

Sidsel Germeten (2002): Limits of Teaching? Freedom and control in the classroom of the 6-year-olds. (Grenser for undervisning? Frihet og kontroll i 6-åringenes klasserom). Stockholm; HLS Förlag.

English Summary

This doctoral thesis is about discourses in teaching in early childhood education in Norway. The purpose of the study was to inquire and examine different teachers in their work, to see how *discourses* (Foucault, 1972) are constituted. To introduce what my curiosity and motive power in this field are, I will present two statements given by teachers for the 6-year-olds:

After working the first year with 6-year-olds in primary, I look forward to start to work with the second grade, because then I can start to teach (elementary teacher)

The curriculum for 6 year olds presents many different activities (...) I do not like to use the word teaching to describe my work, but I use it because it is taken for granted for other teachers and the parents (pre-school teacher)

One unity of the statements is that both teachers do not talk about *teaching* 6-year-olds. The statement of the elementary teacher differs between "working" with the 6-year-olds and "teaching" the older children. The pre-school teacher tells us that "teaching" is "taken-for-given" as the main activity in schools, therefore "teaching" is a useful word, but it does not convey the meaning of what she is doing in her classroom. Both teachers put limits to the word "teaching". This is the reason why I called my project "The Limits of Teaching?". The main questions are: *How is the term "teaching" defined and used by the teachers? Are they still connecting the word "teaching" to their work in first grade?* In this summary I translate the statements of the teachers above into English, due to the language of communication. Speaking of statements, terms and words, it has been difficult for me to translate accurately and precisely from one language to another. Any naming is therefore difficult and dangerous, like Foucault probably would have said it (Foucault, 2001).

The contextual background for the presentation is the educational reform in Norway named Reform 97 (Haug, 1992). All the subjects presented here are teachers in the first grade in elementary school in Norway, teaching 6 year olds. By the educational Reform 97, the 6-year-olds were moved from voluntary kindergarten to compulsory schooling. During this reform, the 6-year olds were moved from a voluntary "scene" of free play and care to a compulsory institution of discipline and control, from one institutional *discourse* to another. One of many questions of concern, was about the organisation of the schooldays, the content of teachers teaching and the children's opportunity to free play according to the new National Curriculum (L97). In Norway, there are two main principles in education. One: All children should be taught the same basic subject matter, but adjusted and adapted to the individual pupil. Second: The education and working methodology should reflect the progression and development of the different stages and age groups (KUF, 1996). For the 6-year-olds, L97 states that "the new pedagogy" should be based on the Norwegian kindergarten tradition and the traditions of the compulsory school. For this age group, the school day should be flexible with emphasis on "playlike" methods. The contents of the education are supposed to be organised as *themes* in contrast to syllabuses. Working methods like project-oriented and teamwork are introduced from first grade. There should be a gradually transition from themes to subjects and syllabuses. To make this possible, pre-school teachers were introduced into compulsory school.

The theoretical framework of the study is based on the following perspectives: A power-in-relation perspective inspired by Michel Foucault and some of his "commentators", Jennifer M. Gore, Thomas Popkewitz and Nicolas Rose, focusing on a micro-perspective on relation between teachers and pupils. I have analysed the terms and the "inner rules" of teaching, its borders and limits, its standards and styles of reasoning (Krüger, 1998). This study also concerns what constitute the "truth" about

relations, freedom and control in teaching young children. Power technology is visible in the ways things are ordered or organised, said or done, also in feelings and emotions in arrangements or statements (Walkedine, 1997). As I see power technology, it could be *read* as structural and in that way visible for others to take part. An example: How do teachers express the inclusion or exclusion of the children in the daily school activities? Are any of the pupils segregated from the others? How do teachers differentiate within subjects? How is *otherness* constituted between so-called "normal" and "pathological"? Telling about subjectivity is a complex work, trying to catch the dimensions of regulations *and* self-discipline, determinism *and* voluntarism, structure *and* agency at the same time.

The origin of the thesis was an evaluation project that started spring 1998 and was finished by the summer of 1999 (Germeten, 1999a, 1999b). The focus in the evaluation project was teachers' different conceptions on Reform 97 as a whole. Writing this thesis, I changed focus for my analysis from the outside perspective on the Reform 97 to examine "*teaching*". The study was carried out in two parts. First I made a discourse analysis of statements given in a questionnaire where teachers, among other questions, were asked the following: "*If you, with your own words, were to define what teaching is, what is your answer then?*". In the analysis I put focus on two aspects. The first aspect was to discuss how teachers define what it is to teach young children, the second was to show how practical discourse analysis can be done through different *readings* of the teachers' statements. Interpretations outlined in the first empirical chapter are focused on what constitutes the limits of what teaching young children could be. What kind of *unities* (Foucault, 1972), themes, strategies and concepts do the statements express? What is included and excluded? Are the teachers positioning themselves in the texts? Among the eighty-eight answers from the teachers there were multiple and diverted discourses of teaching. Therefore, where to start a reading is also a question of

procedure. Tradition is one historical reference, enabling us to isolate the new against the background and permanence of what we think we already know. My groupings are my *discourses*.

To make clusters of statements from this material, I first made a reading of the substantial themes inside and between statements. In spite of the different ways of putting words together as a statement, some similarities occur as main themes of what teaching is about. The interpretative analytics of the statements constituted four main themes: 1) Teaching as *disseminating knowledge*, 2) Teaching as *arranging or organising the classroom*, 3) Teaching as *motivating or provoking interests*, and 4) Teaching as a "*meeting*" between a grown up (i.e. the teacher) and a child (the pupil). The second reading was positioning the teacher and the child. Both the pre-school teachers and the elementary teacher used the word "child" or "pupil" in their statements. In this way there are no differences in teacher background naming one person as an "actor" in teaching. According to textbook vocabulary for pre-school teachers in Norway, I expected that the pre-school teachers had more of the idea of a 6-year-old as a "child" than a "pupil". "Pupil" is being a part of the terms used in more formal educational settings. In this way, the pre-school teachers have inscribed themselves into the school terminology when asked about *teaching* (as another term connected to the idea of "schools"), and they answered as they were asked. The third reading put the question: Is there an outcome of the teaching? In other words, is teaching a task, action, process or relation intended to give an outcome? Is "teaching" in its rationale intentional? Analysing the discourses inscribed in the statements presented here, the "outcome" is not always the issue with teaching. A statement like "*to guide pupils*", describe an action with someone, but what kind of "result" the "*guiding*" will give, is not expressed. I have positioned four different genres of outcome. First, teaching is about acquiring knowledge, skills, and attitude in general terms. What kind of attitude, skills or knowledge is not said, but implicit it is taken for granted.

The *classification* is always a sign of *normalisation* (Gore, 1998). At the same time, normalisation includes and excludes, by this naming the “other” and “ourselves”. The second genre is specific knowledge or cultural heritage, named as the content of a certain curriculum or school subject and the third one is describing specific skills, like for instance working with a project. The next one deals with an emotional “result” of teaching like to become happy, content, enthusiastic, interested or curious. As a “result”, emotional feelings are more elusive than specific skills, and signalise a different attitude to teaching. The last reading was dealing with the simplicity and complexity of the statements. Grouping together the statements using metaphors or anecdotes are one of many ways of reading similarity. Another is for example to look for the “hidden” parts of the statements. Sometimes what is not said, are the things that are taken-for-given. Overall, the results from this questionnaire gave me information on what and how teachers think, perceive, interpret and formulate statements about teaching 6-year-olds. But a questionnaire (Kvale, 1997) do not give an answer to what teachers do “inside classroom”.

Therefore, the second phase of the project was carried out with a more anthropological or ethnographical methodology. The next step was to look into five different classrooms of the 6-year-olds. My interpretative analytics were based on field observations, analyses of written curricula and interviews with the teachers of the schools in the sample. One important aspect of the study of teachers in action was their use of *power technology*. I sat by the 6-year-olds for five weeks, or so to say: walked, crawled or ran beside them. The first thing that struck me was that the organisation, methods and content of the five schools were so distinctively different in many ways. The way the teachers had realised the “*traditions from kindergarten and school*” referring to the national curriculum (L97, p. 73) were different in style, framing and using of *time and space*. Especially time and space, were the core elements of this perspective. For

example, simplifying a subject will be one way of inscribing oneself into a discourse where knowledge is looked upon as a unit that can be divided into “eatable” pieces and served in bits. Some of the teachers presented a subject or theme this way for the 6-year-olds. Another presentation had the distribution of the subject turned around “tasks”. Like the last one, organising this gave the children only one possible “answer” or response. This way is also a *regulation* (Gore, 1998) of possible outcomes. The final discussion extends the *limits of teaching* and the use of the term in the Norwegian language among teachers today. The discussion is focused on the dimension of freedom and control including teachers' concepts of knowledge and teaching.