

Ann-Christine Vallberg Roth, 2002: Early Childhood Curricula. Developments from the middle of the 19th century until today /Läroplaner för de yngre barnen: Utvecklingen från 1800-talets mitt till idag/. Pedagogisk Forskning i Sverige, Vol 6, No 4, pp 241–269. Stockholm. ISSN 1401-6788

A main issue has been brought to the fore with the co-ordination of the Swedish pre-school, school and day-care centre for school-age children: How can the curriculum history of the early childhood education in Sweden be clarified and communicated? The term *early childhood education* includes firstly pre-school children, but also children in day-centres and primary schools, i.e. children of about the age of one to nine.

The study is based on curriculum theory and gender theory. The selected period starts from around the 1850s until today. Examples of analysed key-texts except National curricula are: Handbooks, *The Kindergarten* (a journal; 1841–1947), Instructions (National Swedish Welfare Board, 1945–1990), Educational guidelines at the community and local level, 1993, and also integrated educational guidelines for pre-schools, day-centres and schools, selected in 1998–2000.

The results can be summarised in four concepts and code periods, which includes a gender didactic pattern, as follows:

- *Curriculum of God*, about 1850 to 1890: Patriarchal code
- *Curriculum of the good home*, about 1890 to 1930/40: Sex-segregated common-code
- *Curriculum of the Welfare state*, about the (1930/40) 1950s to the middle of the 1980s: Sex-neutral equality-code
- *Curriculum of the situated world-child*, from the end of the 1980s to 2000: Pluralistic sex/gender-code

The fourth period of today, »Curriculum of the situated world-child«, is still tentative in character. Capturing and analysing our present period of time is always difficult.

When the curriculum history of early childhood education is related to earlier Swedish curriculum theories (which of course isn't without problems), it becomes evident that some similarities can be found as well as some boundaries and additions. Ulf P. Lundgren's (1979) curriculum codes and Tomas Englund's (1986) concepts are both examples of theoretical tools that are partly equal to the patterns in the curriculum history of early childhood education. Englund's patriarchal conception has an obvious corresponding area in the »Curriculum of God«, where religion is a high-level status subject also for the younger children. Furthermore it can be said that Lundgren's moral curriculum code from the 19th century is related to the »Curriculum of

the good home» in this present study. Lundgrens (1979) rational curriculum code and Englund's (1986) scientific-rational educational conception has its corresponding area in the »Curriculum of the Welfare state«, with natural science and math as high-level status subjects and with a starting point in the psychology of learning and development.

Englund's (1986) democratic conception has certain common connections with the »Curriculum of the situated world-child«, where school content is not necessarily structured in various subjects, or in groups of subjects but instead in a problem oriented way, in discussions and in so called total concepts. Learning, problem solutions and communication are the dominating activities in a school aiming for the future citizen in a problem solving, competence – and a communication intensive society.

In contrast to the dominating subject oriented content of the school curriculum, which through the years has basically been the same, it's possible to follow a larger change around the organization of the content in the pre-school and day-centre plans. The dominating way this material is structured is across the boundaries of subjects, and also in other entities than school subjects. This investigation exposes more similarities between aims and subjects used during various periods of school, day-centre and pre-school, than earlier investigations have presented.

From today's environment the results of the study show that it is worthwhile to question the rough view that the contents in pre-school and day-centre are focused around the child, whereas the school is more subject oriented. This study shows a more complex and changing history. Different types and levels of subject orientation and child orientation content can be found, which opens up the need of further discussion of what is meant by children orientation versus subject orientation. Both the so called child centred and subject centred content can be viewed in a critical perspective as a cover for different forces in society, which are embedded in changing discourses during different periods.

When looking back in history it's obvious that the curriculum of both pre-school and early school started as subject oriented, and from the 19th century until today can be explained as follows:

In *The Curriculum of God* the main subject was religion and to learn to fear God as a main patriarchal code. The children were described as pupils (lärljungar?) and were educated in large groups.

In *The Curriculum of the good home*, centred around the soulful little mother and the powerful little builder, the romanticized children were presented as becoming adults in a moral tone. The good home and local environment with domestic activities close to nature was focused as the centre of work and practices.

During *The Curriculum of the Welfare state* and the scientific rational period the gender-neutral child education plan, the child becomes a scientific object in the Welfare state project and in a psychosocial adult perspective. The primary school and the strongly growing and centralised pre-school/day-centre was there to serve the Welfare state.

Finally it's possible to distinguish a stronger globalised, and child oriented trend that can be called in terms of *Curriculum of the situated world-child*. The world citizen rights, competence and the »best for the child« is most important. A growing multifold can be found with a problemizing of the ideology that all are equal as well as an ending of the neutral, universal child and uniform gender. Aims about the child gender difference, gender similarities and equality are integrated with ethnic belonging, class, age/generation, handicap, regional belonging etc., representing thus a change from uniform to heterogeneous, situated gender in a pluralistic sex/gender code.

Even if the children did not participate and formulate the global, national and local plans, aims are now being written that they should participate in the construction of their own individual educational plans. The »child centred orientation« can by this be said to characterise both pre-school, day-centre and primary school. The child, parent and teacher as curriculum makers will likely become an area with a lot of development. Basic subject related contents tend to increase in the plans for pre-school, whereas basic childcare content becomes less important, and is more connected to learning. Theme and problem oriented content tends to become more common in plans for the primary school, even if subject related plans still dominates.

Rodney Åsberg, 2002: There are no qualitative methods – and no quantitative either for that matter. About the misuse of the qualitative-quantitative argument /Det finns inga kvalitativa metoder – och inga kvantitativa heller för den delen. Om det kvalitativa-kvantitativa argumentets missvisande retorik/. Pedagogisk Forskning i Sverige, Vol 6, No 4, pp 270–292. Stockholm. ISSN 1401-6788

My point of departure is a realisation that the comments and writings about the choice between so called qualitative and quantitative methods with regard to research refer to a pseudo-question. There are no qualitative or quantitative research methods. There is an enormous rhetoric about this »important choice and standpoint«. But no method is or can be either qualitative or quantitative.

The word method means »a way or manner of doing something« (*The Advanced Learners Dictionary* 1958 p 792). When we talk about interview-method or survey-method or observation-method, the term method means the way we collect or produce data through interviewing, conducting surveys, making observations et cetera. But the way we collect or produce data can not be either qualitative or quantitative. Further more no data collecting method is limited to only one particular kind of data.

Quáalitas or cuántitas refers to characteristics of the phenomena of which we seek information and knowledge. And these characteristics are reflected in the data we establish about the different phenomena. Data are either qualitative in the form of words or quantitative in the form of figures. But there is nothing more to talk about here as both »numbers and words are needed if we are to understand the world» (Miles & Huberman 1994 p 40).

Structuring the field of »theory of science» in four different levels; (i) ontology, (ii) epistemology, (iii) methodology and (iv) data gives us thus a start, where the categorisation qualitative-quantitative refer to a complementary relationship on the fourth level. When the qualitative-quantitative argument is used beyond the fourth level it creates confusion. For example, when referring to the methodological distinction of induction and deduction, someone (Thurén 1993 p 19) writes, »induction implies quantification» whereas someone else (Backman 1998 p 48) says the opposite; »the qualitative approach is predominantly inductive.»

However, significantly more serious it is when the qualitative-quantitative categorisation is used as referring to distinctions on epistemological and ontological levels and is thus assumed to form two different paradigms. Then the total field, is put on its head and a fruitless and endless rhetoric starts. Two examples.

(i) With reference to pedagogical research, Wolming (1998 p 86) uses the qualitative-quantitative argument as a divide for the meaningful distinction between idiographic and nomotetical knowledge interest:

A way to categorise pedagogical research is from a point of departure in the two terms quantitative and qualitative research ... One (the quantitative) has its background in natural science where empirical quantitative observations have a central role. These observations form the basis for the main task of this paradigm, which is to find causal relations, which should be explained. The other paradigm (the qualitative) has its rotes in the human sciences and emphasises holistic and qualitative information. The main task for this paradigm is to interpret and understand the results (my translation).

(ii) Denzin and Lincoln (1998 p 26) write:

[A]ll qualitative researchers are ... guided by highly abstract principles ... These principles combine beliefs about ontology (What is the nature of reality) ... epistemology ... and methodology. (How do we know the world and gain knowledge of it?) These beliefs shape how the qualitative researcher sees the world and acts in it ... The researcher is bound within a net ... of epistemological and ontological premises... This net may be termed paradigm.

Considerations regarding ontology and epistemology are of importance but are confused when subordinated to the category »qualitative» which, as I see it, only has relevance on the data level. And there it is unnecessary! This conclusion is also in line with Miles and Huberman (1994 p 41) when they

write: »We believe that the quantitative-qualitative argument is essentially unproductive ... we see no reason to tie the distinction to epistemological preferences.»

Rhetoric goes on. One talks about, *Qualitative and Quantitative Methods, Perspectives, Paradigms, Landscapes* and even *Philosophy*. This leads to a crucial question: What is the »qualitative« all about? An answer from one of the later Handbook(s) in Qualitative Research (Denzin & Lincoln 2000) seems to indicate that almost all major research directions are included in »qualitative research«:

At the most general level four major interpretive paradigms structure qualitative research: positivist and postpositivism, constructivist-interpretive, critical (Marxist, emancipatory), and feminist-poststructural. (Denzin & Lincoln 2000 p 19)

Denzin and Lincoln (2000 p xv) write that the »open-ended nature of qualitative research leads to a perpetual resistance against attempts to impose a single, umbrella like paradigm over the entire project«. However, by maintaining the use of the qualitative argument as an overall divide means actually, that »an umbrella like paradigm« is imposed. And under that umbrella different important a priori standpoints of ontological and epistemological importance are hidden and confused. However, when necessary epistemological a priori decisions – representing different knowledge-interests are subordinated and at the same time reduced to a rather banal, common sense, difference between words and figures, they cannot be properly dealt with. Instead of clarifying the ideological/normative implications of different standpoints, these are often hidden in the smoke screen of quasi-normative terms like »depth«, »openness«, and »wholeness«.

As Habermas (1972 p 15) states: »Epistemological investigations do not regress to the dogmatism of common sense.« Moreover »a radical critique of knowledge is possible only as social theory« (Habermas 1972 p vii). Thus, the epistemological issue has hardly anything do with »depth« and »wholeness« per se, but rather with whose interests we serve with our research. This has nothing to do with whether the social inequalities are described by words or figures.

Only when your a priori standpoints are dealt with in accordance with implications on their own level (ontological and epistemological) you take clear responsibility for what kind of knowledge you are producing through your research. When, for example, phenomenology and phenomenography were introduced into pedagogical research as examples of »qualitative methods«, the linkage to a priori standpoints of Husserl's philosophy were confused or hidden. The a priori levels were substituted with the methodological level and many students have accepted these epistemologies as a preference of a research method.

However, when the a priori implications are clarified many students have realised, that they embrace a realistic ontology and epistemology in accordance with praxis philosophy. Having realised that from the beginning,

might have lead to another kind of research. This emphasises the problem of how we arrive at our a priori preferences. This discussion should be open and liberated from the misleading qualitative-quantitative argument.