
Abstract

Title: The School and the Animal Other. An ethnography of human-animal relations in education.

Language: English

Keywords: Human-animal relations, critical theory, gender theory, postcolonial theory, critical pedagogy, the "other", the discourse of species, boundary work, critical ethnography, socialization, meaning-making practices, social representations, the hidden curriculum, social and cultural reproduction.

ISBN: 978-91-7346-585-4

How human-animal relations are expressed and negotiated has significance for the situation of animals in society and offers insights that contribute to our understanding of how we organize relations between humans as well. This critical ethnographic investigation is positioned at the intersection of education research and the interdisciplinary area of human-animal studies. It uses participant observation, interviews with students and teachers and critical discourse analyses of texts and other artefacts used in the schools investigated to contribute cross-curricular perspectives on how human-animal relations are configured in the daily activities of both vocational (animal caretaker) and university preparatory programs.

Building on central ideas from the Frankfurt School, the study proposes a platform for a critical theory of human-animal relations in formal education that embraces species-inclusive versions of critical pedagogy as well as gender and postcolonial analyses. In this vein, the study explores how social processes and practices in and outside the classroom enable certain human as well as animal subject positions while disabling others. A primary question is how a species-discourse intersects with categories formed around conceptions of gender, race/ethnicity, and class. A variety of ascribed animal representations and positions embedded in these processes are identified.

The study argues that human-animal relations are characterized by indeterminacy and contradiction. While the school may educate to achieve improved conditions for animals in human society, it is at the same time involved in a process of social and cultural reproduction that normalizes the accessibility of animal bodies for human purposes. At the heart of this reproduction process lies boundary work around the animal as "other". Such conceptualizations at times conflict with the views of animals that students bring with them to school and they therefore receive guidance about the "appropriate" position of animals in society; guidance that at the same time allows students to keep intact a sense of self as caring and moral actors toward animals. The school has a repertoire of concrete strategies for achieving this, and the effects of these strategies are identified as key components in a hidden curriculum of human-animal relations. The analyses show that these effects constitute a shared frame of reference of commonsense knowledge about animals in which contradictions embedded in human-animal relations can be comfortably accommodated. In addition, analytical tools borrowed from postcolonial theory are proposed that contribute to understanding the operations of hegemonic discourses of human-animal relations in the classroom as well as the effects generated by resistance to these discourses.
