Linköping University Postprint

Recognition of Prior Learning as a Practice for Differential Inclusion and Exclusion of **Immigrants in Sweden**

Andersson, P. and Osman, A.

N.B.: When citing this work, cite the original article.

The final, definitive version of this paper has been published in:

Adult Education Quarterly, (59), 1, 42-60, 2008.

Andersson, P. and Osman, A., Recognition of Prior Learning as a Practice for Differential Inclusion and Exclusion of Immigrants in Sweden http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0741713608325173.

by SAGE Publications Ltd, All rights reserved. http://www.sagepub.com/

Postprint available free at:

Linköping University E-Press: http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:liu:diva-15383

Recognition of Prior Learning as a Practice for Differential Inclusion and Exclusion of Immigrants in Sweden

Associate Professor Per Andersson (corresponding author)

Linköping University

Department of behavioural sciences and learning

SE-581 83 Linköping

Sweden

Phone: +46 – 13 28 21 15

Fax: +46 – 13 28 21 45

per.andersson@liu.se

Associate Professor Ali Osman

AFI-WRI

Boks 6954 St. Olavs plass

NO-0130 Oslo

Norway

Phone: +47 – 98 89 89 70

Fax: +47 – 22 56 89 18

ali.osman@afi-wri.no

Acknowledgement: Åsa Hult made the interviews in this study.

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to describe and analyze how recognition of prior learning acts as a dividing practice and a technique for inclusion/exclusion of immigrants in their vocations in Swedish working life. It is a qualitative study of three pilot programs in Swedish urban centers, and the data consist of interviews, and documents pertaining to these programs. The theoretical starting point of the analysis is three Foucauldian concepts: order of discourse, dividing practice, and technology of power. The results show how recognition of prior learning acts as a dividing practice; in the process of recognition, the targeting of certain vocations for assessment, the de-grading of competence in the process, and the differing opportunities vis-à-vis further training and the labor market, are part of the process of inclusion/exclusion in/from the "orders" of the labor market. Technologies of power – surveillance, observation, and examination – are part of this process.

Introduction

In Sweden, there is a critical mass of research that, from different perspectives, has established that ethnic minority immigrants to a large extent are excluded or, if included, are included in a subordinate position (e.g. Ekberg, 1997; Neergaard, 2000; and Schierup & Paulsson, 1994, to name a few). To address this social phenomenon, the Swedish government has implemented a pilot program to develop models to assess and recognize the education/training and experience of immigrants in Sweden (assessment/recognition of prior learning, which will be referred to in the text as validation). The aim of this article is to describe the pilot programs and analyze how the recognition of prior learning (RPL) acts as a dividing practice and a technique for inclusion and exclusion of immigrants in their vocations in Swedish working life. The analysis of the program is inspired by Foucauldian concepts such as "order of discourse" and "technology of power." Examining validation or recognition of prior learning from this point of departure is interesting as it allows us to examine and reflect on this practice as a social technology or engineering in the process of incorporating immigrants in the Swedish labor market and society.

Thus, in this article we will primarily focus on how the recognition of prior learning is used as an instrument for sorting, classifying, and including or excluding immigrants in their area of competence in the Swedish labor market. In addition, we will discuss how this practice normalizes the misrecognization of immigrants' experience and knowledge and thus affects, often negatively, the incorporation of immigrants in their respective area of competence in the Swedish labor market. In the first part of the paper, we will briefly present a short demographic landscape and changes in Swedish society resulting from immigration in the last four or five decades. This description, we hope, will provide the reader with an insight into why validation has become one of the instruments in the process of integration of immigrants

in Sweden. This will be followed by a brief overview of research in this area and a short presentation of our theoretical point of departure and method. Finally, we will present the empirical study, and end the paper by discussing the main results of the study.

Background

Sweden is a relatively young immigrant country with a population of 9 million people. Like many countries in the West, immigration played and continues to play an important role in the economic development of Swedish society and in transforming the country into an ethnoculturally diverse nation. For instance, in 2006 about 13% of the Swedish population was born outside Sweden compared to 4% in 1960 (SCB, 2007). About 13.7% of those aged 16 years and older were born outside Sweden (Integrationsverket, 2005). Immigration to Sweden has changed in the last three decades or so. In the 1950s and 1960s, immigration was primarily regulated by a guest workers program, or by labor immigration. But since the mid-1970s, migration to Sweden has shifted from labor immigration to immigration that is characterized by or is primarily composed of asylum seekers and refugees. This shift means that new immigrants had no jobs when they got their residence permit. In other words, labor market needs were not the goal or aim when resettling immigrants in Sweden, instead, settlement was granted based on the humanitarian needs of the individual asylum seeker. In this context, it is important to point out that this wave of immigrants were relatively welleducated people compared to the immigrants in the 1960s and 1970s, who typically had a working class background (Svanberg & Tydén, 2005).

The influx of refugees to Sweden in the mid-1980s and early 1990s coincided with the economic crisis of the 1980s. This crisis led to the restructuring of the Swedish economy, from an industrial to a post-industrial based economy. In this restructuring process,

immigrants, both new and old, were hit hard (the majority of immigrants were employed in industries often in jobs that required little or no competence, most of these jobs and industries were relocated in the 1980s and 1990s to developing countries in Eastern Europe and Asia). Thus, the loss of industrial jobs and the influx of refugees in the mid-1980s and early 1990s cemented the marginalization and exclusion of immigrants in Swedish society. Among the initiatives implemented to respond to this exclusion of immigrants, and to facilitate the inclusion of immigrants in the new economy, were a number of pilot validation programs.

Validation was introduced in Sweden during the Adult Education Initiative (AEI) – a five-year development and expansion of adult education initiated by the government in 1997. In formal adult education, it is now possible for anyone to have their prior learning assessed and get a grade that is equal to grades from the corresponding course. In addition to this, two official reports discussed and recommended the introduction of a system of validation of vocational competence (Ministry of Education, 1998; Ministry of Education, 2001) and this led to the establishment of validation centers and pilot projects to develop methods of validation. In this study, we examine three of these centers. The centers are located in three major Swedish cities with a large immigrant population.

Besides adult education and the validation centers, the active labor market policy is important in order to understand the development of validation in Sweden. The policy comprises a variety of measures constructed to give individuals, including immigrants, different opportunities to attain a position in the labor market. One of the main measures of the policy is labor market training. In recent years, numerous targeted measures or projects for unemployed immigrants, commonly known as diversity or integration projects have been introduced. Further, the public employment office (PEO) and its supervisors have key roles in

the labor market policy. They are expected to match the individual needs (skills) to the needs of the labor market, to advise and provide their clients with the necessary vocational and professional training based on their past experience, and to motivate them to undertake the measures recommended by the supervisors. Validation is firstly part of a number of integration projects, which, for example the validation centers in this study have been commissioned to run; secondly, it is part of labor market training, used to assess prior learning and match training to individual needs. In addition to this, the PEO and the supervisors play a central role when complementary training is required after a validation program for unemployed.

Research on Validation

Research on validation in Sweden is still in its infancy and even more so vis-à-vis the inclusion of immigrants in the labor market. Internationally, the research area is also limited but expanding. For an exhaustive presentation of the current (re-)theorization of validation (or recognition of prior learning), see Andersson and Harris (2006), which have examined validation from different perspectives: assessment theory, the sociology of education, poststructuralism and situated knowledge/learning theory, activity, actor-network and complexity theory, and symbolic interactionism.

One can discern different aims and models of validation in the research literature in the area. Validation initiatives are described and conceptualized as instruments to achieve social justice (in relation to individual opportunities, broadening access to education, etc.), economic development (validation should make it possible to effectively use existing vocational/professional competence in the labor market), or social change (making the real competence of the population visible creates better conditions for a changing society) (Andersson, Sjösten, & Ahn, 2003). In addition, Cleary et al. (2002), have shown that

validation can have or results in the case of individuals with better self-confidence and higher self-esteem.

Nevertheless, the ideas of social justice and change are not unproblematic. A recent analysis of higher education in the UK shows how assessing learning from experience, and translating it into academic credits, conforms to other academic assessments, instead of valuing learning from experience outside the academia on its own terms. In other words, there is a "gap in the discourse" of validation between students and assessors when translating experienced-based knowledge, a gap between the outside world and academia (Peters, 2005). French history in the area attempts to adopt a broader and more holistic approach than the British tradition. The more holistic approach tries to include and assign value to a broader spectrum of experiences, compared to the more specific approach in the British vocational qualifications frameworks. According to Pouget and Osborne (2004) this difference leads to, or shows, the difficulties of the universalistic claim of the Western individualistic approach:

... one could take a totally different perspective and consider conceptions of accreditation or validation of prior learning as undoubtedly entrenched in a western culture preoccupied with individual choice and individual freedom. These conceptions can be considered as an ethnocentric phenomenon, encapsulated in a western post-capitalist culture. (p. 61)

Validation (recognition of prior learning) in South Africa is, compared to both the UK and France, conceived of or construed as a practice that could contribute to social inclusion of historically marginalized groups, but this is a practice that has been discussed and questioned by Michelson (1997), and Harris (1999). There is an argument in favor of a more radical

9

perspective on experiential learning and validation, where the situatedness and the collective dimension of learning and knowledge are taken seriously, and knowledge is valued on its own terms (see Michelson, 1996, 1997).

Focused on the assessment of the knowledge of individuals, RPL has not concerned itself with the relationship between the historical experience of the community and the personal experience of individuals, or treated knowledge as a social product that humans make collectively. (Michelson, 1997, p. 145)

Furthermore, there are not only differences in aims and perspectives, but also in the models applied in validation. For instance: a) validation models that aim to change the system, b) models that are adapted to and complement the system (Andersson et al., 2003). Validation models that are tailored to the system use mainly convergent assessment (Torrance & Pryor, 1998). The focus of the convergent assessment is on a predetermined norm or criterion, this can be academic or practical skills, and *if* the candidate has the specific competence and fulfils the norm. Validation models that target institutions and change the system generally use divergent assessment (Torrance & Pryor, 1998). The focus of these divergent models is *what* knowledge and competence the individual has and this is explored in an unprejudiced manner. Other but similar ways of describing the difference between approaches are: the dichotomy between credit-exchange and developmental models (Butterworth, 1992), and the categorization of a technical/market, a liberal/humanist, and a critical/radical perspective (Breier, 2005).

Analyses of the Swedish pilot programs show that the programs in most cases were adapted to the school tradition of grading, and that the Swedish language played an important role in assessing competence. However, there were also differences between municipalities concerning what vocational competences were assessed. Some municipalities made a convergent choice of a few vocations where validation was offered, which excluded those who had a background in other vocations. Other municipalities had a more divergent approach, where validation was offered regardless of vocational background. But even when "everyone" was welcome to participate, as in the latter case, more convergent methods could be used in the assessment of competence *per se*, excluding those who could not present the competence asked for in a certain vocation (Andersson, Fejes, & Ahn, 2004; Andersson, Hult, & Fejes, 2002).

Theoretical Perspective

The analysis of the empirical data is inspired by a number of Foucauldian concepts. These concepts are used primarily to inform our analysis of the practice. In other words, the Foucauldian concepts in the analysis of the empirical data are used pragmatically and not in a Foucauldian discourse analysis "tradition." In our analysis, we are inspired particularly by the Foucauldian concepts of "order of discourse," "dividing practice," and "technology of power." The concept of discourse in our analysis of validation programs is used to describe utterances that are shared and are dominant in a vocation in a specific time and context. Furthermore, it is essential to point out that the "order" of discourse has a double meaning. Order represents both the order in which something is arranged or organized and also the idea of an order fraternity. Thus, an order of discourse means that the discourse has a certain order and that it forms an order. Thus, in this sense, vocations can be understood as orders of discourse — "order fraternities" that order and define "valid" knowledge in social practice (vocation). That is, the order of discourse defines and normalizes how members in a profession are excluded/included. It reproduces and subjectifies the specific norms and values

of the profession, which function as classifying or differentiating the included from the excluded or, to use a Foucauldian concept, acting as a dividing practice. What is recognized as valid knowledge, common language, and values of the profession is codified in the dividing practice. Also embedded in the codified dividing practice and the order of discourse are the techniques for surveillance, observation, and assessment or examination – or what Foucault calls technologies of power. These techniques act to create exclusionary boundaries.

Our use of the Foucauldian concept of dividing practice is primarily intended to show how a process of validation and embedded technologies of power construct a valid professional competence – a professional subject in a vocation or profession. This process is similar to the processes of objectivizing the subject where the mad are divided from the sane, the sick from the healthy, or the criminals from the "good boys" that Foucault (2003) uses to exemplify "dividing practices." The analysis of inclusion and exclusion in/from orders of discourse is what Foucault (1971/1993) describes as a "critical" discourse analysis (compared to "genealogical" analyses). In the dividing practices studied here, technologies of power embedded in the validation process are performative in that they distinguish the insider from the outsider – that is, who is to be included or who is to be excluded, what the excluded has to do to be included. In this process "technologies of power" – surveillance, observation, and examination - can act and produce differential in/exclusion of immigrants and of the knowledge they represent in relation to the "orders of discourse" of working life in general and of certain vocations in Sweden. The present article complements a prior Foucauldian analysis of Swedish policy on adult education (Andersson & Fejes, 2005), focusing on the role of validation as a technique for governing the adult subject. The policy analysis shows that the current focus is on validation of competence based on specific experiences, for example, experience and competence in certain vocations. It is also shown that the notion of "validation" was present long before this specific term was introduced. Earlier (before the term was introduced), the focus was instead on valuing general experience and/or capacity to study, for example, as a basis for general eligibility in the admission to higher education.

Methodology of the Study

This was a qualitative study. The purpose of the study was to explore how players in three organizationally and geographically different validation centers in Sweden describe the validation process, and particularly to describe and analyze how validation acts as a dividing practice and a technique for inclusion/exclusion of immigrants in their vocations in Swedish working life. As Merriam (2002) notes, qualitative research is an appropriate methodology to use to examine how participants make meaning of a phenomenon, and broadly speaking we were interested in how participants view the assessment process. However, the theoretical grounding of our study is based on Foucault's notion that technologies of power are always at play in organizations, and how people discuss what goes on in those organizations. Thus, the analysis of data was based on that lens.

It is important to be clear here that while the study was focused on the validation centers, this is not to say that the actual validation processes are carried out in these centers. On the contrary, the centers are more coordinators and organizers. In other words, they are commissioned by different actors, e.g. the PEOs, to develop and implement validation for different categories of both immigrants and non-immigrants. The process is presented later on. In this article, our analysis will focus on aspects of the (organization of the) validation process whereby dividing practices are discerned, for example, where formal and informal examinations/assessments act as techniques for inclusion and exclusion. The data from the

three contexts are not used as the basis of a comparison but, rather, to provide a rich body of material for the analysis.

In this study we will, as mentioned, use the Foucauldian "tools" described above to analyze practices of inclusion and exclusion of immigrants in their area of vocation in Sweden. The descriptions and analyses are based on empirical material consisting of transcribed, semi-structured qualitative interviews (cf. Kvale, 1996) with ten organizers, counselors, and teachers/assessors, and with 16 former participants, within the validation contexts described above. The three cities and validation centers were chosen because the cities are among the major urban centers in Sweden, with large immigrant populations, and the centers had long (compared with other Swedish centers) experience of validation of immigrants' competence. E.g. the centers had been commissioned by the government to run pilot projects. Thus, the aim was not to have a representative sample of cities, but to obtain a rich body of material concerning a practice that is yet not so well developed in all Swedish cities. The interviewees were selected with support from the validation centers. The organizers, counselors, and teachers/assessors represented the centers in the study.

There are no official statistics or registers on former participants in validation. Therefore, the former participants were selected with help of the centers from among those immigrants who had left the validation programs 1–2 years ago. The strategy for the sample was to get a mix of vocational backgrounds, and a mix of male and female interviewees. The reason for the 1–2 year time span was to make it possible to find persons with relatively recent experience of the programs, but where we also could see what had happened after the program. (However, what happened afterwards is not the main focus of this article.) This also meant a restriction, as some former participants were no longer available – they could have moved on, changed

phone numbers etc. We do not know what those persons who were unavailable could have contributed to the material, but probably their experiences varied as well as the experiences of the interviewees. Those who had moved on might have done this due to failure in the validation – they did not succeed and had to move on to be able to get a job – as well as success in the process – the validation might have given them the qualification necessary to get a job, but in another city. Thus, some perspectives might be missing in the descriptions of the practices of validation. Nevertheless, a variation of perspectives is present in the study.

The group of interviewed former participants consisted of ten men and six women. Their vocational experience and competence varied, and in their validation processes the following competencies were assessed: three assistant nurses, three hairdressers, two sheet-metal workers, two early childhood educators, one lathe operator, one car mechanic, one car builder, one bricklayer, one electrician, and one economist. (As will be discussed in the results, this did not in all cases correspond to their prior vocation/profession.) The ethnic backgrounds of the interviewees reflect the influx of refugees described above, i.e. most of them had come to Sweden as refugees. Five came from Iraq and former Yugoslavia, respectively, two from Afghanistan, and one each from Bulgaria, Indonesia, Iran, and the Lebanon.

The interviews focused on the organization or the validation process, the selection of participants, the assessment, and the documentation of the results. They were conducted partly in the validation centers and partly in other everyday contexts of the interviewees (i.e. former participants were interviewed in places where it was possible to get in touch with them). The interviewees have the position of informants, familiar with the context of validation in Sweden. Thus, the material is perceived and examined as descriptions of practices of validation, which produce and reproduce orders of discourse and technologies of

power, as defined above. This means that we have performed an analysis of a social and discursive practice based on discursive interview data from this practice.

The transcribed interviews were the basis of a qualitative analysis. The analysis can be understood as a process of reading, writing, and interpretation (cf. Denzin, 1994). The transcripts were read and analyzed, and this first step of the analysis resulted in a working report (Andersson, Hult, & Osman, 2006), where central aspects of the validation process were identified and described. One conclusion after writing the report was that the Foucauldian tools described above would be useful for a deeper understanding of the process. Therefore, in a second step, the working report and the transcripts were read with the Foucauldian perspective in mind, i.e. the theoretical tools formed the pre-understanding for the interpretation. In this analytical reading, certain themes or aspects of the validation process were discerned, themes that were interpreted as representing dividing practices and inclusion/exclusion described in the material. These themes provide the structure of the result presentation, where the results of the analysis are illustrated with quotes from the transcripts (translated into English).

Results

In our qualitative analysis of validation as a practice and technique for social inclusion/exclusion of immigrants, we will focus on a number of aspects: the choice of certain vocations for validation; the informal and formal assessment/observation in the validation process; the dividing practices acting in terms of de-grading of competence; differing opportunities for further training; and differing informal recommendations vis-à-vis employers.

Validation as an Exclusionary Practice

A study by Andersson et al. (2004, see above), for instance, showed the existence of two parallel approaches to validation, divergent (more open) and convergent (more predetermined norms and criteria). But in this study we see a convergent trend whereby validation practices focus on pre-determined vocations. This trend is related to the major role local PEOs play in the process. They have become the major financers and recruiters of candidates in the program. Thus, the focus of the program has shifted to labor market needs rather than individual competence. An organizer at one of the centers describes the situation before this shift:

Yes, before it was quite the opposite, then we started from the persons, the participants. What vocational area they had when they came to us. That determined how we then tried to find someone who could look at their vocational competence. It was much more like that, much more.

But in this context, it is important to stress that this shift and focus is in line with the mandate of the PEOs. Hence, recruitment to the program targets immigrants with professions that are considered to be in short supply or will be in short supply in the near future. This focus in practice means that a substantial group of professional immigrants are excluded from practicing their trade in Sweden. In other words, "new" knowledge – from other countries – is included in the "order of discourse" of the Swedish labor market only if there is a shortage, and immigrants with other competencies that do not meet this criterion are excluded already at this stage. This does not mean that ethnic minority immigrants cannot pursue other programs to achieve the same goal of entering the labor market, but the path to achieving this goal without the possibility of validation is longer. At this stage, however, it will suffice to

stress that for immigrants to be recognized as competent in the process, they are subjected to various forms of surveillance and assessment, both formal and informal.

The Basic Level

The process of validation involves a number of explicit and implicit assessment techniques. The first stage in this process is an initial mapping of competence. This initial assessment acts as a dividing practice in relation to the in/exclusion of potential candidates for validation – or, in Foucauldian terms, whose knowledge is valid and could be included in the order of a certain vocation. In this assessment, the candidate meets with a counselor and/or a professional in the vocation – often a teacher – who evaluates his/her competence, and decides whether the individual can enroll in the program. It is important to stress that if the counselor and the teacher have different opinions concerning the occupational competence of a person, it is the counselor who has the final word and often decides in favor of the individual concerned, as is evident in the following statement.

I see myself as the candidate's defense attorney; in some cases I can question the teacher if I see that it is not correct and the candidate also doesn't think it is correct in his or her opinion. Then he/she may get a second chance to make a new assessment... It doesn't happen very often but my role is to protect the individual and I do it often, so it is the attitude of the individual – I most often try to see if the individual can do it again or get a new chance.

This point of departure in the initial assessment is to give the person a chance, even if in the initial assessment it is not clear-cut whether he/she satisfies the formal requirements. Thus, the process starts from the individual competence, but also from what is missing and needs to be complemented (in relation to the Swedish norm in a vocation). But if the individual does

not meet the required norm from the perspective of the counselor/defense attorney, the process in itself is used to make the candidate aware of the reasons for rejecting his/her candidacy:

Yes, it is very difficult, and I do admit that I cannot draw the line really, and my attitude is to give them the benefit of the doubt and that's why persons enter this validation process who maybe shouldn't be there. But as long as we counselors are there in the process and are made aware of what happens and have a talk about it, I don't think there is a problem really, since they are made aware of it.

As evident above, only some pre-determined vocations are validated. In addition, the process targets only individuals with a level of competence that is on a par with the Swedish norms. But the programs provide other limited forms of validation or "vocational evaluation." The aim is to give all candidates the opportunity to have their competence documented and evaluated. These other, non-encompassing, forms of evaluation and documentation are also used as sorting instruments in the admission to validation proper. It appears, however, that the process in general subordinates the inclusion of immigrants, as will be evident to the reader later on.

Swedish Language: Implicit Criterion for Exclusion

In the process of validation, there is no formal language criterion. That is, individuals do not have to complete and pass the Sfi (Swedish for immigrants) language program, or complete a predetermined language program. But despite this lack of clear language policy in the area, this does not mean that it does not exist – that is, who is and is not validated is contingent on their ability in Swedish as evident below.

But I never send anyone to a Swedish test or so just to check. As I said, it can be so that you can validate only very little because you find it difficult to express what you know. And I explain that too when I meet them –that you could perhaps validate more if you studied more Swedish first.

Put simply, knowledge of the Swedish language is examined informally. Those who do not have enough knowledge of the Swedish language are excluded. This ex/inclusion based on language is part and parcel of the more general practice of normalizing immigrants in Sweden and, specifically, in the orders of Swedish vocational practice. This exclusion is justified and legitimized by the requirement that the individuals targeted are expected to communicate their competence in the assessment process. But, and it is important to stress this, although the language criterion is important in this process, the informal language policy in the process sends a mixed message to the individuals targeted, and turned down due to poor language skills. That is, what is evaluated – language or professional competence? By targeting individuals with poor Swedish language skills, they are saying that Swedish language skills are not important, but what is important is vocational skills. This is an issue that is not reflected in the practice. Language is important, although implicit, in all the three programs we studied. This expectation of language skills could be problematic and excluding. One former participant describes problems experienced with assessments based on written language.

And then written, we had to provide written papers. We were writing but nevertheless, one can't write everything that one means, what one thinks, and explain or broaden the sentence or things like that. We who don't know so much [Swedish], we try to bring the

pieces together, which makes it complicated and sometimes one loses everything that one means, if it gets too broad.

De-grading of Competence

The choice in the three validation programs to validate only some pre-determined vocations is problematic, as noted earlier. Moreover, and what is more important, immigrants are sometimes validated in their area of competence, but in a lower status vocation. For instance, nurses have been validated as assistant nurses, and teachers have been validated as early childhood educators. Thus, validation can act as an instrument for de-grading immigrants' competence, or what Jones and Martyn (1997) identified as Procrustean RPL. This is achieved by subjecting immigrants to a process of examination and accreditation, which certifies their de-graded competence. Thus they are excluded from the order of their former vocation, and included in another vocation. This phenomenon is a reflection of a structural problem. The validation processes studied are organized in municipalities, within the adult education system. But in Sweden, teachers and nurses have a university or university college education. The municipalities do not have the legal right to assess competencies of teachers and nurses. Thus, to circumvent this structural problem, immigrants' competencies are degraded. One of the former participants, now validated as an assistant nurse, describes the problem from her perspective:

I'm not an assistant nurse, at home [in the home country] there are no assistant nurses, there are only nurses and care workers working at the hospitals there in the nursing. [...] Yes, most of us think it is better if there is a validation [for nurses] similar to that for assistant nurses... And it costs less for society, otherwise I have to go to university for three years... And that's a long time, OK, I can pass in all subjects that I had before,

that's not so difficult. But it takes time, it's three years and it might be better if there's a shorter option... If I can finish it earlier, that could be better. Because it costs less money too... as I have already been trained once before. As society has paid it for me once.

Formal Assessments in the Validation Process

The actual validation process in all three programs involves different forms of examinations or assessments. These assessments are based either on Swedish educational/training requirements for the vocation validated, or requirements of branch organizations (cf. Andersson et al., 2004). The process of validation begins with an introductory program. This process is described in the following way by one of the evaluators interviewed (referred, not a direct quotation):

The introduction part of the validation program/process lasts about one week, and in the introductory phase the process is described to the individual being validated, what competence is required or essential in the vocation in Sweden etc. When the participants enroll in the program, they start with "technical Swedish" two half-days a week [studying vocational language]. They narrate and are instructed to provide a broad mapping of their own experience, to show what they have been working with. Then they look at the courses that seem to be relevant and make a self-assessment based on those courses. After these processes, a validation plan is tailored for the individual. The process of validation itself is often carried out in either a real work environment or at an adult education/training provider. It is not easy to find places for the participants in companies – the companies have neither the time nor the human resources to supervise the students. Sometimes validation comes at an inconvenient time of the year. In the

practical parts, there are many who pass immediately and are graded. In the theoretical validation, I often talk to them individually, but there are also written tests. It depends on how well they know Swedish, and how well they know the particular "vocational language."

The assessment process utilizes both possibilities described by the evaluator above, that is, candidates are validated either in the workplace or at a training/vocational centre. At the end of the process, the participants and the evaluators go through an evaluation battery developed by the validation centre. The focus of the assessment process is not only practical knowledge or skills but also theoretical knowledge.

Thus, the major requirement for participating in the program is contingent on the level of occupational skills, but also Swedish language skills. To be precise, the validation program targets individuals who are considered to have competency and skills that meet the Swedish requirements in these professions, and can communicate their competency in Swedish. This requirement is based on the idea that the initiative is intended to shorten the process of integration of competent ethnic minority immigrants in their area of competence in the Swedish labor market. For example, one hairdresser experienced inclusion and recognition of his competence in the formal assessment.

And there you come and meet some of the personnel, and they will be able to help you to do tests of your knowledge. And you will get – diploma, that shows that you are a hairdresser, are sort of a master, whatever that could be. Exactly as if one has gone through the schools here in Sweden. As one has taken the hairdresser program at upper secondary school, then step by step, and had the diplomas. And I was very happy

actually. And I have never felt that I am so – very clever. I know that I am very clever but I didn't have... I couldn't present myself, in the right way.

However, this process of inclusion of competent immigrants simultaneously means exclusion of others. The assessment of competence is thus a dividing practice that acts through different technologies of power. It is not only a matter of formal examinations, it also involves formal and informal surveillance and observation in the workplace. However, in this context it is important to point out that apart from validation proper there are other less comprehensive forms of validation (evaluations and documentation), that also act as technologies of power and govern the immigrant subject.

The Portfolio of Merits

One of these forms of evaluation and documentation is the portfolio of merits, where the individual documents and collects all his or her educational merits, professional experience and other experience. (See Brown, 2002, for a discussion of "the impact of portfolio development on adult learning.") In this process, the individual describes his or her competence in detail, what he or she has worked with, what courses he or she has attended, etc. In one of the programs, this evaluation is conducted primarily within the framework of recruitment to the validation proper. In another program, this process is integrated in the introduction program for newly arrived refugees and immigrants (i.e. a program with a broader scope than "only" validation). In two of the programs, the portfolio of merits is used as an alternative and shorter validation process, and to select candidates for validation proper. In other words, this initial evaluation provides the counselor with a basis for judging whether a person has the necessary competence relevant in Sweden. It also provides the counselor with a basis for helping the immigrant to identify what courses he or she may need to take in order practice his or her vocation in Sweden, that is, to be included in the vocational "order."

Vocational Evaluation

Another form of less comprehensive validation is the vocational evaluation. This is a form of general, investigative and divergent evaluation or examination carried out by a professional in the vocation, often a teacher. This evaluation normally takes about five days. Here too, the purpose is to classify the competence of the candidate. The process is open to all individuals who are referred for validation. It also acts as an instrument for sorting and categorizing according to levels of competence, as a basis for recruitment or selection for further validation, but also for assigning people to complementary courses, additional education, etc. After the vocational evaluation, the individual gets a document of competence that can be used as a basis for continued training or when applying for a job.

The vocational evaluation starts with an exploratory conversation. Certain aspects are then selected for the participants to be tested in actual practice for three to five days. This process also functions vis-à-vis immigrants as an instrument to place the individuals in language training courses (Sfi – Swedish for immigrants), where they can learn the Swedish language in general, but also technical language related to their profession or trade. In these programs, the individuals are given the opportunity to practice (language) within their respective areas of occupational competence. In this type of evaluation, the process can be carried out using an interpreter. In one of the programs, this form of evaluation is only used to determine the level of knowledge and competence – and whether the person is eligible for validation.

The following quote from a counselor in one of the centers describes how the vocational evaluation and the portfolio of merits act as techniques for identifying competence, also competence which is beyond the curriculum of vocation education, but particularly for sorting and selection of participants for validation proper.

Then we have started now more and more to [...] try to put them into it from the right end from the beginning, so to speak. That you first make a portfolio of merits, which shows what you know. And that you after that undergo a vocational evaluation and then you have all your knowledge assessed so to speak. And if there is enough of that knowledge, which is in the upper secondary school programs then you can go on and undergo a validation compared with the criteria of those programs. But it could be that you have... if you have knowledge that, if we say it's 100, then maybe only 60 per cent of that knowledge is in the school program. And that depends on different vocations, how they are, so therefore undergoing a vocational evaluation could be good too, that adds that I know this and this and this too, which you can't get a grade for, so to speak. And when you come... so then have undergone a vocational evaluation and then you see rather clearly. Then they have been with a vocational teacher for a whole week normally. And then they know if one can start validating or not, so to speak. So that, there you will get fewer that go for a validation and then can't go on with it, so to speak.

Further Training – for Whom?

The validation process in all the programs examined is often followed by further vocational training by the immigrant being required – immigrants' prior learning is perceived as insufficient. A prior study (Andersson et al., 2002) shows that there are differences in whether the validation is a separate process, or as a matter of course is followed by (or even integrated in) further vocational training. In the present study, further training is not an integral part of the process. On the other hand, there is another dividing practice operating in the process – the programs select only those offered further training. This can be illustrated by an example from one of the cities: If the evaluators determine that the candidate does not fulfill the

standard of knowledge required by the profession, he/she is still awarded a less formal validation certificate and recommended to complement certain specific areas. This recommendation is sent to the local PEO, which determines if it is worthwhile referring the candidate to a complementary training program. One counselor describes the dilemma like this:

Yes, it's a matter of there having to be a high demand [for labor] in the vocation and so on. And even if we say that in the health care sector there will be a huge demand in a few years, when all those born in the forties have retired. Still there is no huge demand at the moment. And then it's difficult for them to pay for that type of training program. And then they want to have a guarantee of employment and that sort of thing.

Informal Recommendations

The validation of vocational competence is normally carried out by teachers in vocational training, often assisted by experienced professionals in the vocation. These assessors or evaluators have extensive contacts with the labor market for the vocation. Thus, in the validation process – apart from formally assessing competence, and recommending compensatory education/training programs – the assessor also sometimes recommends candidates to a potential employer. One teacher/assessor has the following to say:

On the other hand, and I can confirm it, those who go through this process and are successful – we get to know them as individuals, bond with them. In our school we have a lot of vocational teachers, the majority are about my age. We all have an extensive network, and it is very easy for me to ring and say "Hi Anders," or "Hi Gustav," I have a good guy here.

In the following statement, one of the assessors notes that recommendations to potential employers involve both formal and informal aspects of the competence of the candidates:

And then they [the employers] say like this, "is he a good guy?" they say. And what they mean is that, do they come in time, do they come every day, are they interested in the job, and do they have good everyday behavior, that's the criteria they have.

But this help also acts as an informal dividing practice. In addition to the formal requirements, the teachers and assessors relate to the informal demands in the labor market – from employers as well as in the workplace. Based on what could be seen as informal surveillance and/or observations during the validation process, they decide what recommendations to make. It might be these informal recommendations that determine who will actually get the final recognition – a job in their vocation. The following quote illustrates the experience of one former participant, where the formal validation seems to have been less important than the informal dimension, which was not to his advantage. It is an experience of exclusion and subordinate inclusion.

But the only thing I didn't like, and then it was me and two other persons, we sat together and they were also from validation and they were Swedes. They were employed and I only got a temporary job as a substitute. And there were many who were called [to a workplace] after four or three weeks, and they were employed at [name of the workplace]. And I who had a background as an immigrant had to wait for five months, even if I was much more successful in this validation.

Conclusion – Inclusion and Exclusion through Validation

These results show how technologies of power – including surveillance, observation, and examination – act in the validation process. The immigrant is governed through different forms of examination, which both include and exclude. But the validation is also constructed as a process that encompasses more than the formal examination. Thus there are opportunities for observation or surveillance in this process, opportunities that, for example, result in the dividing practice of informal recommendations that include or exclude the subject. Central in these processes is knowledge. The immigrants' knowledge or competence is assessed, and knowledge about their knowledge is produced. Both aspects of this knowledge are the basis of the inclusion or exclusion of subjects and their knowledge in or from the "orders" of different vocations/professions; or, more generally, the order of the labor market and Swedish society.

Furthermore, it should be pointed out that this is a process of in/exclusion not only of immigrants, but also of certain knowledge. The validation process is one way of defining, and maybe re-defining, what is counted as valid knowledge in a vocation. However, in all three programs, the point of departure of validation is to validate individuals who need little or no complementary courses or training in their area of competence to satisfy the Swedish requirements. Thus, one could argue that the process is not intended to change the practice of assessment of different institutions; but it seems as if the process, as it is developed in these initiatives, is organized and characterized by the ambition to identify and select competent immigrants and facilitate their inclusion.

This means that these processes of validation construct a certain desirable immigrant professional subject. The practice of validation of "foreign vocational competence" seems to be not mainly a matter of integration of immigrants in Swedish society. Rather, it is a question

of utilizing vocational competence, of supplying the labor market with labor, in the name of global competitiveness. Thus there is tension between the aims of social justice/change and economic development. To be included as a professional, the subject should be competent in a profession where there is a lack of competence in the Swedish workforce. If you have a background in a profession where there is currently unemployment, you are less likely to be included. Furthermore, vocational competence should be understood in a broad sense. It is not only a matter of technical skills, but also includes, for example, language and social skills. There is a basic level concerning vocational as well as language competence, a level that must be reached to be included as a (potential) professional. There is also a process of adaptation to the Swedish hierarchy and demands on professional competence, which, for example, means excluding (de-qualifying) the subjects from their prior profession. This convergent process constructs a desirable professional subject, who is adapted to the existing hierarchy in a subordinate inclusion.

A final potential exclusion lies in whether the construction of the immigrant professional makes validation, and further Swedish vocational training, compulsory parts of what is called a process of integration. This might mean that an immigrant professional is not accepted as a professional unless s/he has been subject to a process of observation and examination that is carried out based on the norms of the Swedish labor market and adult education/vocational training systems.

What surprised us the most was that the actors in the process of validation ignored or were indifferent to the fact that "immigrants" are discriminated against in the Swedish labor market. The institutional actors involved in this process, particularly the PEOs, have the mandate to enhance the employability of immigrants. However, this praxis has the

consequence of guiding immigrants into the labor niches that require or will require a qualified labor force. In addition, the branch organizations function as "gatekeepers" to maintain the status quo by excluding immigrants from competing with the "insiders" – the members of these organizations. This is achieved by means of a number of techniques, such as targeting only certain sectors/vocations and also changing the criteria for qualification required to access the programs. The point we wish to stress, and which policymakers concerned with this issue have to consider, is that knowledge, and inclusion in this process, is not free from power relations and special interests. In addition, the discrimination of immigrants, particularly from non-European countries, has to be addressed, and it cannot be wished away or left to the market forces as is implicit in the process, where immigrants in a number of cases are guided to labor niches which need labor, and where the institutional actors believe immigrants will meet little resistance and discrimination, rather than to the niche of their original vocation/profession. Finally, knowledge and practice acquired through experience in working life cannot be translated neatly into an academic language or knowledge embedded in training manuals/curricula irrespective of contextual differences. These are the areas that policy makers have to examine and which need creative solutions or validation models that are flexible and address the specific needs of different categories of immigrants.

References

- Andersson, P., & Fejes, A. (2005). Recognition of prior learning as a technique for fabricating the adult learner: A genealogical analysis on Swedish adult education policy. *Journal of Education Policy*, 20, 595-613.
- Andersson, P., Fejes, A., & Ahn, S-e. (2004). Recognition of prior vocational learning in Sweden. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, *36*, 57-71.
- Andersson, P., & Harris, J. (Eds.). (2006). *Re-theorising the recognition of prior learning*. Leicester: NIACE.
- Andersson, P., Hult, Å., & Fejes, A. (2002). Validering av utländsk yrkeskompetens En studie av den utökade försöksverksamheten. In *Validering av utländsk yrkeskompetens* (Redovisning av regeringsuppdrag, Dnr: 01-2001:03631, Bilaga 1). Stockholm: Skolverket.
- Andersson, P., Hult, Å., & Osman, A. (2006). *Validering som sortering: Hur värderas*utländsk yrkeskompetens? Norrköping: Integrationsverket and

 Valideringsdelegationen.
- Andersson, P., Sjösten, N-Å., & Ahn, S-e. (2003). *Att värdera kunskap, erfarenhet och kompetens: Perspektiv på validering*. Stockholm: Myndigheten för skolutveckling.
- Breier, M. (2005). A disciplinary-specific approach to the recognition of prior informal experience in adult pedagogy: "rpl" as opposed to "RPL". *Studies in Continuing Education*, 27, 51-65.
- Brown, J.O. (2002). Know thyself: the impact of portfolio development on adult learning.

 *Adult Education Quarterly, 52, 228-245.
- Butterworth, C. (1992). More than one bite at the APEL: Contrasting models of accrediting prior learning. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 16(3), 39-51.

- Cleary, P., Whittaker, R., Gallacher, J., Merrill, B., Jokinen, L., Carette, M., et al. (2002).

 Social inclusion through APEL: The learners' perspective Comparative report.

 Glasgow: Glasgow Caledonian University.
- Denzin, N.K. (1994). The art and politics of interpretation. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative research* (pp. 500-515). Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications.
- Ekberg, J. (1997). Hur är arbetsmarknaden för den andra generationens invandrare? Arbetsmarknad och Arbetsliv, 3, 5-16.
- Ekberg, J., & Rooth D-O. (2000). *Arbetsmarknadspolitik för invandrare*. Växjö: Växjö University, School of Management and Economics.
- Foucault, M. (1993). *Diskursens ordning*. (M. Rosengren, Trans.). Stockholm/Stehag: Symposion. (Original work *L'ordre du discours* published 1971).
- Foucault, M. (1977). Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison. London: Penguin Books.
- Foucault, M. (2003). The subject and power. In P. Rabinow & N. Rose (Eds.), *The essential Foucault: Selections from the essential works of Foucault* 1954–1984 (pp. 126-144). New York: The New Press.
- Harris, J. (1999). Ways of seeing the recognition of prior learning (RPL). What contribution can such practices make to social inclusion? *Studies in the Education of Adults*, *31*, 24-39.
- Integrationsverket. (2005). Statistics from the Swedish Integration Board. Retrieved September 1, 2005, from http://www.integrationsverket.se
- Jones, M., & Martin, J. (1997). A new paradigm for recognition of prior learning (RPL). In W. Fleet (Ed.), *Issues in recognition of prior learning: A collection of papers* (pp. 11-19). Melbourne: Victoria RPL Network.

- Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage.
- Merriam, S.B., & Associates. (2002). Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Michelson, E. (1996). Beyond Galileo's telescope: situated knowledge and the assessment of experiential learning. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 46, 185-196.
- Michelson, E. (1997). The politics of memory: The recognition of experiential learning. In S. Walters (Ed.), *Globalization, adult education & training. Impacts & issues* (pp. 141-153). London and New York: Zed Books.
- Ministry of Education. (1998). *Validering av utländsk yrkeskompetens* (SOU 1998:165). Stockholm: Utbildningsdepartementet.
- Ministry of Education. (2001). *Validering av vuxnas kunskap och kompetens* (SOU 2001:78). Stockholm: Utbildningsdepartementet.
- Neergaard, A. (2002). Arbetsmarknadens mönster: Om rasifierad segmentering. In I.

 Lindberg & M. Dahlstedt (Eds.), Det *slutna folkhemmet: Om etniska klyftor och blågul självbild* (pp. 116-134). Stockholm: Agora.
- Peters, H. (2005). Contested discourses: Assessing the outcomes of learning from experience for the award of credit in higher education. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 30, 273-285.
- Pouget, M., & Osborne, M. (2004). Accreditation or validation of prior experiential learning: knowledge and savoirs in France—A different perspective? *Studies in Continuing Education*, 26, 45-65.
- SCB. (2007). Befolkningsstatistik i sammandrag 1960-2006. Retrieved October 1, 2007, from http://www.scb.se/templates/tableOrChart____26040.asp

- Schierup, C-U., & Paulsson, S. (Eds.). (1994). *Arbetets etniska delning: Studie från en svensk bilindustri*. Stockholm: Carlsson.
- Svanberg, I., & Tydén, M. (2005). *Tusen år av invandring: En svensk kulturhistoria*.

 Stockholm: Dialogos.
- Torrance, H., & Pryor, J. (1998). *Investigating formative assessment*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Notes

ⁱ In Swedish, "validering". The term was introduced in Sweden in 1996 and is a translation from French, where *validation des acquis de l'experience* is one of the concepts used. In English, validation is also a term for the process to audit or appraisal courses and programmes. The term is not used in that sense here, but synonymously with recognition/accreditation/assessment of prior learning.

ii "According to Procrustes, a ruler in Greek mythology, everyone could fit into his bed regardless of their size and shape. If anyone was too short, he placed them on the rack and stretched them. If they were too long, he would chop of their feet" (Jones & Martin, 1997, p. 16).