Power between Paradoxes  
- Gender Neutrality and Gender Awareness

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Introduction
In this paper, I would like to present a brief study of a Danish classroom, and some research positions on power between paradoxes inspired by poststructuralist theory and methodologies (Michel Foucault, Patti Lather, Roland Barthes, Sara Mills). My focus is on gender as power between paradoxes. The theory and methodologies selected imply that gender should be regarded as a construction. I utilise the concept of discourse here in a broad sense, as structure and pattern in linguistic actions. Within such discourses there are certain rules that include some pupils while excluding others. Discourse analysis is a way of structuring the empirical data, through which the researcher constructs discourses in relation to her research aim. Within the many discourse methodologies, I have been mainly influenced by theories that discuss determinism and accentuate the subject (Dorte Marie Søndergaard, Bronwyn Davies, "discourse-psychology"). In this presentation, I will focus on how subjects, the pupils and the teacher create and use discourses in situated social practice. As in "discourse psychology", I will describe a discourse in a specific situation. My materials are interviews and observations as written texts.

The Danish class under study consists of 13-year-old pupils attending the seventh grade. The teacher is 35 years old, and the researcher is 44. We are in a provincial town, in the year 1995. In the classroom, the pupils sit in groups of 4-5 persons around 5 tables, in gender-mixed groups. After the holidays, they change groups. The teacher determines the composition of the groups. In interviews, she tells me that she consciously creates mixed groups of boys and girls, and that she believes boys do better in mother tongue lessons when there are mixed-gender groups.

Power
Power "is one of the most complex, diffuse and provisional concepts in the authorship" of Michel Foucault, writes the Danish queer theorist Dag Heede (Heede 2000, 37, my translation). With Heede, I find three concepts of power that can be traced in the works of Focault. In the early phase (the 1960s) power is seen in the traditional way as a means of banning and excluding. Power is a matter of suppression. In the second phase of Foucault's works (the 1970s) power is seen as productive, useful and positive.

In the third phase (the 1980s), Foucault elaborates a power-analytic (sic), a network of relationships in a state of constant stimulation, stress and activity. In my work with analyses of power in details and processes, I find it useful to analyse power as a network that bans, excludes and suppresses, but can also be productive, useful and positive.
Power is something that pupils can use, develop, examine, or become part of, as well as be suppressed or excluded by. The pupils, the teacher and the researcher are all part of the power processes that go on in the classroom (and in their history, both when they are together and separately, with their families outside the school).

Paradoxes
I define a "paradox" as a concept in which thoughts become stuck and twisted. In this view, paradox is defined more as an incomprehensible thought than in the usual sense of a self-contradictory or apparently absurd claim. With reference to the French theorist in literature, semiotics and linguistics Roland Barthes, "paradoxa" is related to the writerly text. The text is manifold, pluralistic and paradoxical. To elaborate on Barthes' definition of paradoxa, the paradox is a construction, not a representation of reality.

As you may know, paradoxes are employed in poststructuralism in place of binarities or oppositions. The title of my paper, "Power between Paradoxes", indicates that the influence of post-structuralism implies the following methodologies for me:

1) When you identify gender as a binary or opposition: girl/boy, this is just the first step in the process of deconstruction. But as we live in a Western society in which we tend to think in terms of binarities, it is necessary to identify a construction before you can deconstruct it. In this first step, the binarities are identified as constructed using certain terms, in which one side is given a positive valuation at the expense of the other side's negative position, e.g. the first sex as the positive position and the second sex as the negative position; the hard-working girls as positive power in the classroom, at the expense of the noisy boys suppressing the girls who are eager to do hard work. The second step is to displace the negative to a positive position and vice versa, e.g. the noisy boys as inquisitive, dynamic pupils. In the third step, you "create a more fluid and less coercive conceptual organization of terms that transcends a binary logic by simultaneously being both and neither of the binary terms" (Lather 1992, 96, Grotz 1989, XV).

2) To work with “wild practices” (Lather 1999, lecture, University of Copenhagen, September), for instance taking the first and the last sentences in a interview. It implies not to be “wild”, but to get more than wholeness and normativity from the data, i.e. to catch the remainder or the left-overs and the twisted situations.

3) An analysis can be performed in terms of splits. A split requires at least three positions. These could for example be three gender positions: girl, boy, girlish boy – with the third gender position here being inspired by the work of Judith Halberstam, who writes about female masculinity as “a specific gender with its own cultural history rather than simply a derivative of male masculinity” (Halberstam 1998, 77). Or the positions might be gender neutrality, gender awareness and manifold genders. But in continuing to construct the concept of positions, you can find yourself in a persons-land. In this no-persons-land, the research will be open-ended, with no final interpretations, no solutions. This is where a paradox becomes stuck and twisted (Lather 1999).
MODEL

Power between paradoxes

1) Gender Neutrality 2) Gender Awareness

3) Manifold genders

Gender Neutrality
The material on gender neutrality consists of weak utterances. The pupils knew that I, as a researcher, was observing gender differences in their mother tongue lessons, but they did not themselves place gender issues on the agenda. When I asked in an interview, "Do girls and boys behave differently in Danish lessons?", the pupils would answer:

a) "No."
b) "No, there are no differences between girls and boys."
c) "No, we act the same way. Some girls like Trine and Sara get high marks, and I (Jeppe) used to be lazy, but not any more. No, we behave the same way."

I interpret such utterances as: 'This class is gender-neutral. Look, we have no gender differences in this classroom.' Perhaps the utterances reflect a wish to produce gender equality? Or perhaps the power acting in the interviews between the researcher and the pupil may influence the pupils to ignore gender or to render gender invisible?

The gender neutrality paradox, however, appears when the pupils interviewed claim that there are no gender differences in their class, but in trying to neutralize gender, they not only construct differences, but also stereotypes in a heterosocial discourse. Jeppe constructs these gender stereotypes in words by stating that some girls get high marks, as opposed to him as a lazy boy. You could say that for Jeppe it is obvious that girls like Trine and Sara get high marks. Although he mentions that his laziness belongs to the past, he does not in the present time describe himself as a pupil that gets high marks. In the interview with Jeppe, the obvious girls with high marks call forth gender stereotypes which in turn cause him to present gender neutrality.

Constructing gender neutrality in the classroom, the girls behave in the ways that girls have been observed to do in gender and classroom studies, i.e. as hard-working, social and considerate, silent in the group and a bit boring. Similarly, the boys behave as boys have been observed to do in gender and classroom studies, namely as curious, initiative-taking, talkative, wild, noisy, lazy and very funny. The girls and boys produce perfect pairs in a heterosexual model, in which women and men are meant to supplement each
other. The construction of gender neutrality thus grows out of the theory of complementarity.

The construction of gender neutrality in the class is noticeable in their project work, Youth Culture. Here the pupils, accustomed to working in gender-mixed groups, are free to choose their partners for the project work. All of the pupils prefer to work in a gender-neutral area, in casu a homosocial room. Not only do the pupils select their own genders for project work, but they also choose traditionally gender-split themes: Youth (meeting around a thriller and drinking in a club) (boys), Computer Culture (boys), Role Playing (boys), Fashion (girls), Two Generations: mothers and daughters (girls) and Horse Culture (girls).

For the Youth Culture project, the pupils provide feedback for each other's presentations at what is known as the dress rehearsal. Sofie and Trine present their project Horse Culture. They normally enjoy success in their schoolwork, but not this time. The presentation is long and fragmented, divided by a poem in eight verses. The refrain in the poem is easy to remember and imitate. After a few verses, Jeppe jabbers the refrain "Ponies horses ponies horses", and the other pupils laugh, with the exception of Sofie and Trine. In this situation, Jeppe sees himself as the witty class clown, a position familiar to him from the classroom. During the presentation, some of the boys have difficulty in sitting still and being quiet. They make their critical voices heard in the room via an interrupting discourse. They produce this interrupting discourse as a form of power that forces Sara and Trine to speed up their presentation, but also makes them nervous. As I see this power, it is both productive – in terms of speeding up the presentation – and suppressive in that it makes Sofie and Trine nervous. It is obvious to me that there is a conflict discourse in the classroom between Trine, Sofie, Jeppe and Morten: Trine uses many words to defend their way of presenting the project work, while Sofie sits frowning, not saying very much, but indicating through her body language that she finds the level of feedback beneath her. The feedback ends with this dialogue:

Morten: How many breeds of horses are there?
Sofie: How should I know?
Morten: I thought you studied it for this project … (mumbling) That's too bad.
...
Morten: What is an Arab?
...
Morten: I found the video a bit boring. I'd rather hear about your personal experiences.
...
Sara: I don't agree at all that you have to reveal your personal feelings.
...
Emil: (after the feedback has finished) I think the Arab horse has the greatest sex urge.

The dialogue demonstrates how Sofie's and Trine's points of view on horse culture are suppressed in a conflict discourse that seems rather sexist-spiteful, and they close their
ears to the feedback. In the dialogue quoted above, Sofie and Trine are in the middle of the conflict, and make use of two possibilities:
- to keep (almost) quiet but indicate disagreement with body language
- to reply defensively.

In the conflict, they receive help from Sara with her strong intonation on "at all": "I don't agree at all that you have to reveal your personal feelings." She is a strong person with a powerful voice in the dialogue, and she uses her voice in a reprimanding discourse. The reprimanding discourse is used particularly in relation to Jeppe and Morten. To return to Sofie's role in this short dialogue, she is a part of the reprimanding discourse as well – with a distinct moral tone in her voice, as though speaking to a disobedient child: "How should I know?"

The dialogue is dominated by Morten. He produces the question and the negative response to the presentation. For him, the power used is a productive protest against Sofie's and Trine's feedback to his and the other five boys' presentation of their project Youth (meeting around a thriller and drinking in a club) which took place 30 minutes earlier. The interrupting discourse that he produces is a 'response' to their reprimanding discourse. Is Morten the owner of the power? In a communication model, he would be the sender of the message. A sender is an *animator*, the one who puts the discourse into words with his voice or body language, but he is not necessarily the author or the principal (Perregaard 2003, 26; from Goffman 1974/1986). The *author* is the person who invented the story, which in this feedback could be Morten or Jeppe. Jeppe, as the witty class clown who began the criticism by jabbering the refrain, is the subject creating the interrupting discourse. He is a part of the group that had to listen to the feedback from Sofie and Trine 30 minutes earlier, so he has his reasons for interrupting, saying in effect that 'You, Sofie and Trine, are doing no better than we did in our group. We, the boys, may not have given a great presentation, but the poem you read was ridiculous: "ponies horses ponies horses".' Jeppe, however, does not take part in the conflict discourse in the final dialogue. Emil is the *principal*, the person who is held responsible for the sexist-spiteful utterance, although he produces nothing himself, and merely follows the owners of the power.

The question is, can we construct a third position? Could there be a third power that lies between the binarities, the binarities of girls/boys and the gender neutrality/gender stereotypes?

1) Utterances of no gender
   - gender neutrality

2) Dialogue that reveals
   - gender stereotypes
   Girls: presenting a girls' youth culture; reprimanding discourse
   Boys: presenting a boys’ youth culture; interrupting discourse

3) Gender in between power:
   conflicting discourse
Gender Awareness

Gender awareness comes into focus when the teacher uses her power to create gender-mixed groups. With this focus, gender differences so to speak paste to gender differences in a hierarchy, giving the gender of girls a positive evaluation at the expense of the gender of boys – or vice versa. With gender awareness, gender is constructed on the basis of the thesis that the two genders do make a difference. The thesis can be formulated as: 'To avoid the power of banning and exclusion, we must be aware of gender and compensate for the suppressed gender'. In the 1970s, the suppressed gender in gender-classroom research was the girl, "the silent girl" (Larsen and Nielsen 1981), while in the 1980s, the suppressed gender in gender-classroom research was the boy, "the wild boy" (Kryger 1988).

Let us now examine the same class, in the same year of 1995, but a few months earlier. The pupils were studying a Danish fantasy novel, written by a female Danish author, with a female main character. The teacher was aware that the novel chosen can be aimed more at girls than at boys.

After working with the fantasy novel, the teacher (AN) said in an interview with the researcher (SVK):

AN My favourite novels are fantasy novels; but I know that if I am to hold their attention at this age, I have to find novels that have plots and conflicts, and that are slightly creepy. For example, the part of the novel that many of the boys like best is when there is a little splatter, when Chanda falls apart and the blood comes through. Just a little suspense and a little creepiness, then I can get a lot of things across to them …

SVK Who do you take most into consideration, girls or boys, when you are selecting genres and texts?

AN This year, I think that by starting with the theme of suspense and horror I took the boys very much into consideration. I try not to select books with a female main character every time. Before the summer holidays, we studied a book about conflicts, you know, children in conflicts, and there was a male main character in that …

Obviously, the teacher's awareness in the interview is focused upon the boys: the boys are to have novels with plots, conflicts, creepiness, splatter, suspense and horror. The pupils to whom she says she can "get a lot of things across" are the boys in the class. Although the teacher states that the chosen fantasy novel has a female main character, she emphasises the part that male pupils prefer. The teacher uses her power productively in this gender awareness, and the boys are, in my observation papers, productive in reading and interpreting genres, persons, places, narrator, symbols and empty places.
Most of the boys find the novel boring at the first reading, but with the help of the teacher's awareness, they become absorbed in the work.

And what about the girls in the classroom? They help the teacher and the boys!

The teacher's awareness compensates the boys. The fantasy novel, the teacher presumes, is more readable for the girls than the boys in the class. But it contains parts that appeal to the boys, and the teacher uses her power to emphasise the boys' parts (splatter, Chanda, blood, suspense, creepiness) in the class. Abdo is the animator and the author in the class by being the first to say that his favourite place in the novel is "the splatter things on page 97", quoting the page with a dramatic intonation. Jeppe then follows Abdo by saying, "It was my favourite bit, too." In her awareness of the boys, the teacher does not totally overlook the girls' relationship with the novel. In the interview, she uses the word "little", because she knows that the novel is much more than just splatter, etc. In the novel there is "a little splatter", "a little suspense", "a little creepiness". With this "little" she opens up for the possibility that the girls, as well as herself, can read the novel as fantasy – a genre between magic and reality.

But this "little" opening is not enough for Sofie, Gertrud and Ingelise. First of all, the teacher ignores the fact that Sofie calls the novel a "fable" in class. The teacher hears Sofie saying that the novel is not a fairytale. In this negative utterance the teacher is caught by her awareness of the boys, who argue that the novel is indeed a fairytale. In exploiting the resources of the boys' arguments, she fails to hear Sofie's first statement.

The conflict discourse going on between the pupils in this class in their Youth Culture project work, is, as I mentioned above, a network composed of an interrupting discourse and a reprimanding discourse. But while studying the fantasy novel, Sofie and Gertrud produce a resistance discourse towards the co-operation discourse produced by the boys, the other girls and the teacher. In their work with the fantasy novel, Sofie and Gertrud never in class accepted the novel or its interpretation as a fantasy novel:

Sofie I think it is a fable. I don't believe in it … I don't think it's a fairytale. There is nothing fairytale-like about it. It's just weird.

Gertrud supports Sofie's utterance in class by stating that the novel's main plot, sub-plot and ending show that the work does not have a fairytale ending.

In relation to the teacher, there is a fine line for Sofie between power as self-exclusion and feeling suppressed, and power production, acting as the animator and author of the resistance discourse. She is not a “silent girl” rather a ‘demanding tomboy’.

Towards the teacher, Sofie and Gertrud can alternate between being the gender's victim-girl and the gender's power-girl. They act like ‘talkative tomboys’ in creating the resistance discourse.

Sofie is the animator and author in the resistance discourse. Gertrud becomes the principal in the resistance discourse. In the following interview, Ingelise demonstrates that she agrees with Sofie and Gertrud, but she keeps silent in class:
Ingelise: But I didn't think it (the novel) was especially good. It was kind of mysterious. She tells the story as if it's true, but of course it's all made up. I didn't think it was very good, more like boring.

SVK: Do you remember the name of the author of the book?
Ingelise: No.
SVK: Is it a woman or a man?
Ingelise: I think it's a man. I'm not quite sure.
SVK: No?
Ingelise: No, no, it's a girl. She lived in Skagen.
SVK: That's right. What made you say it was a man at first?
Ingelise: I don't know – it was boring – I don't remember right now.

In her silence, Ingelise belongs to the resistance discourse as a principal, but in the interview she is the author of the resistance discourse. The middle part of the interview indicates that there is a sense of insecurity in her position as the author: "I'm not quite sure". But in the interview, she demonstrates how she creates the resistance discourse by ignoring: 'not remembering' and 'not knowing' as the initial and concluding utterances.

The question is: how can a third position be constructed between the binarities of gender awareness and gender hierarchy?

1) Utterances of best part for boys, best part for girls
- Gender awareness compensation
- Gender hierarchy faults and resources

2) Dialogue ignoring
co-operation discourse

3) Gender in between power:
resistance discourse
- Animator (Sofie): demanding tomboy
author (Sofie, Ingelise): demanding tomboy, ignoring girl
principal (Gertrud, Ingelise): talkative tomboy and supporter girl, silent girl

Conclusions
Power between paradoxes focuses on gender. I have attempted to present to you the paradoxes that arise from the positions of gender neutrality and gender awareness, and how they produce gender stereotypes and gender hierarchies.

In this paper, I have concentrated on a few situations in interviews and observations, with the pupils as the producers and the users of discourses. The next step is to analyse the teacher as the producer and user of discourses. Although I have not elaborated on the researcher's power in the interviews and in constructing the discourses, I am aware...
of the researcher's place in the same paradoxes, becoming both stuck and twisted. So please feel free to provide me with feedback with regard to my blind spots.

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