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Sabine Bollig / Michael-Sebastian Honig / Sascha Neumann / Claudia Seele (Hrsg.)

MultiPluriTrans in Educational Ethnography

Approaching the Multimodality, Plurality and Translocality of Educational Realities

Bielefeld: transcript 2015

(318 S.; ISBN 978-3-8376-2772-5; 34,99 EUR)

Internationally, ethnography is an approved field-based approach to the study of social and cultural phenomena, far beyond the disciplines of anthropology and sociology from which it emerged in the early twentieth century. "MultiPluriTrans in Educational Ethnography" constitutes the fourth conference volume arising from a loose network of German-speaking ethnographers and points to ethnography's growing importance within the German-speaking discipline of education. The conference took place in Luxemburg, which by virtue of its transnational population and astonishing multilingualism provided the perfect environment to promote the slogan "MultiPluriTrans". The conference hosts and editors aimed at connecting the German ethnographic debate to recent international trends in interdisciplinary ethnographic research: "MultiPluriTrans" refers to the heterogeneity and diversity of research objects as well as the very ways of doing ethnography, which are both shaped by globalised dynamics and transnational exchanges (introduction). The international orientation is reflected in the volume's English language.

Part one questions classical fieldwork as long-time immersion in locally bounded communities and instead discusses "multi-sited ethnography" as a research strategy. The term was proposed by the US-American anthropologist George Marcus [1] to trace the "world system" on the ground by following people, objects or metaphors. In the context of accelerating globalisation and due to the rising discomfort with structural-functionalist legacies, multi-sited ethnography soon turned into an intriguing research strategy. Critics, however, deplored that it produced "thin" rather than "thick" description. Furthermore, the concept proliferated in its literal interpretation of "doing fieldwork in more than one field site", which emptied the approach of its conceptual implications. The contributions in the present volume transfer this anthropological debate on multi-sited fieldwork to the particularities of educational research: While Jane Kenway promotes multi-sited fieldwork as a way of studying elite schools within global connections, Stephan Wolff critically discusses practical and methodological challenges that his students faced in their research on transnational social support. Sabine Bollig outlines a multi-sited research approach to transcend the child-centered gaze within institutional borders that dominates the ethnography on early child education and care. Instead, she discerns the multifaceted assemblage of quasi-market policies, local structures, institutional organisation and parents' choices that children are involved in. These explorations into multi-sited ethnography are contrasted by Yuki Imoto, who exemplifies by her research in an international preschool in Tokyo how long-term immersion within a spatially bounded site may result in an analysis of transnational dynamics.

In part two, three contributions deal with "things that matter" and human-nonhuman interactions. As a protagonist of socio-material approaches, Tara Fenwick, together with her students Sarah Doyle, Maureen Michael, and Jennifer Scoles discuss their creative inventions to detect socio-material relations within the field of professional learning. Christoph Maeder points to the emerging obstinacy of ICT devices such as computers and whiteboards in the classroom, resulting in time-consuming repair work. In a methodological contribution, Tobias Röhl argues that material objects connect educational sites with the larger cultural or political context. In analogy to multi-sited fieldwork, he proposes to study these relations by following the material objects to their production sites or to the political debates which regulate the curriculum or educational textbooks. The remaining two articles in this part discuss practices in the interstices between government policies and organisational strategies. Helga Kelle shows how schools implement a state policy for pupils' school entry proceedings in such a way that the individual diagnoses are adapted to organisational needs of the different schools, i.e. concerning class organisation. Robert Fairbanks II draws on regulation theory and his ethnographic experience in prisons to analyse criminal justice practices as part of a changing welfare regime and poverty management in Illinois and Chicago.

The heterogeneous part three starts with multimodal research conceptions. Gunther Kress conceptualises texts such as the new digital "social media" sites from a semiotic perspective as multimodal ensemble. The author approaches their complex meanings as traces of meaning-making within social interactions and thus searches for the common ground of semiotics and ethnography. Oliver Schnoor focuses on sound, an often neglected dimension in ethnography, to study the multimodality of practices of acoustic-spatial-pedagogical ordering in early childhood day care institutions. Claudia Seele researches language practices within early childhood day care institutions in the context of official multilingual education in Luxemburg. She shows how the institutional language agendas are violated by illegitimate multi- and translanguaging practices in everyday conversations. Marc Schulz questions the topoi of "the self-educating child" within the field of child education and care as an empirical given.

Based on his fieldwork in day care centers he discusses how this topic is (re)produced by the very practices of the professionals to observe and document children's activities and their evaluation as Bildung. In distinction to this deconstructive approach, Dominik Krinninger takes an objectivist perspective on how the family's "educational constitution" can be made visible by ethnography.

In sum, the contributions give insights into the diversity of attempts to grasp the dynamics within present-day translocal, multilingual and heterogeneous conditions of education. Therewith, they transgress the imaginations of bounded fields and localised cultures and their essentialist representations. However, an analysis of the similarities and distinctions between the perspectives in the respective parts, e.g. between socio-material, multimodal and ethnomethodological approaches, would have been helpful. While the collection overall leans towards the study of early childhood education and care (promoting the hosts' own research field), other prominent "multipluritrans" research foci such as (trans)gender, transnational policyscapes or situated performances of ethnicity and identity are absent. The editors mention in the introduction that by choosing *MultipluriTrans* as a title, they purposefully forewent the other popular prefix "inter", arguing that ethnography must per se be an interdisciplinary field (11). Indeed, the authors represent not only the discipline of education, but also derive from sociology, anthropology, urban studies or semiotics. This results in a diversity of methodological and epistemological approaches ranging from micro-perspectives (e.g. Schnoor) to theorisations of the state (Fairbanks II). In view of the prevalence of the discipline of education within German-speaking educational ethnography, it would be worthwhile not to glibly gloss over the implications of the distinct disciplinary and national traditions, but to use them for self-reflexive analysis. German educational ethnography so far seems by and large to privilege observation (literally understood) over participation and to focus on the analysis of micro-practices within institutional boundaries, which is related to a particular set of theories (practice, ethnomethodology) and results in specific modes of representation (see also the keynotes of Georg Breidenstein and Marc Schulz at the subsequent educational ethnography conference 2016 in Hildesheim). This volume is an encouragement to move beyond accustomed research practices and to open up ethnographic perspectives on education.

[1] Marcus, G. E.: Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 1995, 24, 95-117.

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