

HÖGSKOLAN VÄST

Knowing at work:

A study of professional knowledge in integration work directed to newly arrived immigrants

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Abstract

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Currently, new knowledge domains and professions emerge as a consequence of societal changes that transform the conditions for work and work integrated learning. Integration work directed to newly-arrived immigrants is one example of such a new professional knowledge domain. In civic orientation, which is the empirical case in this study, quality, standardization and dialogue are explicit strategies that impact the planning, organization and decision-making in everyday work. The interest in this thesis concerns the professional knowledge that is developed in activities aiming to provide heterogeneous groups of immigrants an orientation in the Swedish society. By making activity systems the prime unit of analysis and scrutinizing the ways in which integration workers make use of a stipulated course material and interactions in a specific context, the aim is to contribute to the understanding of the pedagogical and communicative knowledge that is developed in practice. The analytical approach takes its point of departure in a socio-cultural perspective on workplace studies. Three separate studies have been carried out in which the empirical data consist of observations, interviews, video recordings, field notes and documents from various integration offices.

The results show that different perspectives on knowledge and culture becomes relevant in local discourses on quality in integration work. What distinguishes the integration workers professional knowledge concern seeing and understanding the heterogeneity of immigrants' cultural backgrounds and bridging boundaries. Culture function as an organizing element in work that makes it possible to make distinctions and organize a contextually relevant content that can be elaborated together with the members in the groups. Such work imply transformation of procedures and it is shown that the integration workers develop their knowledge from specific situations to understand the significance of textually mediated meanings in other situations. Knowledge is developed as the integration workers move between different situations and activities.

It is concluded that the meaning-making involved in bridging between different cultural contexts relies on extensive knowledge in and about the recognition of the other and of interactions based on equal grounds. Negotiating agreements with the members of the groups about how common possibilities and responsibilities can be understood is central for respecting heterogeneity in the process and is at the core of the integration workers professional knowledge. Considering the future development of integration work, cumulative structures are needed that recognize and support the development of the integration workers professional knowledge within as well as between organizations and other related fields of practice and in relation to higher education.