

The NOMA Project: Experiences with Norwegian Vocational Education and Training in East Africa

Richard Daly

Abstract

Together with Professor Liv Mjelde, I have been involved in establishing a masters' program in vocational pedagogy in Kampala, Uganda--a tripartite venture conceived and developed cooperatively between institutions and instructors in Norway, Sudan (later, South Sudan) and Uganda--financed by the Norwegian government (NORAD) and hosted by the Department of Art and Industrial Design, Faculty of Vocational Studies, Kyambogo University in Kampala. Half the students were recruited in Uganda and half in South Sudan. The social organization of knowledge, particularly formal learning, remains influential in East Africa. Great Britain, the colonial power of the region, developed East African education to serve its own administrative agenda, rather than addressing the needs for a modern, self-reliant, industrial society that could advance the lives of local inhabitants. As everywhere, vocational education in East Africa is linked to global flows of capital, the search for cheap labour power and new consumer markets. Advancing and developing vocational pedagogy requires finding ways to educate the young and equip them more effectively to enter the labour force under existing conditions. This appraisal of our experience is intended to provide our practical experience as a contextual guide for such programs in developing countries in the future. Our program sought to address common problems facing vocational education across Africa, and indeed, across the world. The aim was to stress commonalities of people in practical trades and professions, whom we viewed as our fellow learners and co-workers. We emphasized problem-solving experiences and solutions common to vocational pedagogy as found in the increasingly global labour market.

Introduction

Liv Mjelde and I worked in Kampala, Uganda, developing a masters' program in vocational pedagogy in cooperation with colleagues and students from Uganda and South Sudan. This was referred to as "The NOMA Project in Vocational Pedagogy".¹The NOMA Project was a cooperative trilateral venture involving three partners: Kyambogo University, Kampala, Uganda; Upper Nile University, Malakal, South Sudan and Akershus University College, Norway. The aim of the undertaking was to develop a masters' program in vocational pedagogy at Kyambogo University (KyU) to educate and sensitize students (and indirectly education policy-makers) about vocational educational needs in relation to labour market developments in Uganda and South Sudan. Funding was provided by the Government of Norway. The focus of the program was to produce knowledge useful in developing sustainable living conditions and economic growth for the populations in these regions. Vocational education and training are important to what the development community calls a country's "capacity-building." South Sudan has been in a civil war for many years; it suffers from a lack of well-established vocational schools and corresponding expertise in practical subjects. Uganda has also been through civil wars and unrest during the past decades; however, it has some traditions in vocational education created by the British missionaries and administrators to serve the needs for certain limited forms of skilled labour power during the years of Uganda as a British Protectorate (Ssekamwa 2005).

KyU is the only university in Uganda with a fully-fledged Faculty of Vocational Studies. This faculty offers bachelor degrees in food processing, industrial art and design, human nutrition and

dietetics, agriculture, business management, mechanics, the electro fields, construction and information and communication technology (ICT). These bachelor programmes are part of vocational teacher education in Uganda (Lutalo-Bosa 2006)². Lutalo-Bosa explains in this document that building up a masters' program in vocational pedagogy will strengthen vocational education in Uganda and contribute to the country's economic need for job-related skills. The recent NOMA project was viewed by participants as a direct response to this need.

The Everyday Life of the program³

The program started in February 2009 with fourteen students from Uganda and seven students from South Sudan.⁴ The second cohort of twenty-one students (ten from one country and eleven from the other) started in February 2011 and the third in August 2011. The curriculum for each cohort was two full years. The first year had introductory courses in the foundation of vocational pedagogy: teaching and learning in vocational pedagogy, understanding vocational didactics⁵ and strategies for research and development work in vocational education. Social, cultural and historical perspectives on vocational education and training and its African roots are part of the curriculum.

Efforts were made to ground the curriculum in African issues and epistemology and to avoid Eurocentrism. The students came from different geographical places in South Sudan and Uganda and from various ethnic groups, languages and religious affiliations. They had background education as mechanics and electricians, as home economists and textile producers; they came from the police, the hospitality industry, the health sector as well as special needs training, adult education, accounting, art and design, wildlife management and fisheries. They were all trained vocational teachers. Gender equity was a program requirement from Norway – 50% of students were to be women and 50% men.

Learning by doing and group work, features central to workshop learning everywhere at the core of vocational pedagogy. Another central part of the program was training learners in the practice of conducting *research expeditions both to technical schools and to crafts and industrial worksites* (Mjelde 2011). We prepared the students for doing “mini” research in these places, to cooperate in data-gathering and consolidation, as well as to write up reports from their findings. We started preparing for and implementing these research expeditions to various workplaces together with our Ugandan mentors even before the arrival of the students. We as teachers and mentors undertook mini investigations to test out places we could send the students. This activity helped sensitize our Ugandan colleagues to this type of pedagogy.

The students were immediately divided into groups of seven in the first plenary session. They were assigned to designated group rooms in our NOMA quarters. Here, from day one, when not in lectures, they worked on their readings and on scientific mini-projects, discussing and summing up experiences acquired from the research expeditions. They worked together producing their research reports, in subgroups of two and three, within the group of seven. Two mentors were responsible in each group. Mentoring is the core of success in vocational pedagogy. Six teachers from Kyambogo University were connected to the project. In a short period of activity, they learned the role of mentor and their devotion to the aims of the project became the beating heart of the program. The contact between students and mentors was marked by continuity and proximity. The counselling processes are not unlike an exercise in tailoring: students deal with planning, measuring, cutting, joining and developing their hitherto locked up ideas and hidden potentials. The mentors were responsible both for the group dynamics, deepening of critical investigation in the specific field and for the students' overall progress. The goal of the mentor was also to organize and develop the students' capacity to mentor each other. The goal for a mentor is to raise the level of experience and competence of the student and thus make her/himself redundant. The group members increasingly take care of their own progress together. The “project report” submitted by the students to complete their first year, as

well as their graduating (masters') theses both involved conscious reflection on their learning; these were also based upon the candidates' logging of their own earlier experiences with learning in vocational education, as well as how they had acquired their original trades. Their theses represented pioneering research linked to their own involvement in vocational pedagogy.

In very important ways, the curriculum of the program was rooted in the focus we placed on the method of working. Discipline, punctuality and responsibility for the progress of one and all—these factors were explained and emphasized from the first meeting; these basic principles constantly enriched and enlivened more formal learning aspects of the course of studies. The conscious progress of everyone in the group was part of the curriculum. In the words of the shop steward, Cohort 2, James C. Okvare: "Our cohort is determined to adhere to our formal agreement to complete this two-year program with 100 % success—no one left behind"(email to Richard Daly and Liv Mjelde, August 21, 2012). And indeed, despite many difficulties, this second cohort made good their pledge in September 2013. All twenty-one students from the second cohort and one student from the first cohort defended their theses in September 2013. Fifty-four of the sixty-three students who started their masters' studies in vocational pedagogy in all three cohorts have finished their theses and have successfully defended their work.

Some principles of development work adhered to by NORAD and its Program for Master's Studies (SIU) were non-negotiable. One of the objectives of the NOMA program was to enhance gender equality in all program activities. The easiest road to securing equal opportunity was seen as providing access to both male and female applicants as well as male and female mentors and teachers in the program. Indeed, it was essential to weave a gender understanding into the curriculum in a way that was neither Eurocentric nor ethnocentric, neither male-hegemonic or particularly Euro-feminist in orientation. One of our challenges was how to integrate gender equality into the modules and our own praxis. In the NOMA Masters' Project in Vocational Pedagogy at Kyambogo, since *gender* became a central question in the curriculum, we developed a module in the program on "gender, vocational pedagogy and multiculturalism" (see Gombe 2009). Historically, enduring and changing gender relations in the labor market and in family ideology have influenced vocational education (Mjelde 2004, 2005). We can trace some similar gender patterns in the North and the South, for example, as women are found in the caring professions and home economics and men in the industrial technical trades. However, there are also important and interesting differences. Our impression was that there are more men in nursing, nutrition and home economics in Uganda than in Norway, and more Ugandan women in the field of engineering. These differences in North-South vocational education have received little scholarly attention yet they raise new and interesting possibilities for comparative research in a number of areas. (see also Arnfred 2004)

The students included comments about group work in their written evaluations.⁶ Here are some of the evaluations made by students in the first cohort. Joseph Kikomeko, electrical engineering teacher (Cohort 1): *I changed from being a dispenser of knowledge to being a mentor, a facilitator as well as a counsellor to my learners. I involve my learners in planning their learning and I respect their ideas more than ever before. Since I am teaching, I am learning.* Another student (Cohort 1): *I realized the benefits of group learning and extended it to our workplaces.* Grace Aninge, dental technician teacher (Cohort 1): *In a nutshell, I will forever be grateful that I went through the program. I have been transformed and I will leave the NOMA house a different person with knowledge, skills and attitudes that can be used to transform students in different vocational fields.* Arajab Mogoya, hotel management teacher, now lecturing at Makerere University in Kampala (Cohort 1): *My attitudes towards vocational education have changed tremendously.* The student assessments in the second cohort emphasize the dialogues: "...critiquing, agreeing or disagreeing, the group dynamics used in the learning processes and the sharing of knowledge as the key factor in the learning processes." Several students wanted ways to address work-related problems faced by their

poverty-stricken countrymen and women. The NOMA project gave them some new approaches to these complicated problems.

Vocational pedagogical practices, as described above (“Everyday Life of the Program”), represent alternative ways of organizing learning and teaching processes and also alternative ways of conducting social science. The premise underpinning the vocational pedagogy that NOMA adopted -- in terms of both mentoring and in the priority given to action research -- is that the actual ontology of the researchers and the researched is crucial. Such ventures must start at the local level, situated within the context of the prevailing power relations wherever we focus our attention. This is fraught with difficulty since both researchers and those researched are constantly dogged by poverty and drastically under-supplied with needed material resources. However, Africa is rich in human resources. We believe researchers in the North and the South are capable of working together in ways that go beyond the donor-recipient model, to find modest ways to tap these human resources and help change the climate for vocational pedagogy and its future growth. The NOMA project had a high rate of students graduating and Kyambogo University is now offering vocational pedagogy at the masters’ level under its own initiative. It is not exactly the same course as devised and delivered in Norway, since it adheres to the local university’s academic demands and regulations. However, the methods of work, the workshop learning, the awareness of the constantly changing labour market and the consultation between mentors and students, and between the masters’ students, and, in their own role as teachers, consulting with their own learners. To this extent, vocational pedagogy seems to be taking root in East Africa.

Mixed Experiences from the NOMA Project

While for the most part the NOMA Project successfully graduated most students in the first three cohorts, and in addition stirred public consciousness about the importance of studies in vocational education, the project was not immune to problems arising from various contradictions in the economy and society. In other words, it is important to document some contextual features of the program to indicate some of the actual social relations involved in its successes and shortcomings.

At the moment we began to implement the program, we faced contradictions and difficulties at both universities in the South. The reasons for the difficulties were different in each instance; at the university in Uganda the difficulties were of an internal institutional character that were exacerbated by shortages in funding higher education. The Vice-Chancellor was dismissed as the project began, whereupon the university erupted and exploded, then closed down.⁷ Thus, when we arrived to begin the program with the first cohort, we found that the newly appointed local officials were suspicious, viewing our program as “yet another foreign project” imposed without their knowledge or participation (we had involved their predecessors with every stage of planning). The new authorities feared that this program was being dropped on them without regard for local conditions and traditions. The university in South Sudan, on the other hand, was caught in the crossfire and contradictions with building a new nation at a point in time when Sudan’s civil war had not yet completely abated—either in the society or in the realm of higher education. In practical terms, the civil war had not completely ended. The recruitment of students from South Sudan became a difficult question under the existing conditions of suspicion and lack of awareness of the goals of the program.

Kyambogo University was the institution to award the masters’ degree (in the Faculty of Vocational Studies) and their strict British-based higher education standards of admission and evaluation prevailed over Norwegian procedures for admission.⁸ Due to these difficulties the opening of the program was postponed for six months. Other difficulties in implementing the program arose from the contradictions between the more liberal Nordic traditions regarding admissions, formal evaluation and exams, its greater respect for practical knowledge, compared to Uganda’s education system with inflexible regulations regarding tests, exams, marking and grading. For example, due to

poverty and competition for access to higher education, as well as potentials for fraud and cheating, the university adhered to strict and inflexible formal education standards of assessment and rules of admission—at least when viewed by European eyes.

Another contradiction was of a more scientific character. The Nordic countries have developed a strong tradition in qualitative research and a tradition for methodological variations and combinations of quantitative and qualitative methods in social science (Greenwood & Levin, 1998, Kvale 1996, Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). This was not well known at Kyambogo University,⁹ where the *sine qua non* in scientific research was strict quantitative analysis, even where the students' questionnaire samples—due to the lack of time and resources for large-scale studies—were small and more amenable to qualitative analysis. Norwegian examiners found Kyambogo's insistence on students undertaking quantitative analysis of what were qualitative studies to be unacceptable. They penalized the students for not upholding the principles and methods of qualitative research. The scepticism that confronted the program at Kyambogo University was also nurtured by the ignorance, or lack of knowledge and understanding of the funding personnel in Norway of both the statutes and the informal regulations that govern university management in such education systems in former British colonies. Kyambogo's concern was that the participants from the North would impose neo-colonialist ideas, ideas that might be implemented ethnocentrically on the basis of western pedagogy, experience and technology—and all this with no guarantee that this program would have positive effects on the university's standards and the employability of graduates facing local African social and economic conditions.

Beyond these problems there was the underlying fact that the NOMA Project was wholly financed by Norway. This created a specific set of power relations between the Northern (Norwegian) and the Southern (South Sudanese and Ugandan) partners, a structural relationship often characterized as a “donor/beggar scenario” with its intrinsic power structure and internal dynamics. The donor often becomes more influential in decision-making by virtue of controlling the purse; such financially-backed influence can undermine collective decision-taking and cooperative activities. The situation potentially creates an imbalance in deliberations between the different partners, as well as mixed feelings about project results. Development projects tend to give donors from the North a degree of material authority that is humiliating to our non-Northern partners if, that is, the potential influence is not handled in an open and democratic way, where, within the framework of the goals and budget, all participants are expected to take part in the assessment of the project and its decision-making.¹⁰

Both Kyambogo University (KYU) in Uganda, and the Norwegian institution that was then called Akershus University College (AUC) had years of experience training vocational teachers at the bachelor degree level. South Sudan, however, has suffered decades of war which is still not over. But the UN and other agencies suggest vocational education and training for youth and adults are urgently needed to address the skills deficit in South Sudan (see Badinga 2011). The importance of vocational education and training in South Sudan is stressed as an agent for social integration. One aim of Norway's NOMA Project was to include demobilized soldiers.¹¹ The reintegration of soldiers into civilian life is critical to reinforcing peace and establishing social stability; however, the existing infrastructure in the new South Sudan government was too weak to support this initiative. Education is a tool to such integration but it was not effectively used in this case. The NOMA Program outlined plans for establishing vocational training centres, acknowledged the critical role of women and girls in the development of society; it also raised awareness of the need to promote gender balance in training as part of sustainable development.

One of the main problems for Northerners promoting vocational learning in relation to work in so-called developing countries is their own country's history, a history affected both by

industrialization and colonial relations with regions in the colonized “South.” This is exacerbated by the lack of a suitable climate for the free exchange of ideas and activities given the prevailing “donor-recipient” situation between North and South, with its chronic power imbalances. From the point of view of a researcher from the developing world, Kathryn Choules (2007) poses some fundamental questions in her work “The Shifting Sands of Social Justice Discourse: From Situating the Problem with ‘Them’ to Situating It with ‘Us.’ She asks: “what are the truths and lies we live by?” The North provides the money and hence enjoys power and control in such relationships. Such situations prevail in much of Africa today. Is it possible to provide a relatively level “playing field” for interacting with our colleagues and fellow learners in the field of VET in “the South” when the money is dispensed from the North? In a lecture given in 2009, our Kyambogo colleague Benson Okello (2009) posed essentially the same question as it allies to East Africa.¹² If we can put aside the financing for a moment, we might be able to indicate productive commonalities in vocational training wherever it occurs in the modern world.

Vocational education in schools and apprenticeships in workplaces (as they developed in different ways in Europe in the last century) originated in feudal times (Mjelde 2013). Apprenticeship learning continued in various parts of the world during the colonial period of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These vocational traditions in Europe share similarities with indigenous work-related knowledge traditions found in Africa and elsewhere (see, for example, Lave 2011, for Liberian tailoring traditions; also Botha 2013, on South African craft learning; Bolton & Daly 2013 and Daly 2016, on indigenous craft learning in Canada; Coy 1989 regarding apprenticeships in many cultures). One striking similarity is that central features of these learning traditions focus on the work of the hand and social learning through watching and imitation. For example: “One term in the Japanese language for apprentice is *minarai*, literally one who learns by observation” (Singleton 1989: 14). Another joint feature is that learning through practice and learning through cooperation is central to both traditions. Anthropologist Jean Lave conducted an empirical study among tailors in West Africa and, together with her pedagogical colleague Etienne Wenger, described such learning as social processes, learning in the context of a community of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991). Their emphasis on learning in communities of practice, in which knowledge is socially constructed, has common roots with “learning in apprenticeship traditions” and shares an orientation with the social psychological studies of learning conducted by Lev Vygotsky in the 1920s. In this tradition, learners are motivated to master their tasks (in accord with the understanding of their fellows) in order to become acceptable members of their work community. Both research on, and pedagogical promotion of, such practice-based inductive learning share another feature with apprenticeship learning; namely, no matter where one is located, whether in the North or the South, the managers of education portray such learning traditions as being inferior to academic learning. The academic tradition tends to consider both indigenous ways of living and learning, as well as working class learning behaviour and outlook as remote, deficient and limited (Botha 2013: 134).

The masters’ program at what was Akershus University College(AUC) in Norway¹³ developed partly in response to the students who demanded new ways of organizing teaching and learning processes. AUC has generated forms of learning and teaching praxis that integrate vocational “hands-on knowledge” with “formal scientific knowledge” according to conventional teaching and learning, in relation to the long tradition of learning at work. This integration was made possible through a wide range of development projects in cooperation with business and industry in Norway and through research projects carried out by vocational school teachers enrolled in postgraduate studies. Vocational school teachers learned their trades, developed their qualifications, and were part of the manual labour market *before* they trained as teachers and researchers. As a background to their teaching, such work-related experience has provided a basis for understanding the dynamics of changes in the labour market. In AUC’s programs, emphasis is given to people’s needs

for skills in relation to sustainable development. This has also led to innovative ways of understanding general dynamics of teaching and learning.

Thus, forty years ago, the Department of Vocational and Technical Teacher Education at AUC developed a Masters' Program in Vocational Pedagogy (MPVP). The program has created new knowledge in vocational education and training, knowledge that reflects the ebbs and flows of the manual labour market, and hence the specific educational requirements needed to meet the challenges of changing market conditions. What has been characteristic of the Norwegian tradition in vocational education is that it has taken place jointly in schools and in workplaces and that this system is directly related to the economy's need for skills (Mjelde 1993, 2006).¹⁴This program was the basis for the NOMA venture at Kyambogo University.

Today, East Africa is part of the industrialized world¹⁵ with similar needs for vocational training. In developing the Masters' program at KYU, Mjelde and her colleagues sought to apply their experience with the work-based learning approaches to African conditions (Mjelde 2006, 2013).¹⁶Central to this project were mentoring and group work, essential features of organizing learning processes. We can talk about **"a master/apprentice"** learning model where the central task may be **making a table, learning about products and sales. But beyond this, NOMA used this model for students to follow as they produced their masters' theses**, and this assumes that the starting point is to view the activities themselves as the core of the learning process (Mjelde 2009: 130). In Norway as well as in Uganda and South Sudan, the situation is similar. Vocational learning processes are accelerated when the learners strive to become members in good standing of one or another group of vocational specialists as they prepare to enter the labour market.

Reflections on Cultural Difference, Post-Colonial Poverty and Activity Research

The NOMA experience has brought is a renewed appreciation of how strongly academically-based Western thinking undervalues vocational pedagogy and workshop learning, not to mention other non-hegemonic or indigenous forms of knowledge. This experience strengthens our belief in the need for learners to integrate different knowledge systems as they learn for participation in the world of work. Learners and their mentors must question what knowledge is and how people acquire understanding (Botha 2011, 2013, Broch-Utne 2000, Hoppers 2002, Smith 1999).

Despite similarities in vocational education everywhere, we have learned the importance of knowing something about differing societal values in different regions of the globe. One of our Ugandan colleagues, Dr. James Lutalu Bosa maintains that, **"In Africa in general the most desirable trait one can have is to be practical and social, and in the West the star qualities are to be philosophical, theoretical, individualistic and inventive"**. While this may well be an excessively categorical distinction, it nonetheless reflects "the social organization of knowledge" as it has developed over the past 300 years. By comparison there is a conviction at the core of Western thought that technological rationalism and ego-oriented individualism are principal characteristics of human existence. Ego-oriented individualism assumes that what makes us into **human beings** is freedom from dependence on **the will of others** and our capacity for entering into **ego-oriented relations** with other people. This was elegantly explored, for example, by social philosopher C.B. MacPherson (1962). In this view, human society is first and foremost regarded as a set of market relations between individuals as proprietors of their own person and their own capacities. "Buying and selling yourself" is what pays off and gives "the greatest amount of good to the greatest number of people." This prevailing view is supplemented by the mantra of today: **Everything can be solved through freedom of competition**—a mantra with no firm basis because the playing field of competition is seldom level in relation to the social and material capital that is in play.

This emphasis on individualism and the associated concept of "self-reliance" came to the fore in the USA during the 1840s with the writings of the American thinker Ralph Waldo Emerson, who

called for individual strength of character in the battle to trust one's intuition and move away from social conformity, to dare to be different. Emerson found that most human beings possessed a weak sense of self-esteem; he called on individuals to seek personal freedom by daring to assert themselves in the face of confining hegemonic views. His thinking inspired generations of creative individualists (Richardson 1995).

Be this as it may, there are other forms of self-reliance more in tune with vocational pedagogy. Self-reliance can also be built collectively, based on the interplay between the individual and the social or working group. This form of self-reliance is predicated on the individual's ability to gain self-esteem by working alongside, and in combination with, others. Social learning in relation to work, or what above was called engagement in "communities of practice," is one way of building self-esteem while striving for societal self-reliance. This point of view has much in common with the Tanzanian ideology of **Ujamaa** of the Julius Nyerere-era and which continues to be discussed in Tanzania today (Bondarenko & Nkyabonaki 2012). These researchers, Bondarenko and Nkyabonaki, conducted a survey in Dar es Salaam and Morogoro to assess people's feelings about self-reliance and foreign aid in the context of the distribution of anti-malarial bed nets by NGOs across Tanzania. Many of their respondents considered both development aid **and** self-reliance as necessary to their lives, and pointed out that foreign aid was morally justified, especially to salve the consciences of former colonial masters. The main problems they saw were corruption, inefficiency and a poorly performing civil service within the country. While the donated bed nets were welcomed, the consensus was that the situation would be much better with local production and distribution so that the initiative could be sustained.

We maintain that vocational pedagogues, in their teaching and research, generally would do well to adopt what feminist sociologists and historians have called an "engaged standpoint of knowing" (Haraway 1988, Harding 1986, Smith 1999). This standpoint, as we tried to adopt it in East Africa, has to do with the relation between work and learning. It is not conducted from a distant or disembodied location—from an ivory tower—but from up close where people are learning to make things and provide complex services—and indeed, the study of such processes is itself "situated learning." All of us as researchers can participate in situated learning by consciously placing ourselves and our activities within the focus of the studies we investigate. This is particularly true in the field of vocational pedagogy. Do we grasp the situation better if we stand with the administrators and evaluators of society, or with those who make the clothes, produce the food, maintain the computers and repair the cars? We have to understand the working relations of those who adopt the hegemonic ways of thinking—those presumably in possession of the bigger picture—as well as the working relations of those who produce the goods and services in society. Work relations of producers and members of the work force, and potential work force, are steeped in social learning, communities of practice where ideas and practices are directly experiential, participatory, shared, discussed as well as LISTENED TO and interacted with, to cooperate in order to use skills and tools to make or build something (see also Daly 2009). Wherever we are located when we carry out research and extend knowledge about certain conditions of learning and work—whether combining North and South or local researchers and local skills learners—it is important to **work with**, and not simply **write about** the subject community. This is never a smooth process; such endeavours are always weighed down by ignorance and prejudice on both sides, but particularly by the ignorance and prejudice of the more empowered side of the equation (see Daly's introduction, Point Bolton & Daly 2013).

From the perspective of the recent NOMA project delivered at KyU (Kyambogo), the graduates have subsequently found ways and forums for carrying vocational pedagogy further.¹⁷ They have taken the initiative to organize two symposia on vocational pedagogy. The students set up their own online journal called "**The Vocational Pedagogue**", posting pedagogical news and activities on the internet to help keep their ideas and their professional discourse alive. Publicity for vocational

pedagogy is essential to its continuity, its growth and development. **Harambee Publishing** was established by Professor Mjelde in Kampala to promote the concerns of work and learning. The aim was both to show local audiences and the wider world the rich detailed empirical knowledge found in the graduates' thesis work and also to expose readers to the conditions of work and learning in trades and professions in East Africa.

Graduates from the first cohort have also started to take their experience and ideas of vocational pedagogy to the employers and civil service administrators (in a series of "stakeholder" sessions) so that those with power and influence become surrounded by ideas about a form of education that is an alternative and a supplement to purely academic schooling. These are persons who are used to formal academic training and individual competition, and are less familiar with group work, practice-based activity, inductive learning, cooperation and consultation. To gain influence it is important to talk, lecture, give papers, publish texts, and exchange ideas electronically and professionally. This is not to say international aid should be abandoned in favour of local initiatives, but, for the time being, it is important that North-South cooperation also be geared towards self-generated activities that increase the awareness of vocational pedagogy and thereby increase educational and economic self-reliance in the region, and at the same time strive to strengthen vocational education, its needs, conditions and possibilities.

To become cooperating colleagues in international studies, partners in projects and exchangers of ideas, the vocational pedagogues from the south have constantly to sink roots in the vocational pedagogical tradition (of both the industrial north and the agrarian south) and not fall back into the assumptions of formal academic learning. To find solutions, we who are from "the North" have to free our minds by constantly questioning our supposed entitlement and the firmness of our ethnocentric assumptions. Donor mentality must be washed away, and along with it, ethno-centrism and Euro-centrism. This task is clearer when we have a grasp of the European colonial experiences faced by East Africans over the past centuries. Development aid is called "poverty reduction," in United Nations documents, particularly with regard to "millennium goals."¹⁸ However, poverty and underdevelopment are seldom directly related to the historical period of colonial control of much of Africa by European countries interested in raw materials, cheap labour and an extended market for European industrial products.

Another feature under-communicated today is that colonial and imperial expansion continues to affect many countries under the rubric of globalization. Poverty, following generations of economic dependency on industrial "northern" countries, remains a reality for many (Harrison 2013:1-2) and its reality ought to be part of vocational research whether in the North or in former colonial countries.

In the North, particularly in Scandinavia, vocational education and training in schools and workplaces have been historically connected to industrialization. One complexity of international capital is that Africa has been a major region where the North collects the raw materials for its industrialization and tries to sell its finished goods. Vocational education and training have had different features and functions in the North and South. Yet both in South and North the contradictions between vocational education and training, on one hand and academic education, on the other, are highly visible. The fact that VET is regarded as a poor cousin of general education seems to be similar in both North and South, but it suffers much more neglect in the South where injustice and poverty are particularly salient.

Formal educational institutions have experienced enormous growth during the past fifty years of neo-liberal¹⁹ globalization both in the so-called North and South.²⁰ This growth seems to be intimately linked to the universal belief that an educated population is crucial to ever-changing and innovative productivity. Educational reform policies are high on the agendas of the so-called developing countries. In these countries of the "South", educators possess both faith in and scepticism

toward constructing national copies of the educational systems found in the rich western countries. As well, especially in “the North”, education is a commodity for export, as seen in many of the development projects mounted by the Western world for the “less-developed” countries. Rune Sakslind (2002) maintains that the modern, reason-based, hierarchically-organized education system of “the Western World” has become a corporate cultural brand that is exported globally, both on the strength of its effectiveness and as a symbol of freedom, democracy, individualism and human rights. These developments are replete with dilemmas and contradictions no matter where they occur. One of the UN’s “millennium goals” was to eradicate poverty from the world within 2015. Toward this end, industrialization and vocational education have been looked upon as essential tools. But poverty is far from eliminated in the South; as for the North, poverty and unemployment are also at the core of the unrest in Europe with thousands of young people out of work and taking to the streets in many diverse cities which are also coping with refugees from war zones, poverty and famine. There are also discussions highly critical of so-called development aid in general and specifically in relation to educational projects.²¹

How are we to grapple with these contradictions as we promote research and development in vocational education and training? *More specifically how are we to address fundamental questions concerning how to organize teaching and learning processes wherever we are, and especially if we work to implement ideas from the North to the so-called developing world? What is demanded of the “eyes and ears” of researchers from the North working in the South?* Vita Florence, a South-Sudanese student in the first cohort of the NOMA project at Kyambogo University in Kampala expressed the dilemma in these terms: “The colonial masters were mental and psychological victims of racism and suffered from superiority complexes” (exam project 2009:21).²² What does this “post-colonial” world look like today? How, in our daily work of teaching and researching in the South, do we, researchers and program developers from the North, handle this problematic inheritance? Is our situation the same as the one in the South? Perhaps the Kenyan writer WaThiongoNgugi’s call for “decolonizing the mind” is a useful concept for developing critical analytical minds in both North and South.

Our experience in East Africa has left us with all these question. It has also shown us that whatever degree of success we achieved, each step of the way was an exercise in “decolonizing our minds” away from today’s hegemonic, neo-liberal, academic thinking and being open to learn together with our students--our vocational learners, who are also tomorrow’s teachers and mentors—and who are familiar with working together with a high degree of social competence. In other words, we learned a great deal from the NOMA experience, knowledge acquired together with and directly from our students in East Africa.

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See also:

- The Masters Theses of the Masters of Vocational Pedagogy graduating in 2011. Kampala: Kyambogo University;
- The exam projects of the Masters’ students in Vocational Pedagogy, Kyambogo University, 2009;
- The mini-projects of the Masters students in Vocational Pedagogy during 2009-2010, Kyambogo University.

¹ The Norwegian masters program (NOMA- SIU) was financed by NORAD, the Norwegian government’s agency for foreign aid. The program started in 2007 and finished Dec 31, 2013. The program had a budget around 1.7 million US dollars. Liv Mjelde was the project leader from 2007 until March 1, 2011 and we spent long periods of time in Kampala between 2007 and 2011 building up the program together with colleagues at Kyambogo University. Preparatory work was done as well in both Sudan and South Sudan (see also Mjelde & Daly 2012, Mjelde 2015).

² Lutalo-Bosa, James 2006: *Proposed Education Project for Northern Uganda and Southern Sudan*. Kampala: Kyambogo University. See also Egau 2002, Kyakulumbye 2008.

³ One problem confronting the NOMA program was shortcomings in equipment and material conditions. For example, where on campus should the program establish its working space? Northern donors impose restrictions on how to use project funds. Eventually we were given special permission to renovate two old houses on campus to house the NOMA project

⁴ The first cohort consisted of 2/3 Ugandan students and 1/3 from Southern Sudan. The two next cohort had 50/50, Uganda/South-Sudan in each cohort. The competition over the scholarships was intense; the first year there were 160 applicants for 14 places in Uganda and the number of applicants only increased with subsequent cohorts. To make the program known in war ridden South-Sudan was very complex and the recruitment process met with difficulties.

⁵ According to vocational didactics, the core of learning is the labor process or the work activity itself. Vocational didactics takes the work activity as the site of learning. Learning revolves around the act of creating or making goods or services, whether tool-making, hairdressing, social work, carpentry or even, carrying out research and preparing to write a thesis—where the activities center around gathering data, organizing them, discussing them, writing down the findings, reflecting upon them, criticizing one another’s work and preparing the “finished product.”

⁶ The program was evaluated after each module and annual follow-up reports were demanded by the Norwegian authorities. These citations are from the different evaluations conducted among the students and cited in the Annual Report 2010 to SIU/NORAD, delivered March 15, 2010. Some of the evaluations were anonymous and others were signed with the students’ names.

- ⁷ The intrigues and disputes in the academic world seemed rather similar in the North and South. But the level of violence is different. The explosions at Kyambogo led to physical violence and the university closed for six months. The Vice-Chancellor, an eloquent proponent of vocational education, took the university to court over his dismissal. Later he was vindicated of all accusations and was awarded considerable financial compensation by the courts.
- ⁸ The credentials of three of the students from South Sudan were not accepted by Kyambogo University. They were transferred to AUCs. Fourteen students from Uganda and two from South Sudan were awarded their degree in February 2011. We also had difficulties fulfilling the demand for a 50/50 % gender balance, among Sudanese students in the first cohort.
- ⁹ The main problem was actually the lack of textual material in the social sciences in general and lack of reading material in vocational education.
- ¹⁰ The VET and Culture Network experienced the negative effect of this power relation in the NOMA project during the annual VET Conference held at Torino in September, 2011. Four Kyambogo colleagues were budgeted to attend the Torino Conference to present papers. They delivered abstracts for the conference, but weeks later, shortly before the conference, the new NOMA project leadership refused to release the budgeted funds for these colleagues' travel, thus diminishing the African colleagues' acquisition of knowledge in the field of vocational pedagogy.
- ¹¹ This was not achieved in the NOMA project. The recruitment from South Sudan was difficult.
- ¹² Benson Okellow was one of our colleagues and an active mentor in the NOMA project.
- ¹³ Now part of the newly amalgamated HiOA: Høgskole i Oslo og Akershus (Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Science).
- ¹⁴ The first step to develop the program was to organize a 'meeting of sensitization' with, among others, educational authorities and labour organizations in Uganda (see Nabaggala 2009). There is a difference between educational institutions in the South and the North when it comes to the relation between vocational subjects and general subjects in schools and universities. State-regulated apprenticeship traditions are strong in parts of Europe and this way of organising learning seemed to be absent in Uganda and South Sudan.
- ¹⁵ Some would say that we live in a post-industrial world. However it is possible to challenge this view by asking, is industrial production at a lower level in the twenty-first century than previously? The answer is probably found in the fact that industrial production has been massively consolidated into a limited number of countries. At the same time, the exploitation of labor and raw materials around the globe are being pursued as never before.
- ¹⁶ Vocational pedagogical knowledge has its roots in the workshop tradition of the guild system and in school workshops that developed with industrialization and saw the growth of vocational education at school (Mjelde 2006 p. 31). Historical perspectives of vocational education in crafts and industry are essential for vocational education's own self-awareness. It is important to develop an understanding of this uniqueness within vocational education and how it distinguishes itself qualitatively from general pedagogical thinking (Schriever & Harney 1999, Harney et al 2002).
- ¹⁷ Our counterpart Dr. Habib Kato and his colleague Dr. Constance A. Nsibambi at Kyambogo University are summing up the results from the Noma projects. They have published the results in the International Journal of Vocational Education and Training.
- ¹⁸ www.unmillenniumproject.org/goals/, accessed June 2016.
- ¹⁹ Neoliberalism is a general term for the economic perspective of recent decades that advocates economic liberalization, privatization, free trade, open markets, deregulation, reduced government spending to enhance the role of the economy's private sector of the economy. See, for instance Campbell Jones, Martin Parker, Rene Ten Bos (2005). *For Business Ethics*. Routledge, p. 100: "Neoliberalism represents a set of ideas that caught on from the mid to late 1970s, and are famously associated with the economic policies introduced by Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom and Ronald Reagan in the United States following their elections in 1979 and 1981. The 'neo' part of neoliberalism indicates that there is something new about it, suggesting that it is an updated version of older ideas about 'liberal economics' which has long argued that markets should be free from intervention by the state. In its simplest version, it reads: markets good, government bad."
- ²⁰ Many concepts have been used in describing countries' unequal development in the global economic picture of today. The non-Western world is variously known as the ancient world, the primitive world, the developing world, the underdeveloped world and now the global south (see Comaroff & Comaroff 2012). In Norway, the concepts North/South seem to be used in relation to development aid. Liv Mjelde and I have adopted the terms North/South, as they fit the geographical North/South when it comes to Norway/Africa. However, we remain skeptical to all these concepts. Some are used below for lack of clear alternatives.
- ²¹ Norway's *Bistandsaktuelt* (Current Affairs in Development Aid), 2014, Nr. 6, August, carried an 8-page account of poverty and unemployment in the streets of Kampala, Uganda, "Where the dream job is whatever comes up." The article pointed out that three-quarters of youth in most developing countries are under-employed or unemployed and are not being given the knowledge and skills necessary for today's labour market.
- ²² We are of the view that "new history lessons" are required for us Northerners as to African and colonial history; we could also do with lessons in humility toward this history. The NOMA project has been a steep learning curve. One thing we did in the program was to make a huge effort toward grounding vocational education and training in Uganda and South Sudan. We wanted to ground the project in African soil, in the traditions of vocational education in relation to the labor markets in Uganda and Southern Sudan.