Embedded in a Context:
The Adaptation of Immigrant Youth

av

Ylva Svensson

Akademisk avhandling

Avhandling för filosofie doktorsexamen i psykologi, som enligt beslut av rektor kommer att försvaras offentligt fredagen den 28 september 2012 kl. 13.15, Hörsal B, Bilbergska huset, Örebro universitet

Opponent: Professor Frosso Motti-Stefanidi
University of Athens
Grekland

Örebro universitet
Institutionen för juridik, psykologi och socialt arbete
701 82 ÖREBRO
Abstract


With rising levels of immigration comes a need to know what fosters positive adaptation for the youth growing up in a new culture of settlement. The issue is increasingly studied; however, little of the research conducted has combined a developmental with a contextual approach. The aim of this dissertation was to explore the adaptation of immigrant youth on the basis of developmental theories and models which put emphasis on setting or contextual conditions. This entailed viewing immigrant youths as developing organisms that actively interact with their environments. Further, immigrant youths were seen as embedded in multiple settings, at different levels and with different contextual features. Two of the overall research questions addressed how contextual features of the settings in which the youth are embedded were related to adaptation. Results from all three studies combined to show that the contextual feature of a setting is not of prime or sole importance for the adaptation of immigrant youth, and that the contextual feature of SES diversity is of greater importance than the ethnic compositions of settings. The next two overall research questions addressed how the linkage between settings was related to adaptation. The results indicated that adaptation is not always setting specific and that what is happening in one setting can be related to adaptation in another setting. Further, it was found that the cultural distance between settings is related to adaptation, but that contextual factors affect this relationship. Overall, the results of the dissertation suggests that the adaptation of immigrant youth is a complex matter that is explained better by interaction and indirect effects than by main and direct effects. This highlights the importance of taking all settings in which the immigrant youths are embedded into account and to account for how the settings interact to understand the factors that foster and hinder positive adaptation of immigrant youth.

Keywords: immigrant youth, adaptation, development, settings, contextual features, linkage.

Ylva Svensson, Institutionen för juridik, psykologi och socialt arbete Örebro University, SE-701 82 Örebro, Sweden, ylva.svensson@oru.se