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General description on research questions, objectives and theoretical framework

This paper focuses on how discourses of performativity are negotiated within educational science in different institutional settings in Sweden. The so called ‘knowledge economy’ and its transformation of academia towards marketization, managerialism and an audit culture of performativity is a topic of investigation in many educational research studies (e.g. Dale, 2005; Ball, 2008; Ozga, 2008). There is also a rich body of research on how the new educational landscape affect academic careers and career making, not in the least when it comes to uneven class, gender and ethnicity patterns (e.g. Angervall, Beach & Gustafsson, 2015; Archer, 2008; Carvalho & Santiago, 2010). Carvalho and Santiago (2010), for instance, suggest that neoliberal reforms deepen ethnicity and class related traps for women in academia. In a Swedish study, the “female-dominated ‘two-legged’ teaching- and administration-only contracts” (Angervall et al., 2015, p. 817) within education science is pointed out as one trap where, specifically, middle-aged women are caught – women with many years of teaching experience outside academia.

Angervall et al. (2015) stress that this is a problem, not only for these particular women; it is also a problem for education science, which risks “developing serious research blind-spots and missing hidden or silenced researcher talents” (p. 825). The gendered nature of organizational life (Ducklin & Ozga, 2007) within education science is further studied by Angervall and Gustafsson (2014). They argue that career field seems to be formed by ‘split’ career movements. That is, the field consists of a horizontal career path with a close relation to teaching, education and praxis-related research, and a vertical career path more or less separated from the departmental setting building ‘career capital’ (Inkson & Arthur, 2001) through networks with international reputation and a focus on science rather than praxis. The focus on competitiveness, therefore, structures career capital. Furthermore, the accumulation of career capital is a question of gender and generation, however, more research is needed on that matter (Angervall & Gustafsson, 2014).

The aim of this paper is to explore how pressures from discourses of performativity are negotiated among junior researchers in different departmental and research settings at a three Swedish universities. Research questions concern relations between settings and available subject positions, how these are gendered, classed, and aged, and about the potential for resistance. The paper draws on Foucault’s (1991) theories about governmentality, i.e. how
discourses operate to subjectify individuals into modes of self-governance according to neoliberal principles (Davidson-Harden, 2009). The paper is further positioned within feminist post-structural theories (Butler, 1990/1999) where gender and other social categories are seen as processes of ‘doing’, or as performed, and where different subject positions are taken, or given. Analytically, this theoretical stance is operationalised through an approach inspired by rhetorical and discourse psychological analysis (Billig, 1987; Edley, 2001; Edley & Wetherell, 1999; Wetherell & Potter, 1988). Important concepts in this kind of analysis are the idea of interpretative repertoires and subject positions. Interpretative repertoires are culturally available resources or ‘storylines’ from which members from a specific society “can both draw on and resist in order to produce their own accounts” (Jones 2002, 2).

Methods/methodology

25 junior researchers (18 women and seven men) were interviewed about academic career making. The institutional settings vary between departments that were dominated by teacher education and those that were research-dominated, but some were also more mixed (with both teaching and research). All of the respondents were working in the field of education science and completed their PhDs between 2004 and 2008. The interviews were semi-structured and concerned mainly descriptions of experiences of career and career establishment and development. For example, questions were asked about experiences, career paths, motivation, skills and knowledge, social networks, conditions and consequences, as well as choices and rewards. Questions also focused on how the researchers had been invited to do academic work and how they were given space to do it. The interviews varied in length but were often around one hour long. The interviews were translated verbatim.

Expected outcomes/results

A preliminary analysis shows tensions between teaching duties and performance, which position (mostly) female researchers in a ‘research career vacuum’. Thus, a possible career is re-negotiated within administration or outside academia (compare e.g. Angervall et al., 2015). There is also resistance among doctoral students and ‘young’ researchers against ‘the world of articles’, which is interpreted as creating ‘fake performers’ replicating research findings over and over again in the quest to become excellent. The successful researcher is mostly constructed
as a man whereas female researchers are seen as working too hard and therefore not successful.

Four different modes of self-governance are identified among the junior researchers: ‘using the system’, adapting to the system, ‘do it by yourself’, and ‘chased by the system’. These modes need to be further analysed, however the thick data and preliminary outcomes show potential for new knowledge to be developed.

References


