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Citizenship in a changing world: Studies of two different geographical areas

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Abstract

This study is about two different work-shops concerning social and economic aspects connected to children's living conditions. We have met students in the Teacher School of Education in a course named To become a teacher. The purpose of the course is that the students are supposed to investigate two different reception areas to describe and compare different living conditions with a focus on class, genus and ethnicity. A second purpose is to encourage the students to use and motivate their choice of visual material to be able to communicate different types of messages during the examination. Context: The group consisted of students in science and mathematics with different ethnic settings. The learning setting was based on mixed working- groups. The aim is to prepare the students to meet children and youth in a heterogeneous school. Theory: In the first work-shop the students were supposed to use their gaze on a delimited area near the Teacher School of Education to develop their ability to observe and register signs connected to their task. It was important for the students to use the visual in a social and cultural context. In the second workshop the students had to choose two areas with various socio/economic conditions. Through visiting and observing these areas the students collected empiri to reflect on children's living conditions. During the account the students listened to each other's experiences from the different fieldworks. From a socio-cultural perspective the importance of social factors and the language connected to learning is stressed. Analysis: Some of the results (economy) were pointed out through statistics. Many groups stressed the importance of the impact of the media. The inhabitants did not recognize their housing environments.

Keywords: *Living conditions, Socio-cultural learning, Visual signs, Impact of the media*

Introduction

The assignment of teaching is complex and it is as a mirror to society. The profession of teaching has changed over time, no longer centred on the teachers' desk focus has shifted to the pupil, to developing the pupils' ways to construct knowledge. As educators we believe that it is important that future teachers are aware and have knowledge about different childhood conditions and how these may influence achievement in school. Today many children grow up in families that live with great insecurity due to factors such as unemployment, abuse and poverty. Of course this affects learning opportunities and an important question for teachers is how they can create inclusive activities for children and young people from different backgrounds. Inclusive means in this context that there are activities that will adapt to the pupils needs and not vice versa.

We want to present a pedagogical settlement of practical work with teacher students, concerning social and economic aspects connected to children's living conditions. The task asked students to investigate two different reception areas, to describe and compare different living conditions with focus on class, gender and ethnicity. Furthermore, we wanted student's to document and communicate findings in a variety of visual way and this would form part of their assessment.

When we met the students they were spending their first weeks in Teacher Education. They were curious and looked forward interesting lessons with challenges. Before they started with their task for examination they had to participate in a training task. The purpose was to make them more comfortable with using not only words to explain experiences but also to work with visualizing impressions. This exercise involved group work. Each group had to select a 'special place' in the area from a choice prepared by teachers in advance (given more time it would have been possible for the students to identify the places). The places: the dock-place (a fashionable open place near the water), a garage (on a roof but also on the ground); a platform in the Central station; behind a tree on an embankment; and, opposite the main entrance of the Teacher Education centre. The task was to investigate this special area with a purpose to train their ability to see, not only to record first impressions but also to use patience, to wait and see. When we presented the task some of the students became frightened because they were not comfortable with using the visual language. Academic studies are mostly based upon verbal text but we want to use different ways of communication to train the students to become familiar with non verbal methods of teaching and learning.

The concept of knowledge

In Sweden we have a concept of knowledge defined as having three aspects and four forms:

Three aspects of knowledge

1. The *constructive* aspect of knowledge.
2. The *contextual* aspect of knowledge.
3. The *functional* aspect of knowledge.

Four forms of knowledge:

1. Fact is the quantitative form.
2. Understanding is the qualitative form.
3. Skill is learning by doing.
4. Intimate knowledge is the silent form.

As a teacher you need to ask if you are avoiding some of these forms and if so, why?
(SOU 1992:94 Skola för bildning)

The first task

The students had to explore the place individually and sketch their impressions. We advised the students to approach the place without talking to each other to get an individual impression. Afterwards they had to compare and contrast their drawings. When the students returned to the lesson-room they had to put up their drawings on the wall, and each group had fifteen minutes to discuss their different thoughts before they presenting their observations to the whole class. Bearing in mind that the students didn't know each other very well, there was a relaxed mood and the students found the task both pleasurable and revealing. They discovered things they seldom had thought of, for example; patterns of movement in the place; vegetation in asphalted urban areas; sounds including the nearness of water; and, how people behaved to gain time to reach a train or a bus. They also paid attention to different materials; colours, structures and textures. The student's task was to use their felt-pens to document not only like a photographer but also to add feelings and mood in a personal way. You can, like Gilian Rose, talk about the concepts of *vision* and *visuality* when you look at this material (Rose 2006 s 6). The former she describes from a biological perspective which means what we are capable of seeing. The latter refers to the way we construct our seeing. When people navigate through an urban landscape they select what they want or have to see and in that case you can talk about constructing your glance. This is a practical need as you have to avoid risks to bump into people, cars or buildings. That is necessary because we cannot handle all impressions equally. But if you on the other hand have to linger on a special place you are able to develop your power to see in a deeper way. A third step could be that your feelings about the atmosphere can develop if you integrate different impressions like sound and smell. We wanted the students to express their personal impressions about the place, not document it. When you produce a picture you also take help from earlier experiences. Therefore the student's pictures showed a breadth of individual thoughts.

According to Waern, Pettersson and Svensson (2004 p. 181) visual creating comprises three parts. Number one is formation in a process of design. The second is visual transfer which means that you have the ability to communicate information through pictures. Thirdly, there is visual reception, to understand reactions of visual productions. The group we met went through these three points during short time. It was like "warming-up" before the task of examination.

When you work in a pedagogical way with different kinds of communication you have to think about how a variety of information influences the possibility of learning. In what way is knowledge represented in media and which tools do we need to teach successfully? As teaching in a changing world we have to develop new comprehension concerning what cultural capital implies (Selander & Kress 2010). Learning cannot be about accounting for facts. It's necessary to combine the facts with understanding and that includes being able to analyze phenomenon and develop critical thinking. You can take help from training creativity in different ways (ibid p 15). In our study we tried to start with training the students to use their power of seeing and to translate this in a visual way. Another purpose was to let the students investigate an environment and to look deeper into a delimited area and look behind the surface. Selander and Kress (ibid) mean that at school the young ones during long time are trained into an own social

culture often with weak connection to the world outside. There is a problem to solve when it comes to new generations and their demand for change. We talk about life-long learning but also about life-wide learning. The later form takes place outside school in for example science centres and with the use of the internet. The traditional thinking of the curriculum is challenged. The way we design learning situations has influence on social interplay. The more information we get and the higher demands of accessibility change our lives in a radical way (ibid). Therefore it's important to think about various forms of teaching which include everyone and also develop self-confidence and possibility to participate and contribute on equal conditions. We have to find some kind of balance between confidence and challenges.

The examination task: Studies of two different geographical areas

This is a study included in the overall field: Society in school.

The students who worked on this task will become teachers and they will meet pupils from different socio-economic circumstances. The students were divided into groups. Each group examines two different schools' catchment areas to describe and compare the children's and young people's childhood conditions. The students should reflect on the importance of class, gender and ethnicity. They will also be able to use and justify their choice of images to communicate different messages.

Group study

The students were supposed to choose two different schools' catchment areas that would differ. It could be less valued and high valued areas or areas in the countryside or in the city, a multicultural or mono-cultural area. The most important thing was that they could compare the areas with each other. Then they should examine these by visiting and observing. In what way should they do it?

Instructions

Step 1

Each student examines the area with all the senses turned on and walk in all directions through the area. What do they see? What do they hear? What do they smell and feel? Which impression did the area make at the first sight? To structure this, Kevin Lynch's model was used, with focus on five elements:

- paths – how do people move, in which directions and why.
- barriers – are there any stoppers in the area? Eg major roads.
- nodes –places where people gather
- districts- dwellings districts, bank district etc...
- landmarks

Step 2

The group meets and tells each other about their impressions. What similarities and differences have they observed?

Step 3

The group decides how to continue. They walk in the area during different points of time during the day. What happens? Does their first impression change? What kind of people move and why? The task implies that the students interview as many people as possible and put questions to those people living in this area. How long have they lived here? What do they think of living here? Is it an area with a great in and out moving? Why? They also interview those people who transit the area. Where are they coming from, where are they going? What activities are in the area? How important is it if the area is mono- or multi-ethnic? How do you see class differences and what impact have these? Who has high /less status in the area? What do you see from a gender perspective? Students are asked to try to interview pupils at the schools but have strict guidelines on gaining permission. Are there any activities during leisure-time? What kind and why?

Information about the districts

Following areas are examined:

Djupadal- Kroksbäck

Söderkulla - Sorgenfri

Västra hamnen- Sorgenfri

Djupadal is a district located in the western part of Malmö. Residents who live here are well educated and have well-paid work, there are few immigrants living here. Often both adults in the family are employed. Most of the families live in villas and townhouses, but there are also blocks of flats. The area is described in the media as quiet. Schools reach the expected curriculum goals.

The district **Kroksbäck** geographically is close to the district Djupadal. To visit these two areas is to walk into two different worlds. In Kroksbäck people are coming from all over the world. The unemployment is high and a large number of people are living on social allowance. During periods the area has been affected by violence. Many pupils do not reach the curriculum goals. Since Kroksbäck is located close to Djupadal several Swedish families in Kroksbäck try to move their children from this area to the quieter areas. The consequence of this means that the immigrant children do not meet Swedish children and accordingly don't encounter the Swedish language either.

The district **Sorgenfri** consists of eastern and western Sorgenfri. Eastern Sorgenfri is a residential area with houses built in the mid 1900's and consists largely of condominiums. Before 1945 the area had a bad reputation with destitution accommodation and large family houses for poor families. Today the image is totally different. It is still a working-class area but most of the inhabitants are employed and are managing well. The area has a mixed architecture.

Western Sorgenfri is an area of mixed kind of houses from different periods and architecture. Here we find blocks from 1890-1920. Towards the streets the houses have closed frontage while the backyards are great and verdant. The inhabitants of this area consist of young people and most of them are well educated and are working with IT and creative employments. The area also is inhabited by young students.

Western Harbour is a new neighbourhood under development. This part of Malmö is located between downtown and the waterfront. Once upon a time the big world-wide known shipyard Kockums was situated here. On this place the biggest ships in the world were built. Forty years ago 6000 people worked in the shipyard. Today this area consists of many IT companies and many other private companies. The University of Malmö is established here with 11.000 students. Nowadays 7000 people are working here. This area consists of modern and fashionable flats which are very expensive to buy. Many of the people living here are around 65 years old and have sold their houses in the neighbourhood and have moved to the waterfront. Western Harbours development is focused on the sustainable society and is an example of an environment that inspires creativity, knowledge development and economic growth. The people who live here are well educated and employed. Young families are moving into the area and today there is one school with sustainable focus in this district.

Söderkulla is a district located in the southeast part of Malmö. One third of the inhabitants were born outside Sweden. The housing-area is solid even though there are some problems concerning to unemployment.
(Områdesstudier (2008) Malmö)

The result of the examination

Before the students presented their material we asked them in what way the earlier lessons had improved their work and in what way they put together the material. The students told us that they had got ideas for presenting, a new way of using their eyes and that all people look at things in different ways depending on earlier experiences.

In accordance with the task the students were divided into groups. They had to choose different areas of Malmö and the groups accounted for the differences they had observed in the districts. All of the groups had focused on class, gender and ethnicity and they compared two areas. For example the students mentioned the educational gap of the population, employers and people out of work, school standards, buildings and settlement, official places and possibilities to play and practice sport for the inhabitants. One thing was pointed out in all groups and that was about media portrayals of an area. The students established that some areas had an unjust bad reputation and they showed us positive elements in the environments.

They presented their material in a variety of ways and when we discussed the form of presentation afterwards, the students were satisfied and thought that the visual parts of the work had been interesting to interpret and discuss when they were examined. They also added that it was a pleasurable learning experience.

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