciplines like psychology, industrial sociology, sociology of work, sociology of education, organization theory, natural sciences, engineering, pedagogy and economics.

Rauner and Maclean (2008, p.13) stress the challenges for research by arguing that although the call for interdisciplinary in the study of complex research fields and topics is repeatedly stressed from a scientific and political perspective, the practical realization of interdisciplinary turns out to be difficult. From this perspective, however, it is constitutive for research in this field to treat its research subject as an original one and to provide a subject-adequate foundation of the research methods.

Since the beginning of the 1970s the practice of VET research has taken shape and increasingly been organized as an international scientific community. The European research network Vocational Education and Training Research Network (VETNET), which was established in 1997, as well as the international network of UNESCO- UNEVOC centres are an expression of this development (Rauner & Maclean, 2008, p. 14).

I argue in the mentioned article (Moreno Herrera, 2016) that for the case of Sweden the discussions about best ways to develop Vocational Education & Training in Sweden are diverse. Articles in this special issue shows that for other national education contexts the situation is not different. There is learning to draw from different international models of VET; learning however should be done without simplistic imitation or copying. One of the emergent issues in international comparative studies of VET systems that are valuable to consider is the relevance of a social dialog, understood as implication of different stakeholders. I did stress in the article that arguably social dialogue, one of the pillars of the European social model, has contributed to the development of Vocational Education and Training policies since the founding of the EEC, with the social partners making proposals and agreeing action through joint opinions as well as contributing to the development of legally-binding measures. A question that we share with different educational systems internationally is how VET should prepare for future developments in the labor market. The development of the demand for qualifications are fundamental questions for VET planning; “on the one hand the issue is about qualifications that meet the current needs, on the other hand vocational qualification has to be organized in such a way as to ensure transferability with regard to new demands that could emerge” (Westerhuis, 2011, p. 103, cited in Moreno Herrera, 2016)

I argued then (Moreno Herrera, 2016) and would like to highlight also in the context of this special issue that still a key issue to deal with is what actually can be regarded as fundamental knowledge and skills for different occupations? Is this a question of various elementary practical activities and skills, or an issue of fundamental professional knowledge that facilitates transitions? We are then talking of new context in the development of society where professional practice requires both the so-called technical skills and well as the soft skills, for example skills to cooperate, synergize and intercultural competences. A VET that will best suit to the new times and guarantee employability needs to secure that in the learning process in different context, be it the school or the workshop, the development of practical profession-related skills, will go hand in hand with theoretical reflection and social skills. Articles in this special issue illustrate well the diversity of the research that is needed to meet the new demands and challenges in relation to these needs.

Comparative studies in the VET field could make a considerable contribution to learn from each other in order to meet goals of an education for all and secure youth employment. At research level more comparative cross-national studies in the field of VET are needed. It is equally important that comparative analysis do not stay just as information for researchers and policy makers but far beyond it is more relevant that outcomes of these studies reaches practitioners (e.g. schools teachers, supervisors) We are in need of learning from each other not only amongst researchers working in the field but equally relevant at the vocational school levels. This will not only allow us to understand common problems but also sharing more efficient ways of organizing learning process in classroom and workshops.

We hope that this special issue with an international perspective on research in VET will be a modest but yet valuable contribution to learning together across borders!

## 2. References

- MORENO HERRERA, L. (2016): Vocational Education & Training at a Crossroad. New times, new challenges and `new` responses?, *Nordic Journal of Vocational Education and Training* 6, 2, pp. 66-83.
- RAUNER, F. & MACLEAN, R. (2008): Vocational Education and Training Research. An introduction, In FELIX R. AND RUPERT M. (Eds.), *Handbook of Technical and Vocational Education and Training Research* (Amsterdam: Springer Netherlands).