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**Conduct of life and political conflictuality**

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**Plenary discussion session: Critical and political dimensions of the study of the conduct of everyday life**

Well, I want to start up the discussions about *Critical and political dimensions of the study of the conduct of everyday life* with a focus on the *relatedness* betweenstructural and political social conflicts – and *situated* conflicts of everyday life.

To be political relevant I think we must direct scientific critique to people’s concrete and social *conditions* of their everyday life and explore these conditions as they are experienced and handled by persons.

Even in critical analyses these conditions are often *conceptualized in abstract* ways but structural inequalities and political conflictuality are interwoven with *concrete dilemmas*, contradictions and conflicts of everyday life.

So the problem is that the critique may become about abstract variables such as social differences and family deviance and we have to *guess* about the meanings to the involved – and in this way to estimate meanings from ‘outside’.

Or the critique may become rather implicit as seems to be a dilemma in the concrete and situated analysis I argue for in the following.

In psychological analysis we often have *an implicit political critique* of life conditions and I think we need to make this more *explicit* and more *concrete* related to what people try to organize in their life and how they are hindered in relation to that.

So I discuss political conflictuallity as social conflicts about how societal problems should be understood and handled – and I argue that we find these conflicts in our situated analysis of peoples interplay in everyday life.

In this way analyzing social conflicts *from the perspectives of concrete persons* may lead to knowledge about *general social contradictions*. This is knowledge about how *different* perspectives are connected in historical structural arrangements related to dealing with these common problems.

This could be for instance political conflicts about how to prioritize in relation to the educational system – which seem related to and accentuated in the actual global competition.

In relation to the education of children we confront huge political conflicts about *what* is important to learn, *how* to learn and *who* is responsible to academic failures. The *responsibility* in relation to children’s learning is politically distributed among adults in a privatized, individualized and conflictual way.

Concerning educational problems the tradition is to conceptualize specific and isolated variables as backgrounds for understanding the problems.

From this follows a kind of displacement of problems – *from* social dilemmas and into different kinds of deficiencies in social background leading to abstract and individual deficiencies. This conceptualization points to compensatory interventions

But these interventions are *conflictual.* Adults – mothers and fathers, teachers, pedagogues’, psychologists and politicians – have different perspectives on the problems and on the children.

For instance they disagree about whether a child can stay in regular school or should be sent to special institutions and about how the school should prioritize in relation to working with social problems or working more isolated to obtain good marks in relation to national tests.

These quarrels relate to *political conflicts* about what ought to happen in school and about the distribution of responsibility between the adults.

But they also become at stake’ in the interplay between the children themselves and they become *personal conflicts for individual children conducting their everyday life* across family, classroom, child communities and special help arrangements.

The concrete dilemmas of the children illustrate *meanings* of structural arrangements and you could say that ‘behind’ the practice of pointing out individual children we find a complex landscape of conflicts between different groups of professionals, parents as well as among the children.

These conflicts may be analysed as connected to the question about directions and influence in relation to the change of social practice.

In this way the different perspectives can be seen as connected as well as conflictual. They are not coincidentally different but structurally different and structurally connected.

Theoretically I suggest a decentering of the analysis and conceptual possibilities to analyse *connections* between historical conflictuality and *situated conditions* in the structure of the school.

Instead of displacements of problems we must explore structural inequalities *from* the perspectives of everyday life. Analyses of people’s conduct of everyday life may be used to criticize structural inequalities in a *concrete way* pointing to the political conflicts personal problems are entwined with.

When we explore social and political problems we should not disregard an active subject. And especially: When we study the personal dilemmas in relation to the problems we should set the subject in plural: Active subj***ects*** are negotiating, cooperating and conflicting about these problems.

Conduct of everyday life is interwoven with social coordination and conflicts and with possibilities for taking part in these coordinations. And in the situations of everyday life social possibilities are *structurally and unequally arranged.*

With the concept of *situated inequality* I want to pay attention to the social distribution of possibilities for taking part in and influencing different social contexts.

This could be in a classroom or at an interdisciplinary meeting were parents, psychologists; teachers and social workers negotiate about where to place a child in difficult life situations. At such meetings the access to speak up and to get ones perspectives acknowledged as knowledge is indeed not equally distributed. And in relation to the social distribution of knowledge research play a very explicit part.

In relation to the classroom we often seem to turn our back to the situated structuring here focusing on problems other places.

In the Danish context we have an increasing political focus and a lot of preventive efforts in relation to ‘break the social heritage’ to get more children from uneducated families to take an education. But our preventive efforts seem to reinforce inequality.

What might be at stake is a kind of blindness in relation to analyse the *situated inequality* and to connect such analysis to the political conflicts themselves.

This seems to stem from a kind of logic that when children enter *the same* classroom - and perform differently here - it must have to do with *other* things than what is going on here.

But we need to analyse the school as a local social practice that forms part of a societal structure and to be able to analyse how the classroom does not have the same meanings and does not set the same conditions to different children.

An example could be the situation where William – who is categorised as bright - does not put up his hand to answer the teachers question and the teacher reacts saying: ‘This must be a mistake’ and tries to investigate the mistake – when Martin put’s up his hand she gives up asking him.

This teacher is under pressure of conflicts amongst the adults about Martin, whether he is able to behave in school or not, who are responsible for the noise and trouble in the classroom etc.

The teachers think he is badly brought up at home and the parents think the teachers are inflexible and traditional in their teaching style.

These quarrels relate to *political conflicts* about what ought to happen in school and about the distribution of responsibility between the adults.

Martin himself seems to be working hard to get a position in the group of boys. Due to social differentiations the children participate from *different positions* and with different *conditions* in relation to managing the double agendas of school life. And this seems very important in relation to prioritize and connect their personal engagements across different contexts and demands of their everyday life.

To explore this we have to analyse the situated interplay closely, the different conditions for taking part here, the different *positions* in the classroom, the *reasons* children may have to act as they do, the social dynamics when some children are excluded and others highly appreciated, etc.

In this way we may turn the critical and political dimensionsof our analysis to social conflicts in and about the practices were we conduct our research and to the situated inequality in relation to take part in these conflicts.

Returning to the conduct of everyday life I would state that to handle one’s life implies to *arrange* conditions – together with others to look for possibilities, to revise plans and pursue ideas.

Therefore, the possibilities for developing conduct of life are connected to possibilities for participation *and influence* different places.

This points to rearrange practice in ways that will open op for influence and contributions from different participants. In relation to the children this could be influence in relation to their learning communities, the help they are receiving, the understanding of their problems.

In relation to families as well as professionals it could be influence in relation to the creation of knowledge about their everyday life and professional tasks here.

Analyses of connections between conduct of life and political conflictuality may point to possibilities to *change conditions for collaboration* about a democratic development of concrete local practices – including the practice of research.

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