

Recognising, naming, and resisting racialisation and ethnicisation in Swedish compulsory schools

Among Swedish policymakers and researchers, there is a growing interest in social justice education and children's empowerment. However, there is a need for more research on children's agency and how critical evaluation of lived experiences can enhance social justice. The paper is based on an ongoing article focusing on ethnic and racial oppression experienced by the compulsory school student and their resistance. The aim is to illustrate the processes of resisting and sustaining ethnicised and racialised oppression and how institutionally initiated inquiry can help understand and address oppressive norms and behaviours in local school contexts. Oppression is defined as marginalisation, discrimination, harassment, and exclusionary practices that reinforce inequalities in educational settings (Kumashiro, 2000; Freire, 2018). The primary research questions include exploring how racialised and ethnicised oppression is experienced, resisted, and perpetuated in local schools, how oppressive power dynamics affect the organisation of "body space", and how understanding and investigating oppression can serve as a form of anti-oppressive education.

Theoretical framework

The analytic point of departure is the analysis of oppressive behaviour and normative categorisations and the importance of children's responsive capacities to resisting oppression (Ahmed, 2012; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Oppression is viewed as a phenomenological issue. The analysis is centred on how performative acts and verbal interactions position bodies, shape them and lead to disruptive responses. It underscores the spatial distribution of bodies and interpellations and how these actions align, contest, and maintain boundaries between normative and non-normative bodies, ultimately influencing social interactions and societal meanings attributed to these bodies (Puwar, 2004; Dolk, 2013).

Methodology

This is an ethnographic study conducted in compulsory schools situated in areas of a large city in Sweden. The empirical data were collected through various methods, including students' written reflections on their personal experiences of oppression, participatory observations, and interviews with teachers.

Expected results and findings

The analysis highlights various aspects and examples of the intersection of whiteness, migration, ethnicity, and power dynamics related to age, gender, socioeconomic resources, honour, and religion, as well as resistance to ethnicisation and racialisation. By refusing silence, disrupting, and claiming power to oppose, the student opens the body space to transformation and new potentialities. I argue for the importance of collective and collaborative efforts to develop a critical analysis of privilege and oppression, which can lead to personal, institutional, and social change. The results suggest that recognising and challenging oppressive power dynamics can open new possibilities for transformative actions.

Relevance to Nordic educational research

As the Swedish Discrimination Act excludes race as a basis of discrimination, and there is the official stance of colour blindness in Swedish society (Hübinette & Tigervall, 2009; Osanami Törngren, 2015), it is important to disclose students' own experiences of racism and ethnicisation and their agentic capacity in school contexts.