A case study of career pathways through vocational education

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Vocational Education in Norway follows a split model. Initially, students are enrolled in a two-year school programme, followed by a two-year apprenticeship at a workplace. In a longitudinal study we followed 32 persons over a ten-year period, from the time they started vocational education. After they completed vocational education, we also followed their entrance into jobs as skilled workers. The method was an annual interview. The aim of the study was to develop insights into how young people tend to change course choices, occupational aspirations, and dispositions to learning as well as approaches to studentship throughout this significant period of their life. The intention has been to bring out their own descriptions, understandings and experiences related to the main research question: What choices do young people make in terms of education and occupation and what have influenced these choices? In the presentation we describe how they follow different career pathways through vocational education. Informed by the analytical concepts “agency” and “affordance”, we describe how career pathways are formed in a continuum of complex life conditions, ranging from passion for the profession, to pragmatic reasoning about building a future to secure economic existence.

Key words: career pathways, career choices, agency, vocational education