

Workplaces as Learning Environments: interaction between newcomer and work community

MARIT RISMARK & SILJE SITTER

*VOX—The National Institute for Adult Education, Research Department, Nedre
Bakklandet 60, N-7014 Trondheim, Norway*

ABSTRACT *This article explores interactive qualities between newcomers and workplace practices, the newcomers being adult immigrants in job placement schemes. Focus is on how the novices enter work sites, how they participate and what their duties in daily work situations are in three working life sectors in Norway. The discussion draws attention to courses of involvement and participation through the structuring of work activities and the acceptance of the newcomers in the communities of practice.*

Key words: *immigrants; workplace pedagogy; interactive qualities; adult education*

INTRODUCTION AND AIM

The workplace is an important part of the life of adults. It adds meaning to their lives and opens doors to economic independence. This holds true for ordinary citizens as well as for immigrants settling in a new country. These days, debates on how to integrate immigrants emphasise working life as a main arena for successful integration. However, adult immigrants do not have full access to a working life in many countries, e.g. in Norway. Even though in this country there is a demand for labour in several areas, a considerable number of immigrants to Norway remain unemployed (Rogstad, 2001). Several factors interact and contribute to this situation, such as country of origin, gender, time spent in Norway, reason for immigration and state of trade at the time of immigration (NOU, 20: 2001). Furthermore, employers may be reluctant to recruit immigrants as they are not certain if they will fit in with the staff. As a consequence, immigrant individuals will be categorised according to certain qualities due to external characteristics, and decisions about employment will be made according to more or less stereotyped knowledge of the ethnic group associated with the individual (Barth, 1969).

Research projects focusing on immigrants and language learning point to the importance of including the life that immigrants lead outside school into the learning

situation (Rismark, 2000). Accordingly, both educators and researchers emphasise the workplace as an important arena for acquiring language skills and culture, besides earning an income and establishing regular employment (Norberg, 2002). Therefore, research on workplaces as learning environments may hopefully add new insights that in the long run will facilitate the entry of immigrants into working life and contribute to active citizenship.

The study presented in the following focuses on encounters between new comers and work communities. The newcomers are immigrants to Norway, and the aim of the study is to explore preconditions for learning in work settings and to examine how they gain social and professional acceptance, by observing ways in which immigrant newcomers participate in work activities during a 3 month training placement programme. Focus is on the daily interaction between immigrants and the social partners at the workplaces, concentrating on how the newcomers enter, participate in and acquire duties at the placement facilities. The collected data allows for discussions about learning processes and preconditions for learning within the work sites, as well as about the need for new research.

THEORETICAL APPROACH

In the following, when learning processes in work settings are approached, a socio-cultural framework will be applied. Learning through participation in the social practice of work is described by Vygotskian derived theories of learning and development (Vygotsky, 1978), as being inter-psychological processes, including the individual and the social partners, artefacts, symbols and the physical environment. Learning is understood as a question of possessing information, mastering skills and understanding. Hence, the study of learning accordingly concentrates on the individual and the social partners when exploring learning qualities in real work settings. Interaction is also to the fore as a main concept and relates to the dynamics and the learning potentials in relations involving 'newcomers' and 'old-timers' (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Accordingly, learning is perceived as reciprocal processes (Billett, 2001), occurring as a product of interaction with the social world.

In the workplace the individuals and the work community, through social, cultural and historical processes, mutually create and maintain actions and mediate meaning within this particular activity system (Engeström, 1999). A central part of activity theory is the idea that the division of labour, rules and norms for a practice shape interaction and access. Hence, the individual and social world relation is a basis for creating and maintaining the 'ways' within an activity system, such as the workplace. Knowledge, skills and understanding are created and maintained within the practices and they are valid according to the particular activity system. Individuals become familiar with the practices through interaction. In this way each practice is historically and socially situated and one practice cannot be copied into other times and places (Lave, 1997). With all communication and all actions being situated, according to socio-cultural understanding, these phenomena need to be seen as relative to the activity system within which they occur, and a 'neutral' context does not exist (Säljö, 2000). In this way learning is about more than

individual psychological processes, as knowledge and skills are not within the individual. It is about participation in a community (Lave, 1997). Learning is situated as an integral and inseparable aspect of social practice:

[...] there is no activity that is not situated. It implies emphasis on comprehensive understanding involving the whole person rather than “receiving” a body of factual knowledge about the world; on activity in and with the world; and on the view that agent, activity, and the world mutually constitute each other. (Lave & Wenger 1991, p. 33)

As a consequence, a crucial factor is thus the individual's ability to judge the relevance of (i) particular information, (ii) skills and (iii) the understanding of actual situations and the ability to act according to what is valued by the social world. It follows that much knowledge is relative in its character, and skills that are valued in one situation may not be relevant in relation to other social partners. Human action is situated in social practice, and individuals act according to their knowledge and experience and to what is required, appreciated or made possible in a particular social situation.

To act in appropriate ways within the community of practice requires knowledge about what is valued by the particular work culture. This leaves immigrants in a special situation, as they often do not have language skills on a par with the other employees and staff and therefore may not understand the general culture such that this knowledge can guide their actions in the work setting. In general, newcomers do not play a central role in the work community and their opportunity to make authentic contributions to the joint enterprise is critical (Cope *et al.*, 2000). As for the immigrants, in the workplace they and the work community encounter each other's values, skills and experiences as they participate in daily work activities. In Norway immigrants report feelings of loss as they encounter working life, education and society. The pain they feel is explained as detrimental to their adult role in educational settings, as they are given a pupil role (Skaalvik, 2002). Encountering working life may also have a detrimental effect, as immigrants and the work community have different sets of values and norms. Over time, immigrants to Norway have been regarded as unqualified and lacking initiative, and contact takes place on the work community's premises (Waale, 1996). It also takes time for immigrants to familiarise themselves with the new society. To facilitate the process of integration the workplace may be the most efficient instrument for qualifying immigrants for active citizenship. Studies on social participation report that language skills and professional and cultural competence are important factors that enhance integration into the society (Grønhaug, 1979; Waale, 1996; Drøpping & Kavli, 2002). Therefore, it is important to examine the dynamics and the interactive qualities of workplace encounters.

Workers learn through the workplace activities they take part in. To newcomers in general, entering a work site is about gaining access and belonging to a community, both in a social and professional sense (Cope *et al.*, 2000). The work training invites individuals to participate in workplace activities and provides newcomers with access to learning (Billett, 2000). Hence, the established work com-

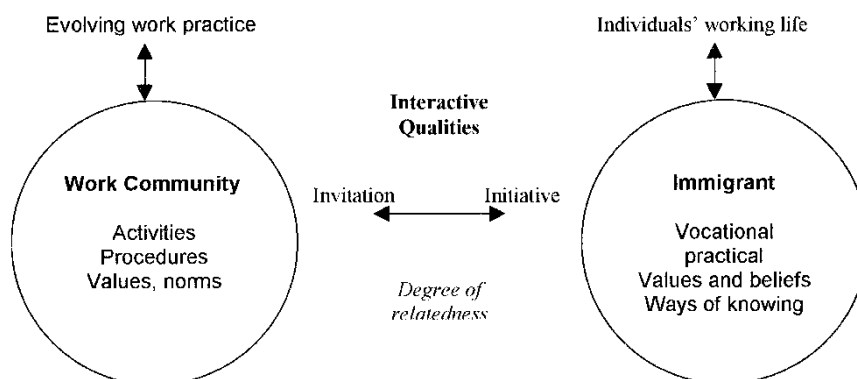


FIG. 1. The relationship between immigrant and work community.

munity influences the individuals' access and learning in daily work. At the same time, learning requires personal involvement. Hay (1993) supports the position of the learner as the centre of interaction and places a large part of the learning authority on the newcomer. Beyond the invitational qualities in social practice is the agency of the individuals. A person's prior working life experiences may be essential to the ways in which work activities are approached. Invitational qualities in the workplace and individual initiatives frame the interactive qualities of these encounters as the participants' values, norms, attitudes and understandings come into play. Billett (2001) finds that changes in work practice are brought about by historical factors (e.g. changes in tools and technologies), cultural factors (e.g. needs for particular products and services) and situational factors (e.g. goals, practices and participants in the workplace). In this way interactional understandings and situational elements are created and maintained by the work community.

Billett (2001) sketches the relationship between the individual and the work community. Figure 1 is a modified version, with personal initiatives and workplace invitations to the fore as interactive qualities.

When the work community invites in newcomers, and the newcomers initiate into the existing language and social and cultural practices, the ways of doing so are decisive. Knowledge is situated in the social practice; between participants, in actions, through tools being used and in the norms and rules to be followed. The newcomer has access to this knowledge through participation in the social and professional community. This means gaining access to real-life standpoints enabling individuals to act meaningfully and purposefully because 'situations might be said to co-produce knowledge through activity' (Billett, 1997, p. 3).

Exploring Workplace Interaction

To newcomers in a work community, such as immigrants in Job Centre Programmes, it is critical to have the opportunity to make authentic contributions to work activities (Cope *et al.*, 2000). However, opportunities to participate in work activities and access to support are not uniformly distributed across participants.

Although the community possesses an important key to invite the individual to participate in work activities, the access to work may be distributed unevenly among workers. Beyond perceptions of personal competence, access is distributed on the basis of affiliations, race, gender, worker or employment status (Billett, 2000).

A main focus of the study reported in the following is the reciprocity between contributions to learning afforded by the social practice of work and how individuals interpret and act according to invitations in the social practice. To understand the relations between social practice and how the individual thinks and acts requires delineating and identifying qualities in the ways in which participation takes place in the natural contexts of learning. A main focus when elaborating on interactive qualities must therefore be to examine the levels and duration of interaction in which the newcomers are involved. Another important question is what characterises immigrants' access to work activities. In order to study the immigrants' processes of gaining social and professional acceptance, the focus had to be on the procedures of entering the workplace and the qualities of participation involving the newcomers and the social partners.

METHOD

Subjects

The reported project followed three immigrants during a 3 month placement at three Norwegian work sites, a car garage, a handicrafts shop and a hospital. This study was part of a 2 year project on learning in the workplace, including altogether 700 employees in three sectors of working life in Norway: the retail sector, the automotive sector and the health sector (Rismark *et. al.*, 2003). How newcomers were attended to and valued by the work community was a main focus of the project, and the study included one working site within each of the three sectors. The three informants participated in a 3 month training placement programme, organized by the Norwegian Job Centre Service.

The newcomers, all in their thirties, were the only visible minorities at the workplaces, and all three were Muslims. They had been in Norway for 2 or 3 years and had participated in the National Programme for Norwegian Language Training. The immigrants had their choice of placement and the trades were relevant to their prior education or experience. One was a trained doctor, another a fully trained seamstress and the third was an unskilled car mechanic.

The work sites differed with respect to size as the shop employed four people (including an apprentice), while 25 worked in the garage and more than 500 were employed in the hospital. The work sites organised their work in different ways according to what they produced, and the division of labour varied accordingly. In the hospital, the division was strict, as doctors, nurses and other health personnel had well-defined routines according to their occupations. The four employees in the small retail business had overlapping tasks and a work activity started by one could be completed by a colleague if needed. They also shared responsibility for the sales of material and accessories. The car garage had separate but cooperating depart-

ments. Apart from the garage, the sales, car parts and cash register and ordering departments were located in one area.

Procedure and Analysis of Data

During the spring of 2001 the 3 month period of data collection was spent observing in all three workplaces. The immigrants were observed as they participated in different situations throughout the working day: at the workstation, moving between departments/wards and work activities, as well as during rests and lunch breaks. The exploration of workplace participation had priority and the diversity of interaction involving agents and activities was captured through studies of units which possessed 'all the basic characteristics of the whole' (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 46) rather than elements of analysis. The methodological choice for exploring participation was participant observation. The observer filled no natural function at the workplaces, but made an effort to get to know the people in the selected departments and to follow them throughout the activities in which they participated. This allowed us to:

... study processes, relationships between people and events, the organization of people and events, continuities over time and patterns, as well as the immediate sociocultural contexts in which human existence unfolds. (Jorgensen, 1989, p. 12)

Data was collected over a 3 month period in 2001. Altogether 125 hours were spent in the three businesses, and brief notes were made during each visit to each of the placements. As these areas were not designed to accommodate anyone other than the workers, notes were often taken in uncomfortable positions. For example, the car garage was filled with tools and spare parts so there was absolutely no free space for the observer to sit down and take notes. More extended field notes and memos were written on a computer after each observation. The joint company with the newcomers and old-timers fitted in well with the intentions of this study, as the researchers' presence in the work settings allowed for thorough descriptions of the interactions and side-by-side joint actions. At the same time, this approach enabled the voices of the participants to emerge, hence visualising the meaning of what was observed from the perspective of the participants. Informal discussions with the participants on the data being gathered provided reasonable assurance of having captured the intent of the participants in the activities described (Henning, 1998). This also increases the credibility and reliability of the observational material (Østerud, 1998), indicating a shift of focus from the researcher to the data.

Analysis took place both in the field and after data collection. The strategy was to narrow down the focus of the study and continually review field notes to determine whether new productive questions could be asked (Strauss & Corbin, 1996). Data were examined for emerging categories which were informed by theoretical perspectives deriving from the socio-cultural approach of the study. Throughout the whole observation period we moved between personal, interpersonal and work community planes of focus. Based on shifts between the different planes, the analysis brings to the fore social interaction, as a 'sensitizing concept'

(Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Patton, 1990), while the personal and work community planes constituted the background for the analysis. All three levels were operative within the analysis, thus bringing to the fore one plane of focus did not preclude the other aspects (Rogoff, 1995).

FINDINGS

The findings describe different pathways through practice placements and the presentation will focus on the welcome and acceptance into the workplaces and the immigrants' earning of acceptance, both vital aspects of integration and success for a newcomer.

Welcomed and Accepted into the Workplace?

The newcomers and the work practices developed qualitatively different levels of interaction. One of the striking aspects of the results was the distinct and different ways in which the immigrants were introduced to the work sites and the resulting contrasting courses of further involvement and participation in the communities of practice. The presentation of our findings begins by describing how the immigrants entered the work sites based on introductions by management. There was one clear example of one immigrant being successfully incorporated into the community of practice and two others of not being supported in their entry into the work practice.

Thirty-year-old Will was introduced to the car garage by the manager. This was the message he gave to the workers: 'He's going to have his job training here and I expect you'll welcome a beginner?' The manager did not hook the novice up with particular workers. He was left in the garage without further instructions being given to any of the parties. The newcomer started out in his work practice with an unclear role. The manager did not appoint any specific workers to be accountable for the new man nor did he make anyone responsible for fostering further involvement between newcomer, workers and work activities. During a break one day when Will was away, the manager expressed the following to some staff members:

He's no car mechanic. He's probably used barbed and steel wires to hold the car parts together before kicking the vehicle. But it's different here.

This newcomer was not introduced as an asset able to add positively to the workplace in a professional sense. Accordingly, the newcomer was not provided with a professional starting point by the manager. The workers and the newcomer were left with questions that called for solutions. How much time to spend with the new man? What work could he be allocated? Was he to rotate among the workers? The overall issue was what solutions were found to these questions.

Diego, a 35-year old fully trained doctor (from his country of origin) had work training at a hospital. He spent 1 week on each ward. These were the comments from the head nurse on one of the wards:

We've had no information on this, and I don't know what management has

considered, we've only been told that he's coming. This seems unplanned. And we are left here without any assignments for him. What shall we do? He asks me: 'What shall I do?' I reply: 'What do you want to do?' He then says: 'I can check blood pressure, inject medicine and so on ...'. But this will be an extra load and we have to find, or to put it bluntly, search for tasks.

This head nurse expressed frustration at the situation. She was looking for communication between the organisational levels that were to be involved with the newcomer. As it was, she placed responsibility for the situation on the hospital director's shoulders and disclaimed responsibility for her own part. Diego's presence was questioned by this staff member and the newcomer was not looked upon as an asset able to add positively to the workplace.

Mona, a 30-year-old dressmaker, was the third person to be observed during work practice. From the first day on the job she was given sewing assignments for costumiers. In addition to sales activities in the shop, sewing was the major product in this business. She was placed at a small table in the middle of the shop and was able to see the other staff at work. The manager was pleased with the new staff member: 'It's like she was sent to us from heaven [because we have so many assignments]'. The company was short on the kind of competence Mona had and mentioned that they were considering hiring her on a permanent basis. After a few days she was participating and contributing to an increase in the total production as she gained a function within the community.

Not only did these three immigrants enter workplaces within different trades, they were appreciated differently by management. Diego was looked upon as an intruder by one of the head nurses and placed outside the enterprise, arguing that his presence had no meaning, neither to him nor to the workplace. On the other hand, another manager praised the newcomer who was a seamstress. The manager was pleased with and had positive expectations for the newcomer. She was perceived as able to produce garments on equal terms with the other staff and she was talked of as being able to have an integrated role in the enterprise. Will was described as unskilled, as he did not have the relevant qualifications for the garage job. The perceptions of the newcomers as a resource, a problem or irrelevant to the enterprises were, as shown in Table I, the starting points for further participation in the work activities.

As shown, the seamstress was found to be adding resources to the workplace and she was accepted professionally, as she was trusted to produce garments for the shop. She was welcomed right from the start and recognised as a resource and as

TABLE I. The organisation's recognition of newcomers as they enter the work sites

Recognition of newcomers	Relevant education	Non-relevant education
Organisational acceptance	Resource (Mona)	Irrelevant (Will)
Organisational scepticism	Problem (Diego)	

qualified for the job. Her background as a trained seamstress meant that her starting point was as a qualified seamstress in this practice placement. Diego, the trained doctor, was not looked upon by the head nurse as a resource able to add positively to the ward. His prior education did not make him qualified in this hospital setting. Indeed, his presence represented a problem to this organisation. The hospital had no space for health personnel that did not fit into their work categories, as the hospital routines, responsibilities and work were strictly divided according to the professions of nurses, doctors and other qualified health personnel. Will, the third newcomer, was not considered to be qualified for the job, while the manager signalled to the mechanics that his attendance at the workplace was accepted.

The different ways in which the immigrants were introduced to the work communities provided some basis and starting points for framing further interaction. Will and Diego were left in a situation where they had to enter a process to *earn acceptance*.

In this initial phase of the placement the workplace revealed *the organisation's recognition* of the newcomer. The workplaces' recognition of the immigrants varied according to the applied basis for assessing the newcomers. In the hospital, the division of labour was strict and they saw no openings for the newcomer, who did not fall within the established professions. Secondly, considerations related to production varied according to the perceived relevance of the immigrants' experiences. Mona was highly valued while Will had a low rating. In Diego's case, there was never any consideration of his professional status, as his presence raised organisational issues that prevented access to work activities.

Earning Acceptance

Job placements involve complex social contexts and the three newcomers faced challenges of a social and professional nature when trying to succeed in joining and being accepted by the work communities. The initial introductions of the immigrants were partly recognised in the further workplace interactions, and the recognition of the newcomers may have established some premises for further participation. The attempts to establish such premises emerged through the analyses of the data as two main themes. One was the *structuring of work activities* through support from the practitioners with whom they worked. The second was the *acceptance of the newcomers* by the work communities.

Structuring of work activities. At the basic level, the newcomers were provided with some procedures and a line of action. For Will this took place at the individual level as a partner in one-to-one situations. Will approached one of the mechanics and came to work at his station in side-by-side joint participation throughout the 3 month period. The experienced worker made the work activities accessible as the newcomer performed small work operations and was provided with information at communicative levels as the work proceeded. Basic *procedures*, detailed *explanations* and open *reflections* over work operations were available to the newcomer.

He took initiatives all the way. Whenever his partner provided procedures, Will

would take appropriate actions. He would open the garage door on information like: 'This job is finished, we'll take it (the car) outside'. In the same way he would help out by finding appropriate tools according to the line of action or explanations such as: 'Have to tune this one 180° to lock, not 90° or they'll fall off in motion'. Will also supplied tools or he manipulated the car parts in manners similar to his partner, according to explanations like: 'The gas runs from here and joins the engine over here ... this one has to be fitted in like this, and squeezed like this'. Over the period, however, Will started out as a 'tool assistant' and towards the end of the period he was responsible for small work operations. The experienced worker then watched over each work operation and organised the work activities by explaining, controlling and providing tools. In this way the experienced worker gradually stepped aside. There was no bidding nor any commands. Based on procedures and explanations, the newcomer initiated and the old-timer kept control of the total work activity. The experienced worker invited the newcomer into a work practice characterised by practical actions and ensuing explanations and reflections. Will was a member of a duo at the mechanics' workstation, but the relation was not valid outside this place. During breaks the other workers found their regular seats and the newcomer was a loner at a table at the very end of the lunch room. The other staff never included him in their talk and Will made no attempts to join in the conversations. He remained socially excluded from the larger group of workers throughout the period.

The organising of Diego's work training implied temporary stays in numerous wards and his interaction with the personnel was sporadic. He placed himself by the ward office always ready to help out: 'I'm here in case they need me. I'm prepared'. He would talk to the personnel and ask for jobs, and as he was standing by the counter, he paged through the medical book. One regular post on his programme was to do rounds with the doctor and his team. 'I don't discuss much with the doctors, they're too busy. Whenever I have questions, I write them down'. After the round the staff sit down to discuss and summarise the cases. 'That discussion took place at a very high tempo and I wasn't able to follow it, but I can't ask questions either because the doctors are too busy'. Diego approached several staff members offering to assist them or to take over some tasks. Often they refused his initiative, or they would occasionally allow him to participate as an observer. With the many separate rooms in the wards the newcomer had limited access to observe and participate and hence lacked information about procedures and the line of action needed to guide participation in work activities. Accordingly, Diego possessed limited knowledge for further proceedings in the workplace.

In the sewing shop, the newcomer participated in discussions on equal terms with other staff, but they did not provide her with information at the detailed and procedural level. Customers would come and go during opening hours, and whenever the shop was 'empty', discussions would take place. One of the staff addressed the newcomer to discuss the price of a male suit:

Staff member: The manager has set the price at NOK 2300 for women's suits and NOK 3200 for men's suits. That's too expensive!

The two of them study a price list and discuss the stipulated prices compared to the work carried out on each garment.

Newcomer: Male vests require more work, and the listed price is OK, but the jacket is priced very high.

Staff member: The list says NOK 800 to 1000 for jackets, what about 800 for the jacket?

Newcomer: Yes, that's more reasonable.

The seamstress was an equal participant in discussions and she was invited to make authentic contributions on real matters with no staff being superior. Work-related matters were dealt with through discussions between equal participants, rather than informing and explaining. Contact was not limited to just a few of the staff and the newcomer learned about the lines of action for work activities because she had access to discussions and side-by-side joint work activities.

The three persons were involved to different extents at their job placements and the work community's structuring of the work activities was not equally distributed to the newcomers in the three work settings. One had limited staff contact through interaction with just one staff member. Another was included in a larger network and participated at the group level, while the third achieved only sporadic contact with a wider range of staff and was not able to establish any stable relations as he wandered from one ward to the next.

Will's connection with one particular mechanic made procedures and lines of action accessible. Actions were supported by detailed comments from the experienced worker. Focus was on work operations, not on broader work-related issues. In contrast to this, Mona was included in a network involving all workers in the shop, and she had shared responsibility for the sewing production. Lines of action were not introduced to her at a detailed level. Rather, as a participant in discussions she learned about the overall policy and matters of judgment in the sewing production. In this way the inviting practitioners in these two workplaces structured the work activities on detailed levels or at overall levels, respectively.

Through interpersonal interaction between newcomers and work communities the knowledge needed was made accessible to different extents and at different levels. Will had access to *basic procedures* and lines of action, as these were provided by the mechanic. Mona was not offered information and procedures at a detailed level. Rather, the community provided the *overall policy*. Accordingly, as the workplace allowed access to social interaction through workplace activities, the newcomers learned the ways and the modes for vocational knowledge. The third newcomer, Diego, was not invited to participate in work activities and hence lacked access to social interaction. As a consequence he also lacked information about procedures and lines of action needed to guide further participation.

Acceptance of the newcomers. Being placed in a work community is no guarantee of an easy passage into the community. Situational factors such as the organisation of practice (e.g. wandering from ward to ward) and the organisation's acceptance, scepticism or ignorance comprised the platform for gaining acceptance in the

day-to-day work activities. Through interaction in work-related activities, the newcomers to some extent and rather gradually earned *social and professional acceptance*. Access to interaction and the levels and the duration of contacts were decisive for the immigrant's chances to earn such acceptance.

Diego did not have stable contact persons and he was not included in any relations with staff over time. As mentioned, the organisational issues raised by his presence, the strict division of labour and the sporadic interaction with staff gave few openings for earning acceptance through interaction. Will's membership in the limited network of two persons was valid only during work activities. Away from the mechanic's workstation, this relation dissolved. On top of this, he was not involved with the total work community and did not earn professional or social acceptance within an extended social network.

The seamstress, on the other hand, was included in a broader network in both a social and professional sense. She was invited to breaks. In looking back they reminded her of how they had to struggle to get her to join them in the first days, whereas now their daily routines were synchronised. Placing the immigrant in the centre of the shop was not argued for as being 'for her own good'. The manager said: 'Our apprentice could never have been placed in the shop area to work. She is much too impatient and easily flustered. But Mona (the immigrant) fits in well out there with us because she has a different personality'. In this way the newcomer was in view and was talked to and about as a person they valued and accepted for her personal qualities and professional skills. However, the work community was not without social and professional requirements. This is clearly illustrated by focusing for a moment on the role of the apprentice. The apprentice explores various sewing techniques. She is assigned tasks that are not strictly defined and she operates within wide frames when sketching, cutting and sewing garments. At this time she is making a jacket. As the work proceeds, her sewing is commented on by the others:

Experienced worker:	What kind of lining are you going to use?
Apprentice:	There isn't any lining in this jacket
Experienced worker:	Sloppy!

Afterwards, the apprentice tells me (the observer) she is sick of getting no support.

I've stopped showing them what I do because their reactions are not supportive and by no means encouraging.

The frames for sewing priorities were narrow with respect to following certain sewing procedures for various garments. Mona, with priorities that matched those of the regular staff, was perceived as a skilled seamstress. The immigrant's sewing practice was within the pre-established frames for production and sewing procedures, while the apprentice's sewing was not. The work community valued 'traditional sewing' that followed established sewing procedures. The apprentice challenged this tradition by using creative and experimental sewing procedures.

The immigrants earned social and professional acceptance at different levels and within certain limits at each of the workplaces. Will was fully accepted by one mechanic and included in a social and professional sense while the two of them

operated at the workstation. This was a limited sphere within the total work community and the newcomer earned no general acceptance within the total work community. The seamstress earned social and professional acceptance at a more overall level as she had access to all work activities within the sewing area. One important aspect in her acceptance may have been the matching professional priorities between her and the work community. The involvement in work activities allowed existing knowledge about work to be reinforced, refined and transformed. In this way, the limits and frameworks for performance or production that were within the established standard of, for example, 'quality sewing' were a product of social practice.

DISCUSSION

Immigrants face multiple challenges when approaching working life in Norway. At a general level it is hard to gain access to work and, as mentioned above, unemployment is more frequent among immigrants than the total population (Rogstad, 2001). The results presented in this article reveal the course of events for immigrants to Norway when they have gained access to training placement.

None of the three immigrants observed in this study were automatically incorporated into the work communities. It is not unusual for newcomers in general to be ignored in the work community (Hay, 1993), and marginalisation and isolation may ensue when the novices are not included. The observed immigrants experienced three different pathways through practice. One of them (Will) was left in the garage by the manager with few lines to direct further workplace interaction. In this way the immigrant was '*dropped*' in the car garage and participated in work operations within a limited space and with one worker only. Another (Diego) remained isolated on the hospital wards. He was left to wander from one ward to the next. In relation to both the organisational arrangements and the actual involvement in work activities, he was '*trespassing*' in the workplace, always passed on to the next ward. The last immigrant, the seamstress, was accepted into the work community, contributed to production and was looked upon as an asset to the business. This newcomer was '*installed*' in a small retail business.

There were certain conditions attached to the communities' acceptance of the newcomers and there were barriers to overcome in order to be placed in a meaningful role in ongoing work activities. One of the immigrants experienced isolation as he '*trespassed*' in the workplace. Our observations revealed a person suffering from a lack of invitation from the work community, and the findings suggested that communication, or the lack of it, within the ward organisation with its strict division of labour was a central barrier to invitation of the newcomer into work activities.

Interaction with social partners contributed in specific ways to the newcomer's ability to capture procedures and routines in line with the other staff. Through the dynamics of interaction and side-by-side joint participation the newcomers attained a framework for actions and behaviour that were relevant for participation. They accessed particular information, skills and the understanding of actual situations, and hence increased their chances of acting according to what was valued by the

work community. The social partners' structuring of work activities had the form of *basic procedures* with a line of action made accessible through explanations, information and reflections. Side-by-side participation also helped the newcomers to *access wider frameworks and overall policy* to guide subsequent actions. In this way social interaction contributed in specific ways to the transparency of the situation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). With different sets of values as points of departure for the involved partners, transparency provided vital content for negotiating future participation.

There was no one way of doing things. Senior workers may have given direct orders about what to do, but the ways in which the work was carried out were not absolute. When given a role in ongoing work activities, the observed newcomer and work community mutually constituted a joint practice with senior workers and newcomers negotiating joint premises for further participation. The participants constructed both absolute and relative demands for participation through interaction, and work operation procedures became transparent and accessible. The structuring of work activities did not give strict and narrow behaviour patterns for the immigrants to use. Rather, the partners with whom they worked contributed by *framing* work activities, referring to the attention given to particular aspects of a situation at hand. Knowledge of general frameworks operating within or across situations contributed to establishing common ground for further actions and hence guided subsequent action. Given these conditions the newcomers were then able to participate in ways relevant to their work. This contributed to the immigrants' *participatory appropriation*, referring to

how individuals change through their involvement in one or another activity, in the process of becoming prepared for subsequent involvement in related activities. (Rogoff, 1995, p. 142)

Appropriation occurs in the process of participation through involvement in social interaction in work activities. This phenomenon includes the ability to anticipate or a sense of what can feasibly occur within specified contexts (Lave & Wenger, 1991). At a basic level, the newcomer needed to familiarise him or herself with the structures of work activities and procedures to guide participation. On the other hand, acquiring structures did not lead to a 'uniform' standardisation of participation, and there were examples of mutually constructed joint practice. Nonetheless, the structures provided common ground for further participation. Hence, inclusion in mutual relations enabled newcomers to develop a more flexible competence, the ability to anticipate, to see what is coming, to predict different alternatives and the ability to improvise from there. In this way learning was about developing 'portable interactive skills' (Hanks, 1991) within the work practice.

Prospects for being accepted and invited to participate in work activities were linked to the organisation's recognition of the newcomers, to the division of labour in the workplace and to access to interaction with social partners. Extended access to interaction allowed the newcomers and 'old-timers' to co-construct norms and rules for future participation in work activities. An absence of interaction partners

made a less dynamic situation, leaving it to the newcomer to decode and take up existing norms and values.

Successful incorporation of immigrants into training placements may benefit from two specific insights, namely the importance of access to social partners through extended interaction and the importance of side-by-side joint participation. In this exploratory study we have shown that vital preconditions for successful incorporation of immigrants into work communities involves the building and maintaining of relations. In a wider perspective, qualities of workplace interactions also involve the preconditions for using the immigrants' vocational knowledge as a resource for Norwegian society.

There may also be other important preconditions for the immigrants' integration into the workforce than those reported here. New research is needed to establish the eventual generality of the findings reported and also to estimate the actual scope of the problem, so that workplaces can be used efficiently as learning environments for immigrants as newcomers in the work community.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The study is part of the two-year project 'Learning at the Workplace—Access to Working Life', funded by the Norwegian Research Council. The authors wish to express their appreciation to Tove Steen-Olsen and Heidi Engesbak who participated in the project. We are also grateful to Christin Tønseth and Jorun Stenøien for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article.

REFERENCES

- BARTH, F. (1969). Introduction. In I.F. BARTH (Ed.) *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: the social organization of culture difference*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- BILLET, S. (1997). Situation, social systems and learning. *Journal of Education and Work*, 11(3), 255–274.
- BILLET, S. (2000). Coparticipation at Work: knowing and work practice. In *8th Annual International Conference on Post-compulsory Education and Training: Learning Together, Working Together*, Queensland, Australia, Vol. 1, pp. 16–24.
- BILLET, S. (2001). Workplace pedagogic practices: participation and learning. Paper presented at the VOX October Seminar, *Workplace Pedagogy*, Trondheim, Norway.
- BRYMAN, A. & BURGESS, R.G. (1994). Developments in qualitative data analysis: an introduction. In A. BRYMAN & R.G. BURGESS (Eds) *Analyzing Qualitative Data*. London: Routledge.
- COPE, P., CUTHBERTSON, P. & STODDART, B. (2000). Situated learning in the practice placement. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 31(4), 850–856.
- DROPPING, J.A. & KAVLI, H.C. (2002). *Kurs for Arbeid. Norksoopl ring og yrkesdelatkelse blant ikke-vestlige flyktninger og innvandrere* [Course for Work. Norwegian language courses and participation in work among non-western refugees and immigrants]. Oslo: Fafo, Institute for Applied Social Science.
- ENGESTR M, Y. (1999). Activity theory and individual and social transformation. In Y. ENGESTR M, R. MIETTINEN & R.-L. PUNAM KI (Eds) *Perspectives on Activity Theory*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- GLASER, B.G. & STRAUSS, A.L. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: strategies for qualitative research*. New York, NY: Aldine.

- GRØNHAUG, R. (1979). Nordmenn og innvandrere. Om etnisitet og klasse som to ulike forutsetninger for sosial deltakelse i Norge. [Norwegians and immigrants. About ethnicity and class as to different underpinnings for social participation in Norway; in Norwegian]. In R. GRØNHAUG (Ed.) *Migrasjon, Utvikling og Minoriteter*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- HANKS, W.F. (1991). Foreword by William F. Hanks. In J. LAVE & E. WENGER (Eds) *Situated Learning, Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- HAY, K.E. (1993). Legitimate peripheral participation, instructionism, and constructivism: whose situation is it anyway? *Educational Technology*, 33, 33–38.
- HENNING, P.H. (1998). Ways of learning. An ethnographic study of the work and situated learning of a group of refrigeration service technicians. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 27(1), 85–136.
- JØRGENSEN, D.L. (1989). *Participant Observation. A methodology for human studies*. London: Sage Publications.
- LAVE, J. (1997). Learning, apprenticeship, social practice. *Nordisk Pedagogik*, 17(3), 140–151.
- LAVE, J. & WENGER, E. (1991). *Situated Learning, Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- NORBERG, P. (2002). *Sluttrapport fra Prosjektet Norskopplæring for Voksne Innvandrere 1998–2001* [Final Report from the Norwegian Language Course for Adult Immigrants 1998–2001; in Norwegian]. Trondheim: VOX–The National Institute for Adult Education.
- NOU (20: 2001). *Lov om Introduksjonsordning for Nyankomne Innvandrere (Introduksjonsloven)*. [The Act Relating to the Introductory Scheme for Newly Arrived Immigrants (the Introduction Act); in Norwegian]. Oslo: Statens Forvaltningstjeneste Informasjonsforvaltning.
- ØSTERUD, S. (1998). Relevansen av begrepene “validitet” og “reliabilitet” i kvalitativ forskning [The relevance of the terms “validity” and “reliability” in qualitative research; in Norwegian]. *Norsk Pedagogisk Tidsskrift*, 81(3), 119–130.
- PATTON, M.Q. (1990). *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Method*. London: Sage Publications.
- RISMAR, M. (2000). *Klasseromsstudie fra B-Løp* [Classroom Study from the B Scheme; in Norwegian]. Trondheim: VOX–The National Institute for Adult Education.
- RISMAR, M., ENGESBAK, H., STEEN-OLSEN, T. & SITTER, S. (2003). *Læring på Arbeidsplassen—tilgang på arbeidslivet* [Learning at the Workplace—access to working life; in Norwegian]. Trondheim: VOX–The National Institute for Adult Education.
- ROGOFF, B. (1995). Sociocultural setting, intersubjectivity, and the formation of the individual. In J.V. WERTSCH, P. DEL RIO & A. ALVAREZ (Eds) *Sociocultural Studies of Mind*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- ROGSTAD, J. (2001). *Sist Blant Likemenn? Synlige minoriteter på arbeidsmarkedet*. [Last Among Equals? Visible minorities on the labour market; in Norwegian]. Oslo: Institutt for Samfunnsforskning.
- SKAALVIK, S. (2002). *Et Liv i to Verden. Innvandrerne møte med det flerkulturelle Norge*. [A Life in Two Worlds. Immigrants’ encounters with multicultural Norway; in Norwegian]. Trondheim: VOX–The National Institute for Adult Education.
- STRAUSS, A. & CORBIN, J. (1996). *Basics of Qualitative Research*. London: Sage Publications.
- SÄLJÖ, R. (2000). *Lärande i Praktiken. Ett sociokulturellt perspektiv*. [Learning in Practice. A sociocultural perspective; in Swedish]. Stockholm: Prisma.
- VYGOTSKY, L.S. (1978). *Mind in Society: the development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- VYGOTSKY, L.S. (1987). *The Collected Works of L.S. Vygotsky: Vol. 1. Problems of General Psychology*. New York, NY: Plenum Press.
- WAALE, M.B. (1996). Innvandrernes forhold til det Norske arbeidsmarkedet i lys av begrepene “kulturell kompetanse” og “kulturell kapital” [Immigrants’ relations to the Norwegian labour market in the light of the concepts “cultural competence” and “cultural capital”; in Norwegian]. Unpublished manuscript, University of Tromsø Department of Education.