

**This is a self-archived version of an original article. This version may differ from the original in pagination and typographic details.**

**Author(s):** Ryökkynen, Sanna; Pirttimaa, Raija; Kontu, Elina

**Title:** Interaction between students and class teachers in vocational education and training : 'Safety distance is needed'

**Year:** 2019

**Version:** Published version

**Copyright:** © The authors 2019

**Rights:** CC BY-NC 4.0

**Rights url:** <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

**Please cite the original version:**

Ryökkynen, S., Pirttimaa, R., & Kontu, E. (2019). Interaction between students and class teachers in vocational education and training : 'Safety distance is needed'. *Nordic Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, 9(2), 156-174. <https://doi.org/10.3384/njvet.2242-458X.1992156>



# Interaction between students and class teachers in vocational education and training: 'Safety distance is needed'

Sanna Ryökkynen\*, Raija Pirrtimaa\*\* & Elina Kontu\*\*\*

\*Helsinki University, Finland,

\*\*University of Jyväskylä, Finland, \*\*\*Tampere University, Finland

(sanna.ryokkynen@helsinki.fi)

## Abstract

Interaction between students and teachers is fundamental and has therefore been widely studied in education. However, there have been few studies on intensive special support being provided to vocational education and training (VET) students. Firstly, the focus of this article is on students' perceptions of interactions with their class teachers. Students (aged 17–34 years) from four Finnish vocational institutions providing intensive special support were interviewed. According to the findings, the demands students placed on their class teachers and for interactions with them were modest and their perceptions of both were favourable. Interactions seemed to be study-orientated and class teachers behaved as active initiators, with students echoing their opinions. Students' narratives excluded future career plans, talking about students' strengths or future ambitions or dreams. Secondly, the aim of this study is to review Finnish VET critically. In the reformed VET system, competence-based orientation emphasises individual guidance and support. Therefore, as the dialogue between teacher and student seems to enable successful trajectories, it is essential to make this apparent. Part of education's larger purpose is to make room for students' voices and interpretations during their study, which includes both acquiring qualifications to undertake certain work, and subjectification as an empowering element and socialisation of the social, cultural and political order.

**Keywords:** vocational education and training (VET), interaction, critical pedagogy, guidance, power, social justice, content analysis



## Introduction

Finnish vocational education has recently undergone its most significant reform in decades. The consequential change has been from the system-based approach to a competence-based approach through which the personal study-paths, broad-based competence and a close cooperation with labour markets are core concerns. To achieve changes, practice reculturing and restructuring are needed (Fullan, 1993; Le Fevre, 2014). Recent reforms in vocational education and training (VET) regulation require vocational institutions and teachers to rethink how they organise teaching to respond more swiftly to the changes in the workplace and to adapt to individual competence needs (Kukkonen, 2018; Vähäsantanen, 2015; Vähäsantanen & Eteläpelto, 2009). Time is needed to discuss shared norms and values, to talk about teaching practices, to work together on developing instruments or curricula and to have reflective dialogues with colleagues (Fullan, 1993; Le Fevre, 2014).

Changes might sometimes induce challenges. The new VET legislation emphasises support and guidance provided for students' individual study paths and life-long learning after VET. In the reformed VET system, teachers are seen as coaches who facilitate their students' development in individual learning and future career path (Maunu, 2018; Tapani, Raudasoja & Nokelainen, 2019). Therefore, it is important to investigate the core of teaching: the interaction between students and teachers. Misbah (2019) states that examining the student – teacher interaction in competent-based education promises to be a valuable contribution for understanding how competence development can be fostered in a more effective way.

In this study the interaction between students and class teachers is understood as a social phenomenon in which talk is interactionally constructed and negotiated for particular purposes (Bakhtin, 1981; Goffman, 1981). The attention is shifted from the persons who act to the nature and direction of the action. This article focuses on the VET students who receive intensive special support when they study, experiences of interaction with their class teacher. Intensive special support is defined in the Act of Vocational Education 2017/531, §65. It is provided for students who have serious learning difficulties, disabilities or serious health problems and who therefore need individual, transversal and diverse special support. The aim of the support is to ensure that these students achieve professional skills and expertise consistent with the qualification requirements. It permits equal access of education to all students. Class teachers in the Finnish VET system formulate the personal competence development plan for each student, with the student and the student's family and non-teaching services providers. They cooperate closely with the student, other teachers and non-teaching personnel.

Extensive previous research (e.g. Cornelius-White, 2007; Fraser & Walberg, 2005; Korthagen, Attema-Noordewier & Zwart, 2014; Äärelä, 2012) has established that the interaction between students and teachers specifically plays a crucial role in the quality of teaching and learning. Student – teacher interaction is a leading factor for promoting school attachment and corresponding adaptive behaviours, including academic success and well-being (Roorda, Koomen, Split & Oort, 2011; Rytönen, 2013). Furthermore, students' perceptions of teachers are a significant predictor of school attachment (Tyler, Stevens-Morgan & Brown-Wright, 2016). School experiences matter for them, to feel connected to their study (Elffers, Oort & Karsten, 2012).

However, studies linking the students' perceptions of teacher interpersonal behaviour and learning outcome in VET are few (Henderson & Fisher, 2008; Van Uden, Ritzen & Pieters, 2014). The further research on interaction between student and teacher in competence-based VET will contribute to the development and successful implementation of competence-based education (Mishab, 2019). By investigating the interaction between student and class teacher from the students' angle in the provision of intensive special support in VET system, a new perspective is demonstrated in this article.

This study examines the interaction between student and class teacher as a social phenomenon, which has a particular purpose and orientation. Furthermore, an important aspect is the guidance that is employed in this setting. In this article, we have used guidance to cover a wide range of individual and collective activities relating to information-giving, counselling, competence assessment, support, and the teaching of decision-making and career management skills (Hooley, 2014). Vocational schools internationally are now seen as career centres where students can acquire career competencies and to undertake the actions and initiatives to direct their own career development (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2000; Jarvis & Keeley, 2003; Mittendorf, Brok & Beijaard, 2011). Competence-based learning in the reformed Finnish VET (through the Act on Finnish VET in 2017/531) is also founded on the idea that students learn to direct their career development to meet the needs of the workplace and to lay the foundations for lifelong learning. Individual curriculum development starts from the actual competencies needed for engagement with the workplace rather than from academic disciplines (Act of Vocational Education 2017/531). As vocational education schools in Finland are implementing competence-based curricula, the career guidance as a part of teachers' work is emphasised (Maunu 2018; Tapani et al., 2019).

However, it seems that schools are mostly helping their students in their academic achievement and not in developing competencies to manage their own career (Draaisma, Meijers & Kuijpers, 2017; Mittendorf, 2010). The results and progress of the student are mostly at the centre of career conversations in VET

(Mittendorf, 2010; Winters, Meijers, Kuijpers & Baert, 2009). Teachers appear to behave in a traditional way, showing dominant behaviour, not focusing on students' career issues or stimulating their self-directedness. A great deal of their attention seems to be on grades and the progress of the student through school. This means giving many instructions and arriving at agreements on how a student's results or behaviour could be improved.

Guidance and good positive interaction between students and teachers can have a remarkable effect on individuals by increasing their engagement with learning, constructing the pathways through learning and work (Bimrose & Barnes, 2006; Äärelä, 2012). Furthermore, it supports VET students' acquisition of career management skills including managing life, learning and work (Kuijpers, Meijers & Gundy, 2011; Parkkila, Ryökkynen, Vaalasaranta, Männistö, Korkeamäki & Gustavsson-Lilius, 2018). The career dialogue between teachers and students appears to be the most effective element of integral career guidance (Kuijpers et al., 2011; Mittendorf, 2010). Specifically, individual guidance is vital because students often find it difficult to reflect on their own learning processes or to construct meaning about themselves and their future career (Bullock & Jamieson, 1998; Kuijpers et al., 2011).

The objective of this study was to investigate the interaction between students and class teachers from the students' perspective in providing intensive special support in the Finnish VET system. The research questions of this study are the following:

- How do VET students receiving intensive special support describe the interactions with their class teacher?
- What is the purpose and orientation of the interaction according to students?
- What guidance is provided in the interaction between students and class teachers?

### Providing a theoretical framework for the research questions and data analysis

The theoretical framework for this study has been built to endorse the research questions and to construe the results.

*Critical pedagogy is a premise of this study.* The concept of difference is central to critical ontology (Kincheloe, 2011). By highlighting the students who need intensive special support, we are giving voice to those representing a minority of VET students. The number of students needing intensive special support was 1.2 % of all students in the Finnish VET system during 2017 (Opetus- ja kulttuuriminis-

teriön julkaisuja, 2019). Furthermore, in this article we utilised the critical tradition of generating understanding and empowerment of individuals, to rethink a reason in a humane and interconnected manner (Freire, 1970/2017; Kincheloe, 2008).

To cultivate humanity in the world, the capacity for critical examination of oneself and one's tradition is needed (Kincheloe, 2011; Nussbaum, 2000). Furthermore, an ability to see that we are human beings bound to other human beings and that we feel empathy is essential. In this study, by monitoring students' voices in detail (Giroux, 1997; Kincheloe, 2007), we have drilled under the mandated curriculum to seek the larger purpose of vocational education.

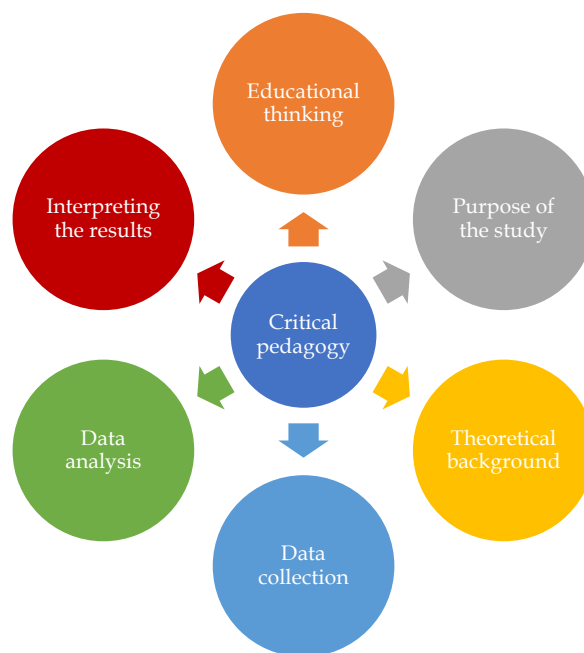


Figure 1. Critical pedagogy as a premise of this study.

Power plays an exaggerated role in production of any knowledge (Freire, 1970/2017; Giroux, 1997; Kincheloe, 2008). Power relations fundamentally mediate all thought, and facts can never be isolated from the domain of values. In depositing education (Freire, 1970/2017), the teacher-student relationship is narrative. The teacher is the narrating subject, and the student is the listening object. Furthermore, the teachers' interest lies in changing the students' consciousness or the situation surrounding them. The teachers' implicit goal is to lead students in adapting the current situation, and to integrate themselves into society as a worker who still needs intensive special support and guidance (Giroux, 1997; Kincheloe, 2008). It is known that VET students look to their teachers for active

support in their professional development (Louw, 2013). Brunila (2019) argues that if societal power relations are to be taken seriously, there should be continuous awareness of discursive practices through which young people speak and understand themselves and are spoken of and understood by others.

*Purpose of education.* Finnish vocational education is being subjected to enormous change through which the competence-based approach is being substituted for a system-based approach. Individual study paths and work-led practice are being combined with a fundamental revision of funding, giving rise to the question of the purpose of VET. Biesta (2010) inquires if there is still room for qualification, socialisation and subjectification. Qualification in this sense refers to providing the students with the knowledge, skills and understanding needed in the workplace and for citizenship. Socialisation is needed because through education we become part of particular social, cultural and political orders. In addition, subjectification empowers students to become more autonomous and independent in their thinking and acting. Furthermore, the question of justice is evident: Are the vocational schools providing intensive special support so students can fully promote their capabilities? As Nussbaum (2011) states, the key question demonstrating basic social justice is to ask, 'What is each person able to do and to be?' 'What opportunities are available to each person?' Savickas (2002, 2005) argues that one's career development is an integration of one's personal needs and social expectations and, therefore one's adaptation to the environment. Education, then, provides openings for societal participation and world culture (Scheerens, 2004). Social inclusion and equal opportunities (Irving, 2005) are therefore major challenges for education, training and employment policies. However, it is questionable whether the social inclusion agenda that is limited to labour market participation can accommodate different needs and desires and facilitate socially-just outcomes that are fair and equitable for all. One of the major challenges in education is to build bridges connecting self and others (Biesta, 2010).

## Methods

The aim of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the interaction between students and class teachers in the Finnish VET system. This qualitative research which is premised on critical thinking and gives voice to the participants and advances the opportunity to form and re-form the understanding of problems and thereby give concerned individuals the knowledge to come up with ideas for improving their circumstances (Atkins & Wallace, 2012; Cooley, 2013). We assume that critical ontological vision helps in efforts to gain new understandings and insights about who we are and who we can become (Kincheloe, 2011).



### **Participants and data collection**

Data for this study were collected by interviewing eleven students from four Finnish Vocational institutes that provided intensive special support to students during spring 2018. Eight students were studying for vocational upper secondary qualifications in Business and Administration, and three students in Information and Communication Technology. These fields were selected because of their popularity and because social skills are often needed in these occupations.

Two of the students were in the first year at the vocational institution, four students were finishing their VET study in spring 2018 and five were in the middle of their three-year study programme. Five of the students were female and six were male. The ages of the students varied from 17 to 34. Most of the students were under 20 years old.

Interviews were based on three leading themes: 1) Students' descriptions of the interaction with their class teachers, 2) students' descriptions of supportive and helpful interaction, 3) students' descriptions of their own initiatives.

These themes were elaborated on through 26 questions in semi-structured interviews. The interviews were carried out individually either face-to-face or via Skype. A Skype connection was used because of scheduling and/or because of distance. Some students also preferred not to meet face-to-face but wanted to discuss matters via Skype. Each interview took approximately 45 minutes. The interview data collected totalled about 11 hours, and they were transcribed onto 194 pages.

Permission to carry out this research was first sought from the school principals who suggested the class teachers to be contacted. The students expressed their consent to their class teachers. After this, the interviews were arranged. A newsletter giving basic information about the research was addressed to all participants. Signed consent was obtained from the participants prior to completing the interviews. The data used for this article were anonymised by making only generic reference to students, to class teachers and to vocational institutions.

### **Data analysis**

As depicted earlier, critical ontology has been a premise of this study. It was the background for our thinking and guided the process from the designing the study to the conclusions. The data analysis followed the principles of qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 1984; Schreier, 2012). The approach to the content analysis was summative (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), because the interviews were approached in relation to a specific theme and the analysis of the patterns led to an interpretation of the contextual meaning of specific content. The goal of this research was to describe the material in detail. Because little has been published



about the interaction between students and teachers in the context of VET concerning the provision of intensive special support for the students, the inductive approach (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007) was applicable.

The interviews were read through several times for the researchers to become completely familiar with the data, as recommended by Thomas (2006). Only the apparent content of the interviews was analysed. This means that tones of voice, laughter and breaks were ignored. Then the analytical procedure continued by identifying specific units in the text made up of the several lines or sentences which referred to the theme. In the next phase, the reduction of the content (Thomas, 2006) from several themes and questions was carried out. This means that a student described the interaction with the class teacher and said that s/he did not know what to talk about with the class teacher, it was described as reserved interaction. After this, the reduced expressions were grouped and compared according to their similarities and differences. The data analysis was performed manually (Basit, 2003) by using Excel to sort the answers in each theme into relevant categories to be analysed separately.

## Findings

In this section, the findings of each research question are reported sequentially.

### **Students' perceptions of the interaction with the class teacher**

We understood from the interviews that the students' perceptions of class teachers were quite congenial. They portrayed them very positively. Consequently, they described class teachers as nice, relaxed, positive, empathic and reliable adults, who were helping them with their school exercises and activities.

He is a good teacher, he is kind [...] it is the way he helps me to understand the exercises. (Interviewee 4)

She is... at least towards me, very kind [...] she is fussing around, and I mean that she has many irons in the fire, she is doing many things at the same time [...] but she is trying to do her best in everything. She is very reliable, so one can talk about private things with her. She is not spreading those. And at least in my opinion, she is a good teacher. (Interviewee 5)

Few students depicted their teachers slightly negatively. One of them narrated that their class teacher did not always understand and that their class teacher was sometimes angry. Another one considered the class teacher to be old-fashioned and one stated that the class teacher could be a little more relaxed.

Well... he is quite nice and so, although I sometimes have had varying opinions of him. Sometimes it feels somehow hard that teachers don't always understand their students [...] And he might sometimes be angry, but... but he is quite a good

teacher anyhow, there is a good side too and we have mainly got along. (Interviewee 6)

I don't have any unpleasant feelings about my teacher, but... he is as normal as teachers can be and... and... well he is old-fashioned [...] and he is sometimes joking or talking in an old-fashioned way which I don't understand, while he is talking about things from before I was even born. (Interviewee 7)

Furthermore, students explained that they have enough opportunities to have discussions with their class teacher while there were very few encounters. However, it was mentioned that there should be more opportunities to talk with the class teacher. Their definition of the successful interaction consisted of the demand for reciprocal understanding and decision-making. The class teacher's sincere interest in the student, comprehension and listening was emphasised in students' answers.

To have a feeling that someone else is interested in me and [...] that one has got out everything that is on one's mind [...] and that decisions have been made [...] and that teacher understands the student's situation better. (Interviewee 1)

The most important thing to me is that people are listening to me and understanding what I am saying. And then, that one is listening to me in a way that one is answering to me too and if I say something stupid, I would like to know that too. So that we can talk about that then. (Interviewee 9)

### Orientation of the interaction

Students described their role as being active, but at the same time, the discourse and their studying appeared to be supervised by the class teachers. Class teachers were taking the initiative and students were echoing them.

It is mainly my teacher who is talking about the plans and so on and I just see if they are acceptable or not, and I mainly accept them. (Interviewee 7)

I got a feeling that my plan has not quite been heard. But then last week we had a meeting at which I explained my plans, that I could continue to study in another field [...] So that we don't need to think about the employment at the moment [...] This was a big surprise for my teacher, but I told him that this was my decision. (Interviewee 6)

My teacher doesn't have any doubts that I couldn't cope with that work, but then he decided that there was a vacancy in another place. (Interviewee 6)

It is implicit that students felt themselves to be insecure and incapable speakers in relation to class teachers and articulated that they were unsure about what to talk about with them. They also felt nervous in social situations, especially in the strange places and with the strange people. Students appeared to be active if they had not comprehended something, but not as initiators.

I don't know what to talk about with my teacher [...] It makes me nervous, because I can't figure out any issues to talk about with my teacher. (Interviewee 7)

I don't necessarily have courage to start any conversation by myself... I do stay there, I don't leave [...] And I do answer if somebody asks me something... But I am not able to start any conversation with a stranger easily. (Interviewee 8)

### What guidance is provided

Generally, the students described how they mainly spoke with their class teachers about issues related to their VET study. Success in given exercises and in workplace learning seemed to be very important topics for the students and seemed to be the most essential part of the conversations with their class teachers.

[...] about private life [...] we haven't talked much about it with my teacher [...] with my teacher the discussion is more study-orientated. (Interviewee 1)

The uppermost issue is always about how I get my studying running. (Interviewee 9)

Other school personnel, parents and other social networks appeared to have a significant role in questions concerning private life. Students' perceptions of the relationship with their class teacher was that it was not very close: the class teacher is available, but not near.

[...] if I talk to the class instructor and she might then talk to the teacher, that we have talked about this and that [...] And this is ok for me and I'd prefer talking to the class instructor about my private things instead of teacher. (Interviewee 1)

I ask for help with my exercises if she is at school, but I can also ask for help from other teachers too [...] I am not too close to my teachers [...] safety distance is needed. (Interviewee 10)

The things that they highlighted as being the most memorable during their studies in VET related to their study programme; they were happy that they had found their own study field. In addition, other students as friends played a significant role in the interviews. The data also included mentions about excursions and about the teaching methods. Students seemed to appreciate class teachers' positive feedback and confidence in them. Practical exercises, along with success in learning, reinforced their positive recognition and engagement with their studies.

One big thing for me has been that I have found my own study programme. (Interviewee 7)

The best thing is that I have made new friends. (Interviewee 10)

Some of the students who participated in the study said that they had encountered bullying during their earlier school years. This might be interrelated with their thinking as well to the practice, albeit this was not established in this study.

## Discussion

The main goal of this study was to gain insight into Finnish VET students who receive intensive special support, and those students' perceptions of the interactions with their class teachers. Furthermore, our aim was to discover the purpose and orientation of the interaction between students and class teachers, and what guidance was provided. The ethos of this work was to have a critical perspective on Finnish VET providing intensive special support for their students.

The results of this study indicate that VET students who receive and need special support during their study use their voice in an adaptable way. They had favourable perceptions of their class teachers. Their demands of them were modest. Their encounters with the class teachers were teacher-orientated. Students were mainly echoing class teachers' opinions as class teachers were active initiators and students were compliant. Therefore, the student guidance seemed to be directive. Class teachers were perceived as being dominant tutors but at the same time they were respectful listeners. These findings correspond to those of Mittendorf (2010) and Draaisma et al. (2017): Teachers often showed teacher-orientated behaviour, such as giving instructions, explaining, helping with the exercises, or organising practical training etc.

Students' discussions in the class teacher appointments were mainly study-orientated: How to ensure that the studies were progressing? How to conduct class exercises successfully? How to accomplish workplace learning? Students' narratives excluded future career plans, talking about students' strengths or future ambitions or dreams. They gave depictions of their individual survival stories, how one coped with one's studies. Their stories sum to a perception that their interaction with the class teacher is formal and distant. Class teachers gave out instructions and arrived at agreements on how a student's results could be improved. Students did not look to their class teachers for active support in their professional development. Furthermore, our results highlighted that most of the students found it difficult and/or unnecessary to discuss anything other than study-related issues with their class teachers. It seems that they needed distance in relation to the class teacher. These findings support those from earlier studies (Mittendorf, 2010; Winters et al., 2009).

Class teachers' power in these interconnections was explicit. As in Freire's (1970/2017) interpretation of depositing education, students depicted their class teachers as a narrating subject and themselves as listening objects. It was implicit that the class teachers' goal was to lead the students to adapt to the current situation of the workforce instead of fully exploring and promoting their students' capabilities and dreams. For example, if problems occurred during the practical training period, class teachers helped the individual students to find more suitable practice jobs, rather than helping workplaces to adapt to different trainees.

Through this kind of discursive practice, they implicitly confirmed societal power relations, where a student with special needs is appraised as unsuitable for a certain working environment (Brunila, 2019). For the student, this manifested itself as limited opportunities and narrowed social inclusion: how one understands oneself in relation to the others.

Earlier studies (Bullock & Jamieson, 1998; Kuijpers et al., 2011) suggested that students generally, and those who need special support for their studies specifically, benefit from continuous opportunities to have dialogues with their teachers. This results in strengthening their perceptions of themselves as active initiators and as equally accepted speaker. Moreover, it is fundamental to appraise oneself as an equal member of a school, workplace or society. Teachers' guidance reinforces students to see their opportunities and value.

The guidance that the students in this study received from their class teachers focused mainly on challenges with their individual study or workplace learning, and not on building their professional pathways or on finding their place in society. It did not stimulate students' self-directedness and career issues. Students did not reflect on their private life, personal ambitions or career development issues with their class teachers. There were other persons like class supervisors, parents, friends and social service counsellors who have a significant role in students' lives and with their plans for the future. This support network seems to be a crucial interconnection between the world and the students. This supports the findings of previous research (Elffers et al., 2012; Niittylahti, Annala & Mäkinen, 2019), which showed a strong connection between peer support and the sense of belonging and engagement.

Students who receive intensive special support are often those whose paths have received strong guidance and whose lives and studies have been supported by a multi-professional network. They represent a minority of students in the Finnish VET system. Therefore, it is essential to pay attention to the voices of these students. Critical ontology produces a solid ground for our interpretations. By concentrating on their stories, it is possible to create more room for their interpretations and needs (Kincheloe, 2007). It further allows for the enhancement of understanding of how significant a teacher's acts and attitudes are while working with students who need support and encouragement to use their own voice: to get the opportunity to learn to express themselves and to be able to identify their options as a VET student, as a worker and as a member of society in general. The data collection, methods and theoretical background used are all connected this ethos: to give the students a voice.

This research has a few limitations. Students who volunteered to be interviewed for this research seemed to be positively engaged with the school and with learning. Their absences from the school had been minor. Consequently,

they gave positive feedback about their class teachers and of the interaction between students and class teachers. Those who had a background of absenteeism from school might have had a different perspective on their study, class teachers and student – teacher interaction.

## Conclusion

We conducted our study in the Finnish vocational education and training institutions providing intensive special support for their students. Relatively little is known about student – teacher relationship and about guidance in this setting. This study used a qualitative approach with critical thinking as premise to examine the interaction between students and class teachers. In line with earlier studies, we found that Finnish VET students who received intensive special support described their interaction with their class teachers as being teacher-orientated, but still positive and relaxed. They said that they needed distance in relation to their class teacher. Students seemed to act in an adaptable way in these encounters. They had an accommodating attitude and role in their discussions with class teachers. Guidance that they had received from the class teachers seemed to be directive, giving instructions and solving problems individually. It was focused on on-going studies. From the student's perspective, the nexus was significant when exploring one's future plans, career development and dreams.

The reformed Finnish VET is based on a competence-orientated approach (Act of Vocational Education 2017/531). However, students' expectations of their class teachers' actions still seemed to be quite traditional. They perceived that normal VET teachers' behaviour is to provide on-going information related to the individual studies, to the exercises and to workplace learning. As for teachers, they might want to restrict their remit in order to take care of their well-being. Furthermore, traditionally the VET teacher's profession has been perceived as emphasising subject knowledge. Therefore, it is important to figure out the other dimensions of the teacher's profession: guidance that is stimulating self-directedness of students, strengthening meaning-making and realising a process of reflection. As Biesta (2010) states, the purpose of education is to help a student to be a part of the world, part of the particular social, cultural and political order. It is worth considering whether the students in general, and those who need intensive special support for their studies, produce a certain type of professional discourse in which the cultural, historical, political, economic and social aspects of problems young people face may be ignored (Brunila, Mertanen, Tiainen, Kurki, Masoud, Mäkelä & Ikävalko, 2019).

Firstly, one practical implication for VET teachers providing intensive special support for their students is to find enough time for student encounters to make



sure that students repeatedly have opportunities to form and re-form the perception of themselves as young people, as a student and as a member of a workplace and a society. Secondly, the question is not only about applying career conversations as part of their work, but also about what is recognised as an acceptable form of being, doing and dreaming. It would be important to see the teaching profession as well as the whole meaning of VET more broadly. Not only as a qualifying, competence-based, subject-orientated and effective, but also as a socialising and subjectifying factor. Education and teachers function as inductors into workplaces, as well as into life and society. Investing in the teacher-student dialogues would help students to open up their full capacity and to use the vocabulary needed in life and work more independently.

### Notes on contributors

**Sanna Ryökkynen** is a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Educational Sciences at University of Helsinki, Finland. Her research interest is focused on vocational education providing special support for the students.

**Raija Pirttimaa** is a senior lecturer of special education at the Faculty of Education and Psychology at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland, and an adjunct professor at the University of Helsinki. Her research interests are focused on disability studies and education.

**Elina Kontu** is a professor in psychology, Faculty of Social Sciences, Health Sciences, Tampere University, Finland. She is interested in disability studies and education.



## References

- Act on Vocational Education. (2017). Finnish Acts of Parliament, 2017:531. Retrieved 26. June, 2019, from <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/alkup/2017/20170531>
- Atkins, L., & Wallace, S. (2012). *Qualitative research in education*. London: Sage.
- Bakhtin, M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination: Four essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Basit, T. (2003). Manual or electronic? The role of coding in qualitative data analysis. *Educational Research*, 45(2), 143–154.
- Biesta, G. (2010). *Good education in an age of measurement: Ethics, politics, democracy*. Colorado: Paradigm Publishers.
- Bimrose, J., & Barnes, S-A. (2006). Is career guidance effective? Evidence from a longitudinal study in England. *Australian Journal of Career Development*, 15(2), 19–25.
- Brunila, K. (2019). Interrupting psychological management of youth training. *Education Inquiry*. Published online, DOI: 10.1080/20004508.2019.1624458.
- Brunila, K., Mertanen, K., Tiainen, K., Kurki, T., Masoud, A., Mäkelä, K., & Ikävalko, E. (2019). Essay: Vulnerabilizing young people: Interrupting the ethos of vulnerability, the neoliberal rationality, and the precision education governance. *Suomen Antropologi*, 43(3), 113–120.
- Bullock, K., & Jamieson, I. (1998). The effectiveness of personal development planning. *Curriculum Journal*, 9(1), 63–77.
- Cooley, A. (2013). Qualitative research in education: The origins, debates, and politics of creating knowledge. *Educational Studies*, 49(3), 247–262.
- Cornelius-White, J. (2007). Learner-centered teacher-student relationships are effective: A meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, 77(1), 113–143.
- Draaisma A., Meijers F., & Kuijpers, M. (2018). The development of strong career learning environments: The project 'Career orientation and guidance' in Dutch vocational education. *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, 70(1), 27–46.
- Elffers, L., Oort, F.J., & Karsten, S. (2012). Making the connection: The role of social and academic school experiences in students' emotional engagement with school in post-secondary vocational education. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 22(2), 242–250.
- Elo, S., & Kyngäs, H. (2008). The qualitative content analysis process. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 62(1), 107–115.
- Fraser, B.J., & Walberg, H.J. (2005). Research on teacher-student relationships and learning environments: Context, retrospect and prospect. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 43(1), 103–109.
- Freire, P. (1970/2017). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. London: Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

- Fullan, M. (1993). *Change forces: Probing the depths of educational reform*. London: The Falmer Press.
- Giroux, H.A. (1997). *Pedagogy and the politics of hope: Theory, culture, and schooling. A critical reader*. Colorado: Westview Press.
- Goffman, E. (1981). *Forms of talk*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Hargreaves, A., & Fullan, M. (2000). Mentoring in the new millennium. *Theory Into Practice*, 39(1), 50–56.
- Henderson, D.G., & Fisher, D.L. (2008). Interpersonal behaviour and student outcomes in vocational education classes. *Learning Environments Research*, 11(1), 19–29.
- Hooley, T. (2014). *The evidence base on lifelong guidance: A guide to key findings for effective policy and practice*. Saarijärvi: Saarijärven Offset Oy.
- Hsieh, H.F., & Shannon, S.E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(9), 1277–1288.
- Irving, B.A. (2005). Social justice: A context for career education and guidance. In B.A. Irving, & B. Malik (Eds.), *Critical reflections on career education and guidance: Promoting social justice within a global economy* (pp. 10–24). London and New York: RoutledgeFalmer. Taylor & Francis e-Library.
- Jarvis, P.S., & Keeley, E.S. (2003). From vocational decision making to career building: Blueprint, real games, and school counseling. *Professional School Counseling*, 6(4), 244–250.
- Kincheloe, J.L. (2007). Critical pedagogy in the twenty-first century: Evolution for survival. In P. McLaren, & J.L. Kincheloe (Eds.), *Critical pedagogy: Where are we now?* (pp. 9–43). New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.
- Kincheloe, J.L. (2008). *Knowledge and critical pedagogy: An introduction*. Dordrecht: Springer Science + Business Media B.V.
- Kincheloe, J.L. (2011). Critical ontology and indigenous ways of being: Forging a postcolonial curriculum. In K. Haye, S.R. Steinberg, & K. Tobin (Eds.), *Key works in critical pedagogy: Joe L. Kincheloe* (pp. 333–349). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Korthagen, F.A.J., Attema-Noordewier, S.A., & Zwart, R.C. (2014). Teacher-student contact: Exploring a basic but complicated concept. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 40, 22–32.
- Krippendorff, K. (1984). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology*. London: Sage.
- Kuijpers M., Meijers, F., & Gundy, C. (2011). The relationship between learning environment and career competencies of students in vocational education. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 78(1), 21–30.
- Kukkonen, H. (2018). Osaamisperusteisuus ja opettajan identiteetti [Competence-based approach and teacher's identity]. In H. Kukkonen, & A. Raudasoja

- (Eds.), *Osaaminen esiin: Ammatillisen koulutuksen reformi ja osaamisperusteisuus* [Highlighting competence: The reform of vocational education and competence-based approach] (pp. 24–35). Tampere: Tampereen ammattikorkeakoulun julkaisuja, sarja A, tutkimuksia.
- Le Fevre, D.M. (2014). Barriers to implementing pedagogical change: The role of teachers' perceptions of risk. *Teacher and Teacher Education*, 38, 56–64.
- Louw, A.V. (2013). Pedagogical practices in VET: Between direct and indirect teacher approaches. *Nordic Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, 3(1), 1–16.
- Maunu, A. (2018). Opettaja, kasvattaja ja jotain muuta: Ammatillisten opettajien ammatti-identiteetti arjen käytäntöjen näkökulmasta [Practice and interaction needed: How do vocational teachers evaluate their own teacher education?]. *Ammattikasvatuksen aikakauskirja*, 20(4), 70–87.
- Mishab, Z. (2019). *Teacher-student interaction in competence-based vocational education in Indonesia*. Wageningen, NL: Wageningen University.
- Mittendorff, K.M. (2010). *Career conversations in senior secondary vocational education*. Eindhoven: Technische Universiteit Eindhoven.
- Mittendorff, K.M., den Brok, P., & Beijaard, D. (2011). Students' perceptions of career conversations with their teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 27(3), 515–523.
- Niittylahti, S., Annala, J., & Mäkinen, M. (2019). Student engagement at the beginning of vocational studies. *Nordic Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, 9(1), 21–42.
- Nussbaum, M.C. (2000). *Cultivating humanity: A classical defence of reform in liberal education*. London: Harvard University Press.
- Nussbaum, M.C. (2011). *Creating capabilities: The human development approach*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriön julkaisuja. (2019). Ammatillisen koulutuksen vaativan erityisen tuen kehittämissryhmän ehdotukset: Kehittämissryhmän loppuraportti [Proposals of the group for developing intensive special support in vocational education and training: Final report of the development group]. Opetus- ja Kulttuuriministeriö. Retrieved 7. October, 2019, from <https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/161647/OKM%202019%2023%20Ammatillisen%20koulutuksen%20vaativa%20erityinen%20tuki.pdf>
- Parkkila, M., Ryökkynen S., Vaalasaranta, L., Männistö, E., Korkeamäki, J., & Gustavsson-Lilius, M. (2018). *Erityistä tukea taroitsevien opiskelijoiden ohjaus ja psykososiaalisista hyvinvointia kartoittava kysely ammatillisissa opinnoissa: Helmi-hankkeen loppuraportti* [The guidance of the students with special needs in vo-

- cational education and training and the assessment method of the psychosocial wellbeing: Final report of the Helmi-project]. Kuntoutussäätiön työselosteita/Working papers 57. Helsinki: Kuntoutussäätiö.
- Roorda, D.L., Koomen, H.M.Y., Spilt, J.L., & Oort, F.J. (2011). The influence of affective teacher-student relationships on students' school engagement and achievement: A meta-analytic approach. *Review of Educational Research*, 81(4), 493–529.
- Rytkönen, M. (2013). *Kehityskulkuja ja väliintuloja: Ekologinen näkökulma vakavan väkivallanteon tehneiden nuorten sosioemotionaalisen terveyden kehitykseen* [Developmental pathways and interventions: An ecological view on the development of the socioemotional health of adolescents who have committed a serious act of violence]. Kuopio: Kopijyvä Oy.
- Savickas, M.L. (2002). Career construction: A developmental theory of vocational behaviour. In D. Brown (Ed.), *Career choice and development* (pp. 149–205) (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Savickas, M.L. (2005). The theory and practice of career construction. In S.D. Brown, & R.W. Lent (Eds.), *Career development and counselling: Putting theory and research to work* (pp. 42–70). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Scheerens, J. (2004). *The quality of education at the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century*. Background paper for the Education for all global monitoring report 2005: The quality imperative. Unesdoc Digital library. Retrieved 1. January, 2020, from <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000146697?posInSet=3&queryId=4158a171-87e4-4934-bed8-bd756543f008>.
- Schreirer, M. (2012). *Qualitative content analysis in practice*. London: Sage.
- Tapani, A., Raudasoja, A., & Nokelainen, P. (2019). Ammatillisen koulutuksen uudistus: Uhka ja mahdollisuus [The reform of Finnish vocational education and training: Threat and opportunity]. *Ammattikasvatuksen aikakauskirja*, 21(2), 4–8.
- Thomas, D.R. (2006). A General inductive approach for analyzing qualitative evaluation data. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 27(2), 237–246.
- Tyler, K.M., Stevens-Morgan, R., & Brown-Wright, L. (2016). Home-school dissonance and student-teacher interaction as predictors of school attachment among urban middle level students. *RMLE Online*, 39(7), 1–22.
- Van Uden, J.M., Ritzen, H., & Pieters, J.M. (2014). Engaging students: The role of teacher beliefs and interpersonal teacher behaviour in fostering student engagement in vocational education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 37, 21–32.
- Vähäsantanen, K. (2015). Professional agency in the stream of change: Understanding educational change and teachers' professional identities. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 47, 1–12.

- Vähäsantanen, K., & Eteläpelto, A. (2009). Vocational teachers in the face of major educational reform: Individual ways of negotiating professional identities. *Journal of Education and Work*, 22(1), 15-33.
- Winters, A., Meijers, F., Kuijpers, M., & Baert, H. (2009). What are vocational training conversations about? Analysis of vocational training conversations in Dutch vocational education from a career learning perspective. *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, 61(3), 247-266
- Äärelä, T. (2012). "Aika paljón vaikuttaa minkäläinen ilme opettajalla on naamalla." *Nuoret vangit kertovat peruskouluvuosistaan* ["It means quite a lot what kind of look a teacher has." Young prisoners talking about their experiences at a comprehensive school]. Rovaniemi: Lapin yliopistopaino.