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Den goda skolan – i lagens namn eller en trygghetens famn?

Diskurser om skolproblem i lokal media
och bland skolverksamma

Elin Stark

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Fakultetsopponent: Førsteamanuensis Anne Dåsvatn Homme
Institutt for pedagogikk, Universitetet i Bergen

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Author

Elin Stark

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The Good School – in the Name of the Law or in the Sense of Caring?
Discourses of School Problems in Local Media and Among School Professionals

Abstract

This thesis focuses on representations of school problems in Swedish local newspapers and how these can be understood in terms of discourses about “the good school”. The thesis also focuses on how these discourses are manifested among and resisted by school professionals, and on the potential consequences for schools. Representations of school problems are seen as expressions of power as they produce and reproduce values. These values, which can be referred to in terms of discourses, affect both school practices and individuals attending or working at schools. The theoretical starting point is a Foucauldian perspective on governing. The main elements adopted are Foucault’s understanding of power and the relationship between power and knowledge; how people are positioned as subjects; and how we are governed by representations of problems. The analytical approach adopted draws on Carol Bacchi’s “What’s the problem represented to be” (WPR) approach. Two empirical studies were conducted: a media study and an interview study.

Four main problem representations could be distinguished: “the school is breaking the law”; “the working environment at the school is poor”; “the school does not listen to the students”; and “the school does not measure up to other schools”. Out of these problem representations, “the schools is breaking the law” and “the working environment at the school is poor” were the most predominant representations. Using the problem representations and their underlying assumptions as a starting point, four main discourses on “the good school” were identified: *the legal discourse*, *the caring discourse*, *the democratic discourse*; and *the market discourse*. Regarding effects of the discourses, an overall reflection is that students are positioned as active subjects with significant influence in nearly all of the discourses identified in the media study, with the exception of the caring discourse.

As evident by both the embrace of and the resistance against the discourses, the dominant discourses in both the media study and the interview study are the legal discourse and the caring discourse. It is concluded that there is a discursive struggle between these discourses as to whether “the good school” is a school “in the name of the law” or “in the sense of caring”. This discursive struggle may result in possibilities for resistance against one discourse on behalf of the other.

Keywords

problem representation, discourse, governing, resistance, educational debate, mediatization, juridification, caring, democracy, marketization, compulsory education, Sweden

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