

Doing Research

Theoretical and Methodological Considerations and Choices

Berit H. Johnsen

Introduction

This book is the second of three anthologies related to the international research cooperation project WB 04/06: Development towards the Inclusive School: Practices – Research – Capacity Building: Universities of Belgrade, Ljubljana, Sarajevo, Skopje, Tuzla, Zagreb & Oslo. While the first anthology dealt with how to prepare and formulate research projects (Johnsen, 2013), this book draws attention to the research process itself. Theoretical and methodological considerations are important aspects of doing research throughout the process of implementation. Theory and methodology are therefore the focal point of this book.

A number of internationally renowned scholars have contributed articles about theory on practice related to either of the two broad theoretical traditions; 1) the Vygotskyan cultural-historical school of teaching, learning and development, and 2) humanistic didactic-curricular theory aiming towards inclusion. Small-scale research projects are in focus, particularly classroom studies related to international comparative analysis. Different qualitative methodologies are investigated, including case study, action research and “mixed methods”, which combines qualitative and quantitative approaches.

Thus, this anthology is addressed to researchers, students and professionals within education and special needs education as well as psychology, sociology, health sciences and other related fields. It makes a contribution to cross-disciplinary international research cooperation, aiming at revealing good practices and gaps between human rights principles and everyday practice. The book is a valuable asset to international students at the PhD and Master levels within

the social sciences and humanities in general, and the educational sciences in particular. Moreover, it directly applies to research colleagues in the joint project *International Comparative Classroom Studies towards Inclusion*, who have contributed to this anthology.

On theory, methodology and ethics of research on inclusive practices

The book is divided into four parts. In addition to this article, Part One has an historical survey article describing and discussing the history of ideas concerning the school for all and inclusion from the beginning of non-tuition elementary education “for all and everyone” in 1739 until current efforts being made to implement the principles of the inclusive school.

Part Two has seven articles mainly containing theoretical perspectives from cultural-historical and didactic-curricular theory, focusing on certain aspects of practice such as communication and care as well as teaching, learning and development. What is humanistic didactic-curricular theory? As the two closely related notions, the Continental-European ‘didactics’ and the Anglo-American ‘curriculum’ indicate, they focus on planning, implementing and revising education of individuals, groups and classes at school. The foundation for humanistic didactic-curricular theory is 1) communication – more precisely, the dialogue and 2) child- and individual centred education within the community of the class and school. Modern humanistic education draws its philosophy from Martin Buber’s (1947) encounter between “I and Thou” to Paolo Freire’s (1972) pedagogy of the oppressed and subsequent related texts. The broad traditions are in line with and capable of developing UNESCO’s (1994) statement on educational inclusion from a general international principle into practice within the diversity of countries and cultures.

Thus, Part Two begins with Ragnar Rommetveit’s criticism of mainstream individualistic communication theory and discussion of the essence of the dialogical paradigm and the individual as co-owner of the language. His article is followed by Harry Daniels’, Ivan Ivić’ and Berit H. Johnsen’s articles discussing aspects of cultural-historical theory in light of teaching, learning and development within education and special needs education, and during peace and war. Direct focus is placed on the interaction between the new-born and caregiver in Colwyn Trevarthen’s discussion of art and the joyful companionship of fiction. In his second article Harry Daniels discusses how development within the

cultural-historical tradition in social science has contributed to our understanding of pedagogy and thus to educational research. Cultural-historical theory coincides with humanistic didactic-curricular theory in the last article of Part Two, where issues are presented and discussed concerning how to bridge the gap between the principle and practice of educational inclusion.

Why does it take such a long time to realise the principle of inclusion? There are undoubtedly many answers to this question, among which there is an increasing awareness of ethical issues. Thus, Part Three addresses ethical issues in the development of social and educational inclusion, starting with Charles Gardou's brief, poetical text *From the Exceptional to the Universal*. The following two articles introduce French-Bulgarian philosopher and psycho-linguist Julia Kristeva's ethical-political program focusing on our shared human sense of vulnerability. Similarly, Sangeeta Bagga-Gupta reflects on inclusion and equality at the end of Part Three.

Research methodology is the focus of Part Four. Possibilities and limitations of qualitative research approaches in general and action research in particular were eagerly discussed and implemented in several of the participating universities within the joint comparative classroom study project (WB 06/04). Therefore, two different action research approaches are present and discussed, one of which focuses directly on qualitative classroom studies. The other is a good example of cross-disciplinary influence, where researchers in the field of health and medicine obtain knowledge from the field of education and try out approaches that stand out as good examples within several related research disciplines. The joint methodological basis and flexibility within the comparative classroom study project (WB 04/06) are discussed in an article summarizing the various methodological choices. It is followed by seven articles, one from each of the university teams presenting their methodological reflections and choices in more detail.

Participants

The various articles in this anthology provide the reader with an impression of the joint working process of the participants in the *International Comparative Classroom Studies towards Inclusion* (WB 06/04), as well as the joint upgrading process that took place throughout the project, particularly in the rotating workshops held every semester. Professor Harry Daniels, currently at Oxford University, England, Professor Sangeeta Bagga-Gupta, University of Örebro,

Sweden, and Professor Ivan Ivić, University of Belgrade, Serbia, have all participated in workshops and contributed articles to this anthology.

Other authors have participated in related networks or conferences, such as Professor Emeritus Colwyn Trevarthen at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland and Professor Emeritus Ragnar Rommetveit, University of Oslo. Several of the contributors belong to a circle related to Bulgarian-French Professor Julia Kristeva, University of Paris Diderot; they include French Professor Charles Gardou, University of Lyon 2, and Norwegian professors Per Koren Solvang, University College of Oslo and Akershus, and Eivind Engebretsen, University of Oslo, as well as the editor of this anthology. Engebretsen has also contributed the above-mentioned article on action research along with colleagues. The other article on action research has been written by Professor at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim, May Britt Postholm.

Researchers from all the participating WB 04/06 project universities have contributed methodological articles. Thus, this anthology presents a number of methodological reflections which may serve as examples for research fellows and students who are in the preparatory phase of their own studies. They may also be read together with the research plans of the same university teams presented in the first anthology of this series, *Research Project Preparation within Education and Special Needs Education* (Johnsen, 2013). The seven articles are linked to an article describing and discussing the common flexible methodological framework within the international comparative project. Taken together, these articles may serve as examples for other research networks that are planning joint research projects. However, thorough reflections on the possibilities and limitations of the kind of qualitative international comparative studies that have been carried out in this project will have to wait until the next of the three anthologies. All the authors of these methodological texts are presented in relation to their articles as well as in the survey of contributors at the end of the book. However, many other researchers, students and administrators are also behind the project process and subsequent articles in this anthology, having contributed project activities and acting as local peer reviewers or discussants and interpreters.

As already indicated, several other participants are needed in cooperation-projects of this size. This is also the case in the process from project activities to publishing a resulting anthology. Using English as their research language, the participating teams have done a great job of writing these articles. In addition, a French, Serbian and Norwegian article needed translating and editing to English

within the respective discipline genres. Mr. Goran Đapić, project interpreter, translated the Serbian and French articles to English, and the publisher's translator and proof-reader, Karin Lee-Hansen, translated from Norwegian to English. Both did an excellent job. The next step consisted of starting a detailed editing process in order to present the articles in accordance with different and complex scientific terminologies. This task included having "a hermeneutical dialogue" with the authors, and all three articles were eventually accepted by their authors. Special thanks go to Ragnar Rommetveit, who reviewed his article in English translation twice during this editing process, and to Ingrid Rommetveit, who has mediated the majority of messages sent back and forth between the two of us.

Certain articles have been published earlier and appear here in slightly revised forms or in translation. Thus, both articles by Harry Daniels have been adapted from former articles with the author's consent. Ragnar Rommetveit's article was published in the Norwegian language by Gyldendal Akademisk (2008) and is now being published in English with the consent of the author as well as the publishing company. Colwyn Trevarthen's article is also being published in a slightly revised version with the consent of the author and the publisher, Oxford University Press.

All articles have been peer reviewed, edited and proof read. A number of internal and external research colleagues have participated in the peer review process; amongst them my colleague at the Department of Special Needs Education, UiO, Associate Professor Ivar Morken, my colleague from the joint project, Professor Ljiljana Igrić at the University of Zagreb, Croatia, and Professor Gregor Hensen, University of Applied Sciences Osnabrück, Germany, deserve special mention. The cooperation with authors and peer reviewers throughout this project has been an excellent joint effort to increase the articles' overall quality. However, one difficult feature of editing has been to shorten the articles in order to make room for all the texts. The close cooperation with publishing house proof reader Karin Lee-Hansen has once again significantly increased the clarity and readability of our articles due to her conscientious and detailed work.

The publication of this second anthology has been made possible through funding from 1) the Department of Special Needs Education, and 2) the research group Humanity Studies in Pedagogy (HumStud), both located at the Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Oslo, and 3) the international research cooperation project WB 06/04, which was partly financed by the Norwegian Cooperation Program on Research and Higher Education with the Countries in the Western Balkans (CPWB).

The editing process of this book took considerably longer time than expected. The cooperation with the generous and patient editor, Bjørn O. Hansen, at the publishing house Cappelen Damm Akademisk has once again been highly appreciated throughout the process of creating this book.

All participants deserve great thanks for their diligent work and close cooperation over several years with regard to their making contributions to this anthology, which we also hope will benefit other research colleagues, students and professionals.

Further dissemination

As mentioned in the introduction, this is the second anthology in the dissemination of the joint project *International Comparative Classroom Studies towards Inclusion* (WB 06/04). While the first anthology dealt with how to prepare and formulate research projects, this book draws attention to the research process itself. Several articles have already been delivered concerning the research process as well as results in the project participants' languages, and future articles are expected to be published in national as well as international journals. The third anthology will contain the findings of the joint international research project *Comparative Classroom Studies towards Inclusion*, and in this coming book the comparative analysis and discussion of findings from the studies of the seven universities in Belgrade, Ljubljana, Sarajevo, Skopje, Tuzla, Zagreb and Oslo will comprise the main body of the book. In addition, there will be articles written by each of the research teams as well as discussions of other central aspects of inclusion, such as the process of making comparisons of inclusive practices within educational research completed on an international basis.

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