

Institutionen för pedagogik, kommunikation och lärande

# Mind the Gap

Ethnography about cultural reproduction of  
difference and disadvantage in urban education

av

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AKADEMISK AVHANDLING

som med tillstånd av utbildningsvetenskapliga fakulteten vid  
Göteborgs universitet för vinnande av doktorsexamen i  
pedagogiskt arbete framläggs till offentlig granskning

Fredagen den 27 november 2015, kl. 13.00  
Göteborgs universitet, Pedagogen, Hus B, Sal BE036

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Fakultetsopponent: Professor Gunilla Holm, Helsingfors universitet



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# Abstract

Title: Mind the Gap: Ethnography about cultural reproduction of difference and disadvantage in urban education  
Author: Osa Lundberg  
Language: English with a Swedish summary  
ISBN: 978-91-7346-853-4 (tryckt)  
ISBN: 978-91-7346-854-1 (pdf)  
ISSN: 0436-1121  
Keywords: cultural racism, color-blindness, race, 'Othering', pedagogical discourse

This thesis examines cultural reproduction of difference and disadvantage in the pedagogical content and practices in urban education. Cultural differentiation is seen as a social and ideological practice that is constructed institutionally in the organization and structure of pedagogy. The objectives of this study are threefold. I examine: 1) how cultural difference is formulated, enacted and conveyed in policy and practice, 2) how pedagogical practices contribute to the (re)production of social and cultural inequalities, and 3) where opportunities for change and transformation in the pedagogical practice can occur. The empirical data is produced by participant observation and interviews with teachers and students. Three different ninth grade classes and the teachers, at the same school, were observed for three years consecutively between 2006 and 2009. A fifth grade class was also observed for one semester. The analysis is informed by theories of sociology of education (Bernstein, 1990; 2000, p. 165) and critical race theory (Leonardo, 2009b). The analysis of this study highlights the social and cultural reproduction (Bernstein, 2001) in the formulation, realization and transformation arenas (Lindensjö & Lundgren, 2000). Specific attention is given to the relationship between the macro power, in the formulation arena, and the micro practices of pedagogy, in the realization arena, that are intended to compensate for social and cultural differences and disparities. Based on findings, I claim that cultural racism (Ryan, 1976, p. 190), in the pedagogical discourse, allows race and racism to go under the guise of culturally acceptable forms of institutional racism. I argue that 'culture' is used as a metaphor for race and as a rationale to employ compensatory pedagogy (Gitz-Johansen, 2009) as a solution that does not alleviate, but rather accentuates inequality and segregation. This study discusses how differentiation along the lines of 'culture' has bearing on allocation of government funding, urban development, school reform, bilingual education, hiring and retention of bilingual teachers, and pedagogical practices aimed at reforming the students' through compensatory measures to enable integration into the mainstream "Swedish" society which also reify and cement 'Otherness'. The academic contribution is geared towards development of the sociology of school knowledge in pedagogical work, critical pedagogy and social justice education.