

# Validation

– a developing research field  
in the Nordic countries

Per Andersson  
Linköping University  
Sweden

## What is research?

In this review:

- Focus on theory-based analyses
- Mainly focus on empirical studies
  
- (Other types of studies
  - Evaluations
  - Follow-up studies
  - Descriptions, inventories etc.)

## Nordic research on RPL or validation

- Mainly in Sweden
  - Developing parallel to the development of RPL in (adult) education policy and practice
  - Research mainly starting in 2000
- Much effort in policy and practice in other Nordic countries, but not much research
  - NOTE: Sweden, together with England and Scotland, are exceptions in Europe when it comes to critical, academic research on validation (Harris, 2011)

## Approaches in research:

- Basically qualitative studies
- Quantitative ideas introduced theoretically
  - Validity, reliability
  - Lack of data in official statistics is one explanation of lack of empirically based quantitative research
  - Some mainly descriptive quantitative studies, not defined as research

## Disciplinary development (in Sweden)

- Educational research
  - Has been and is dominating
- Human work science, and
- Business administration
  - Have added new dimensions

## Theoretically focussing on phenomena such as

- Learning
  - E.g. Lave & Wenger, situated learning
- Governance
  - E.g. Foucault, governmentality, discourse
- Communication
  - E.g. Habermas, communicative action
- Gender
  - E.g. Hirdman, gender order
- Processes of organising
- Validity
  - E.g. Messick

## Six main themes (Sweden)

- Historical development of RPL/validation
  - There was validation or recognition processes even before the concepts were introduced
- Recognition of vocational competence
- RPL, immigration and gender
  - Ethnicity, gender
- Theories of assessment in RPL
- RPL and governance
- Comparative studies of RPL
  - Nordic countries, Sweden and Canada

## Iceland

- An analysis of what validation is
  - Prof. Gunnar E. Finnbogason
- Two master theses
  - Helga Dögg Sverrisdóttir (2009)
  - Auður Sigurðardóttir (2010)

## Norway

- Research indirectly relevant for validation, but not exactly on validation; some reports of interest
- Assessment of competence in the work place (Skule, 2004)
- Experiences of higher education among informal/non-formal learners (Holmesland & Lundin, 2009)
- Employers' views on formal – and real/actual – competence (Ure, 2010)
- Validation in education for prisoners (Alfsen, Hanssen & Lyngvær Ramstad, 2010)

## Denmark

- NVR anthology
- PhD work in progress, on selection in the university, medicine
- Not much directly on validation

NVR: Nationalt Videnscenter for Realkompetence –  
National Knowledge Centre for Validation of Prior  
Learning

## Finland

- International anthology (work in progress)
- Some smaller studies
- Evaluations, more practically oriented projects

## Some conclusions

- The research field is still limited, but could develop if RPL/validation is paid further attention to in education and labour market policy and practice
- A broad spectra of theoretical perspectives
- Swedish research contributes to theorisation of RPL nationally, in the Nordic countries, and internationally
- More RPL research could be expected in the other Nordic countries in the future, as much effort is put on RPL in policy and practice

## See also:

Per Andersson and Andreas Fejes:  
Sweden: the developing field of  
validation research

In: Harris et al. (Eds) *Researching the  
Recognition of Prior Learning*.  
Leicester: NIACE.