

Knowledge in Motion across Contexts of Learning (KnowMo)

The project focuses on how teachers handle the flow of information and experiences from different contexts that students bring to the classroom and between formal, non-formal and informal ways of learning.

Aim

The aim of the KnowMo project is to study the conditions under which learning experiences in out-of-school settings can be made relevant for learning in secondary schools. Many students experience schooling as disconnected from other domains in their lives, and there is much debate on how to increase student motivation at this level of schooling. One suggested solution is to bring young people's experiences outside school into the classroom. There is, however, a lack of knowledge about the consequences of different ways of doing this. The KnowMo project aims to develop understanding of the differences and similarities between learning processes in different contexts. A practical objective is to investigate and suggest how teachers can draw on young people's out-of-school experiences in ways that are productive for school learning.

Background

There is a lot of attention on challenges in schools concerning motivation and dropout rates, and especially in secondary schools. Still, there is uncertainty about why this is so and how teachers relate to such challenges. The teacher education at Vestfold University College has been a pilot case for the Ministry of Education towards a more level-oriented teacher training targeting lower secondary schools (LUT 2007–2010). They have also been part of the national project PIL (Praksis som integrerende element i lærerutdanning, 2007–2010), actively developing practice as a premise for teacher training.

Status of knowledge

Research shows that the teacher is a key person in making out-of-school literacy and learning practices relevant in boundary-crossing activities. Nevertheless, studies have so far mainly focused on the students. Taking this shortcoming as a point of departure, the planned project will study how teachers make the diverse and heterogeneous literacy practices of young people relevant in classroom activities. The importance of doing so, in a Norwegian context, is underlined by the research finding that teachers' ability to engage students in the classroom is connected to their capacity to recognize students' values, relate learning to their world and what they are concerned with, while simultaneously remaining in charge of the classroom. The present project will provide a review of this body of research, and point out the direction for educational practice of relevance for both teachers' didactic strategies and students' learning. Such a project will position itself within core issues of international research related to teacher education and learning in the 21st century.

Research questions/method

The main research questions are:

- How do teachers handle differences and similarities between knowledge practices in and out of school?
- And what are the implications of connecting young people's knowledge practices from different domains for student learning and teachers' didactic strategies?

In order to answer these questions we need to:

- 1) describe and analyse the variety of young people's knowledge practices in different contexts, both within and outside school
- 2) analyse the ways in which these practices are negotiated in relation to knowledge practices in school and the implications for learning therein

We focus on three important domains in young people's lives: the family, sports and media. These domains are particularly interesting because they are all important arenas for learning, but the learning conditions and their links with school differ.

The research design is based on a qualitative, longitudinal study involving two lower secondary schools in two different local communities in medium-sized cities. The schools will be selected in cooperation with Vestfold University College. The data collection will be conducted over two-and-a-half years, enabling the project team to follow developments over the course of lower secondary school, from the second semester of eighth grade until the end of tenth grade. We will recruit a total of 60 students, and follow these students across contexts and over time. The main focus of the observations and interviews will be on identifying, describing and analysing learning processes in each of the specified domains.

Relevance to society

The research focus of this project has major relevance for key challenges in teacher education and school development today, especially as stated in the White Paper 22 (2010–2011) on lower secondary schools called "Motivasjon – Mestring – Muligheter". The key challenges stated in this document are to make learning more relevant and authentic for students in order to increase motivation. However, how this can be done is not so clearly stated. Furthermore, in highlighting broader issues about youth, participation and knowledge building, KnowMo will be of relevance for public discourse about learning in the 21st century in Norway.

The project is headed by professor *Ola Erstad* at the Department of Educational Research, University of Oslo. Researchers from the University of Oslo and Norwegian Social Research (NOVA) will conduct the main part of the research. The Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK) will take part in some sub-projects and a design experiment. The main partner is the teacher education unit at Vestfold University College.

KnowMo is a four-year project, starting September 2012 and ending August 2016.

For more information see:
www.uv.uio.no/pfi/english/research/projects/knowmo/index.html

The Programme for Practice-based Educational Research – PRAKUT has a primary objective to enhance the quality of early childhood education and care (ECEC), basic education (primary and secondary education) and teacher education. It builds on the experiences gained from the Programme for Practice-based R&D in Pre-school through Secondary Schools and Teacher Education (PRAKSISFOU) (2006–2010). PRAKUT is designed to further develop and strengthen R&D expertise and the knowledge base in teacher education programmes. Activities under the programme will be directed towards improving cooperation on research between teacher education programmes and the field of practice in ECEC and primary and secondary schools. A prerequisite for all projects applying for funding is that one or more of the teacher education institutions are active partners in the project.

www.forskningsradet.no/prakut

