Educational Leadership in Independent Muslim Schools: A Methodological Proposal

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Contribution

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The phenomena of Muslim independent schools in Sweden is mainly discussed as an issue of social and cultural integration. This discourse has to been understood in the light of the transformation of Swedish school system has underwent. Meanings about the necessary of keeping religious influence and secularised education apart (Englund, 1996) are still strong. The state and municipals is looked up as warrants of this divide. At the same time 6 % of 134 000 pupils in independent schools attend confessionals schools in Sweden. The number of Islamic profiled school are increasing as the immigration from countries where the larger part of the population affirm themselves as Muslims. The Central Bureau of Statistics (2014) in Sweden predict that 20 % of the Swedish population either are immigrants or the children of immigrants in year 2020. A larger part of those immigrants will probably be Muslims with a wish to maintain their faith identity and recognized as Muslims (Thobani, 2011). To understand the context of leadership you need to have knowledge about the discourses about Islam and Muslims.

The aim of this paper is to discuss methodology to do research on educational leadership in Muslim schools. An empirical touchdown from my dissertation (Nilsson, 2015) will serve as a back-drop to do this.

The academic discourse about the outcomes of Muslim profiled schools education is divided (Nilsson, 2015). Either are Muslim Schools comprehended to maintain self-assurance and cultural recognition (Gerle, 1997) or as means of segregating children with different backgrounds from each other (Englund, 2010) and/or to reproduce patriarchy circumscribing democracy (Ali, 2009). The representation of Muslims and Muslim school in mass media and the civil sphere often held the
later opinion to be true (Shadid & Koningsveld, 2002). Especially when it comes to the establishment of a new school, prejudice are common among the members of the majority. An increasing Islamophobia in Europe is emerging and parents therefore chose Muslim profiled schools because they think they are safe. However Shah (Shah, 2015, p 140) argues that the interest in Islamic schools is reflecting a desire to make education not just a mean for developing and strengthening their faith identity but also as a vehicle for social mobility).

According to Durkheim, education is about transmitting knowledge and values to the next generation (Durkheim, 1956) and this process can in a social perspective bring about reproduction of social position (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) but also producing cultural meanings and crossing boarders of culture (Giroux, 2005). But how does cultural boarder crossing happens? My suggestion is to look up on educational leadership as a possible cultural boarder crossing. I understand the boarder crossing as a social performance which aims to re-fuse already de-fused meanings (Alexander, 2006). A social performance can be successful if it re-fuses meaning and change the audiences' landscapes of meaning (Reed, 2011) and change the way of social life in the direction that the actor intend. This direction has in a normative perspective not be wanted. That's why, from a sociological point of view, I suggest that the social performance also is a question about content in aspects about whose cultural meanings getting re-fused or remains de-fused. The different content of the de-fusion/re-fusion is therefore understood as different modes of incorporation: assimilation, hyphenation and multicultural incorporation (Alexander, 2006). Integration in this perspective is about on-going internal social and cultural processes.

Method

Under scrutiny is social performance and incorporation; ways of managing the future lives of the children. When performed, the curriculum consist of particular values, attitudes and dispositions. The curriculum taught "shapes perceptions of ethnic identity...struggles over ethnicity and curriculum" (Sleeter, 2015, p 231). The action of educational leaders are "set in motion by discursive and organizational conflicts over incorporation" (Alexander, 2001, s. 246) i.e. cultural meanings. The practises are tied to particular times and places located in a web of practice (politic, economic, cultural, language, family.) The educational leader breaks off certain aspects of other practices to motivate and legitimize pedagogies and therefore also construct different discourses of pathways to incorporation. From a sociological point of view the educational outcomes describes modes of incorporation: i) assimilative ii) hyphenated iii) multicultural (Alexander, 2001). In an assimilative mode of incorporation the particular identity is expected to be hidden in public places. It is not appreciated e.g. if you talk your native language during breaks or wear the hijab in school. This mode of incorporation reminds of what McLaren (1994, p 49) defines conservative (or corporate) multiculturalism. The goal is to assimilate everyone into the culture of the majority and the coregroup. A principal that perform an assimilative educational leadership tries to persuade and get his audience to embrace standards of achievement that assimalte students of minorities “into skills, concepts, language, and values of the dominant society” (Sleeter, 2015). How and if it happens depends on the success or failure of the performance in a local context. In the hyphenated mode different identities are highlighted when it suits and benefits the majority (Banks, 1999).The third mode of incorporation is understood as multicultural. In this mode the particular identities and the majorits' is seen as equal good, righteous, democratic and so are the institutions they represent (Alexander, 2006). According to (Banks, 1999, p 31) the mode is a “transformative approach, which changes ‘the canon, paradigms, and basic assumptions of the curriculum and enables students to view concepts, issues, themes, and problems from different perspectives and points of view”.

Expected Outcomes

I expect that the theory of social performance and incorporation can add important perspective on leadership, it means social performance and it's ends incorporation. Traditionally, educational leadership in multicultural school is understood as reproducing structures: symbolic, cultural and economic capital which constitute an assimilative mode of incorporation. In control of material elements such as structures and institutions e. g. means of symbolic productions: television and mass media, the chances for a successful assimilation of course increases. But it's not sufficient to re-fuse meanings with those performative elements. Even if you own and/or access means of symbolic production the others elements of the social performance e. g. authenticity of actor, the actual performance on the scene and the script has to be interpreted as true, real and natural. If the actor fails in these regards so does the re-fusion of meanings and it doesn't matter how much material recourses you use. The initial re-analyse of the ethnographic observation indicates that in the particular case the principal have to balance between different modes of incorporation. That's because different social groups have different normative hopes and beliefs about education, both within school and with external stakeholders, such as worried neighbours in connection with the establishment of the school. The principal explain how Islam, and the way Muslims use Islam, and be interpreted. Sometimes he criticises Islam and it's practising representatives, but above all he tries to reshape the characteristics society attributes to Muslim and Islam. The principal dedicates himself to talk about problems and solutions in a way that he identifies as Swedish. In this and other ways he attributes the Swedish society positive values at the same time as he weaves together the picture of himself and his work with a dominant narrative about the Swedish pragmatic society.
References


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