Study Strategies - Crossing Contexts

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Network: 22. Research in Higher Education
Format: Paper

Session Information

**22 SES 06 B, Learning Contexts, Diverse Perspectives**

Paper Session

Time: 2016-08-24
15:30-17:00

Room: NM-Theatre O

Chair: Georgeta Ion

Contribution

**Study Strategies - Crossing Contexts**

This paper provides comparative cross-disciplinary aspects on elements in the professionalisation process of nurse students and veterinary students.

An inherent alternation between different learning rooms – scholastic academic classrooms and professional workplaces - is central to the profession-oriented educations. Educational structure and time allocated to each context varies between the different profession-oriented educational programs. To a great extent, profession-oriented educational development- and research projects have had a common focus on the interplay between the different learning contexts - and the classical dilemma of how to bridge theory and practice. Further, most empirical studies have been conducted in the part of the educations taking place in the work-oriented learning contexts (practice).

The paper is based on two independent case-studies referring to the educational field of future nurses and future veterinarians. Both projects can be characterised as research-based evaluation of pedagogical development projects. The projects refer to investigations in both classroom educational contexts and the contexts of (educational) workplaces.

Case 1: In the nursing educational environment, research has been conducted as ethnographic studies following students in an alternative educational model based on a principle of "practice before theory" - named the E-class. Planned as a full-scale study, students have been followed through all learning contexts, in the process from enrolment into the nursing
program as members of the E-class until graduation and entrance into the nursing field as professional nurses.

Case 2: In the veterinary educational environment, a pedagogical development project on development, implementation and evaluation of game-based learning as a possible way of strengthening the interplay between practice and theory forms the basis of the research. Veterinary students have been followed through alternating learning contexts referring to both the scholastic academic classrooms and workplaces in commercial pig herds as well as to group work and game-based situations in a mandatory master course - “the pig module”.

The projects differ in terms of both starting point and main focus of research (an alternative educational model and profession-orientated Game-based learning). However, in the on-going process of research, an empirical ‘harmony’ on common recurrent themes related to students `study strategies´ emerged from frequent discussions between researchers. The repeated common empirical themes propelled the idea of a comparative analysis aiming to answer the following overall research questions:

- How do students in profession-oriented educations manage the multiple shifts in learning contexts?
- What study strategies do students in profession-oriented educations develop and what are the possible consequences?

The common comparative analysis is mainly empirically driven. In empirical terms the analysis refers to the Nordic tradition of classroom research (Lindblad and Sahlström, 2002; Klette, 2007) and pedagogical fieldwork/concept of study strategies (Borgnakke 1996ab, Borgnakke, 2008).

Theoretically, the two projects refer to theory and concepts related to learning situations and student learning processes considered as profession-orientated and situated formation processes (Benner, Sutphen, Leonard, & Day, 2010; Benner, 2011). Further, the empirical analysis draws on Bernsteinian concepts of contexts and re-contextualisation (Bernstein, 1973, 2000), and the concept of situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Method

The two research projects share a common methodological approach inspired by educational ethnography (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1997, Borgnakke, 1996, 2011, 2013). Further, common methodological principles of “following-the-field”- “following-the-case” – “following-the-learners” inspired by Marcus (1995), implies that students were followed in real educational time and rhythm – as they were alternating across the different learning contexts (from classrooms to workplaces in hospitals and commercial swine farms). The empirical material is generated using a mix of qualitative methods. The methods range from classical ethnographic studies; participant observation, spontaneous dialogues, photos, collection of documents and interviews (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Borgnakke, 2013; Hastrup, 2010; Brinkmann, 2012, Kvale, 1997) to the experimental use of newer methods including videos and video diaries (Ran Noer, 2014; Mahl, 2012).

The research projects were conducted independently, and consequently the empirical material was generated displaced in time and space. Individually, the projects have generated a rich, diverse and detailed empirical collection. The comparative analysis arose from discussions on analytic strategies, theoretical concepts and empirical analysis in the two projects and the identification of coinciding themes related to student´s study strategies. Hence, both the theoretical framework and the empirical analysis of each of the two projects have informed the comparative analysis. However, the comparative analysis is mainly empirically driven. The analysis has focused on revealing patterns of similarities and differences related to student’s study strategies in the shifting learning contexts both within- and across cases.

Expected Outcomes

The paper aim to qualify discussions on profession-oriented education. The paper reflects the fundamental conditions of the profession-oriented educations - the alternating learning contexts and student´s multiples shifts between contexts - in new ways, attempting to widen and nuance the on-going debate on profession-oriented education. The ethnographic studies and the close-up analysis of different learning situations in different contexts aim to expand empirical knowledge on the actual teaching practices and student’s learning processes and to provide important perspectives on student’s study-strategies and their possible consequences in relation to both ‘life as a student’ and the process of professionalization. By maintaining the position of focusing upon the education as a situated and formative trajectory, the comparative analysis shows how students in profession-oriented educational settings manage the challenges of education and use study strategies.
characterised as both similar and very different within and across contexts and cases.

References


This proposal is part of a master or doctoral thesis.

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