

Dropping out of vocational education and training: Identity dynamics and relational issues

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The dual vocational education and training (VET) system is considered a favorable environment for the professional socialization of young people. However, it may not be exempt from shortcomings, especially when apprentices live a crisis situation or when they encounter difficulties during their on-the-job training. These difficult situations lead sometimes to VET dropout, which might undermine the construction of young people's personal and occupational identity, and point out a failure in the way the profession was trained.

A qualitative study is carried out on the process and the consequences of VET dropout, from the apprentices' point of view. It consists in a content analysis of 46 semi-structured interviews, conducted with learners who dropped out during the first year of VET. This study made it possible to understand the way in which young people experience and explain their dropping out. It also detects the links between dropping out and identity dynamics.

Results indicate a great heterogeneity in the situations described by the apprentices, as well as in the way they experience VET and VET dropout. However, the difficulties the apprentices encountered during their VET are often related to their particular status. Actually, they are no more pupils, but not yet considered as real skilled workers, and are therefore in a weak hierarchical position in the company. Moreover, results stress the key role of relational issues for the learning of a profession. In fact, a problematic interaction between the on-the-job trainer and the apprentice can undermine an effective learning of the profession, which often leads to dropout.