

Gymnasial lärlingsutbildning på Handels- och administrationsprogrammet

En studie av lärlingsutbildningens
förutsättningar och utvecklingen av
yrkeskunnande

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Title

Upper Secondary Apprenticeship Education in the Business and Administration Programme
A study of preconditions of upper secondary apprenticeship education and development of professional skills

Abstract

This thesis is about the workplace-based part of the 2008-11 pilot project of upper secondary apprenticeship education (USAE) in the Business and Administration programme. The aim is to develop knowledge on the ways in which USAE is realised in the Business and Administration programme, and how students in this programme develop professional skills. A further aim is to shed light on the nature of professional skills in the retail industry in a historical as well as a contemporary perspective. The development of professional skills, and the conditions created for that process to take place is the particular focus of the thesis. Lave & Wenger's (1991) theory of legitimate peripheral participation (LPP), Billetts (1996, 2002, 2006) theory of a workplace curriculum and Engeström's (1987) activity theory are used for the analyses in the study. Data production was conducted mainly through interviews, observations, gathering of documents and participation in trilateral talks. Development and structural changes that have taken place on several levels in the retail sector have resulted in many professional skills becoming embedded in information technology. This, in combination with the current division of labour, means that apprentice students may have difficulties in reaching the more advanced tasks. The prevailing view among the general public on the retail industry as a low-status sector can also be traced back to its history. The steering documents did not appear to have any decisive significance for the content of the education. Instead, what may be termed the workplace curriculum, control the knowledge content that is made accessible. The conclusion must be, therefore, that the professional skills that apprentices can develop are narrow and specific for the workplace. The apprentices gain access to basic tasks related to the daily work at the workplace, but rarely have the opportunity to take part in the more advanced work-tasks. USAE students in the Business and Administration programme also experience difficulties in achieving deeper and so-called theoretical or abstract skills. This implies that instead of this more challenging work they are assigned tasks that are quantifiable and can be checked mechanically in matrices and checklists. The study shows that in the assessment work, professional skills have been downgraded and are considered as little more than social and interactive competence and employability. A crucial conclusion is that USAE does not constitute one unified activity system with a common underlying motive, but should rather be considered as two separate activity systems (school and workplace) with distinct cultural differences.

Keywords

Apprenticeship education, vocational education and training, retail trade, professional skills, activity theory, legitimate peripheral participation, workplace curriculum, Business and Administration programme

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