Knowing how, where, when and why: Practical Knowledge in Education

Panel for “Situated Practices of Exclusion and Inclusion”
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This panel is part of an interdisciplinary research project on the formative dimensions of preschool education, *Being and Becoming – A phenomenological perspective of preschool education in Sweden and Germany*, at the Center for Studies in Practical Knowledge at the Södertörn University in Stockholm\(^1\) funded by the Baltic Sea Foundation. As a research group, we are interested in how participants in contemporary preschool education – teachers and children – are formed by and are able to form their educational processes. We are combining a phenomenological-philosophical perspective on the concept of “Bildung” with empirical studies in Stockholm, Södertälje and Berlin. Doing this we want to contribute to a dialogue between philosophical and empirical research on education. In five different sub-projects we are exploring pre-school education as interplay of different perspectives (teacher, teacher students and children), but also of nature/culture, body/min, experience/reflection, practice/theory. In this panel we will present our research, focusing on the question of practical knowledge as knowledge that proves itself in the educational situation, that is embodied (as the example of dance teachers shows), situated (in nature and culture), and often not explicit (or formulated).

Knowing how, where, when and why: A phenomenological account on practical knowledge (Eva Schwarz)

The first presentation of Eva Schwarz is meant to be an introduction into the methodological questions that arises within our research project: What do we mean by practical knowledge and how to investigate it? What is the relation between experience and reflection? How to understand a phenomenological account on education? What is the relation between transcendental phenomenology and empirical research on education?

It is often said that a phenomenological method should be helpful in order to get a “view from within” human subjectivity, an embodied and situated view. It is via a “phenomenological

\(^1\) http://webappl.web.sh.se/p3/ext/content.nsf/agent?openagent&key=projekt_page_1383834245124
approach” one might finally get to know “what it is like to be X”. The formation of subjectivity and intersubjectivity is a key research question in the phenomenological tradition. From this perspective the subject’s being and becoming is given to her as something to be understood. A subject finds itself already situated in the world but also in a constant interaction with it and others and thereby also always in a process of becoming.

On the other hand, we have the founding father of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl, who was very thorough in describing phenomenology as a non-empirical science, as a transcendental project, operating with ideas and not facts (Hua III/1, 22). From this perspective, the knowing subject is just a formal structure. Instead of leading us to the core of subjectivity, right into the very “heart of being”, phenomenology leads us far away from it in an abstract sphere of ideas and concepts.

How do we solve this dilemma: Do we have to leave Husserlian phenomenology behind in favour of another (a non-transcendental) account or do we accept that phenomenology and empirical educational research coexist independently from each other? What could a possible phenomenological approach to education look like?

Writing as research (Lotte Alsterdal)

In this contribution the focus is on process-writing as a method of visualizing, investigating and developing practical knowledge. Essay writing is regularly used in teaching students, in this example for experienced child minders during a pre-school teachers education. Practical knowledge is shown and tested in action. How can we transfer it to a scientific context and adopt it for the purpose of reflection? How can writing out of experience contribute and what can a research method of this kind interact with practical knowledge? What kind of effects occur as texts of practitioner´s experiences in action are used as research material?

The students in my example start out from a lived situation in action that has confronted them in their work, and are then elaborated as the students further reflect upon their own stories through theoretical perspectives and reflective talks during seminars. Gradually the texts are processed to a complete essay. The methodology aims at creating reflections regarding the self experienced practice and clarifies aspects that has been unclear or concealed. Adding up the student´s contributions they illuminate the pre-school practice, but also their achievements during education.

In my research-project I am investigating how educational training can intervene the process of becoming pre-school teachers, influencing the way the students reflect upon and perform their professional experiences. The research work of this study consists in the analysis of these student essays and dialogues with students after having finished the teacher training program. Together with the researcher they discuss their texts and reflection processes in order to create understanding of the meeting between experience and reflection. In this sense the study involves a “reflection on reflection”.

What does theory do with experience? (Jonna Bornemark)

This contribution builds upon Alsterdal’s paper but takes a more theoretical and philosophical point of view. How can one investigate her own tacit knowledge through theoretical reflection (as is the case in the essays discussed by Alsterdal)? And how can research upon others tacit knowledge take place and what is the relation between theory and empirical observation in such research? Both these questions falls back onto the question on what theory does with experience. I will shortly use Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s and Gilles Deleuze’s thoughts on thinking and perception, mind and materiality in order to understand this relation further. Can experience and theory at all be understood separated from each other? How is experience always already theoretical? How does theory contain experience? But also: how can theory not contain experience? Is there also a gap between experience and theory?

I will bring these philosophical questions back into a dialogue with students’ essays and investigate further how theory and experience are intertwined in these. I will especially focus upon how embodiment, permeated with power-relations, is experienced, described, analyzed and reflected upon, and thus changed through the essay. But I will also discuss what is not changed in embodiment. Finally I will touch upon the question on experience of others experiences, and on what this discussion on theory and experience does to research as reflection upon other’s experiences.

Learning in and about nature as situated practice (Beatriz Lindqvist)
Currently, many countries, like Sweden, have an increasing interest in and awareness of the outdoor environment as a valuable complement to traditional classroom teaching (Dahlgren, Sjölander, Szczepanski & Strid, 2007; Jordet, 2010; Mårtensson, Lisberg Jensen, Söderström & Öhman, 2011). In Swedish preschools, visits to nature environments are additionally seen as important opportunities to develop democratic values like participation, equality, solidarity, mutual respect, responsibility and belonging.

This contribution addresses different ways of talking about and making use of nature in everyday activities in Swedish preschools in the multi-ethnic city of Södertälje. The data includes ethnographic material such as observations, interviews and local documents. The analysis indicates that nature is used in different ways: as a classroom where children learn about nature, as an extended playground where they can eat, play and relax and as a fairy-tale landscape. Natural environments in the city in order to encourage meaningful learning by moving between the abstract and concrete as well as transforming experience into knowledge through reflection and communication (Szczepanski & Strid 2007; Jordet, 2010).
By exploring how activities oriented at learning in and about nature are associated to educational ideals of “citizenship” and “equality”, this project aims to analyse how social orders and roles, but also alternative experiences are constituted, maintained and negotiated through situated practices. Outdoor activities can offer opportunities where children can be involved and connect their own experience to the history of the place feeling included despite ethnic origins. On the other hand outdoor activities can also provide situations that - regardless of the teachers’ intentions - generate exclusion.

**The teacher’s surface - Between art and knowledge, form and content. (Maria Pröckl)**

My background lays in the practices of dance and my research within the theory of Practical knowledge has been focusing on what a dance teacher can and does. I have tried to immerse myself how a teacher’s practice can be understood primarily from a phenomenological perspective. The field studies and interviews with dance teachers who formed the basis of my research has taken place in a semiprofessional and professional context.

An interesting observation that has become central to my understanding of the dance teacher’s profession is that almost all the people I interviewed, testified about their own strong desire to dance that springs from a need of dance. They often expressed thoughts that dance is the only thing they know and understand.

They behold in their practice an artistry that lies as a foundation in their teaching. They also say that they through their teaching received confirmation that dance can have a decisive impact on people. That dance can give meaning to life and express what cannot be expressed otherwise.

In my paper I will investigate how the dance teacher relates to their own body; the primary teaching material harboring all knowledge about and in dance. And: How does dance skills transfer from body to body? What is it the dance student’s needs to understand, to be able to accumulate dance knowledge? How important is reflection and emotional commitment for a learning process in artistic contexts?

I caught sight of a dialogic interaction between dance teacher and dance students – as a group and as individuals – that I wish to present. An interaction that, at best, lands in a balance between form and content. The dance teacher and the student jointly involved in a process where the goal is that students will develop their own approach to the material that the teacher presents.