



Haastattelu:

Professori Susanne Weber, Institute of Human Resource Education & Management, Ludwig-Maximilians University, Saksa

PN: Professor Weber, please tell us who you are and what you do?

SW: I am a full professor and director of the Institute of Human Resource Education and Management, which is located in the Munich School of Management at Ludwig-Maximilians University, München (LMU).

Many years ago my initial interest was to become a teacher. When my classmates struggled with recruiting pro-

cedures within their transition process from school-to-work I got interested in these recruitment processes and applied myself – just to experience this process. Then I got an offer to start an apprenticeship from the State Bank of Lower Saxony. I took this chance. The job was very interesting and I got to know about various job tasks, including a profession of VET teachers. Part of my job was to spend one or two days per week in a VET school, and that made me interested in becoming a VET teacher.

After seven years in the bank I applied for a study program at the University of Göttingen. During the studies I worked in projects and got to know about academic work, so after my master's thesis it was natural for me to start doctoral studies on VET students' prior knowledge and its change.

After completing my PhD I did my advanced research (habilitation) on international issues and intercultural learning. I was awarded a professor position at LMU in 2005 and since then I have been conducting research on many topics, including intra-/entrepreneurship education, workplace learning and VET teacher education. I am not only interested in teaching for the job, but also education (*Bildung*) is very important as students should have possibilities to develop their professional identities.

PN: What is the current status of VET in Germany?

SW: It is a collective skills system, where many stakeholders are involved: mainly, government, 16 states, trade unions, employers' associations, chambers of commerce and industry as well as chambers of handicraft. This is a great challenge to balance the tensions of different voices, especially, when negotiating commonly shared curricula or adequate instructional means and assessment procedures.

PN: How do you see the future of VET?

SW: Important issues that need to be considered under a future perspective are intra-/entrepreneurship, opportunity recognition, dealing with risk, teamwork and intercultural issues. What comes to certifications, we need to aim towards

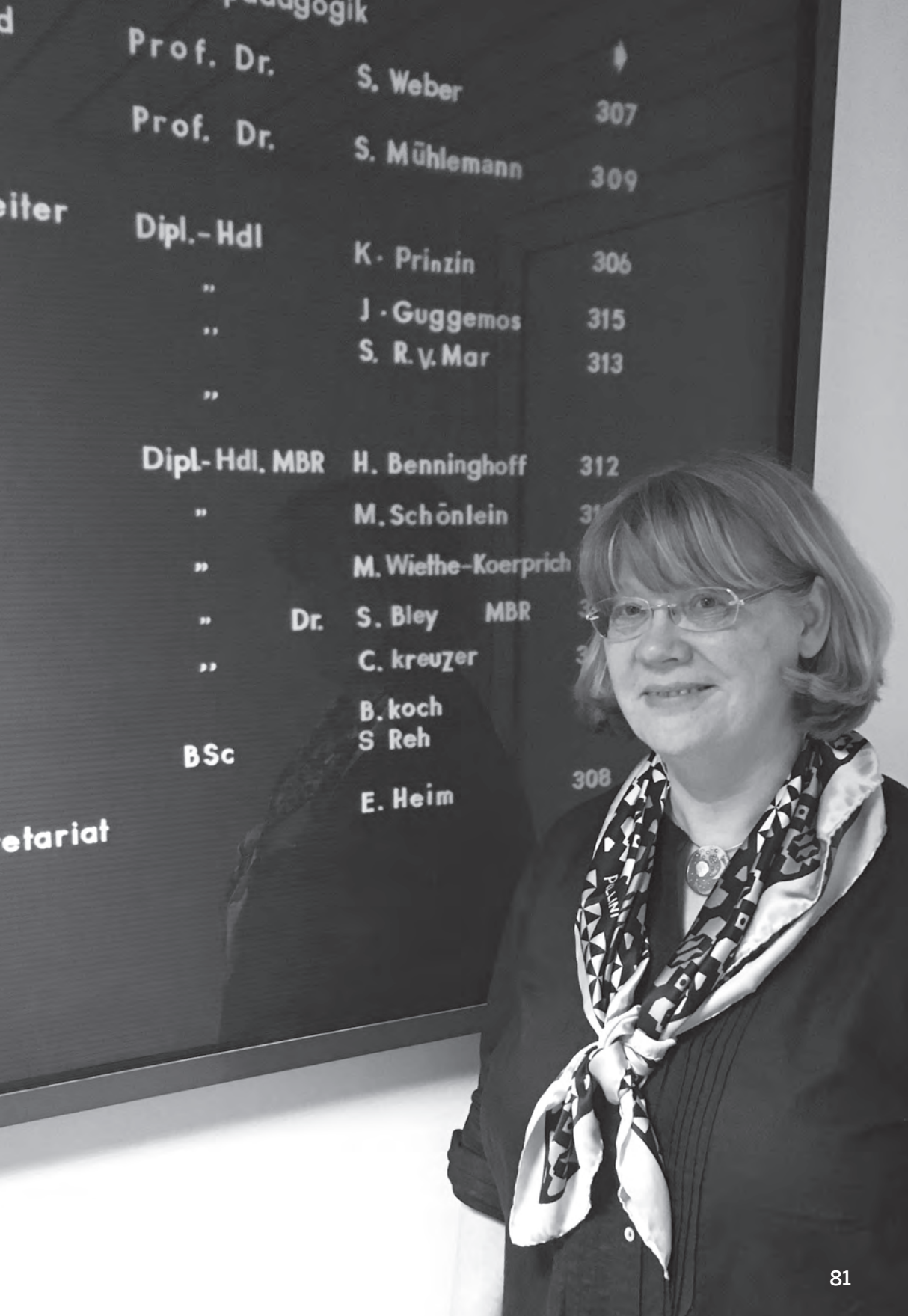
flexibility and avoid BA programs which are too narrow to VET. One possibility is to have Executive Bachelors and Masters in addition to academic degrees. Currently we have new kinds of dual programs where apprenticeship and BA program take place at the same time – BMW, for example, has this kind of training in the commercial sector.

PN: What are the main concerns for the VET system in Germany?

SW: Of course we have some issues in the dual system, for example, about firms selecting mostly the young students. That means that apprenticeships – as the main part of VET programs in Germany – are not accessible to everyone. Another concern is the labeling of the jobs as young people are not informed about the underlying occupational tasks and/or it sounds old-fashioned for them so that they cannot identify with such an apprenticeship. More information about certain occupations is needed to give orientation and increase their attractiveness. One solution is the BERUFE-TV (<http://www.berufe.tv>), which contains videoclips made by the Bundesagentur für Arbeit for apprentices to inform about different vocations. Finally, we need to address issues related to career development, and especially, the currently most challenging theme is how to train and to educate migrants and refugees to integrate and bring them into the labor market.

PN: I think our readers would be interested in learning what is it like to be a VET teacher in Germany?

SW: It is an interesting, broad and challenging profession as you teach students of 16-30 years of age. One needs to



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know about developmental tasks as students are at different stages. Some students need more guidance or support on self-regulated learning. The student population is heterogeneous as we have a quite large number of migrants and refugees. Here in the Bavaria region 30 000 students from various ethnic groups go to vocational schools, some of them are illiterates, others interrupted their university studies at home.

VET teachers need to be aware what happens in the field, but this is not a problem as they have a close connection to firms. Teachers get all the time feedback on their teaching from the students and the company trainers. Interaction between institutions and firms takes place all the time as teachers are involved in many interesting projects with Siemens, BMW, Stadtwerke, general transportation and consulting firms.

VET teacher education (for Germany, Austria and Switzerland) renewed its general curriculum in BA/MA programs, I was the President of the committee. We wanted to stress the importance of three main issues: VET teachers should be competent on 1) the structure of the whole VET system and context factors influencing learning and development, 2) modern learning and teaching theories as well as 3) research methodology, as they are consumers and producers of new knowledge.

PN: The German dual system is internationally well known. Could you describe at the general level what are the main functions of the system?

SW: Firstly, to provide for an individual portable competencies, secondly, to safeguard industry and market with skill-

ful employees; thirdly, to promote participation and social embeddedness in society; fourthly, to promote individuals' well being. Our goal is to guide young people from adolescence to adulthood so that they become independent of parents or other care takers on thinking, financial issues, and learn to take responsibility for their future. The dual system contains many features to support this: students have working contracts, they earn money and they learn to argue, to take responsibility in real work contexts and collaborate in institutional and work-related communities. The role of VET institutions is to support theoretical issues (general and vocational), allow experimenting without fear of consequences as well as to reflect and structure experiences, the role of working life is to provide authentic learning experiences and to support the development of work identities.

PN: How about your current research interests?

SW: Currently I am interested in proactivity in business and human resource education contexts such like entrepreneurship competence (we are conducting large scale assessments in apprenticeship). Teamwork is one of my research topics, especially supporting factors (university level BA) for team competence. Then I continue the research on intercultural learning (my habilitation). In total, I can see a good opportunity for international research collaboration.

I warmly thank Professor Susanne Weber for this interview.

Petri Nokelainen