



Awarded COFAS Marie Curie fellows – For the FIIP programme



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Project: Literacy and education at the workplace: The use of Swedish as a second language within the Swedish workplace

Abstract: This project focuses upon the role of literacy in workplaces, as a result of the introduction of new technologies and new work structures. Recent socio-economic changes have resulted in the proliferation of texts within workplaces and consequently in the emplacement of new literacy demands upon workers, especially those whose first language is not the same with the language of their work. Aim of this study is to examine the new literacy practices that arise out of this new reality in the Swedish context, as well as the way the workers' individual and professional identities are reconstructed through this process.

More specifically, the study will take place in a branch of a large-scale industry. Ethnographic methods of data collection, such as participant observation and interviews, will be employed in order to examine the reading and writing practices involved in every occupational role within the company, the workers' attitudes towards these practices, the problems they encounter and the solutions they find. The study proposed here will be framed under the theoretical lens of the New Literacy Studies. Within this framework, literacy is understood not as an autonomous skill which can be acquired and transferred to all social contexts, but rather as embedded in social situations and therefore studied only within the context within which it is being enacted.

Career plan: During my MA studies in the UK, I developed an interest in adult literacy. I wrote my dissertation on the role of literacy in the lives of immigrants in Athens and I realized the important role of literacy in the workplace.

I wrote my PhD thesis on the literacy practices in which vocational students in the UK engage when studying for a vocational qualification. I conducted research in a factory and in a vocational college and focused upon the creation of vocational portfolios. I examined the literacy practices involved in creating the portfolio and the impact this has on the construction of the student's professional and institutional identity.

Having achieved a good theoretical and empirical background on workplace literacy practices in the UK, I wish now to conduct a similar study in the Swedish workplace context. My aim is to examine how the Swedish workplace has been influenced and changed as a result of the increased number and role of texts and what impact this has on the employees.

The overarching epistemology that characterizes my research is the view of literacy as a situated practice which can only be studied in the context it is being enacted. This is the reason why I have always used ethnography as my principal methodology, as my aim is to become a participant in the field and examine in detail the ways literacy is being acted out.