Linköping University Post Print

Ethnography in action. How ethnography was established in Swedish educational research

Staffan Larsson

N.B.: When citing this work, cite the original article.

This is an electronic version of an article published in:

Staffan Larsson, Ethnography in action. How ethnography was established in Swedish educational research, 2006, Ethnography and Education, (1), 2, 177-195.

Ethnography and Education is available online at informaworldTM:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17457820600715406>

Copyright: Taylor & Francis

<http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/default.asp>

Postprint available at: Linköping University Electronic Press

<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:liu:diva-17462>

Ethnography in Action. How ethnography was established in Swedish educational research.

Published: Larsson, S. (2006) Ethnography in Action. How ethnography was established in Swedish educational research. *Ethnography and Education*, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 177 – 195.

Staffan Larsson, Department of Behavioural Sciences, Linköping University, S-583 81 Linköping, Sweden.

E-mail: stala@ibv.liu.se

Abstract

The emergence of new research practices is the general theme in this text. The case is ethnography as an approach in Swedish educational research. Ethnography is now an established approach in educational research in Sweden. What was the process behind this position? The paper will follow a trajectory that starts in the 1960s and discuss how ethnography was established and consolidated in educational research in Sweden. The paper discerns five phases of formation, starting in the late 1960s through to today. The unilateral relation to Anglo-American ethnographic networks is discussed. An actor network metaphor is used as a tool in the interpretation of the process. The aim of the paper is to contribute to the knowledge of ethnographic research as well as the process of change in research practices generally.

Key words: actor-network theory, educational research, ethnography, globalisation, citation indexes, sociology of science and technology, methodology.

Introduction

Educational research is perhaps not a favourite area for empirical investigations of how disciplinary knowledge is formed. Maybe it should be – the advantage is that it is a field where changes are relatively fast and where variation is wide. This text focuses on how ethnographic approaches were established in Swedish educational research. It is a complex story about meanings and choices and social relations and power. It is also about what emerged as successful and what was

suppressed and provides an interpretation of a trajectory covering 40 years.

It can be conceived of as a case that contributes to the understanding of the international migration of specific research practices, i. e. an aspect of globalisation. We can also view it as a case, where the processes of “innovation” of research practices are studied.

On educational research and the notion of ethnography

The focus in this text is on the successive construction of knowledge – on “science in the making” (Latour, 1997, p. 4). It is about the creation of “ethnographic research” as a label and an identity. It also tries to identify research practices, which are referred to as ethnographic, but also can exist under various other labels. There is an interesting dialectic here between the research practices and the labelling of the practices.

Educational research in Sweden is mostly conducted in the context of the discipline “Educational research” (Pedagogik). However, some educational research is done in Sociology, Communication Studies and various other disciplines. Ethnography was once the name of a discipline in Sweden, nowadays called social anthropology, but in this text it refers more to a research strategy or approach that can and is used in various research areas or disciplines. Education has not been investigated very much by social anthropologists in Sweden, a tradition that is more visible in e.g. the US¹.

There is no fixed definition on ethnography. Not even the label is stable - we can instead talk about a research tradition, a trajectory. Earlier versions have been labelled “naturalistic research” or “field studies”. Textbook writers construct trajectories, which knit various texts into a web and claim it to be ethnography. However, Ethnography is a heterogeneous sample in terms of theoretical foundations, research practices and disciplinary contexts. To discuss ethnography as a network seems more useful than formulating a fixed definition.

The actor-network metaphor

¹ Wollcott (1999) argues that there is no ethnography without the anthropological theorising. His view has found little support– many if not most textbooks on ethnographic research are written by sociologists.

Callon, Law & Rip recommend that researchers of the dynamics of science "follow the actors' both as they attempt to transform society and as they attempt to build scientific knowledge or technological systems" when arguing for an "actor-network theory" (1986, p. 4). Here, they refer to the method of Machiavelli, who wrote a "mirror for princes", a popular genre in his time intended to foster the nobility. Machiavelli's text differed in that it mirrored the real prince instead of his ideal face (Ehnmark, 1989, p. 9). This reference indicates that research can be seen as struggles and strategies, which are used in the construction of "truth", rather than following an idealistic rationale. "Scientific activity is not "about nature", it is a fierce fight to construct reality" (Latour & Woolgar, 1986, p. 243). My contribution thus highlights aspects of research practice, which are left in the dark in texts about ethnographic methodology – the latter presenting the "ideal face" of research.

Investigating how interest is translated into "fact" becomes the approach used in actor-network theory. How can ethnography be translated and inscribed into specific contexts and become a "fact"? The identity of ethnography becomes a moving object: "the notion of translation emphasizes the continuity of the displacements and transformations.." (Callon, 1986, s. 223). However, this perspective is based on a relational ontology, fundamentally materialistic, referred to as relational materiality (Sismondo, 2004, p. 69). Callon (1986) introduces the metaphor of an "actor-network", to mark the connectedness of various "actors", who can be both human and non-human. Anything that does something is an actor: ".. the very dividing line between those objects that we choose to call people and those we call machines is variable, negotiable..." (Law, 2000, p. 17). Law (2000) writes about the relational materiality: "Rather it is a *sociotechnical order*. What appears to be social is partly technical. What we usually call technical is partly social. In practice nothing is purely technical. Neither is anything purely social. And the same may be said for the economic, the political, the scientific, and all the rest" (ibid, p.10). One might think that actor-network theory has been shaped by the specific challenges that the study of research practices encounters. Tools are often best when they are used for the purpose they were developed. I can confirm from experience that the metaphor has been fruitful in my case. One reason is that the dialectic between researchers and texts, meeting-places and other socio-material entities is highlighted. Another reason is that the power of networks is highlighted. It also brings to light the making of research, the process: Ethnography as action. I find it to be in line with the general attitude that has been celebrated in ethnographic research.

In order to understand change in the world of research, one can identify a number of entities that are of importance, such as researchers, texts, conferences and, not least, ways of representing relevant aspects of the world. The trick of the trade here is to talk about both humans and non-human entities as actors and not to privilege the human actor. "These entities are not human alone since electrons, catalysts, electrolytes and lead accumulators are included. These entities act, react and cancel each other out, in just the same way as any others" (Callon, 1986, p. 22). These actors – e.g. texts, places, references or researchers, are connected in complicated patterns and change can be understood in terms of changes in the connections. Nesper (1994) points out how social practices are shaped by networks that connect nodes and knots together: "Practice is distributed across the spaces and times it produces so that 'social interactions', settings, and events, are intersections of trajectories that tie together distant times and spaces and give them form as social space" (p. 16). Actor-networks produce representations of the world that are part of the social practice where the metaphor is used. In this process some practices are suppressed, others becoming dominant. Actor-network theory produces a picture of research, which undermines the idea that it follows a simple, transparent and formulaic road (Clarke (2002).

An understanding of research or disciplines or knowledge as formed by actor-networks seems to be useful for my purpose. With such a point of departure, one can also discern the nodes, crossroads and key entities where the connections come together: The actors that seem to be most relevant in my case are references, textbooks, researchers, conferences, doctoral programme courses and publishing companies. Labels are also key actors. These are the nodes of the networks, which become relevant in my investigation. The concept of a trajectory is also fruitful, indicating the general outline of successive movements. I try to follow the emergent actor-network over a period of 40 years. My key ambition is empirical – to follow the actors. The basis of my interpretation is texts – reports, doctoral dissertations, textbooks, etc. Interviews with some informants² and my own participation in the process since the mid-1980s have also been a source. In this latter respect, it is also partly a "self-ethnography" (Alvesson, 2003). I use the inspiration of an actor-network metaphor to organise my story, but I am not a close follower. Law (1999, p. 1 – 3) actually critique the reification of the theory.

² Anders Gustavsson, Per-Johan Ödman and Gösta Berglund, Bengt Tjellander, Kerstin Bergqvist, Jan Byström, Birgitta Qvarsell.

The pre-history of Swedish educational research

Most educational research in Sweden is done within the boundaries of “Educational Research” (Pedagogik), which was established as a university discipline in Sweden in 1910. Teacher education for the elementary stages was provided elsewhere, so it was supposed to be a purely academic discipline. It was a two-legged animal until World War II: the knowledge considered important was experimental psychology and educational history (Härnqvist, 1997, p. 235 – 237). Educational research took on a somewhat different shape from the 1950ies: it became more of a social science that was linked to educational reforms. Thus, educational research was given a clear role in the logic of restructuring society, one might say as social engineers (Ball & Larsson, 1989). Sweden can be considered as one of the most dedicated followers of such a programme, with comprehensive and rapid modernisation into a welfare state. The prototypical studies were large samples that were studied with data from combinations of psychological and sociological variables. The training of researchers mirrored this with a heavy emphasis on statistics. Behaviourism and positivism were part of the dominating perspective. Exceptions did exist, but were marginal. The educational researchers constituted a fairly tight network with a common way of representing the world, including a political vision of how to use educational research.

During the late 1960s, this pattern was broken. The relative uniformity was undermined by a number of challenges, methodological as well as theoretical. Educational research became pluralistic in the sense that the old co-existed with the new. The relatively comprehensive network was replaced by more complex patterns. The multiplicity of rationalities that we are so familiar with nowadays was firmly established in the 1970s. It is in the context of this shift that we start looking for signs of ethnography as something that was a basis of an actor-network.

Phase one: Close in practice but no ethnographic trajectory

A book was published 1973, which was considered by many to be controversial: "Kvarteret Flisan" (Trankell, 1973). It was about conflicts in a housing area and the study was based on interviews and participant observation. The author was Arne Trankell, a well-established professor at the Department of Education in Stockholm. He was part of a research team, the IMFO group, which had worked with this project since the mid-1960s. The study has characteristics that look very much like the research practices of an ethnographic study. However, Trankell looked at it in a quite different way, as an example of hermeneutics and without doubt

saw the book as an opportunity to demonstrate this methodology. The book has an elaborated presentation of hermeneutics as the logic of its interpretation. According to interviews with Trankell's co-workers, this choice of theoretical affiliation was inspired by two doctoral students (Sven-Åke Johansson and Charles Westin) in the team, who had encountered hermeneutics in texts by Lesche, a Swedish psychoanalyst, and an American introduction to hermeneutics by Palmer (1969). The members of the team did not develop the practice of fieldwork in their later careers. Here, one can see an alliance between the research group and some references, which were enrolled by the research group to invade the current educational research network for a new way of representing research, i.e. as hermeneutics. This alliance resulted was mutually beneficial for both the book and the research group in that it generated a strong trajectory of a hermeneutic network in Swedish educational research. A textbook on hermeneutics by one of the members of the research group, Per-Johan Ödman (1979), enrolled a broad audience of educational researchers and students to the hermeneutic network. Examples in the textbook had no relation to fieldwork, in spite of the fact that the author's dissertation was based on the same project as in Trankell's book. It was the first to adopt a hermeneutic perspective in Swedish social science (Westin, 1998, p. 9) and was defended in 1973. It seems that the connection between the texts on hermeneutics and the research team shaped a trajectory that did not highlight fieldwork but, rather, connected to practices such as history. No "ethnographic trajectory" was established as a consequence of this contribution.

In the same department, Torbjörn Stockfelt led another group, which was doing research that was close to an ethnographic tradition in its practice, e.g. work that could be based on participant observation. However, they did not focus much on developing a method discourse or discuss their work in relation to a method tradition, i.e. there was no connection to ethnographic networks. Method was dealt with in a pragmatic way. It seems as if the connection to the researched context and use value within it was more important than connections to methodological networks. There were conflicts around their work, which were related to resistance in the establishment to dissertations from the group (Stockfelt, 1982). No ethnographic network trajectory emanated from this work – it was more a case of exclusion from the mainstream of research practices.

A classroom research tradition was developed at the Department of Education at Göteborg University in the late 1960s. Prominent figures were Dahllöf and Lundgren. With a focus on classroom interaction and analyses of processes, one might think that they came close to an

ethnographic approach. However, their practice was based on systematic observation with fixed categories and did not really follow any of the characteristics I have put forward above except that it involved case studies. There are references to ethnographic classroom research but, basically, the research is connected to an established American tradition of systematic observation through references and the way these references represent research. Here, one can see a network that is tight in terms of common practices, common references and close connections. The barrier towards ethnographic research seems to be delicate, but clear.

Another important contribution to the shift in discourse in the 1970s came from educational sociologists at the University of Lund. They made a pioneering contribution by introducing a French sociological tradition into a Swedish context, which after World War II had been an appendix to Anglo Saxon research. A connection was thus established to texts, concepts and researchers situated in France. The research practices looked very much like ethnography and are acknowledged with some ambivalence: social-anthropological methods are used for pragmatic reasons, but not as a matter of principle (Callewaert & Nilsson 1980, p. 346). The trajectory, which emanated, was based on a network consisting of a number of researchers and texts with sharp boundaries, i.e. clear connections with Bourdieu's conceptual apparatus and texts, not least on the representation of research practice, became a basis for weak connections to other networks. Ethnography was thus not the basis for connections. However, this "Bourdieuian" network has been a part of the "Nordic Network for Ethnographic Research", a key node for connecting various trajectories into a transnational ethnographic network, over the last 5 years.

One can identify some more isolated examples of research, which came close to the ethnographic research practice, but did not result in the establishment of a long-term actor-network. In a project in Linköping, led by Mats Ekholm, participant observation was practised, but the work was not clearly presented as ethnographic. Another example of ethnographic practice resulted in a book by Bertil Gustavsson, Roger Ljungvall and Eva Stigebrandt (1981) with a title that referred to the hidden curriculum". They identified themselves as being within a structuralist and Marxist tradition and did not refer to themselves at all as ethnographers. A few years later, Lena Hellblom (1985) defended a dissertation, which is a very clear example of an ethnographic study, leaning towards the tradition of community studies and critical theory. However, the approach in terms of method is extremely underplayed in the text. The contribution does not connect to any ethnographic network.

All these examples are drawn from research planned during the period when there was a significant shift in both perspectives and practices of educational research, i.e. from the middle of the 1960s to the end of the 1970s. They seem to have a common denominator. In spite of coming close to ethnography in various aspects of the research practice, they do not identify themselves as ethnographers or connect to research outside of their own context. There are no spokesmen for ethnography. These examples illustrate how ethnography does not become established as an actor network, even if the research practices seem to come close. Ethnography is not cultivated as a methodological discourse and alternative networks are, instead, connected to. The potential of an ethnographic network is thus not realised and in some cases excluded by the connection to competing actor-networks. The research discussed here aligned itself with other actors constituting networks, which connected researchers, texts, conference sessions and references in other configurations. They were enrolled in other networks and formed other alliances, which created other trajectories. Those researchers who actually employed ethnographic research practices were part of other networks that created other boundaries in terms of inclusion/exclusion, where ethnographic practices were not a defining tool.

Another consequence was that ethnography was not viewed in Sweden as an entity that belonged to the topics of courses on method, a key actor in the Swedish system of reproducing research practices. When qualitative method and methodology were introduced, it was with labels such as hermeneutics and phenomenography and they were often legitimated on an epistemological or ontological level, e.g. discussed in terms of positivism and hermeneutics or materialism and idealism and similar themes.

Phase 2: A node connected to an American actor-network

A research team in Uppsala was engaged in studies of therapeutic communities. They wanted to peep into the "black box" – the processes that took place and that could shed light on the output of these institutions. This seems to be a problematisation that invited new connections. It enabled their work to be connected to references, which were part of networks situated in North America that can be identified as ethnographic. Here we can follow the translation of North American into a Swedish educational research context. The research practices are indexed as ethnographic. Since this translation connects new actors into a existing actor-networks, it creates something new. 1979, two doctoral

dissertations by Jenner and Stensmo, who represented this team, were defended. Gösta Berglund was the supervisor. A look at Stensmo's dissertation shows that he explicitly legitimated his method through references to ethnographic texts (Stensmo, 1979). He used participant observation in combination with other kinds of data, i.e. also connected in terms of research practices. It seems that we have here a team of researchers who explicitly connect to ethnographic networks, in this case North American. However, what is perhaps the most distinct move to enrol educational research in an alliance with ethnographic networks was the publication in 1983 of a report by Gösta Berglund, under the label of naturalistic research, which was the first text to present the methodological tradition in the context of Swedish educational research (Berglund, 1983). He becomes a spokesman for ethnography. This could perhaps be regarded as a beginning of an actor-network for ethnographic research that resides within the larger network of Swedish educational research. Berglund and his team mobilised ethnography as something that could exist in Swedish educational research. It was a small local group, which had only a marginal influence on educational research, although it was part of the larger educational research network. Its members explicitly identified their work as ethnography, they practised it and, not least, they followed up with Gösta Berglund's text, which presents the ethnographic view of the world of research practices.

The work done in Uppsala was important, but limited to one department. It was also done in an area that many saw as a peripheral research object in the mainstreams of educational research, i.e. therapeutic communities. In this context, Berglund's introductory text in 1983 was important in that it highlighted the existence of ethnography in a Swedish context as an alternative. The text transcends local boundaries, asking, as it were, for allies. Berglund followed up with another text in 1985, where ethnography was explicitly referred to in the title (Berglund, 1985). Berglund's inspiration was American literature and thus created a connection to existing networks through texts.

Phase three: Multiple nodes connected to Anglo-American ethnography

Another path for enrolment of researchers and, consequently, in some cases, their research and texts, was courses in the doctoral programme. I took the initiative in 1986 to hold a course on ethnography at Göteborg university, inspired by my own first ethnographic study initiated that same year (Larsson, 1993). Stephen Ball from King's College, London, was invited to provide the key content. Such a course could be viewed as

a node in an actor network, enrolling doctoral students in a network of texts and references and ways of representing research. It exposes the future generation of researchers to something, even if they do not consider the possibility of using the approach. It also gives the approach a certain aura of prestige: it becomes acknowledged as one of the choices that doctoral students can make. Later, I gave a similar course a number of times in Göteborg and in Linköping from 1989 and onwards as well as one together with Berglund in Uppsala in 1990. In this way, the local network was transcended to some extent. Ethnography continued to be on the doctoral programme curriculum at those universities. These courses meant that ethnographic research mobilised "mainstream" students to join the ethnographic actor-network. They can be seen as passage points shaping trajectories and almost becoming obligatory to pass in order to be part of the emerging network. Such courses involved doctoral students in ethnography at the cost of other activities, connected to other actor-networks. The enrolled students were also enrolled in projects with supervisors, who had already allied themselves with the ethnographic network. Sverker Lindblad became such a supervisor in Uppsala and I moved from Göteborg to Linköping, supervising doctoral students in both places. In this way enrolment in doctoral courses was followed up enrolment, which strengthened the emerging ethnographic actor-network in the competition with alternatives.

Stephen Ball operated as a bridge between a British environment where ethnography was an established part of educational research in the mid-1980s. Several others from the same network contributed by giving short courses and seminars: Andy Hargreaves and Ivor Goodson, to mention just two, who visited several universities. They contributed with their thorough knowledge of the tradition. They also shaped the content by representing the Chicago School's sociological tradition at that time, but also a British sub-network of sociological researchers, texts and connections to publishers and conferences. The British researchers thus connected Swedish researchers and doctoral students to Anglo-American networks of researchers, texts and, later, meeting-places such as conferences. Broadly speaking, parts of the Swedish research were thus enrolled first through North American texts (Berglund) and later through British sociologists, who had come to represent a somewhat independent sub-network, but allied with North American texts. In spite of differences between British and North American ethnographers (Delamont et al, 2000), they could be seen as belonging to the same loose network in certain respects such as ways of representing the world, i.e. theoretical positioning and through references. A key textbook used in Sweden since the 1980s was Hammersley & Atkinson's textbook from 1983 and its

second edition (1995). The book invited educational research students to appropriate this representation of research as their own, but it also signified what was meant by ethnography. The authors use a fairly even mix of sources from North America and the UK. In relation to Berglund and his team, this means that some British references and ways of representing the world became mobilised in the emerging Swedish ethnography actor-network.

During this phase, ethnography was established as part of the key alternatives in the discourse on methods in Swedish educational research. In this way, more future researchers enrolled in the network. One could say that the approach moved from a peripheral existence at the beginning 1980s to a more central position at the beginning 1990s. A key feature is that ethnography during this phase became acknowledged as an accepted entity by being part of the curriculum of doctoral programmes and promoted by a number of professors.

During phase three, we can see an emerging national network and how it allies with elaborate Anglo Saxon networks. Connections are not only texts, but also personal contacts. Ethnography becomes a label, which operates as an actor by offering a research identity. An imagined trajectory of an ethnographic educational research career can be discerned, i.e. the production of dissertations, research projects, etc. through fieldwork, participant observation and other practices that are visualised as ethnographic. There are researchers who identify with the label "ethnography", associate it with texts with the same label and link it to other researchers in the international research community because they are identified as ethnographers. Another side is also that research becomes classified and lumped together under the label, excluding other options.

Phase four: Harvest

At the beginning of the 1990s, one could note the consequences of the activities taking place during the third phase. Doctoral dissertations, which explicitly referred to ethnography as a choice of approach, were defended at several universities. This could be described as the second wave of dissertations. Some dissertations were clear examples such as Eva Pilhammar Andersson's dissertation from 1991 in Göteborg. Kerstin Bergkvist wrote an ethnographic dissertation on an educational question in communication studies at Linköping University in 1990 as well as Ann-Carita Evaldsson in 1993. Other dissertations were studies that were what we might call hybrids; e.g. starting out as something else and then

linking to an ethnographic tradition as in the case of Inger Ungmark (1992) in the subject educational research at Linköping university. Here, we see a completely different attitude compared with the 1970s: ethnography is now an attractive label for identifying research work, which means that also practices that are less clearly ethnographic are nevertheless labelled as such.

Birgitta Kullberg (1996) published a textbook labelled “Ethnography in the classroom”. References on the whole have their origins in North America, supplemented by Swedish and British texts. Birgitta Qvarsell, Stockholm University, (1996) also published a report, where she uses the term “educational ethnography”. She relates to the heritage of the philosopher Peirce.

Both supervisors and students at local universities were in contact with each other, not least through NFPF/NERA’s annual conferences. These conferences became a key actor, where research from various Nordic countries was brought together. A significant step was taken when a Nordic network for developing the ethnographic approach among doctoral students was given substantial financial support from 1998 and onwards. The network was co-ordinated from Uppsala, where Sverker Lindblad led a group of ethnographic researchers. Dennis Beach from Göteborg was also a key figure in the creation of this network and Linköping was represented by myself in the steering group. However, it can be noted that Stockholm – where Birgitta Qvarsell worked as an experienced supervisor with an interest in ethnography – was not represented.

Since the Nordic network was open to all researchers and doctoral students in the Nordic countries, it can be assumed that ethnography was exposed to a wider audience than before. The boundaries of the universities with an established local tradition were crossed. One effect of this was probably that the discourse was broadened by new versions of ethnographic research being introduced as a result of these contacts. Another consequence was the authority that ethnographic research gained through these alliances between senior as well as junior researchers.

Phase five: Generation shift and counteracting subordination

At the end of the 1990s, we can also see how the leadership of the tradition is reproduced. A continuation of the trajectory seems to be possible. Among the supervisors tending to the tradition, we find two of the participants in the course in 1986, where Stephen Ball was teaching:

Pilhammar Andersson and Beach. They also differ insofar as their doctoral dissertations were explicitly based on an ethnographic research strategy. This was also the case with as well Bergkvist and Evaldsson from Linköping, as Perez Prieto and Sahlström from Uppsala, who eventually joined the growing group of supervisors of doctoral work. These second-generation supervisors are different from the first, who turned to ethnography after being involved in other traditions of empirical research. Another path to supervising ethnographic dissertations seems to be that the supervisor's speciality takes an ethnographic turn. Examples of this are Öhrn, with an interest in gender, and Säljö, representing a socio-cultural view of learning, and Carlgren and Colnerud, who focus on varying aspects of teaching and teacher education research. In the early 21st century, it seems as if ethnographic research has become normal in the Swedish context. We can also discern a differentiation into sub-networks, some related to research on gender, some to learning and others to microstudies of classroom interaction.

It is obvious from the story told here that a main pattern is the enrolment of parts of the Swedish educational research into Anglo-American ethnographic actor-networks. It is also obvious that this, in terms of power relations, has a unilateral character: Swedish research is at the receiving end. Researchers in Sweden have built careers on, and new ways of representing education have been made possible, by this import. From the perspective of Anglo-American ethnographic research, it is an expansion: new territories are placed under the regime of an ethnographic way of representing research. However, the unilateral relation between the Anglo-American actor-networks and the Swedish, and later Nordic, actor-network have changed in some limited respects at the beginning of the new millennium. In recent years, Swedish researchers have been more frequent participants at conferences outside the Nordic context, e.g. the ethnographic network organised by EERA, the European Educational Research Association and the conferences at St Hilda's College, Oxford, which has been a meeting-place for British ethnographers in recent decades. The participation of two Swedish researchers on the editorial board of the journal "Ethnography and Education", starting in 2006, is a similar sign. Dennis Beach, a Swede with a British background, has been a key person as an accepted introducer of Swedish research to the British context. A collection of Nordic ethnographic research studies published for the English-speaking market has also led to ethnography becoming more well known outside the Nordic context (Beach, Gordon & Lahelma, 2003). The Nordic cooperation was also useful in this respect since it was very much supported by the contacts of the British-Finnish ethnographer Tuula Gordon. That some Swedish researchers are referred to in the

Handbook of Ethnography (Atkinson et al., 2001) is also probably due to the fact that Tuula Gordon and Elina Lahelma, Finnish researchers involved in the Nordic network, were responsible for the article on educational ethnography together with a British co-worker. Gordon, with her academic training in UK, as well as Beach, with his background, seem to create a legitimate connection between the Nordic and the Anglo-American contexts.

Conclusions

Can we learn something from the Swedish case? It is in many ways a unique story, but there are themes that can be potentially interesting in relation to other cases and the movements and migration of research practices across various boundaries. I will highlight some of these themes.

Actor-networks as contingent and the importance of labels

We can note that ethnographic practices were part of the paradigmatic shift of the late 1960s. However, this did not imply that there was an actor-network based on either this practice or this label. The researchers identified themselves with other concepts or traditions. This meant that they formed networks that did not cultivate the ethnographic practice as a distinctive part of what connected actors. Here, we can compare with the UK, where it is possible to identify such a network in the sociology of education, from the 1970s. Swedish educational research shared the shift to qualitative methods, but this shift was identified through other labels – hermeneutics, phenomenology, phenomenography or the general notion of qualitative research. This also meant that they formed networks around these labels with common connections in terms of meeting-places, references, etc. No trajectory with ethnography as the backbone came out of that.

Maybe one can note an undercurrent in the 1980s that highlighted method, methodology and philosophy of science. Most researchers in the early 1970s focussed on choice of theories about the research object or, more pragmatically and atheoretically, on the substance of research. Some of them were occupied by the idea of research as a direct change agent - action research. From the early 1980s, a number of textbooks were published in Swedish on qualitative methods and in the 1990s one can talk about a flood of such books. It is as if methods and methodology positioned themselves more firmly in the process of producing

educational research texts. Choice of research design was translated to questions of methodology. During the same period, the practice of research also expanded as a requirement for an examination, not only as a result of the rising numbers of doctoral dissertations, but also as a result of the introduction of thesis work in the education of teachers, nurses, physiotherapists, etc. This created a demand for texts and teaching on research methods, which were then translated into various research practices, when they were used in these contexts.

The history of Swedish ethnography can be used to argue that actor-networks are contingent in the sense that there are several configuration options for configuring research into a network. In our case, hermeneutics was something that connected research and, consequently, connected research with ethnographic practices together with e.g. historical practices, instead of creating a boundary against non-ethnographic research, which the ethnographic label encourages. Each label includes and excludes with different consequences. One can conclude that labels operated as important actors in the creation of this network (as is often the case).

On a more general level, one can learn from the case that research approaches are contingent in the sense that the same practice can be incorporated in different networks, according to the situational circumstances. There is no logical space or categorial space that is pure and/or without ambiguity. The research practices, which different labels signify, are not necessarily that different. Wittgenstein (1958) used the concept “family resemblances” when discussing what “meaning” is. He argues that instead of clean and clear meanings, we can see relations between meanings that are “a complicated network of similarities overlapping and crisscrossing” (p. 31). One can also think of e.g. hermeneutics and ethnography as different language games that can relate to the same research practice, but give it different meaning.

Bringing authority from one network to another

The establishment of ethnography in Swedish educational research seems to have been a success story. Ethnography moved from a position in the margins to one in the centre. Another pattern is the relatively low level of conflict surrounding the emergence of such a new research practice. One possible interpretation here is to highlight the fact that most significant persons in the story told here have made their contribution from a position of authority in other powerful network. They did their PhD with approaches that were well established before ethnography was.

Berglund was established as a skilled quantitative researcher and Lindblad, Larsson, Säljö, Carlgren, and Öhrn were part of various other networks before engaging in ethnography. One can note how the authority stemming from being an established member of one network spills over to the new ethnographic network. The power of this authority could thus be moved from one network to another, which could be established without too much open conflict.

A male-dominated network

I suppose that many readers have noticed the gender order in the network discussed here. It seems as if most actors, who have accumulated power that make them visible in a story like this, are male. In terms of the academic hierarchy, it is obvious that the first generation of supervisors and teachers are male, while the doctoral students are female to a large extent. It can be noted that female researchers have contributed in various ways, but a marginal place from the perspective of power. They are typically involved in contributions such as producing theses, not in organising activities that create connections between different nodes in the network. Nobody should be surprised, academia is like this and ethnography is no exception. On the other hand, in the cooperation between the Nordic Network the leading figures in the other countries have all been female. It also contributed to a change in terms of the references and texts that represented ethnographic research being written by women. The Anglo-American flow of invited researchers was expanded to include Barrie Thorne and Beverly Skeggs, both female gender researchers, during this late phase. One problem here is myself, a male writing a history account. Delamont (2003) has pointed in a convincing way to the problem of such stories. She shows among other things how female contributions are made invisible, but also that female accounts differs from male accounts in terms of what they “remember”, in autobiographical narratives. Reviewing autobiographies by male and female sociologists, she exposes large differences in the intellectual themes they give accounts of. Male sociologists never noticed feminism with the exception of one (out of 25) who mentioned 19th century feminism. 16 out of 22 female sociologist did notice feminism (Delamont, 2003, pp. 124, 128). I have scrutinised my version of the story and found gender problems in earlier versions of the text (which is not to say that they are not still there), as a result of which I have carried out some additional investigations. However, in the last phase there a change in so far as a considerable number of female researchers are higher up the academic ladder, e.g. as supervisors and professors, and are

therefore involved in defining the discourse on examination boards, in evaluations of research applications, and eventually research as such.

The lack of transdisciplinary crossings

A noticeable parochialism is the fact that ethnographic educational research does not connect to social anthropologists and ethnologists locally. I cannot trace any clear connections where there has been cooperation between these different disciplines locally. One can find some connections in ethnographies focused on learning, following Lave & Wenger (1991). A similar lack of connection was described by Gerholm (1995), discussing the relation between social anthropology and ethnology in Sweden. Anthropologists never studied the texts of ethnologists, while the latter eagerly studied American and British anthropologists, but rarely Swedish.

An unilateral actor-network

As has been obvious from the story told so far, the research community in the UK and the USA plays a key role. This community is a network, or rather several networks, loosely connected through conferences, collections, references and ways of representing phenomena that are researched at specific times. It also includes the publishing companies with journals and books and the industrial-academia connection of editorial boards, their reviews and their representation of the world, i.e. what should be published (market, trends, relevance or whatever mix of criteria is used for the selection of texts). Law (2002) writes about a continuous network, a network of elements that holds its shape as it moves, referring to Latour's expression "immutable mobiles" (p. 2). This is supported to some degree by the fact that most persons, who are potentially critical, also perform the same acts as everybody else, reproducing a common network (like this text).

It has been pointed out that British and North American ethnographers constitute two separate networks in educational research, separated by national and disciplinary boundaries (Atkinson & Delamont, 1990). However, from the Swedish point of view, it seems to be more of an Anglo-American network than two separate networks. Atkinson's and Delamont's article also illustrates the boundary between what geographies they found to be important to discuss, i.e. the UK and the US, and the rest of the world is not mentioned. It is as if San Diego and Dover are the end of the world that counts. When the ethnographic approach is introduced as a label for building networks in Sweden and

Scandinavia, it is technically speaking a question of connecting to an existing network, or two if we accept Atkinson & Delamont's arguments.

Atkinson & Delamont's text (1990) describes the abyss between the UK and the US as a relation between two separated equals: "American educational ethnographers do not cite British work and vice versa" (p. 114). The relation between the Swedish/Scandinavian network and the Anglo-American is on the whole unilateral. It is not a connection on an equal basis, but one where Swedes invite researchers, refer, use textbooks and read research from the UK or the US. There seems to be very few signs of the opposite occurring. There are, for instance, very few references to Scandinavian ethnographic research in "Handbook of Ethnography" (Atkinson et al., 2001). I counted 0 Danish, 2 Norwegian, 8 Swedish and 8 Finnish references out of around 3,500, based on identifying known Scandinavian researchers or names that are typically Scandinavian. Most Nordic references emanate from an article written by two Finnish researchers, which shows the power of geographical background. Authors in Bryman's (2001) four-volume book "Ethnography" seldom refer to anything written outside an Anglo-American research community. Lack of texts in English should not be the problem in the case of Nordic educational research - between 650 and 800 researchers have participated in the most recent Nordic Educational Research (NERA) congresses, where English is the prime language. It could rather be due to a lack of success in terms of establishing negotiating power in relation to the powers that are gatekeepers of the Anglo-American domination in the Anglophone ethnographic network.

English language as an actor

Languages are awfully powerful actors. They make texts available, but also create boundaries that isolate whole bodies of literature from each other. Actor-networks seldom transcend language differences. Nowadays, Swedish academics are practically excluded from alternative language communities other than the Anglophone, i.e. only a limited group read texts in other languages. The German language was generally the dominating foreign language until the Battle of Stalingrad. It also disappeared from the reference lists at the same time and English became the only foreign language that has a place in Swedish social science academia. The same can be said of French. Universities are thus institutions where only Swedish and English are used. It means that these languages operate as filters that shape connections to texts, researchers, journals and conferences. Language is thus probably the most significant actor forming the Swedish discourse. It is a very firmly rooted device that

invites and excludes connections between actors. It is part of how the minds of students are shaped by their studies at university. One of its effects is that libraries often only provide Anglo-American literature and search engines and almost no journals in languages other than the Scandinavian languages and English. Contact with texts in other languages is based on translations, which has the peculiar effect of some gurus' key texts being referred to, but not the research and debates in their home countries. The effect is actor-networks that are geographically severely limited.

The general pattern becomes one of parochialism, i.e. there are few signs of a cosmopolitan or multilateral international actor-network. Globalisation in the social sciences becomes unilateral to a degree that is arguably more pronounced than in other social practices, such as in food, wars, business and culture, even if these are also extremely unequal. This pattern is perhaps especially peculiar from the perspective that ethnographers, at least in social anthropology, emerged as a result of a curiosity in the "other", although backed by colonial interests. The ethnocentric eye was of course there, but has been recognised later (Clifford & Marcus, 1986). A similar pattern has been described in relation to Swedish social anthropology, with the triad of British, American and French anthropologies as a prosperous mainland and other countries as an archipelago of islands (Gerholm, 1995). As in my case, it is noted that: "On the mainland, people can go through their professional lives more or less unaware of what happens on the islands. The reverse seems not to be the case" (Gerholm, p. 159-160)

The publications' gatekeepers

We can discern the interconnectedness between language as actor and the actor-network that controls publication, indexing and access to texts through libraries. Bibliographical databases nowadays are key actors, i.e. gatekeepers that decide which journal is included or not or which articles are visible and not. It becomes the key technology that governs research, if we use Foucauldian views. The effect of bibliographical databases is that decisions in Bethesda, Maryland (the headquarters of CSA, owner of ERIC) or Carlsbad, California (the offices of ISI, a Thomson company that runs the Social Science Citation Index) can make my colleague's research in Sweden invisible also for other Swedes. This is an example of the effects of compression of space, which is sometimes referred to as non-situated. However, when we put the space on the map, we can identify the location of the social science discourse, i.e. where the watchdogs are chosen (Edwards & Usher, 2000). The effects are very

thorough. At some Nordic universities, salaries and resources are based on the impact these citation indexes indicate of your publications. The allocation of resources between disciplines and faculties are also more and more related to this in Sweden. The Social Science Citation Index indexes 92 journals in education. An e-mail from a Taylor & Francis representative, who is negotiating with ISI, says: “Of the 92 journals ranked by ISI in the Education and Educational Research category: 63 are published from the US, 24 from the UK and 5 from Europe and the Rest of the World” (Hobbs, 2003). None of these are Scandinavian. The publishing companies explicitly operate with an eye on the market, e.g. which books should be accepted and which countries editorial boards should be recruited from. The general pattern is fairly obvious. A key problem is the effects of such a domination by a very limited part of the world on the gatekeepers’ views of what is an interesting problem, choice of theory, style of writing, etc. It is easy to imagine the price you have to pay in order to be accepted through subordination to the dominating taste. The dominated actors can turn their backs on participating, but can also be more active within the existing actor-network and use different tactics to make ethnography more multilateral. For instance, by submitting more texts to journals, acting to become part of gate-keeping and making the dominance a problem for the gatekeepers by declaring it openly.

The general pattern that Swedish educational ethnography is a locally isolated and internationally subordinated enclave seems to be unproductive. However, the problem with a more cosmopolitan discourse is somewhat peculiar. As a population on a small island, we are eager to keep ourselves informed about the mainland. This seems to produce some cosmopolitan attitudes. The problem is that the discourse on the mainland is basically national and when the researchers on the little island connect to the network, they will only know about these very few but powerful places and not very much more. As importers, they are also lagging behind in the constant flux of various trends and do not look very attractive to anyone. Accordingly, I conclude that the Swedish problem is not Swedish but concerns educational ethnography internationally or, rather, generally – it is about the limitations that are produced in such a network.

In spite of these critical remarks, one can note that the story told here is on the whole a success story. It is about an approach that has been able to invade the territory of educational research in Sweden and become a prominent and powerful part of it. The case could also stimulate reflection on patterns of domination in social science and how it can be challenged. Hopefully, there will be developments in the future that

create a more cosmopolitan network containing more equal power relations.

References

Alvesson, M. (2003) Methodology for close up studies – struggling with closeness and closure. *Higher Education*, 46, pp. 167 – 193.

Atkinson, P., Coffey, A., Lofland, J. and Lofland, L. (Eds.) (2001) *Handbook of Ethnography*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Dehli: Sage.

Atkinson, P., Delamont, S. (1990) Writing about Teachers: How British and American Ethnographic Texts Describe Teachers and Teaching. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, Vol. 6, (2), pp 111 – 126.

Beach, D., Gordon, T. and Lahelma, E. (Eds.) (2003) *Democratic Education. Ethnographic Challenges*. London: the Tuffnell Press.

Berglund, G. (1983) Om naturalistisk forskning. Uppsala: Arbetsrapporter från Pedagogiska institutionen, Uppsala universitet.

Berglund, G. (1985) Den etnografiska ansatsen: ett aktuellt inslag i pedagogisk forskning. Uppsala: Arbetsrapporter från Pedagogiska institutionen, Uppsala universitet.

Bergqvist, K. (1990) *Doing Schoolwork: Task premisses and joint activity in the comprehensive classroom*. Linköping Studies in Art and Science. 55. Linköping: Linköping University.

Bryman, A. (2001) *Ethnography, Vol. 1-4*, London: Sage

Callewaert, S. and Nilsson B-E. (1980) *Skolklassen som socialt system. Lektionsanalyser*. Kristianstad: Lunds Bok och tidskrifts AB.

Callon, M., Law, J. and Rip, A (Eds.) (1986) *Mapping the Dynamics of Science and Technology. Sociology of Science in the Real World*. Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press

- Callon, M. (1986) The Sociology of Actor-Network: The Case of the Electric Vehicle. in: Callon, M., Law, J. and Rip, A (Eds.) *Mapping the Dynamics of Science and Technology. Sociology of Science in the Real World*. Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press pp. 19 – 34
- Callon, M. (1986) Some elements of a sociology of translation: domestication of the scallops and the fishermen of St Brieuc Bay. In: Law, J (Ed.) *Power, Action and Belief*. London: Routledge & Kegan, Paul. s. 196 – 233
- Callon, M., Law, J., Rip, A. (1986) How to Study the Force of Science. In: Callon, M., Law, J., Rip, A (Eds.) (1986) *Mapping the Dynamics of Science and Technology. Sociology of Science in the Real World*. Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press pp. 3 – 18
- Clarke, J. (2002) A new kind of symmetry: Actor-network theories and the new literacy studies. *Studies in the Education of Adults*. Vol. 34, Issue (2) pp. 107 – 119.
- Clifford, J. and Marcus, G., E. (1986) *Writing Culture. The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Delamont, S., Coffey, A. and Atkinson, P. (2000) The Twilight years? Educational ethnography and the five moments model. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, Vol. 13, (3), 223 – 238.
- Delamont, S. (2003) *Feminist Sociology*. London: Sage.
- Edwards, R. and Usher, R. (2000). *Globalisation and pedagogy. Space, place and identity*. London and New York: Routledge
- Ehnmark (1989) *Maktens hemligheter. En essä om Machiavelli*. Trondheim: Nordstedts.
- Gerholm, T. (1995) Central ethnology, peripheral anthropology. in: Vermeulen, H., F. and Alvarez Roldán, A. (Eds.) *Fieldwork and Footnotes. Studies in the history of European Anthropology*. London and new York: Routledge. pp. 159 – 170
- Gordon, T., Holland, J. and Lahelma, E. (2001) Ethnographic research in Educational Settings. in: Atkinson, P., Coffey, A., Lofland, J. and Lofland, L. (Eds.) *Handbook of Ethnography*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Dehli: Sage Publications.

- Gustafsson, B., Ljungvall, R. and Stigebrandt, E. (1981) *Den dolda läroplanen*. Stockholm: Liberförlag/Utbildningsförlaget.
- Hammersley, M. and Atkinson, P. (1983) *Ethnography. Principles in Practice*. London: Tavistock.
- Hammersley, M. and Atkinson, P. (1995) *Ethnography. Principles in Practice. Second edition*. London: Routledge.
- Hellblom, L. (1985) *Från primitiv till organiserad demokrati. En studie av några offentligheter inom den socialdemokratiska arbetarrörelsen med utgångspunkt i 1970-talets studiecirklar i Vikmanshyttan och Söderfors*. Lidingö: Salamander.
- Hobbs, G. (2003) e-mail. Received 18 Sept. 2003
- Härnqvist, K. (1997) Educational Research in Sweden: Infrastructure and orientation. in: Karl-Erik Rosengren & Bo Öhngren (eds.) *An Evaluation of Swedish Research in Education*. Uppsala: HSFR.
- Nespor, J. (1996) *Knowledge in Motion: Space, Time and Curriculum in Undergraduate Physics and Management*. London: Falmer Press.
- Kullberg, B. (1996) *Etnografi i klassrummet*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Larsson, S. (1993) Initial encounters in formal adult education. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, Vol. 6, No 1, pp. 49 – 65.
- Latour, B. and Woolgar, S. (1986) *Laboratory Life. The Construction of Scientific Facts*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Latour, B. (1997) *Science in Action. How to follow scientists and engineers through society*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1991) *Situated learning*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Law, J. (1999) After ANT: complexity, naming and topology. In: Law, J. and Hassard, J. *Actor Network Theory and after*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Law, J. (2000) Introduction: monsters, machines and sociotechnical relations. in: Law, J. (Ed.) (2000) *A Sociology of Monsters. Essays on Power, technology and domination*. London & New York: Routledge. Pp. 1 – 23.

Law, J. and Hetherington, K. (2002) Materialities, Spatialities, Globalities. www.comp.lanc.ac.uk/sociology/soc029jl.html

Palmer, R., E. (1969) *Hermeneutics: Interpretation theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger and Gadamer*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Pilhammar Andersson, E. (1991) *Det är vi som är dom: Sjuksköterskestuderandes föreställningar och perspektiv under utbildningstiden*. Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis.

Pilhammar Andersson, E. (1996) *Etnografi i det vårdpedagogiska fältet - en jakt på ledtrådar*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Qvarsell, B. (1996) *Pedagogisk etnografi för praktiken: en diskussion om förändringsfokuserad pedagogisk forskning*. Stockholm: Stockholms universitet, Pedagogiska institutionen. Texter om Forskningsmetod nr. 2

Sismondo, S. (2004) *An introduction to Science and Technology Studies*. Malden MA: Blackwell.

Stockfelt, T. (1982) *Professorn*. Täby: Max Media.

Stensmo, C. (1979) *Kollektivet Trollängen: en utvärdering på organisationsnivå*. Uppsala: Uppsala Studies in Education.

Trankell, A. (1973) *Kvarteret Flisan. Om en kris och dess övervinnande i ett svenskt förortssamhälle*. Stockholm: Nordstedts

Ungmark, I. (1992) *Kvinnor, brott, övervakning*. Linköping: Linköping Studies in Education and Psychology.

Wittgenstein, L. (1958) *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Wolcott, H., F. (1999) *Ethnography. A Way of Seeing*. Walnut Creek: Altamira Press.

Ödman, P.-J. (1979) *Tolkning, förståelse, vetande: Hermeneutik i teori och praktik*. Stockholm: AWE/Gebbers