”... det vore bättre om man kunde vara med och bestämma hur det skulle göras...”

En etnografisk studie om elevinflytande i gymnasieskolan

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Akademisk avhandling

som med vederbörligt tillstånd av Rektor vid Umeå universitet för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen framläggs till offentligt förvar i D270, Högskolan i Borås, fredagen den 16 november 2012, kl. 13:00. Avhandlingen kommer att förvaras på svenska.

Fakultetsopponent: Professor Staffan Larsson, Institutionen för beteendevetenskap och lärande, Linköpings universitet.
"... it would be better if one could be involved in how things should be done..." An ethnographic study on student influence in upper secondary school.

Abstract
The aim of this study is to explore how young people act and the organisation of school practice, and what possibilities they have of influencing the content and the forms practiced. The study focuses on how the pedagogic practice is organised in two classes in their first year of upper secondary school, one Social Science programme class and one Vehicle programme class. This embraces questions as: How, where, when and for what cause do students act to influence, and then with what result? Are students offered influence, and in that case which students? How does the organisation of and the content in the pedagogic practice prepare students to act in order to be able to exert influence in the future? These questions have been studied with focus on differences between the programmes with regard to social background and gender.


The empirical material of the thesis was ethnographically produced during one school year, through classroom observations, individual interviews with students, teachers and head teachers, and the gathering of school and teaching material.

The main results in the analysis are that actions taken to gain influence were rare, that the organisation of and the content in the pedagogic practice was mainly focussed on students as becoming, i. e. it focused students possibilities to be able to influence in the future and not the present. Furthermore, changing of pedagogic content or pedagogic forms was dependent on students’ own actions. There was a lack of teacher organisation to promote student influence. Finally, what was evaluated in the pedagogic practice, i.e. factual learning, did not promote student influence.

The thesis demonstrates how pedagogic practice was gendered and classed, which had consequences for how students could influence and how students were prepared to influence in the future. Since the Social Science programme mostly attracts students from a middle-class background and the Vehicle programme those with a working-class background, the content in the programmes contributed to reproducing hierarchical social relations. The content for the Vehicle students proved to be simplified, personal and context dependent, whereas the content of the Social Science programme was more advanced, general and context independent, knowledge which, in argumentation for influence, is usually highly valued.

In previous research, working class masculinities have often been associated with opposition towards study-oriented subjects. However, the current study indicates that there is an interest in studying Swedish, English and maths. The students argued that it was necessary for future employment, and that the Vehicle industry is now asking for this kind of knowledge.

Keywords
Student influence, gender, social background, ethnography, upper secondary school.