Title: Attending to and Creating Difference: Migrant Voices in Diverse Classrooms

Abstract

Take two Austrian students: Ten-year-old Türkan, daughter of foreign-born parents, and ten-year-old Tanja, daughter of mainstream background. How (differently) do they experience schooling? How (differently) do they experience learning at this institution? How differently do they respond to what is expected of them? Students are attributed with different characteristics for many reasons. As students they are viewed as being good, bad, average, intelligent, engaged, interested, bored, etc. This not only determines how they are recognized but also the kind of attention they get at school. Teachers and students are closely entangled with each other and act in the presence of others, as Ricken argues (2009, 129). The others who are present become potential allies, competitors, scapegoats, spectators or referees and it is their presence that creates issues such as neglect, injustice or discrimination in the first place. By examining how one attributes something to something, ascribes something to someone and recognizes someone as something, specific social phenomena in heterogeneous classrooms can be revealed. Recognition of the Other is regarded a particular challenge in educational processes (Bildungsprozesse) (Micus-Loos 2012; Ricken 2009), calling for research into phenomena such as recognition, ascription or equality and social justice in education. This paper explores these phenomena of the learning experience at school from three main theoretical foundations: (1) phenomenology (lifeworldly and embodiment concepts in particular; Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Waldenfels, Meyer-Drawe), (2) experiential dimensions of learning and Theories of the Third (Bedorf, 2010, 2011; Butler 2006; 2012; Mecheril 2010; Plößer & Mecheril 2012). With regard to learning theory this paper focuses on recent theoretical work in the phenomenology of learning (Meyer-Drawe 2008; 2010) which defines learning as experience from a pedagogical perspective which is widely neglected by mainstream perspectives on results as well as neuro-scientific and cognitive views of learning. The phenomenologically grounded approach seeks to explore students’ lived experiences at school and contribute to the understanding of experiential facets of their learning. Based on vignettes from a grant funded project carried out in middle schools across Austria, this paper intends to explore how differently different (Arens/Mecheril, 2010) students are and which implications this may have for research, learning theory and teaching.