

Vicki MacKnight (forthcoming, 2016) *Imagining Classrooms: Stories of children, teaching and ethnography*. Manchester: Mattering Press. 198 pages. ISBN: 978-0-9931449-6-7.

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The emergence of research topics; methods and methodology; imaginations and imagining; taking perspectives and theorizing; focusing on the workings of classrooms in a range of schools in Melbourne, Australia, MacKnight's book unfolds as lively, crisp and thrilling analysis. Written for readers interested probing distinctions between analytics derived from foundational metaphysics and analytics expressing relational metaphysics, the book concerns children and their imagining, classrooms and schools; and different ways of doing imagination. Throughout the book we get to know students, teachers and schools, and the ethnographer/the writer herself.

Researchers keen to discover new and ethical ways of coming to conclusions based on a vast amount of research data, should read this book. Engaging the reader with various theoretical approaches and their implications, MacKnight accounts 'the how' of interpreting data in processes of theorizing. I will highlight two aspects of her book: its theoretical discussion of classrooms, and the ways the author constitutes accountability in the research results. But there is much more in the book to divert and delight the reader.

Drawing explicitly on approaches of Donna Haraway, Ian Hacking, Annemarie Mol and John Law, Andrew Pickering and Susan Leigh Star, MacKnight applies STS methods to educational settings, and in contrasting foundational and

relational analytics the book owes much to Helen Verran's work. In line with Ian Hacking, MacKnight (2016: 20) suggests that 'good' knowing does not refer to the best representation of a reality, but to 'what enables knowers best to intervene in the world'. Accordingly, knowers come to know the real by their own interactions with it. Consistently recognizing and dealing with multiplicity, MacKnight introduces a second approach to what is 'good' by referring to Kathryn Pyne Addelson (1994: 1), who has 'the good' emerging in relations. Indeed, what place could be better to see knowers emerge in relational situations than classrooms? But what *is* a classroom? It is an unusual question to start with, yet as MacKnight delves into this consideration, she situates her research locally, socially and theoretically.

MacKnight (2016: 37) suggests two modes of ordering for exploring what a classroom is: A classroom could be ordered as part of a whole, embedded into a school that itself is embedded into the society, and/or as a complex assemblage of classed and classing bodies. If classrooms are ordered as parts of a whole, nested within society, how, then, are they related to that society? To which educational traditions, for example, do the schools subscribe? What values do they represent? By referring to Kieran Egan's (1997: chapter one) work, particularly his three educational aims, MacKnight (2016: 39) initially follows this path of taking schools as representative of values of an

ideal society, until she concludes that it becomes problematic if schools represent more than one conflicting ideal value. Rather than asking how schools represent values, the author suggests that we think of *doing* these values. Focusing on practices of doing values enables us to become more able to deal with multiplicity (MacKnight, 2016: 40). Thus, she suggests a change of perspective, which looks at classrooms as assemblages of classed and classing bodies.

Paying attention to the metaphors in the classroom, and also to metaphors for the classroom, showing how they work, MacKnight argues that the metaphors guide our (re-)constituting of our world. Here, MacKnight (2016: 47) is drawn to the metaphor 'class' that is 'both meta-physically and materially significant to what classrooms are'. The terms 'classed' and 'classing' are used to accentuate two features of the people assembled in a school: a) they are embedded in hierarchies of wealth, culture, and future potential and b) 'they are bodies who learn to classify their worlds in particular by everyday ways' (MacKnight, 2016: 37-38). Having understood them this way, MacKnight shifts to the issue of classing/classifying and making groups, group identities and memberships. In this assemblage, learning to class/classify becomes one of the key tasks of primary schools. Each of the school types has different aims in terms of what the children should ideally become, but rather than analyzing through those distinctions, the schools educate the author to link them in their socio-material way of doing imagination. She asks which patterns of thinking were encouraged in the classrooms, as well as how mental connections and separations were made explicit by students and teacher. The roles of difference and sameness in analysis are vividly and explicitly demonstrated here. Unusually here we see sameness mobilized explicitly within the articulation of difference. This makes the analysis revealing in a novel way.

Each chapter and each subchapter starts with field notes. From there, MacKnight shifts refreshingly between analysis, the metaphysical implications of this analysis and reflections on her process of writing. It is difficult to do justice to the elegance of MacKnight's argumentation. However, a glimmer of the creativity, the careful selection

of and thorough dealing with theories and their implications should be mentioned here. I followed each of MacKnight's questions and her attempts to tackle them with increasing curiosity. Indeed, they allowed me to open up to the described 'possibilities to interpret imagination as the routines of perspective taking' (MacKnight, 2016: 143) in my own analyses.

Similarly remarkable was her 'working up' of the empirical data. Being at the office again after three months of fieldwork, MacKnight faces the task that is familiar to most of her readers: analyzing an enormous amount of research data. Ten thousand words of field notes, hundreds of paintings and stories created by children, three and a half hour of interviews, school brochures and curricula have to be ordered in one way or the other. "Well, I thought, nothing will happen if I just sit here; I should *do* something" (MacKnight, 2016: 60). So, she starts piling, un-piling and re-piling the paintings of the children, thinking about the arguments she could make with each of the piles and the theoretical formats she is adopting by doing so. MacKnight makes visible the ethical and political consequences of ordering the data according to 'generalization' and 'typologies', 'meaning' and 'the politics of becoming'. She makes us see how the selected approaches makes more familiar or less familiar sense, arguing that the politics of experimentation, enacted by theorizing imagination as the unpredictable outcome of human and non-human interactions, is the most ethical approach. As with the elegant line of argument, the section of the book on experimental theorizing convinces the reader with a seemingly effortless narration, guided by careful reflection.

MacKnight makes the relations that constitute the entities of her research: the classroom, the students, the teachers, and the imagination. The strength of this book is the consistent tailoring of a relational writing about generative practices while applying relational metaphysics. This book makes me a modest witness of MacKnight's thinking; her thinking *with* implications of data collection methods, and theorizing. I felt stimulated and encouraged to experiment with perspective-taking, to follow the data, and to get engaged in the knowledge process.

References

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