ABSTRACT
Power between Paradoxes – Gender Neutrality and Gender Awareness

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Feminist researchers inspired by poststructuralist queer positions have discussed how to use discourse theory and analysis. Especially Michel Foucault’s work on the issue of power and a power-analytic has been useful (Simonsen 1996, Mills 1997, Heede 2000). I argue that the analysis of power has to begin with small mechanisms: with their own stories, technics and strategies – and from there it is possible to move towards more general mechanisms and forms of power. To make this move it is necessary to work with theories and methodologies of subjectivity, criticising however, the determinism in discourse theory and analysis (Oksala 1998). In my empirical studies of gender in three Danish classes, which I followed from 1995-2002. I have identified numerous discourses and mini life histories representing subjectivity.

To illustrate my work I will discuss two paradoxes: gender neutrality and gender awareness. The gender neutrality paradox I find when pupils and teachers in interviews on one hand claim, that there are no differences between girls and boys in the class – while they on the other hand construct gender differences in their interpretations of teaching situations, other pupils and other teachers. However when pupils and teachers do a lot to neutralize gender, they construct not only gender differences, but stereotypes in a heterosexual discourse. The gender awareness comes into focus when teachers want to work with differences between girls and boys in an equality discourse. With this focus gender differences so to say paste to gender differences, making the gender of girls positive at the expense of the gender of boys – or vice versa.

What do such paradoxes imply to the contents in and the way of teaching and learning? What and how do the paradoxes do to the persons, pupils and teachers, in the classroom? Does gender tickle unpleasant? Or pleasant and desirable?

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