

Different “reading” of the multicultural within early childhood (con)texts¹

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This paper explores issues related to studying cultural differences. In this text I will present ideas about post-modern/-structuralist thinking. I will also connect the following and search for how theories about hegemonic discourses, power, postcolonial theory and “whiteness” can influence understandings of different discourses within the “multicultural” field.

My point of departure is that postcolonial reading, the deconstruction of power structures, the prevailing apprehension of whiteness, and the location of subjectivity all influence understandings of multiculturalism. I will in this article first present some ideas about the ideologies of equality in schooling in Norway. I do so to search for reasons why ethnically diverse students and school children experience being marginalised, invisible and not in a position to influence the content of the curriculum. Next I will situate early childhood education within a post-modern paradigm and give a short introduction to the reading of hegemonic discourses, power, postcolonial theory and “whiteness”. I end with the presentation of theories of subjectivity, deconstruction and methodology to give alternative readings of the “multicultural” early childhood field today. Throughout the text

¹ The concept of (con)texts is put in brackets to illustrate that context and text both represent different educational aspects, such as written texts, communication, literature, narratives, group-work, lectures, curriculum and so on.

there will be citations² from an Indian-Norwegian pre-school teacher’s storytelling/narratives³.

Starting point as a researcher

I take a political stand for social justice in education. I do so by the presentation of post colonialism, power and understandings of whiteness. Through these I question the epistemologies of how western social science conceptualizes or defines knowledge about “the other”. Hence my exemplary questions are: What type of constructions of knowledge in multicultural discourses are visible in educational (con)texts and how are the students inscribed in those? What types of knowledge are more valued, and from which perspectives? Who is in a position to influence the educational content, and whose voices are heard? Who is invited to be represented in the negotiation about their own subjectivity positions? The point of departure for my project⁴ is to look into how understandings about cultures can contribute to explore understandings of the “others” positions: more precisely how pre-school teachers with diverse ethnic cultural backgrounds present and negotiate subjectivities within early childhood education and the profession. From this I investigate firstly how these people negotiate their own educational processes in educational and professional contexts; and secondly how these negotiations can contribute in women’s constructions of their subjectivities as professionals. One way of exploring these negotiating processes is “inviting” persons with ethnic diverse experience to talk about their experiences from educational and professional contexts. Following this, a research project then deconstructs these people’s narratives and investigates how different discourses appear to contribute to the

² All the selected indented citations in the text are taken from Aruna Sharma’s spoken presentation on “Experiences as a woman with ethnic minority background in Norway” which was held at the library in her neighbourhood in Oslo last year. Sharma is a pre-school teacher. She was born in India and has lived half her life in Norway. She has many years further education, among other things; “Multiculturalism” at Oslo University and has recently finished her degree in 2. avd in Special Education. Aruna Sharma is working in a multicultural day care center in Oslo.

³ All the indented citations are my translation from Norwegian to English. I have tried to translate the words and sentences from the Indian-Norwegian pre-school original texts, but my translations might not capture all the nuances in her original text.

⁴ In this paper I will try to give reasons for theoretical concepts chosen, and not connect the writing to the ongoing process in my research.

production of knowledges and practices within professionalism. This project’s focus is analysing and discussing the others’ positions: how the other is constructing, reconstructing and producing subjectivities through social interaction in educational contexts, professional experiences and lived lives. By focusing on and deconstructing current discourses from the texts in the research material collected, I will search for epistemological sources and how knowledge of subjectivity within cultural identities is produced, negotiated and re-negotiated.

Equal opportunities for all

The Norwegian multicultural⁵ discourses are from my point of view still focusing on how differences or common understanding of culture or language give opportunities to represent a successful integration process. In Norway equal opportunity in education has been a national ideology for decades. Central here is the ideology that the school should embrace everybody, and serve as a social and economic equalizer. These ideological aims, which were introduced by the Labour Party, focus on increased education for all. The school’s responsibility has been to create an identity for children, and students in higher education also, to reconcile common traditions. Values and knowledge based on these can thus be seen as projecting nationalistic ideas, where building the state of the nation, as well as modernizing the Norwegian society, is important (Telhaug 1994, Slagstad 1998, 2000).

In the discussions regarding the creation of a new curriculum eight years ago (in what became document L-97, 1999), politicians emphasized the importance of knowledge that secures the national identity and common values as part of the aim of the curriculum. The egalitarian school wants to create “unity between groups and resemblance in equality of prospect between groups, towards a dignified and rich life” (Hernes 1995:403-404. My translation, as for all quotes here). Further: “if we lose the battle about the egalitarian school, then we lose the national unity in

⁵ This field has many names: diversity, multicultural, ethnic minorities, ethnic/linguistic groups, black Africans, immigrants, coloured, non-western, people from the South; or “them and us”. These different concepts in use create definitions and distances when they are in use. I attempt to work with concepts not creating even more distances between “them and us”; but this is difficult.

our multicultural society”. Over the last 20 years there have been ongoing debates in Norway concerning how integration can be achieved for children with minority backgrounds. These debates include(d) how children “best” learn the Norwegian language, how to stimulate to multicultural, how to deal with “hyphen identity” (Werbner & Modood 2000), and how to be qualified for the Norwegian schooling, community and society. The discourses underlying this are about day care institutions and schools facing challenges to fulfil the ideology of obtaining equal opportunities for all children in care and education. A classroom or a day care institution representing children from other ethnical backgrounds than Norwegian will thus not alone be seen as giving a multicultural profile or content. This is because the teaching and learning take place through the Norwegian language and the major discourse is Norwegian. Here the school discourse might not represent and focus on the kind of qualification minority children and their families are in favour of, such as speaking many languages, multiethnic experiences, and knowledge about different religions and traditions. If there was more focus on the positive aspects of cultural differences, perhaps not so many children with minority backgrounds would be disqualified. Here my critical questions regarding what is going to represent the national heritage in the future, and who is creating and constructing this, are not discussed in the official debates. This is also reflected in the ongoing debates on how the “multicultural” ideology should be presented, as in the revised Framework Plan for day care institutions (1996).

Situating early childhood education from the modern to the post-modern

In recent years the early childhood fields are being highly influenced by changes in society regarding complexities, diversities and new perspectives on children and childhoods (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence 1999). Outside Norway there has been increasing interest in post-modernism and structuralism as radically different ways of understanding contemporary social and cultural trends and shifts. The concepts of the “post-modern” (Alvesson & Skölberg 2000, Cherryholmes 1988, Smith 1998) may be understood as complex and multiforms which resist reductive and simplistic explanations (Lather 2001). Hence the term “post-modern” does not refer to one unified movement. Instead postmodernism can be said to represent discontinuities

with earlier phases of the modern period. These discontinuities can be regarded as the “end” of the modern period or may also indicate movements within the modern (Alvesson & Skölberg 2000). A post-modern “reading” requires special attention regarding multiple approaches to particular fields, so it is possible for all to recognise meaningful descriptions or argumentations. Post-modern thinking can be interpreted as taking something well known apart. Concepts such as social constructions and structures, stability, identity constructions, beliefs of truth, stabile knowledge and dualism might be replaced with complicating references, contradictions, fragmentation, disruption, and diversity. The post-modern paradigm thus represents a confrontation within universalism, essentialism and the influence of how “the grand narratives” (Lyotard 1984) have influenced the “western social sciences”.

In day care centres and in early childhood education the strains of ethnic diversities are increasing. These are challenging the researchers’ schooled eyes. For a contemporary early childhood researcher there is now a need for alternative concepts and new readings of different texts, events and sites. Such a researcher’s aim is to reveal the constructions of truth and the construction of grand narratives in contrast to ethnicities, diversities and complexities. This means that any existing “multicultural” discourses of today will be criticised and deconstructed, by searching for alternative analysis and also by inviting in “other voices” to be visible and represented within the educational and professional (con)texts. I will next focus on how a post-modern reading might create alternative understanding of “the multicultural field” within early childhood. I will try to both focus on the ongoing discourses in Norway today and to present international trends within the ethnic diversity (multicultural) field. At the same time I will discuss how discourses are seen to create subjectivity.

Discourses and power

Foucault’s interest in discourses (Foucault 1977) began with his concern for how people presented their lives; how we/they are trapped in history; how historically emergent systems of thoughts and action determine practice (Smith 1998). Discourse following Foucault is seen as a system of representation, made up of rules of conduct, established texts and institutions that regulate meanings and practices which can or cannot be produced

(Foucault 1972). Here a key concept is what Foucault calls a discursive practice: “a body of anonymous, historical rules, always determined in the time and space that have defined a given period, and for a given social, economic, geographical, or linguistic area, the conditions of operation of the enunciatively function.” (Foucault 1972:117). Relatedly, from the research data, Aruna Sharma said:

Reciprocity is important in this process. The one who is to be included has to obtain willingness to be included, [and there is] a certain openness about the relationship from both sides. The openness of the majority of the society and will to invite and include people with another cultural background, and flexibility and openness from the point of the minority groups is important. I can’t expect that everybody shall take into consideration me and my interests all the time - yes maybe in the beginning just to get along, but then it is my turn to show interest and to contribute in the society I wish to be part of. After living in Norway so many years I have to say I am one of them living in Norway. And it is my second home country. I cannot live here if I all the time collect the negative[stories] about the country I live in, but I can work with the different aspects I have mentioned before.

In my research notes following this I wrote: Different discourses about diversity are here visible. By asking the question about “who is responsible for the mentioned inclusion processes”, the discourse about responsibility for taking agency for your own integration process is a successful step forward. The text above shows that Aruna’s agency reflects a positive attitude, a willingness and a flexibility towards her “new society”. The discourse of taking responsibility for making your own integration process successfully is also recognised as a political discourse where the focus is on language skills. By speaking the Norwegian language fluently, both job and career are secured as an integration possibility. In the last sentence in the text a new discourse appears. Asking who is the author of and producing “the negative [stories] about the country I live in”, might reflect complaints and negative attitudes from the minority population and not be acceptable to somebody representing the majority society. Here Aruna’s view may also reflect a discourse within the minority population: negative attitudes and negative values about the majority society. Aruna’s main empha-

sis is related to agency: she says that it is possible to work through these matters. Here power in discourses works at many levels.

Relatedly, our students at the University College where I teach meet many different discourses. They are, for example, being at the same time positioned through discourses as a student, as young/adult, as woman/man, as included/excluded, as white/coloured. Additionally there are different discourses within the disciplines they encounter, such as mathematics, music and pedagogy. Here the curriculum, the textbooks, the teacher-lecturers in practice as employees in higher education, and the students in higher education classrooms and elsewhere, will influence, construct and reconstruct all of these various discourses at various times and in various places. Thus discourses are historically produced and socially organised from values, common rules and norms (Foucault 1977). Such discourses determine what is acceptable to present as a topic or theme, who is in a position to speak or publish, and when and where the saying and publishing takes place. Aruna says this in everyday spoken language, which I have translated from the Norwegian for the purposes of this article.

I remember a conversation I had with a woman who asked me if I had planned to stay in Norway forever... I interpreted this as she didn't want me here in Norway and would be happy if I moved. It was probably not like this but I believed that.... I had surely expressed that I should go back to India. But where in India?... Is there anybody in India waiting for their relatives living abroad to return home to be taken into care?

The pathos of this emphasizes what happens not only with marginalization within the adopted nation, for the so-called immigrants. It also points to a marginalization in the home nation, of those who have left it and now might have no place to which they belong. I shall next attempt to express this theoretically.

Discursive practices, according to Foucault, are conceptual devices in the modern social sciences used to describe forces that have constituted social life and the modern conception of human thought. Consequently they have also marginalized different people in different ways in different places. In teacher education many such different discourses occur; and these have influence on how the concept of “multiculturalism” is “read” and interpreted. The above citation, by Aruna, of another concept regarding the multicultural, exemplifies the existing discourses as willingness to

be included (assimilated); but at the same time the discourse situates an Indian Norwegian woman in a position of being in between tradition and continuances. This particular woman is also framed as a woman who has to take responsibility for her own agency. Her individual agency is not understood in relation to also belonging to a group identity. Her position as an individual includes responsibility for her own position in Norway as well as the unsure circumstances her homeland represents. Here the political power aspect concerning people with ethnic diverse backgrounds and situations *is not visible* as an argument in her statement.

The progress of the investigation and the researched “other”

In this sub-section I discuss some methodological and epistemological dilemmas in the above. Ethnographers study the production of everyday life by “other” people. They analyze social structure, power relations and history (Denzin & Lincoln 2003, Lather 2001). In studies of cultures, ethnic differences, and the relation between same/other positions, are discussed as related to how cultural differences construct hegemonic discourses. Cultural studies for example (Abu-Lughod 1991, Gandhi 1998, Gunaratnam 2003, Smith 1999, Spivak 2000) demonstrate how western discourses value “whiteness” rather than people of colour (Montecinos 2004). These studies reflect the tendency that whiteness is in a position of power by dominating the other. Throughout history the “other” (Lincoln & Guba 2003) has not traditionally been represented; their voices as speaking subjects have been absent in ethnographic research. This can be seen in contrast to ethnographic research today, where the emphasis is on giving the research to the researched (Smith 1999, Visweswaran 1997). This methodological practice represents a major shift in the conduct and the subsequent textualizing of research. To give “voice to the voiceless”, to “secure” representation, and to hinder the manipulation of who is benefiting from the research are challenges to be critically reflected upon within contemporary educational research. Relatedly, there seems to be a growing preference for the term “participant” to be used. This is understood, within the discourse of giving the research to the researched, as individuals and groups taking part in and constructing his/her/their own social and cultural meanings during the research process. How to represent participants with-

out “othering” them though, and how to avoid a reinforcing of their marginal status and their difference from “us”, are further challenges. In the ongoing research process of my particular project I am attempting to deal with all of this. Hence the co-authoring of this article, with the political and practical implications here.

My concerns here are connected to anxiety about the space between self and other, between researcher and researched, and between the desire to dissolve or to ethically regulate such matters (MacLure 2003). Another insertion from Aruna makes the point. Again, I translate.

[I have] two suitcases consisting of culture [two packages of cultures]. I came to Norway with a suitcase filled with Indian clothes, attitudes, traditions and standpoints. Then I made another suitcase with my Norwegian clothes, attitudes, traditions and standpoints, and after a while they became one big suitcase with two equal rooms. And this suitcase follows me the whole time. This suitcase I bring with me to India and it fits with the content I need there now, because the suitcase I had with me in 1980 is too old for the current circumstances in India. The development has not stopped in my country. The new suitcase or package of culture is big but not heavy, because I try to sort out and tidy up, in cooperation with people independent of skin colour and culture.

Attempting to do post-modern ethnographic research, which I am describing through the writing of this article, involves reading peoples’ lives in many ways, trying to identify and understand their social existence, and considering how their values and stories might make sense for *them*. Here a post-modern approach places a strong emphasis upon the role of storytelling/narratives, as part of the social science (Czarniawska-Joerges 2004). Such an approach considers, amongst other matters, the ways narratives are connected to “language games”. Related ethnographic work (Denzin & Lincoln 2003) focuses on issues of processes, attempting to show how cultures are constructed and negotiated as results of interactions between groups and between cultures. Hence a post-modern ethnography as *methodology*, (employing deconstruction, and participants’ influences in the research processes⁶), can from my understanding have possibilities to em-

⁶ In participatory research I have to consider ethical reflections as difference in power positions between the researcher and the participants involved. A continuation of this discussion will be further followed up in my PhD thesis forthcoming.

brace a multiplicity of perspectives and situations. In my project I see options of combining deconstructions of texts. Following Derrida (1973), I am reading and deconstructing various official documents⁷, collecting narratives from pre-school teachers with ethnically diverse backgrounds, and doing collaborative professional development together with them. Following this and following Foucault I then invite them to re-read the texts together with me, and to search, following Lyotard, for epistemological challenges within early childhood education. I am saying this in everyday Norwegian language, to bridge the gap between genres and between differently educated people. As a response Aruna said this about age. My reflection on the reading of her text follows.

One of my colleagues who also has a multicultural background asked me how long I have lived in Norway. When I answered 24 years she told me that I was 24 years old. She meant that 24 was my Norwegian age. She explained it like we are re-born when we come to Norway. I have reflected on this and tried out this statement, and it is true in a way, because we start with language development as children and struggle with æ-ø-å. Everything has to be learned again. We don't understand what people are saying and they don't understand us because we can't say what they don't understand. The other day I tried this idea out on a colleague from Pakistan with a Masters degree in education from her homeland... She is so enthusiastic learning Norwegian. I told her that she shouldn't expect so much from herself because she is only five years old [she has only lived here five years]. We laugh and often talk about our Norwegian age.

This text can be read as several different readings. I now suggest one. The situations above describe how language skills give opportunities and become important when you want to be included into a particular society. Language skills also point to the necessity of people understanding each other. Communication is a difficult skill, and language ability is important as access and as qualification into society. Language here is understood as talking Norwegian, and it is interesting to look for why a discourse of being fully bilingual is not visible.

⁷ As in the Norwegian Framework Plan for day care institutions (1996).

From a post-modern position which blurs differences between the researcher and the researched, I must also consider the researcher's own position: from power, gender, body and ethnic backgrounds. Additionally I must explore alternative approaches to textual representations. In her article “Towards a critical multiculturalism” (2002), Rhedding-Jones holds that “Norway is not a place with a strong research culture of critical theory” (Rhedding-Jones 2002:93). She relates this to the aspect of consensus: mutual support and agreement are the dominant values in white Norwegian society, especially among the women dominating the professionalism of early childhood education. So far our experience within the schooling and caring system is that there has been a great emphasis on “the multicultural” but highly critical questions are not raised (Becher 2004). This is not the case in *international* research. Here much research relates to diversity or multiculturalism, and is focused on dealing with indigenous voices and experiences of being “the research other” (Gandhi, 1998; Gunaratnam 2003, Narayan 1997, Said 1978, Smith 1999, Spivak 2000, Viruru 2001, Viruru & Cannella 2001). Other internationally published research deals with the oppressed and marginalized (for example, Freire 1970, Griffiths 1997); and how marginalized individuals, groups and cultures are dominated by hegemonic discourses (for example, Said 1978, Spivak 1995).

In Norway research projects within the multicultural field (for example, Gullestad 2002) can be “read” as emphasizing the dichotomy of inclusion/exclusion, with the focus on what “the others” should do to make the integration process more successful. What “we” (the majority) shall contribute has not been given much emphasis. Here an OECD report (2001) points out that a minority population has little confidence or self-security to make their voices heard, and the consequences of this can be “how can they participate in our Norwegian society” (OECD 2001:73). Following Viruru (2001) I see the “we” placed in the position of being the colonizer. “They” are being colonized in spite of Norway being a nation without a history of having colonies like England or France. Here “we” (Norwegians) can be said to represent the western hegemonic discourse. Hence, when the concept of majority is debated, it is a form of essence: the Norwegian soul of the people (*den norske folkesjela*) is what is referred to. Thus the numerical majority serves as a frame of reference seen as something inevitable and natural. To pinpoint this view, everybody then has to adhere to this particular discourse, despite his or her “skin color” and background (Gullestad 2002). The immigration debate's starting point, I would claim, concerns these values, ideas and concepts. These form the

basis of an unstable hegemony, read as a powerful division between “us” (non-immigrants) and “them” (visible and/or audible immigrants). This hegemonic division seems today natural and self-explanatory: it was introduced 10-15 years ago by politicians, researchers and mass media (Gullstad 2002). Challenges within educational (con)texts will be to search for how these discourses can be recognized⁸; not as supporting the existing “we” and “them” dichotomies, but by investigating if alternative understandings and negotiations are visible in so-called “multicultural teacher education”.

Interrupting my theorizing with some self-reflections and narratives, Aruna says:

When I am walking in the woods I see many people who look like me. Yes, I mean people with minority backgrounds walking in the woods. And some of them have even got hold of dogs. They say they have created broader networks, like people talking to them about the dog’s breed, its appearances and behaviors. They let the dogs welcome each other and these multicultural dogs like it as much as their owners.

A discourse analysis of these few lines provides an opportunity to reveal how Norwegian values are represented by the metaphor of “dog” in the text. The inclusion process is situated in the woods (*friluftsliv*), where the importance of walking and being healthy is positively valued as a Norwegian or Scandinavian discourse. Giving the dogs a human positioning provides an opening for difference and sameness, and acceptance. People are welcomed in spite of being different.

Postcolonial reading

This sub-section deals with a key concept in contemporary theorizing within cultural fields. As already indicated, colonizing has many negative effects. As with all terms, “postcolonial” has many meanings. One way into understanding it is to identify the “after” effects of colonialism and the

⁸ For example how “the multicultural field” is presented and stated within the Strategic Plan for Teacher Education; or how “multicultural” aspects are reflected in different academic disciplines by investigating the various literature lists and set or recommended readings (*pensum*).

restructured relations of power that form particular decolonizations. The aim of this kind of thinking is to show the “relationship between imperialism and subjectivity” (Brooks 1997). Here cultural identities shift as people experience new languages have new experiences and get new understandings (Gandhi 1998). Postcolonialism thus challenges homogeneous views of culture and undermines the idea of the “other” as exotic. Relatedly, Aruna says, about being an immigrant:

I am not a refugee, or a diplomat or a computer genius from India. I am a so-called guest worker, we were called that then. In 1970, [But] who am I? What can we call us? Immigrant,.. no. Foreigner, a person from a distant culture, no. I work in a multicultural environment and have often thought about who we are. What shall we be called? Do you have any suggestions? “Our new fellow citizen...”

In trying to theorize this, and integrate it into my text, or rather transform my text, I read postcolonial studies. These focus on different ways of stating the problems in the dominant discourses in education, for example as they relate to power (Foucault 1977). The purpose of the studies is to recognize, but also to critically uncover theory and practice related to diversity, experiences and complexities, which the students with another background than the Norwegian background represent. Postcolonial studies thus criticize hegemonic European cultural knowledge by attempting to reintroduce and give value to knowledge represented from the non-European world (Gandhi 1998, Said 1978, Spivak 2000). Further, postcolonial studies seek to deconstruct the ongoing discourses; and point out the need to ask questions about the dominant discourses. For example, do all the students have the *possibilities* to be presented with the same opportunities? As progress in Norway today we can now observe new tendencies within social sciences, where research focuses on contexts, complexity, multiple identities, gender and diversity (Andersen 2002, Germeten 2002, Jacobsen 2000, Pihl 1998, Rhedding-Jones 2002, Sandve 2001, Østberg 1998, 2003). This is in contrast to the universalism and essentialism which have dominated the early childhood educations previously, and which are heavily critiqued by Cannella (1997) and Dahlberg et al. (1999). What follows takes the concept of postcolonialism further by focusing on whiteness as a problematic.

Reading whiteness

Carmen Montecinos (2004) is concerned with “paradoxes in multicultural teacher education: students of color positioned as objects while ignored as subjects”. Her article focuses on research within the multicultural field, and gives the reader a broad view of research in multicultural teacher education preparation. Montecinos analyses the discontinuity between principles of multicultural teacher education and efforts to diversify the teaching force. She reveals that the research literature that focuses on multicultural teacher preparation is exclusively preoccupied with education of “white” teachers. By excluding, silencing and ignoring the presence of students of color, multicultural teacher education is, paradoxically, securing the norm of “whiteness” and undermining the principles of multicultural education. “The scant attention afforded to pre-service teachers of color in the research literature may mirror the limited attention they are reportedly receiving in their university classroom” (Montecinos 2004:168). Many studies have focused on the issues surrounding the preparation of “white teachers” for diversity (Norwegian early childhood education included), and far fewer focus on what students of color think and how they respond to issues of diversity. “The preparation of teachers for diversity is based on the needs and concerns of white teachers” (2004:171). Montecinos focuses on a “whiteness” position, a position which has until recently been given very little emphasis. I would believe that an analysis of the content of the multicultural courses given to Norwegian teacher education students has headings like bilingualism, double identities, and cultural differences. Yet I have never been part of discussions where the focus has troubled “whiteness”. Might we find that the “white” students feel “too white”? And their fellow students are pleased they are “darker” because “darker” is better? Here it appears that teacher education has never given white student teachers and teacher educators any training at all in seeing advantage from a majority position of color. Maybe such an exercise would be too powerful and challenging to existing white privilege.

Dislocated subjectivity

I have already pointed to identity and to multiple positionings within simultaneously operating discourses. Here I develop these by discussing

poststructuralist questions of the concept of constitutive power of discourses. By critiquing rationalities and focusing on the possibilities of freedom for the subject, a poststructuralist concept of the subject offers a radical break with the humanist conceptions of the individual (Smith 1998). Here humanist accounts presuppose an already existing individual who is socialised, who becomes for example “a girl” or “a boy”. Poststructuralism proposes a subjectivity which is precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak (Rhedding-Jones 1994). Our everyday language is suffused with a grammar that expresses our experiences as active independent subjects. We consider our opinions, choose and think critically and act on our ideas. From a poststructuralist perspective we experience ourselves as subjects precisely because we are produced as such via the assumptions of our everyday language. Here Aruna says:

Who are the Norwegians, and what does it mean to become Norwegian? Is it something dangerous or negative? Is it possible to avoid it when you live in Norway? [We speak] Norwegian language, eat Norwegian food, wears Norwegian clothes [Western clothes]. We have good manners, good table manners, politeness [Norwegian manners, ways of eating, and politeness].

Here then Aruna, in everyday language, plays with concept of difference. Taking this as my lead into theory I read Derrida (1976). From following him I make another reading of the constitution of the subject, building on Derrida’s theory of *différance*. Here Derrida claims that significance is built on the processes of difference and exposing. Every identity is or becomes significant in relation to these processes, by being in opposition or in demarcation from these. In this way identity occurs through a constitutive limitation, which from Derrida’s point of view, is established from a “constitutive outside”. This “constitutive outside” can be both an opportunity and an impossible requirement for the identity. It is an opportunity because the identity would not be what it is without exclusion: it is a demarcation from the other. It is an impossible requirement since the constitutive out there is preventing the identity from establishing itself: the exclusive other is always present and threatens the remaining identity. According to this reading there is no authentic and no homogenous subject. Hence “becoming a multicultural woman” will always be an ongoing discursive practice, in constant negotiations. Here Butler (1990) argues that there is no

subject who “takes up” or “puts on” the various possibilities for being. Rather, it is discourses (“discursive injunctions” says Butler) that form meaning, and that “takes on” and produce the subject. Aruna has this to say here, about integration/inclusion and adjustment:

I have heard people say “Pakkis” to me. [She is not from Pakistan. She is from India.] And then it is useless to say you are not a Pakki, because the people who are looking for Pakkis name us all Pakkis. What is the difference if you are a foreigner you are named as that wherever you come from? I am talking about those of us coming from Asia or Africa. I know young people who have experienced difficulties in their childhood because they have heard such statements and I believe we contribute to creating Pakkis.

By pointing to the theory of dislocated subjectivity, Aruna’s statement links to what I have said in the introduction to this article, when I asked how pre-school teachers with ethnically diverse backgrounds are in a position to negotiate their subjectivities in their professional practices. To now theorize this further, I would point to Lacan’s (1977) influence on Butler (1990), on Kristeva (1984) and on Derrida (1976). By his inscriptions of the subject position, Lacan situates the subject as in constant negotiation of positions through *language*. This linguistic theory of Lacan’s might then present possibilities for reading the subjects of a research project, such as Aruna, from different and complex subject positions: as being in student positions, in professional positions, as mothers, as fathers, as born in Norway or in Asia and with different religious backgrounds, speaking many languages, and so on. Such a reading would resist reading for categorizations. Instead it would look for how the complexity in various subject positions is expressed and negotiated within different educational and practice discourses.

Deconstruction and methodology

This section of the article takes Derrida’s theorizing further, as it impacts upon my research methodology. In particular I now borrow from Derrida’s concept of deconstruction (Derrida 1973, 1981). This yields possibilities to look at western constructions of knowledge and to ask critically: Which

meanings are produced, and what are the boundaries and relationships between them? Derrida suggests that we should re- rethink everything by focusing on the concept of “text”. From Derrida’s point of view, deconstruction is the key to questioning existing understandings of epistemology. Rather than searching for some underlying essence, he argues for deconstruction to involve the interrogation of texts, in order to establish their organisation around oppositions such as: true/false, rationality/irrationality, masculinity/femininity and same/other (Derrida 1981). Deconstruction is thus a theory and a practice to bring out and consider power, contradictions, agency, resistance, emancipation and freedom that texts might presuppose and present. Everything is “language”, and “texts” are proclaimed to be the core of matter in Derrida’s thinking (1973, 1981). This concept of deconstruction shows how we are invaded with “patterns” through the contents of language. Deconstruction such as this contributes to identifying and evaluating the themes and forms of discourse that have dominated particular fields, leading to re-constructions of specific theories and forms of practice (Burman 1994, Derrida 1981). Deconstructive reading thus dissolves, destabilises and denaturalises (Lather 2001, Rhedding-Jones 1995), and these forms of deconstructive reading create different approaches, making visible multiple ways of thinking and acting. In *Deconstructing Early Childhood Education* Cannella (1997) says that the goal of deconstruction is to reveal inconsistencies, contradictions, and biases within dominating themes. Troubling concept of issues such as power, language, culture, color as in blackness or whiteness, have until recently been seldom, if ever, discussed. So when students with ethnic experiences are focused on, they are very often essentialized and categorized (Becher & Otterstad 2000a, 2000b). About this Aruna says:

The library has been a meeting place for many people. Here you get information about everything. I am used to libraries being quiet... Shush. There have been many changes here, now you find clothes and *knick-knacks*. But I am thinking of the books, and the women who are walking in and out of the library with and without the *hijab*, the *kaftan*, the *sari*, or national costume [in Norway, the *bunad*]. The people, every one of them, are like short stories, novels or poems, as living literature. These books can talk, it is recorded books – we have to carry out a conversation with them because they can think, talk and feel.

My reading of this, in relation to Derrida’s philosophy, connects to contradictions and resistance positions. I work with deconstruction intent to uncover and reveal dilemmas. The scene for Aruna here is the library. First she resists the idea that the library is open for diversity through noisiness and knick-knacks. At the same time she uses the books as metaphors to identify herself and other ethnically diverse users of the library as stories and novels, as living literature themselves. This can be read, following Derrida, as making multiple ways of thinking and acting visible. Aruna’s text here might contain practices of resistance and power positions, seen in relation to minority and majority positionings. Aruna’s agency positioning gives her opportunity to both open up for the possible and the impossible at the same time. She emphasises the “we” as both an insider and outsider positioning, by pointing out that “they” can think, talk and feel. In this short text Aruna’s resistance appears to be about not being defined as essentialist. Rather this is an emancipatory positioning.

It is difficult to define Derrida’s (1981) deconstruction practice. He claims that deconstruction is not neutral; it intervenes. And he questions logocentrism, ethnocentrism and any form of political dogmatism. The word “deconstruction” is a hybrid of “destruction” and “construction”, which means that all concepts have to be replaced by new ones. In the article “Five strategies for deconstruction”, Martin McQuillan (2000) discusses the content of deconstruction. He says deconstruction is neither a school nor an “ism”, because there is no such thing as “deconstructionism”. It is not a theory and not a project, because it does not present an idea of the world that we can follow, nor does it offer rules for achieving an idea. Deconstruction then does not present “the application” of Derrida’s thinking, but it does “undo” the logic of outside and inside, which the idea of an application pre-supposes. So deconstruction is not solely about language, but it displaces and re-inscribes understandings of textuality (Rheding-Jones 1995). It does so by opening up texts to contextual matter, such as history, sociology, politics, and so forth. Further it gives the researcher/writer opportunities to write from a shifting network of places, which for me presents opportunities to take shifting, complex positions. To “deconstruct” a text, as I understand Derrida, is thus to focus on a conflicting logics of sense and implication, by trying to show that different texts never mean exactly what they say or say what they mean.

In my research, some of which is exemplified here, I analyze discourses from the text material I have collected, such as the texts from Aruna. I look for different discourses, as indicative of ideologies within

educational and professional contexts. I search for how these discourses can be connected to negotiation processes about subjectivity positioning, *for the persons involved in my research*. Methodically I search for how different “voices” (as in Bakhtin 1990) are presented/stated in selected texts, and how these voices can be identified as discourses/ideologies *and then re-conceptualized*. Scholars who have discussed the issues of voice with the aim of not silencing others, from political and pedagogical departures, include Smith (1999), Freire (1979), Swadener (1995) and Ayer and Ford (1996, referred to by Wyngaard 2005). The methodological challenges for me as a researcher at the doctoral level are to critically reflect on what I am doing; and to see if dialogical interactions where all voices have something to offer may be utilized in the processes of knowledge productions.

Conclusion

In this article I have tried to present and reflect on my doing of research within the multicultural field. This is not one field but many fields, represented by many discourses characterized by different backgrounds, such as color, gender, class, religion, language and so on. Students and professionals with ethnically diverse backgrounds have many experiences and they represent many cultures of the world. By using for example a label like “minority group” for students with particular ethnic and cultural backgrounds, the individual student disappears as a subject; but she has to represent all the others in her supposed group or culture as an object. This is not the situation for white students. By seeking to identify and challenge any traces of colonialism in educational (con)texts I focus in the next stage of my research project on which kinds of discourses are visible in different educational contexts. A challenge for education today is how complexity and diversity should and can be made visible. Today the multicultural focus is represented by what kind of knowledge and practice experiences “the whites” need for understanding the discourses of diversity (Montecinos 2004). A re-conceptualizing practice that resists this discourse is education that offers a multicultural education where white students together with the multiethnic students politicize by deconstructing their understandings of color and ethnically diverse backgrounds. In this way all might engage and be in a position to negotiate their own practices. Researchers and teachers within the multicultural early childhood education should take seriously into account the premises of a critical multicultural educational

theory and practice and that makes it possible for all students to be represented, and to co-construct another kind of education together. This would challenge those representing the majority. Here Aruna says:

The process of integration has been demanding, informative but not painless. Because when you arrive you are so emotional and vulnerable, then you go around with opinions and think so much. When somebody looks at you, you might think they don't like you.

By ignoring students' ethnic subjectivities, early childhood education undergraduate coursework appears to exclude most controversies regarding how educational knowledge is constructed, mediated and governed. By not making explicit the fact that the participants in a study on multicultural teacher education are not all white, whiteness is given an essential character. Here the insinuation is that what works or does not work with *white* students is universal, and can therefore be categorized into “good” or “bad” teacher education practices. By making whiteness invisible the norms of whiteness are secured (Giroux 1997), and the colored students might very often feel ignored, if they allow such feelings to be recognised. As Spivak (1995) explains, there might not be a position for me to speak for the “sub-altern”. As a postcolonial critic Spivak says sub-alterns can speak for themselves if they are given possibilities to be listened to, and given influence regarding the content of educational practices to include everyone. Here Aruna's says if she has become Norwegian:

Yes, I have become Norwegian and I can't become more Norwegian. I take it as a compliment and I want to have the permission to be as much Indian and my colleagues and friends and other people I know have given me the opportunity to be. We have to think globally and everybody has responsibility, we who live here, we have rights and duties. Previously I felt I represented India, but now I represent both India and Norway also I am in relation to my community. When I am abroad then I represent Norway. Do I miss my home country? Yes I do, if I have homesickness, I have. But when I am in India I long for Norway, my second homeland.

Following this it seems to me that Spivak opens up possibilities for understandings of how the issues of complexity and diversity affect negotiations of different positionings of identities. From Spivak I am seeking dialogues between different deconstructions, where new negotiations might contribute to create new discourses and replace the hegemonic practices of today. Here achieving a greater educational equity associated with diversity, as I have indicated, requests that students and professionals with diverse backgrounds get opportunities to negotiate their subjectivities.

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