

Constructing and Circulating Knowledge in Continuous Education: A Study of Norwegian Educational-Psychological Counsellors' Reflection Logs in Post-Graduate Education

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Abstract : In Norway, every municipality shall provide an educational psychological service, EPS, to support kindergartens and schools in their work with children and youths with special needs. The EPS focus its work on individuals, aiming to identify special needs and to give advice to teachers and parents when they ask for it. In addition, the service also give priority to prevention and system intervention in kindergartens and schools. To master these big tasks university courses are established to support EPS counsellors' continuous learning. There is, however, a need for more in-depth and systematic knowledge on how they experience the courses they attend. In this study, EPS counsellors' reflection logs during a particular course are investigated. The research question is: what are the content and priorities of the reflections that are communicated in the logs produced by the educational psychological counsellors during a post-graduate course? The investigated course is a credit course organized over a one-year period in two one-semester modules. The altogether 55 students enrolled in the course work as EPS counsellors in various municipalities across Norway. At the end of each day throughout the course period, the participants wrote reflection logs about what they had experienced during the day. The data material consists of 165 pages of typed text. The collaborating researchers studied the data material to ascertain, differentiate and understand the meaning of the content in each log. The analysis also involved the search for similarity in content and development of analytical categories that described the focus and primary concerns in each of the written logs. This involved constant 'critical and sustained discussions' for mutual construction of meaning between the co-researchers in the developing categories. The process is inspired by Grounded Theory. This means that the concepts developed during the analysis derived from the data material and not chosen prior to the investigation. The analysis revealed that the concept 'Useful' frequently appeared in the participants' reflections and, as such, 'Useful' serves as a core category. The core category is described through three major categories: (1) knowledge sharing (concerning direct and indirect work with students with special needs) with colleagues is useful, (2) reflections on models and theoretical concepts (concerning students with special needs) are useful, (3) reflection on the role as EPS counsellor is useful. In all the categories, the notion of useful occurs in the participants' emphasis on and acknowledgement of the immediate and direct link between the university course content and their daily work practice. Even if each category has an importance and value of its own, it is crucial that they are understood in connection with one another and as interwoven. It is the connectedness that gives the core category an overarching explanatory power. The knowledge from this study may be a relevant contribution when it comes to designing new courses that support continuing professional development for EPS counsellors, whether for post-graduate university courses or local courses at the EPS offices or whether in Norway or other countries in the world.

Keywords : constructing and circulating knowledge, educational-psychological counsellor, higher education, professional development

Conference Title : ICEQSSN 2019 : International Conference on Educational Quality and Students with Special Needs

Conference Location : Bangkok, Thailand

Conference Dates : January 17-18, 2019