

Fakultetsopponenten sammanfattar

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Hillevi Lenz Taguchi – Emancipation och motstånd: dokumentation och kooperativa läroprocesser i förskolan (Stockholm: HLS Förlag, 2000)

From the field of preschooling and from the discourses of feminist poststructural theory this dissertation is effective for the following: preschooling and child care as practice, for international research in education, for changing research methodology, for feminist work and professionalism, for academic literacy across languages and for developments of poststructural theory. To say what the thesis is and what it does requests some background regarding its epistemology, knowledge and science. Before presenting this I shall describe the dissertation as it does from the Stockholm project titled »Early Childhood Education in a Changing World».

Chapter one presents the research focus, given postmodern discourses and their effects for Early Childhood Education. Documentation is made problematic, and preschooling is seen as a site for emancipation and resistance. This acts as a critique of the phenomenological and hermeneutic discourses prevailing in Early Childhood Education. Chapter two prepares the philosophical reader for what is to come later in the dissertation. This is a crucial strategy in the development of higher degree work of difference.

Chapter three presents Swedish history as an example and pointer of what is to follow, and as a remembering of women. It shows that preschooling as a field is underrepresented in feminist poststructural deconstructings. Chapter four says how feminist poststructuralism develops from Foucault's work on governmentality and power. By the end of this chapter there is a solid foundation to the thesis, though readers may by now wonder what methodology will be employed. Chapter five presents this, though I miss exemplary methodologies from feminist poststructural research, and would have liked more argumentation for the methodology eventually taken up.

Chapter six presents four readings and four confrontations, of three preschool teachers' and the researcher's cooperative learning processes. The place of resistance in learning is presented, together with a skilful blending of theoretical discussion and selected extracts from the research data of interviews, everyday conversations between young children, written texts of various genres and practical details. The first readings, which are genealogical, present resistance; the second give voice to multiplicity instead of singularity; the third document and deconstruct to search for truth and knowledge; the fourth present the collective biographies of the three preschool teachers in relation to their changing professional positionings. Chapter seven functions as an exploratory essay.

Lenz Taguchi's readings show pedagogical practices as disciplinary and normalising. Feminist essentialist readings show preschooling as an important public sphere for the professionalisation of women. ›The Child‹ in the modern society is shown to have overtones for today's constructions of childhood in education and care. Hence competence and learning processes receive attention. Newer constructivist frameworks may be seen to empower children as well as pedagogues. Values and ethical notions of young children as equal citizens, with rights to a pedagogical practice and with possibilities to investigate their surrounding world together with other children and adults, formed the platform for this co-operative research.

As poststructural and deconstructive research the dissertation follows closely today's descriptions of what such research should be. I therefore see the research as taking up an approach to social science research that draws on discourses, theories and practices beyond those that are called empiricist, interpretive or critical. Accordingly, the dissertation does not concern itself with classical scientific investigations (an empiricist approach). Nor is it primarily concerned with phenomenology and hermeneutics (an interpretive approach); nor problems of distorted communications, Marxist ideologies, critical self-reflection of observations and the radical improvement of human existence (a critical approach).

Rather it takes up the complex positionings constructed by discourses, with the resultant epistemological and methodological effects on the research product itself. I shall say what some of these effects are, in relation to how the dissertation needs to be read. As deconstructive/poststructural research Lenz Taguchi's dissertation must be judged by its own references, philosophical assumptions and ethics. Because these sometimes differ from those that are not deconstructive/poststructural they may require spelling out. Following Connole (H. Connole: *Approaches to Social Science Inquiry*. In *Research Methodologies in Education*. Deakin University, Geelong, Australia: 1998, pp 22 ff.), research within the social sciences follows and constructs research models, views of reality, assumptions about foundations, research data, generations of inquiry, particular interests and values. Further, and again following Connole, four approaches to socially scientific research may be differentiated. These are the empiricist; the interpretive, phenomenological or hermeneutic; the critical; and the deconstructive/poststructural. Each of these relates differently to research models, realities, foundations, data gatherings and analysis, inquiries, interests and values. Locating poststructural research as both within and against earlier research practices, ideologies, genres and discourses then enables Lenz Taguchi's dissertation to be located.

LOCATION

The model for empiricist research is classical physical science investigation. For interpretive, hermeneutic and phenomenological research the model comes from historical, literary and existential studies. Critical research is modelled on Marxist, interpretive and psychoanalytic studies. Deconstruc-

tive/poststructural research is modelled on anthropological, psychoanalytical and linguistic understandings between culture, language, desire and self.

The last named model allows Lenz Taguchi, as a theorising researcher, to deal with cultures of women, as indicated in the feminist stance assumed throughout. Further, it allows her to deal with the spoken and written language of the women in the research, including herself, as they talk together and discuss the pedagogical and other documents they have written. In many ways the dissertation models and develops itself on contemporary feminist poststructural texts, which include the particular desire of feminist researchers for research products of difference, and a new ethics in their productions and co-constructions.

Reality in the empiricist approach is unitary and can be understood by empirical analytic method. In an interpretive approach realities are multiple, requiring multiple methods for understanding. For a critical approach realities are problematic because of distorted communication. With deconstructive/poststructural approaches there is no reality beyond language. Here reality is constituted in and through language as discourse, as representations of reality are naturalised through ideology.

In going against the grain of usual Doctoral dissertation writing and production processes, Lenz Taguchi challenges the status quo of reality in research. She does so by presenting work that is highly original and closely relates to the field of practice from whence it comes: and to which it will constantly return. As indicated by its title, the dissertation problematises the power of written language: of documentation as a pedagogical practice. It does so by resisting authoritative ›reality‹ from various discursive positionings, and includes that of the dissertation itself.

The foundation of empiricist research data is discipline, the senses and the perceptions. Interpretive research makes meaning foundational, and this precedes logic and fact. The foundation of critical research data is also meaning, as found in language and social behaviour. For the deconstructive/poststructural the foundation of research data is problematic as meanings are always discursive and plural. Meanings shift according to contexts and audiences.

Lenz Taguchi neatly exemplifies how this happens, to show by the making of four different readings of her data how discourses cause us to see things differently. By inference this shows how practices become normalized by particular regimes of truth. In refusing to gather and analyse research data in usual ways Lenz Taguchi's thesis regards a new ethics in research methodology, epistemology and knowledge-making. This is important not only for early childhood education but for the social sciences in general.

In empiricist research, data are gathered and analysed by clear and unambiguous rules, independent of setting. In interpretive research, data are gathered and worked with through the social, linguistic and cognitive skills of researchers: for example by dialogue. In critical research, data are gathered and worked with by interpretive methods, plus critical self-reflection concerning their grounds. In deconstructive/poststructural research data are found, constructed, and re-read by interrogating various discourses which

constitute the field of inquiry. Further there are analyses of the power relationships generated through the discourses, as well as between the researcher and the researched.

This the dissertation skilfully demonstrates. Further to this an analysis of power relationships is generated through the discourses as well as between the researcher and the researched. Doing research like this is not only highly demanding; it requests particular skills, desires and energies. In many ways this makes such poststructural methodologies as Lenz Taguchi pioneers unavailable to researchers without such commitment and experience within a field of practice. Truly the term for such research is praxis (the highly professional and ethical development of work) and not just practice.

Inquiry in empiricist research generates evidence and generalizable laws. Here objectivity depends on removal of error and bias, and this relates to the logic of observation and measurement. Interpretive research's inquiry generates knowledge which is dependent on the process of its discovery. Thus the integrity of its findings depends on the particular researcher's skills regarding analysis and conclusions. Critical inquiry generates knowledge within an interpretive framework, but which also serves the purposes of personal liberation, understanding and emancipation: for example from forces constraining the rational independence of individuals. Deconstructive/poststructural inquiry generates constructions of knowledge by questioning knowledge's foundations and frameworks. Further it queries how knowledge has been constituted as truth, and how social realities are constructed through language.

Here an example of the deconstructive/poststructural is Lenz Taguchi's naming of the ending of her dissertation as not a conclusion but an inclusion. Refusing the role of expert, she as researching theorist implicitly requests that readers themselves become new knowledge constructors, and that they act accordingly to deconstruct the foundations and frameworks of their normalized research practices, pedagogical practices and notions of excellence in writing. At the same time her critical inquiry is acknowledged by the focus on emancipatory processes and practices, in particular those regarding power.

Research interests in empiricist inquiry are prediction, control, technically exploitable knowledge and explanation. With an interpretive inquiry the research interests are understanding at the level of ordinary language and action, and discovering the meanings and beliefs underlying the actions of others. Critical research interests are also interpretive. They concern radically transforming human existence, by practical and public involvement in knowledge formation and use. Deconstructive/poststructural research interests are to question totalising or unified interpretations and understandings. They also locate dominant interests and how they are produced and maintained. Hence marginal positions matter.

Lenz Taguchi removes preschooling practices from the periphery of theoretical attention. Further, she works from the marginal position of contemporary feminist philosophers and theorists in malestream academic discourses. Accordingly the dissertation draws strongly on publications from feminist and poststructural English-speaking research cultures (Butler, Davies,

Ellsworth, Flax, Grosz, Haraway, Harding, Hekman, Lather, Rhedding-Jones, Spivak, Walkerdine). That the dissertation is written in Swedish and not in English indicates, at least to me, the desire for a change in Scandinavian academia, its research and its related professional practices in preschooling and other educational institutions.

The values of the empiricist approach values are scientific and inherently value neutral. Interpretive values are that scientific knowledge must be interpreted in terms of what it represents. Critical values are never neutral; they always represent certain interests. For deconstructive/poststructural approaches, value is contested, because of inherent contradictions between researcher and researched, and also because of contrary values within one's self. Here examples are the discourses of gender, race, class, age, sexual preference, ethnicity, nationality, physical ability etc. It follows that scientific truths and knowledge are never value-neutral. Rather they are effects of power.

In this regard the thesis follows and builds from the work of Foucault, with much use made of the philosophical positionings of Derrida, especially for the deconstructions of the considered documentations, and the constant focus at many levels on emancipation and resistance. Here what is valued are the cooperative learning processes of the participants in the research project, including the researcher herself. For recipients of the research and for the publications that will follow it, this represents a most important breakthrough for pedagogy, research and their combination.

EFFECTS

For preschooling and child care as practice

Here the workforce in preschooling is shown to be thoroughly professional, with a high level of intellectualism coupled with sensitive developments of thinking and action. In making apparent the naturalized discourses of preschooling, poststructural research is not aiming to establish yet another truth. Rather it performs critical understandings of non-fixedness, with boundaries between researcher and researched liquidized. Children's positionings, by these deconstructions of learning processes and documents, are thus more likely to become more appropriately powerful.

For international research in education

The dissertation places this Swedish research at the forefront of international work on Early Childhood Education, and on feminist poststructural theory and its related ways of going about doing research and resultant writing. Because the many references and quotes from non-Scandinavian publications are linked with what has been published in Swedish, the research has unique qualities. This and the level of its theorizing ensure its international promulgations if translated into English. The researcher has put together Swedish practices and published work by key feminist poststructuralist texts from Sweden, Australia, UK, USA and other countries in such a way as to make her a leading figure in international arenas. The interest in this will go

beyond preschooling to the research of education more generally, and to gender and education research in particular.

For the purposes of changing research methodology

As feminist scholars have claimed, feminism is not a methodology; nor is poststructuralism. Yet this research demonstrates the creative and ethical development of methodology in relation to the people in the field, the researcher's own developing consciousness and the desire for academic excellence within its named theoretical fields. As a model for how to make research subject-sensitive rather than object-determined, the methodology explored here will show future researchers that they too may work with freedom if they work with sufficient rigour and discipline.

For feminist work

Much feminist research is still within paradigms and approaches bearing little relation to today's new times and their resistance of earlier genres of analysis, authority, researcher positioning and the normalised voice of an academic. This research shows that accountable feminist research not only requests a focus on gender but new relationships between who works in particular spaces. By emphasizing feminist poststructural theories the dissertation shows that over-reliance on the theories and philosophies of men is no longer mandatory. More than this, a uniquely feminist ethics is seen to be arising. This goes far beyond the traditional notions of women as carers. Here the implications for early childhood education are most important: in other words, this feminist researcher has critically selected her research field.

For the development of an international academic literacy

The dissertation shows readers that it is not enough to work in national isolation with a few token references to research cultures outside the home language. For Anglophones the implications here are profound. We simply must become more proficient at languages other than English, and start decentering what usually goes in our reference lists. Within globalization the local is shown by this dissertation to become glocal. Here the reading and the writing of more than one language and more than one national research culture makes monolingual and monocultural research look quite outdated.

For new developments in poststructural theories

The dissertation makes much use of recent publications, to develop its own particular theory and praxis of an ethics of doing research. Moving poststructural theory into practice is not new though, as such binary categories blur anyway. Here my critique is that more explicit theories could have come from the end of the dissertation. In my experience though, this poststructural refusal to say clearly what theory is developed may be more than compensated for in the articles in international refereed journals that follow the production of such a Doctoral dissertation. What, for example, of the psychoanalytic theories the thesis touches on but does not develop? What of the theory of ethics to which this dissertation can of necessity only point?

QUESTIONS, RESPONSES, PROBLEMS AND CRITIQUES

The following may be asked of Lenz Taguchi's thesis and its contexts. At the time of the public and oral examination of the dissertation these were answered by the candidate. I now leave them open.

Research methodology

Feminism is not a methodology, and neither is poststructural theory. Yet together they effect methodology choices, so that some practices become undesirable. The research is described as a form of ethnography which then develops into co-operative learning processes. If this is not action research, then could action research be taken much further than it currently has, as a feminist poststructural research practice? Or would a poststructuralist not want to categorise methodology in this way?

Researching with young children

Many feminists find it unethical to do research about or even with children. For adults whose normalized practice involves their unacknowledged power this may not be problematic. Yet why has the research not focused more on young girls' and young boys' resistances and emancipations? Can there ever be a fair negotiation between children and adults in institutions such as preschooling and child care? What could or should the role of young children be in research projects where researchers have particular power? What are the effects of hidden discourses of ageism?

Feminist poststructural theory

There are many theories in this dissertation, but not apparently many kinds of feminisms. Some people would find middle class Scandinavian feminism problematic. The research sometimes names class and ethnicities, yet the poor and the foreign are mostly overlooked. Where should feminists draw the line in taking on discourses other than those of gender? Whose structure is it that feminists oppose?

Binary theory

The dissertation draws heavily on Bronwyn Davies' work, as have many feminist poststructuralists. There are two problems with this. Firstly, are all categories binary? What about triads and more complex relationships, even in modernity? Secondly, why not just call this work or philosophy ›postmodern‹? By labelling ourselves as ›feminist poststructuralists‹ we alienate men, don't we?

Deconstructive ›readings‹

A theory of reading necessarily involves knowledge of how texts work, for writers and for readers. Why has the dissertation not gone more seriously into the functions of language and of audience, for example via applied linguistics? Isn't it only people who don't know about text theory who think that meaning lies in texts? Is it enough to follow Derrida here? Or could the readings exemplified in the dissertation be called something else?

Emancipation and resistance

What is it that this research resists and has been freed from? If the keys to freedom are documentation and cooperative learning processes, what could happen as results of such research and its subsequent publications? Further, what new theories are there here, and what new practices for young children and their teacher-carers? Taken to extremes the result of a radical challenge to the status quo of a Doctoral dissertation may be failure. Where are the politics of claims to power taking us, and is this what we want? If the keys to freedom are documentation and cooperative learning processes, what could happen as results of the production of such research? Further, what new practices will there be for children and their teacher-carers? Why is this not a recipe for the end of institutions?

ENDINGS

I end this piece of writing with a quote from the dissertation I have examined. Used in this way the quote turns the thesis back on itself, to say what it is that it has done and what it implicitly requests. »Rather, ethics explodes anew in every circumstance, demands a specific reinscription, and hounds praxis unmercifully.» (Adams St Pierre, 1997, p 176, in Lenz Taguchi, 2000, p 280) At the levels of many practices, this dissertation has aimed at political and pedagogical effects far beyond the those of getting a Doctorate.

In research practice the four named approaches to research may occasionally blur. Additionally, the adoption of one or more is not necessarily a fixed positioning for a researcher, who will shift according to research task(s) and questions. Further, although the qualities of qualitative research have been considered, a positivist naming has been avoided. Deconstruction can never be positivist, though other approaches may be made to lean towards it. Post-positivist research approaches in today's postmodernity will appear as reconstructions and border crossings between the critical and the interpretive, the sometimes empiricist and the sometimes poststructural. Lenz Taguchi's dissertation is most appropriately within the deconstructive, poststructural and the feminist, on her terms. Here the descriptor of feminist simply denotes a pro-woman stance, though gender matters are always coloured by ethnically normalized glasses, as by age and class.