



Universitetet
i Sørøst-Norge

3 types of tightrope dance

Findings of a longitudinal ethnographic study
in Norway of dropping out as well as
reentering education

Mette Bunting and Geir Moshuus



Content

- Society has changed
- How can we understand dropout
- Another way to research
- What do we find through the young people's own stories?

Baker's «The schooled Society»

- *School mandatory and essential for all*
- *Culture og education influence*
- *Subjectively and objectively define individual success and failure*



The Schooled Society

«The Schooled Society» a new phase in the knowledge economy?

Skolesamfunnet

kompetansekrav og ungdomsfellesskap

DAVID P. BAKER

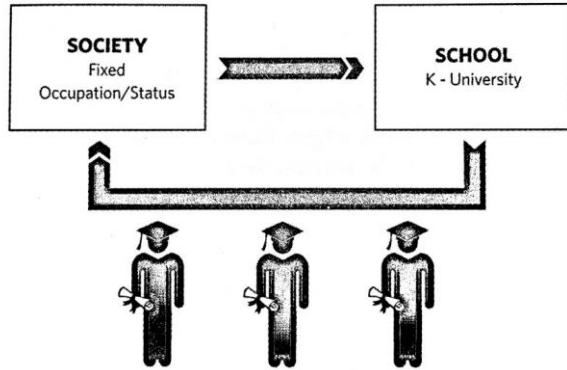


FIGURE I.1 Traditional perspective on the relationship between education and society.

Trad. view of the knowledge economy

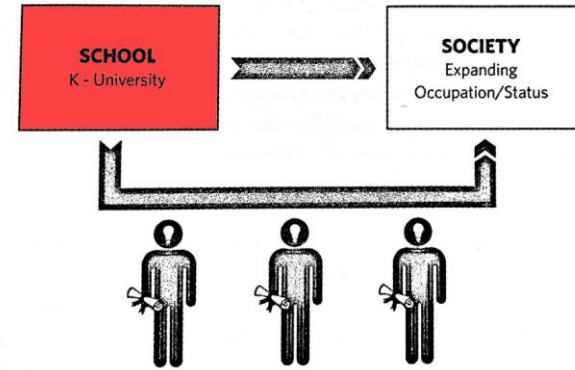


FIGURE I.2 Schooled society (neo-institutional) perspective on the relationship between education and society.

The Schooled Society



Short background. Dropout in Norway

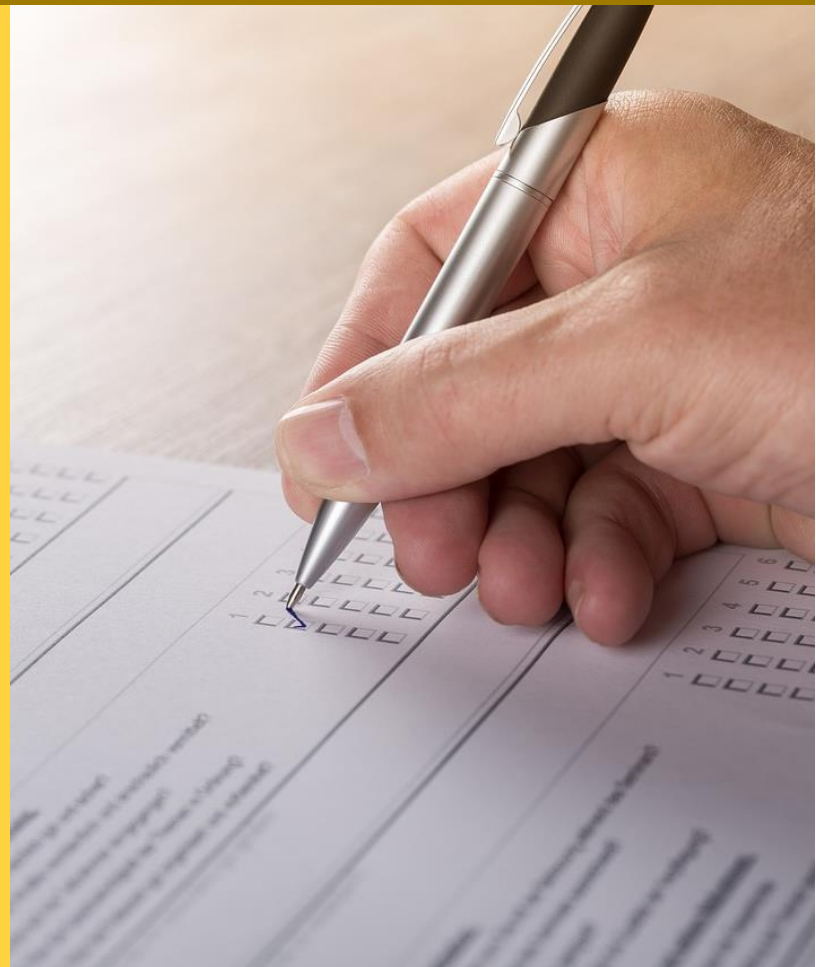


Completion rate, upper secondary in Norway, 2012-2017

74,5%

How can we understand dropout??

- Quantitative
- Qualitative



Risk factors

Family background

Boys

Local environment

Bad marks from
lower secondary
school

Vocational

Not Norwegian as
mother tongue

Living with
one parent

Other reasons

What can't this research tell us?

Youth, completion and drop out in Telemark (2013-2023)

Research financed by FARVE – Department for welfare and work and USN

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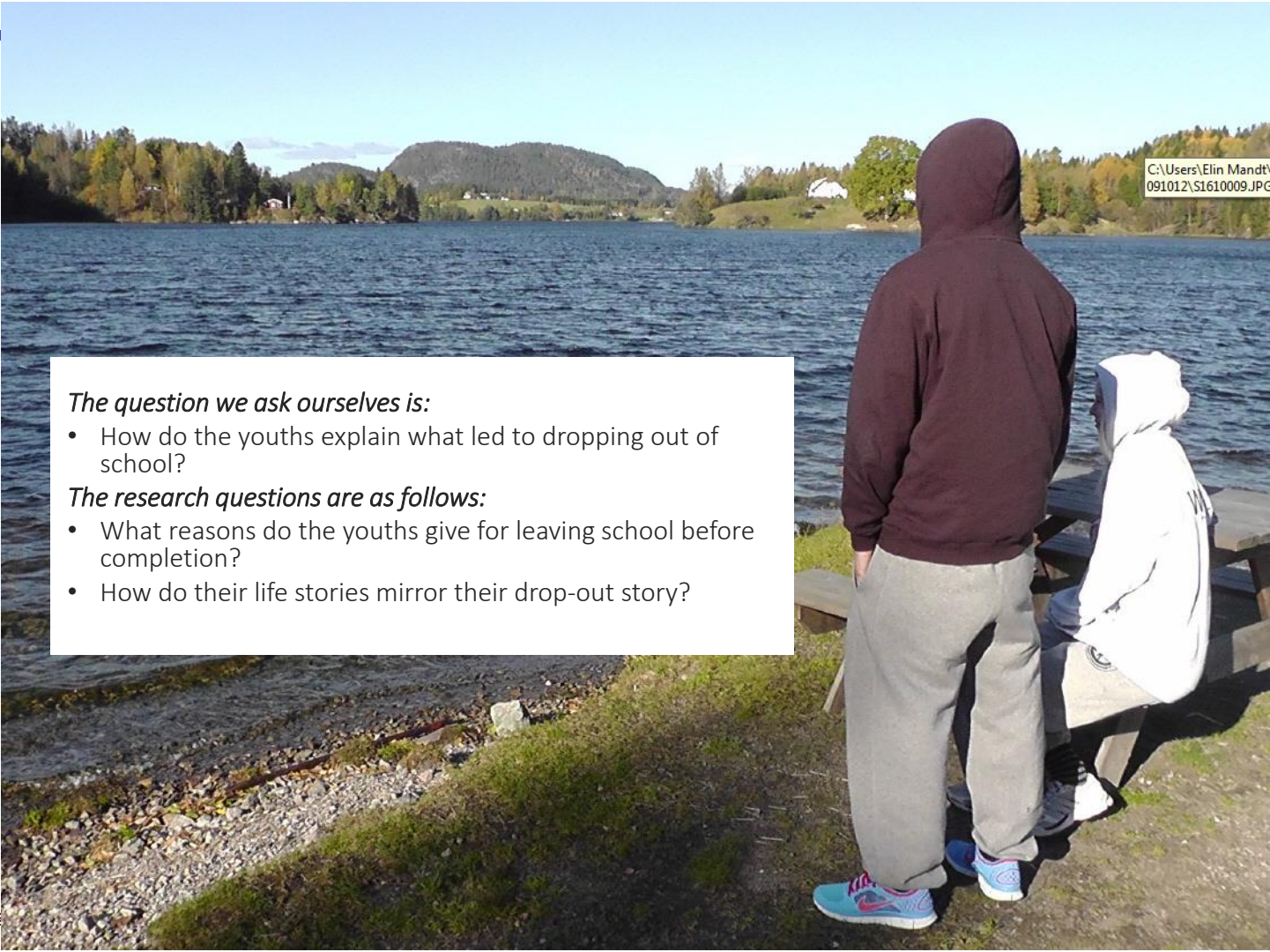
Scientific Assistant Trine S. Ask

PhD-candidate Mari Bergåker

21 students and their master theses







The question we ask ourselves is:

- How do the youths explain what led to dropping out of school?

The research questions are as follows:

- What reasons do the youths give for leaving school before completion?
- How do their life stories mirror their drop-out story?

The success of our research builds on

- Cooperation with practitioners
- Students as co-researchers
- The way we interview

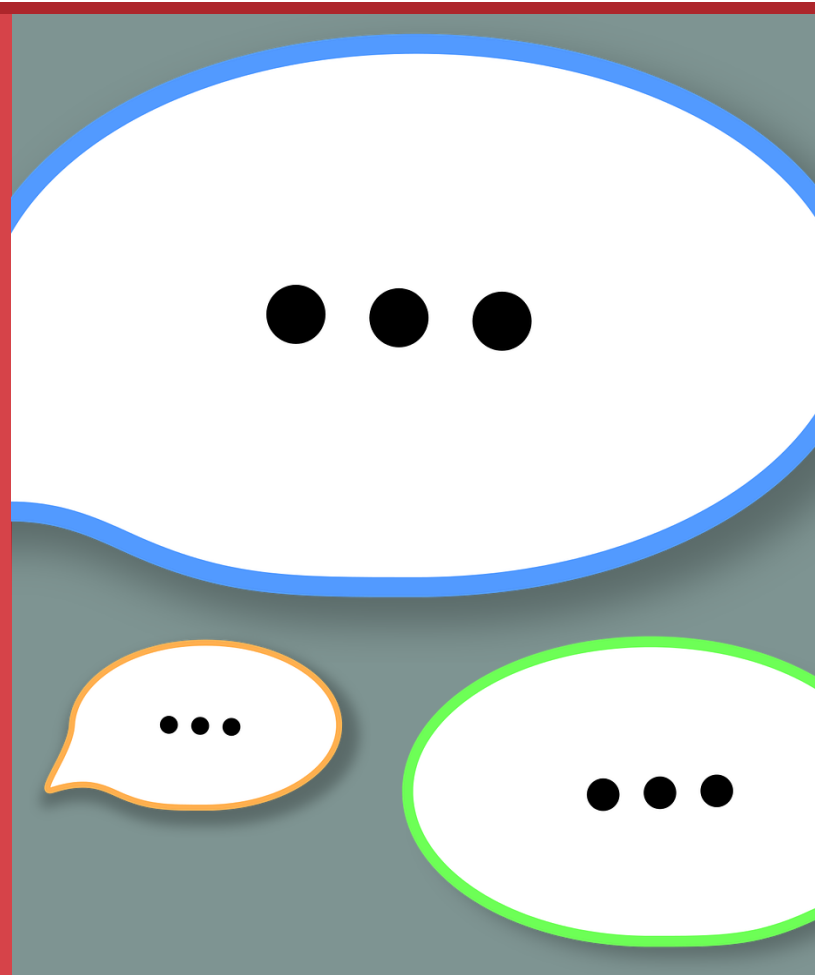


Methodology

Longitudinal qualitative study- 10 years altogether, we are in the fifth year

Narrative interviews, collect an in-depth knowledge of the individual life stories.

- 71 participants,
- Age of 16-21, when we started
- Are interviewed 1-4 times, dependant on availability



We have an obligation to ask:

From where do our
questions originate?

*And then we know to whom
we are accountable.*



We have to find another way!

1. We want to find the unique and personal experiences
2. We have to find out about the relationship between us as researchers and them as informants
3. We do NOT want to have answers to our questions- we want to have the young people's stories about their lives.



How can these perspectives contribute into the research about young people?

BACK TO SCHOOL



An example



When a young man was answering a questions about hobbies, he smilingly said he loved cats. After having followed this interest, the conversation went over to the tattoo he ad which included the name of a friend's cat.

From there a dialogue developed, and instead of answering the questions he told his story. He told us about his love for animals and his loneliness and lack of human contact. The stories also contained dropout and therapy sessions.

The young people told us two stories that revealed the complexity of dropout.

This is what they said at first:

- A singular event,
 - Failed the exam, didn't get an apprenticeship, chose the wrong strand....
 - Some examples of another story appearing

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Young peoples' own stories about dropping out in Norway:
An indirect qualitative approach

Sammendrag

Mye forskning om skoleavbrudd i videregående opplæring ser på risikofaktorer, som sosio-økonomisk bakgrunn, grunnskolepoeng og kjønn, og kan derfor sies å fokusere på individuelle og strukturelle faktorer. Artikkelen argumenterer for heller å se på skoleavbrudd som et samspill eller møte mellom individet og systemet, det individuelle og strukturelle. Forskingen baseres på data fra en longitudinell kvalitativ studie i sitt fjerde år. Informantene er ungdom i NAV-systemet som har sluttet på videregående skole, men som fortsatt har skolerett. Gjennom den indirekte metoden, en intervjuetode basert på etnografiske intervjuer, søkes det å legge til rette for at ungdommene kan fortelle sine historier med egne ord og på sin måte. Disse fortellingene belyser avbruddsprosessene, og beskriver opplevelser forut for avbruddet. Funnene viser at selv om ungdommene sier dette skjer på grunn av enkelthendelser, belyser fortellingene deres at dette er komplekse prosesser som ligger til grunn, gjerne år tilbake. Artikkelen konkluderer med at sosialt medierte prosesser også utenfor skole, må vektlegges for å kunne forstå skoleavbrudd.

Nøkkelord: frafall, kvalitativ longitudinell studie, livshistorier, etnografisk intervju, ungdom, videregående skole

Abstract

Research on dropout from upper secondary school usually focuses on risk factors such as socioeconomic background, previous academic results and gender—that is, on individual and structural factors. The present article argues for a shift of focus, looking at dropping out as an interaction between the person and the system—between the individual and the structural. This research draws on interview data from a longitudinal qualitative study (now in its fourth year) of young people both in and out of school. The informants were young dropouts

Paula

Primary school

- I do not know why. But I was very different. And it meant that it was difficult to sit in class with the others. Because everything you did was observed. Because you did something without understanding why people thought what you did was strange. So then you did something strange. And now I can understand better. For example when we were going to take a photo, and then I came with these mucky boots and the hair in a.. And then I sit down and smile. Another girl wouldn't have done that.

Paula

- I was often teased by the teachers. A lot of times it was fun. Yes, if you decide to stand up for something- and things like that, that is ok. And some other times then I was being made fun of in front of the class. If they used persons as examples, then I often was picked. But that was because I could take more than the other girls.

Peter

- Yes, I think sort of, that it is the schools fault, that I have dyslexia. Because I think that, that a lot of the reason that I have dyslexia today is because I have been bullied. At primary school, at lower and upper secondary school. Because then, perhaps you quickly, yes how should I put it, hm, [...] school should be a place that is safe and good, but perhaps it isn't. You are supposed to learn there, but you are challenged differently in you everyday life. Where you perhaps start thinking about other things, and become unmotivated because you are being bullied. And unconcentrated because of this, and lost a bit of, what should I say, the fire, or the strength to actually bother to try in a way.
- I mean, if not, if the school or the teachers had been better at forcefully stopping the bullying at primary school, then I don't think I would have struggled so much with the dyslexia. And the way it is, I don't struggle so much now, except from my dyscalculia. But I don't think I would have struggled so much at upper secondary school, I don't think so.

Dennis

- We [father and son] look exactly the same, but he is... he is very serious, he is an adult. It's not like he has struggled with things, but he is a bit too fond of alcohol. And he becomes very emotional when he is drunk, and I hate to look at that. It's ok, he can have some and cry on my shoulder, things like that. But when you have a child at home [Dennis' sister] and you drink, and you can't take beer ... so he drinks five beers, and then he walks like this. And. And Elisabeth [sister] is there, and then I become nearly like «No, I am taking her away» sort of. And then I go to grandma and granddad and deliver her there.
- And grandma and granddad are the most serious people I know that I have seen all my life, that I know of. So it's like. But when they start drinking and they have a good time in a way, then they can be a bit like «Where's the party?» in a way, like them too. But then the crying starts and things like that. And Elisabeth sits there, in front of them. And then I get upset that she sees this. Because I do not want to see this either. It isn't fun to see you daddy cry when you are at the age she is, and not understand.

Another story

Their complex life situation

Challenges at school as bullying, learning difficulties', lack of relationship

Challenges at home, single families, addiction, welfare, poverty, being alone

Dropout as a mediated social process- over time, a process in the meeting with the institutional level.



Education, Youth & Biographies:

The Steady, The Shaky & The Shivering



Three Types of Tightrope Dance in the Comeback Process

Preliminary Findings from a Longitudinal Study of Young People at
the Margins of Upper Secondary School in Norway

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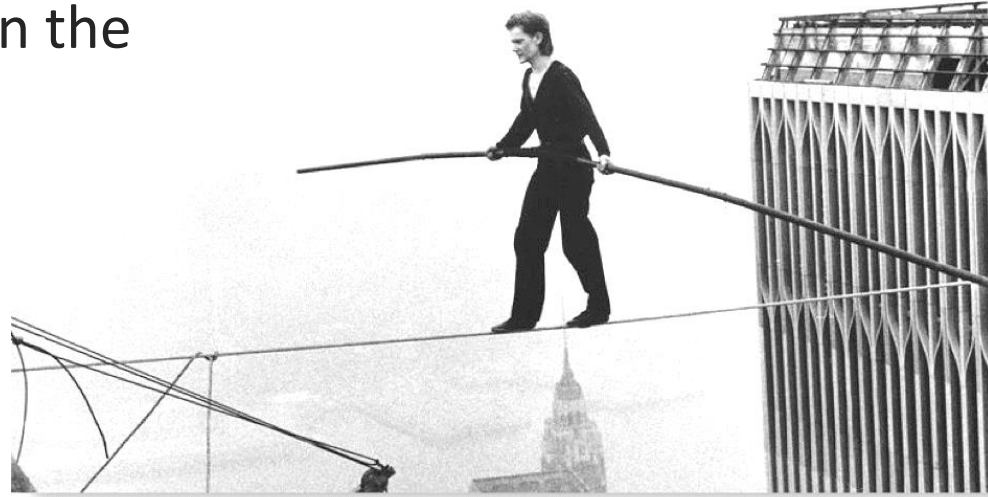
Abstract: Fewer than half of the young people attending vocational institutions in Norway complete their education within the allotted five years. Indeed, many of these students have non-linear paths to completion. However, it is not changes in the dropout rate that make this different from earlier generations but the expansion of formal education and the rise of the knowledge society and individualisation. The term 'tightrope biographies' is used here to encapsulate why individualisation cannot be thought of in terms of choice, because today's youth are often held accountable for their educational progression rather than this progression being viewed as dependent on institutional mechanisms. The present study characterises young people as *tightrope dancers* in their interactions with vocational schools. Selected data collected from ethnographic interviews during the ongoing longitudinal project *Youth, Completion and Dropout in Telemark* are used here to capture the voices of young people. These data focus on the non-linear educational careers of these youth when they re-enter schools and explore the stories they tell about dropping out and re-entering. These stories suggest that, to succeed, students need customised support throughout the process from school to the workplace and that many depend on this support. The study identifies three different ways of understanding these students as tightrope dancers trying to get back on track, characterising them as The Steady, The Shaky and The Shivering.

Keywords: VET, Vocational Education and Training, School Leavers, Tightrope Biographies, Knowledge Society, Continuing Vocational Education and Training, Re-entry Students, Pushout, Youth Research

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Three Types of Tightrope Dance in the Comeback Process

Young people's stories over time interpreted as biographies formed in an entrepreneurial spirit («My Story»)



Tightrope biographies (dances) describe how young navigate their Self according to (hidden) guidelines



Kent

- Dropped out of apprenticeship in the restaurant strand
- Goes back to school doing a different strand (concrete worker)
- Gets good grades at school and finds a new apprenticeship



Lina

- Dropped out of health and social strand failing to complete exams
- Returns to complete the missing exams
- She is now getting good grades – but has absences



Lars

- Fails to complete exams but is expelled because of drug consumption
- Returns to school and is closely followed by parents
- Struggles to balance hashish use with his efforts at school

They belong to the same risk group: They have low entry grades, they dropped out of school, parents with little education and modest income. They all present their schooling as selfmade decisions.

Three types of Tightrope Dances

Schooling as selfmade decisions:

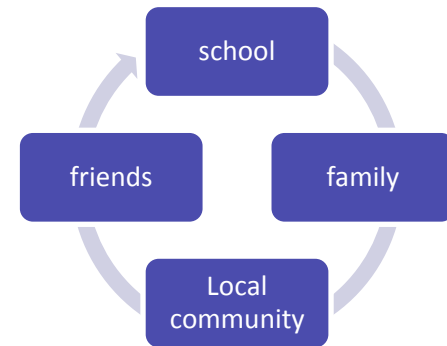
Kent – dealing with a negative appranteship experience

Lina – dealing with a mother into drugs

Lars – dealing with his own hashish consumption

The Steady – The Shaky – The Shivering

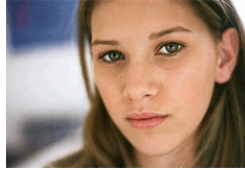
Schooling result of young people in relations to their surroundings:



Tightrope Dances at the margins of school



Kent
The Steady



Lina
The Shaky



Lars
The Shivering

- **The Steady** – risk group – strong relations – local community, friends, school and family
- **The Shaky** – risk group – weaker relations – local community, friends, school and family
- **The Shivering** – risk group – possibly broken relations – local community, friends, school and family

What lesson may we draw from this?

1. Youth at risk? – Look at their relationships and context!
2. Education extends beyond school!
3. Same risk group: Interventions that help some - may not help others!
4. Dropout Research need to give young people a voice!



Our publications:



- ✓ **Bunting M., & Moshuus, G.H.**, (2017) - Young peoples' own stories of dropping out in Norway: An indirect qualitative approach, *Acta Didactica*, Vol.11, Nr. 2, Art. 5. [Online Access](#)
- ✓ **Bunting M., & Moshuus, G.H** (2017) - Framing Narratives: Youth and Schooling, Silencing and Dissent, *Studia paedagogica*, v. 21, n. 4, p. 35–52, Feb. 2017, [Online Access](#)
- ✓ **Bunting, M., Halvorsen, T. A., & Moshuus, G. H.** (2017) - Three Types of Tightrope Dance in the Comeback Process, *International Journal for Research in Vocational Education and Training (IJRVET)* Vol.4, Issue 2, August 2017, 1-35. [Online Access.](#)
- ✓ **Moshuus, G.H.. & Eide, K.** (2016) The Indirect Approach: How to Discover Context When Studying Marginal Youth. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods (IQJM)* January-December 2016: 1–10 [Online Access](#)



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