

Educational research on everyday life, education and their transformations in globalized contexts

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Not only formal education but everyday life inside as well as outside institutions have always been central sites of learning for children and adults. However, as social relations in everyday life are staged ever more as pedagogical and educational relations, practices of learning undergo transformations. The concept of everyday life is changing as daily routines and associated practices of learning are being transformed through processes caused by virtualization (social media, cell phones, lap-top computers) and rapid global flows of information, merchandise and people. Research on education as everyday life and everyday life as education therefore becomes increasingly relevant.

In this special issue of *Nordic Studies in Education* we gather manuscripts that have been reworked into articles by the four keynote-presenters at the NERA Congress in Copenhagen that took place in March 2012. We are thus proud to be able to present a special issue where senior scholars from India, the United States, Germany and Denmark representing three con-

tinents reflect upon transformations of everyday life in Nordic and globalized contexts. They furthermore reflect upon the challenges that such changes present to research on everyday life.

In our era education and everyday life change fast, profoundly and on a global scale. The same concepts emerge in multiple settings that defy national borders. Phenomena somehow appear the same regardless of place. In his article «Leading a Life: Five Key Elements in the Hidden Curriculum of Our Schools», *Hartmut Rosa* from the Friedrich-Schiller University in Jena shows us how *globalized* and *mediatized* high-speed late-modern societies require a vast number of complex cultural competencies and dispositions for individuals to successfully cope with the challenges of everyday life (e.g. Rosa & Scheuerman, 2009). He points out that the most fundamental human questions: «How should I live?», or «What should I do with my life?» have been thoroughly privatized in the course of modernity and can apparently only be answered individually.

«Find out for yourself!» is the only acceptable or legitimate answer modern institutions provide to these questions according to Rosa. Everyone has to judge for him- or herself what to do with his or her life and how to lead (or not lead) it. Nevertheless, under late-modern conditions in particular, it has become clear that while there are many ways to lead a happy life, there are just as many ways to fail in life and to waste it. He argues that the school-ground seems of overriding importance in terms of learning how to lead a life.

This, however, does not take place as part of the (official) teaching since the commitment to ethical pluralism and liberal neutrality with respect to comprehensive doctrines of the good prevents schools from developing an explicit curriculum for teaching kids how to live and lead a life. Nevertheless, Rosa argues, the lives children are going to lead as

adults are to a large extent results of the lessons learned at school without anyone explicitly teaching them. Such lessons «learned but not openly intended» are the elements of what has been called *the hidden curriculum*.

He points out and develops five key elements in everyday school-ground classroom curriculum that appear to play significant roles in shaping the sense of life and the ensuing patterns of living. These elements help kids to develop their strategies of (i) recognition-seeking and (ii) distinction, (iii) their strong evaluations and (iv) their fundamental definitions of existential problems, and (v) their strategies for balancing long-term and short-term issues and selecting options. Finally Rosa discusses how to develop some preliminary ways for pedagogical intervention that could help to transform the hidden curriculum into at least a more semi-transparent curriculum of everyday (school-)life.

At a closer scrutiny, however, huge cultural and social diversities translate such apparent common features into profound differences as lived lives unfold in particular educational and everyday localities. In her article «Children's everyday lives (re)constructed as variable sets of field bodies: Revisiting the exotic remote island – a case study» *Ida Wentzel Winther* leaves the discourses of speed and change behind and attempts to study the inertia, routines and repetitious aspects that are equally dominant – and often overlooked – features of our everyday lives.

She reports from a fieldwork she did on an isolated island in the Baltic Sea, where she zoomed in on how children play, interact with each other, use cell phones, facebook and so forth. She brought a camcorder, and she distributed seven small digital cameras to the children on the island to produce material about their daily lives. As an integral part of her reporting *Ida Wentzel Winther* continually reflects upon how to study an everyday life that just happens. It is both solid and

liquid, embedded and changeable. In order to comprehend this, she argues, the researcher must develop new methods that simultaneously bring well-known elements together in new ways and work with different types of performative practices of doing ethnographic research. She explores how the researcher works with different kinds of *field bodies*, how different kinds of knowledge are produced and constructed and how this kind of shared anthropology can bring attention to new parts of everyday life.

Ida Wentzel Winther thus leads us into fundamental epistemological considerations upon issues that call for reflections on how everyday life, education and their relations can be conceptualized and reflected. But how does one come to terms with understanding the larger issues of social and cultural transformations and the seemingly unproblematic character of the inertias and routines of everyday life?

In his article «The impracticality of practical knowledge and lived experience in educational research» Thomas S. Popkewitz from the University of Wisconsin-Madison questions what he calls the *grids of intelligibility* or *systems of reason* that make us take the features of our daily lives for granted. In thought-provoking moves he reminds us how strong taken for granted alliances like the child-school-family triplet too easily turn into a mental strait-jacket that disciplines how we can think about relations and possibilities. And dominant technologies like curriculum tend to institutionalize and narrow down the spaces within which we can think of «truths» and other strong claims that guide our thinking and practices. The argument is that reason and *kinds of people* are no natural phenomena to take for granted. They are indeed highly political basic encodings that format how individuals become governable subjects. And the greatest power of that formatting may be the fact that it so often succeeds in not leav-

ing traces of itself that are sufficiently conspicuous to arouse unease and resistance. According to Thomas S. Popkewitz, that indeed presents a challenge for researchers to re-think the projects they/we participate in.

Thomas S. Popkewitz furthermore reminds us that the problem of change, so coveted within educational research, has haunted the human sciences since their institutionalization at the turn of the 20th century. Initially responding to the Social Question about the moral disorder and economic dislocations of the city, the quest today, a century later according to Popkewitz, is obsessed with delivering the practical and useful knowledge that makes possible what he calls «the Enlightenment's cosmopolitan dream». That dream of change, he claims, is expressed in PISA, New Public Management and constructivist psychologies, among others (e.g. Popkewitz, 2008).

Popkewitz sees his own task as an educational researcher in everyday life as that of the historian of the present, who asks about the conditions that make possible the notion of designing everyday life and people (e.g. Popkewitz, Olsson, Petersson & Kowalczyk, 2006). Whether the future is «the lifelong learner» or «practical knowledge» that is deemed necessary for the Knowledge Society, the sciences to change social conditions are expected to design particular kinds of people. He argues that such designs should be seen as a «making of kinds of people» that excludes and abjects in the impulse to include, that tends to conserve rather than challenge the existing frameworks that govern the present, and that produces a hierarchy and inequality in the processes of shepherding social and personal transformations. In a jesting air, he concludes that what seems practical and useful is impractical, and encourages the reader to consider whether it is perhaps time to consider a thorough revision of the human sciences.

Yet another issue following the critique of our internalized encodings of what constitutes everyday life is represented by the salient fact that the lived experiences of everyday life in a rapidly changing world depend very much on the «locality» in which that life takes place. In her article «Waiting for Change: enduring educational outcomes» Meenakshi Thapan from the University of Delhi argues that the key to understanding the relationship between education and transformation lies in perceiving the ways in which it is possible for young people around the world to make sense of their everyday lives in this rapidly changing world. The encounter with education is on one hand a global process with similarities from one society to another, since education is part of young people's experience all over the world. On the other hand, however, diverse localities provide different conditions for this encounter.

Meenakshi Thapan understands educational outcomes on two registers: that of *locality* which is central to the lived experiences of young people as much as it is to the educational process itself; and secondly, inspired by Pierre Bourdieu, that of *social capital* which is an outcome of available social and cultural resources that include peer and friendship groups, family, community, and the social networks that emerge from these.

Meenakshi Thapan seeks to understand the relationship between educational outcomes and transformation in terms of what it means to the individual human being and the youth culture in which he or she is embedded. She highlights an important ambiguity in the significance of education in many poor localities: on the one hand education does not keep its promises and leaves young people in a position of waiting. Many young people have an «experience of being in a liminal stage exemplified by the metaphor of 'waiting' for something to happen: a

job, an event, a cause, i.e. *waiting*». They experience that education does not always keep its promises of employment, freedom, opportunity, dignity and above all, change. Instead young people experience unemployment and poverty.

On the other hand, however, young people are not only waiting, they also use education to mobilise themselves for goals that are meaningful for themselves in their everyday lives. Consequently we need to understand how educated, unemployed young people build identities as they express themselves in hopes of acquiring social goods. Thapan exemplifies these ambiguous mechanisms by elaborating a concrete case from an empirical study of 14 years old Varun. He lives in a poor urban Indian area. Despite the poverty that defines Varun's life, Thapan shows how his enthusiasm for school and participation in all school activities remains central to his experience, Varun's story testifies to a strong commitment to seek gains through education.

Put together, the articles of this special issue illustrate how the concept of *everyday life* can be productive in educational research. All contributions highlight people's social (everyday) lives as routines and practices taken for granted in the social context in which they are embedded. The articles represent an endeavour to understand social life in light of «larger issues», i.e. general societal patterns, tendencies and changes. The four articles, however, grasp, conceptualize and deal with these issues in very different ways.

The concept of *everyday life* constituted one of the key concepts in what has been called the ethnographic turn in educational research. Since this turn innumerable empirical studies have been conducted by means of methods taken from ethnographic/anthropological, micro-sociological, post-structural and other traditions to study people's so-

cial lives. Such studies do not merely focus on social practices seen from the outside, but also on how people themselves make meaning of their social lives as an important part of living their everyday lives.

In this issue Meenakshi Thapan draws on this tradition by analysing the life of the 14 years old boy, Varun by means of what is called a *thick description* in ethnographic tradition (Geertz, 1973). Thapan points out how elements, processes and materialities in a poor Indian locality establish the conditions for everyday life for Varun, and she points out how Varun constructs meanings and hopes for the future. Simultaneously Thapan offers an understanding of everyday life in its particularity as embedded in the larger context of global modernity. This she does by positioning even a poor Indian locality within the orbit of a global modernity that is itself partially constructed by and a consequence of schooling and education.

Ida W. Winther is inspired by the ethnographic tradition as well. Her meta-reflections on what kinds of knowledge are produced and constructed by means of her ethnographic approach are important when studying everyday life. She puts a reflective focus on methodology by bringing in new aspects, such as material and sensuous tactile-kinesthetic aspects, in the study of people's social lives by experimenting with alternative ways of producing knowledge about people's «everyday lives». Simultaneously, Winther offers (tentative) understandings of larger issues by considering her story about children's everyday lives on a remote Danish island as a possible counter-narrative to the narrative of modern childhood (as a critique of «exotification of an old-fashioned childhood» or as «often forgotten aspects of everyday life»).

Taking his point departure in a more philosophical discussion Hartmut Rosa makes use of a concept that is to a high degree de-

veloped on the basis of ethnographic studies. He does so by referring to the concept of the hidden curriculum as one of the key concepts in his main argumentation. This concept was introduced as a central concept in Jackson's classical empirical study *Life in classrooms* (Jackson, 1968). This study was an important contribution to the ethnographical turn in educational studies.

Rosa combines the narrative of the hidden curriculum with a diagnosis of the contemporary claiming that our (Western) society is characterized by «high speed modernity» and by few guidelines for children as to how they should live their lives. His optimistic hope is that opening up the hidden curriculum may provide children with better guidelines to live their lives. By adopting this approach Rosa simultaneously inscribes his contribution into a more sociological/philosophical tradition for studying everyday life. In this tradition the critique of (the conditions for) people's everyday lives is a critique of the societal mechanisms and conditions that shape (condition) everyday life. This tradition is not least represented in Agnes Heller (1999), Henri Lefebvre (1991) and the Frankfurter school (Honneth, Habermas and Adorno) in critiques of capitalism and the alienation it causes in people's everyday lives.

Thomas S. Popkewitz in his contribution establishes a perspective on everyday life as formed by societal and historical conditions. Drawing on Foucault as well as the growing field of post-foucauldian governmentality studies, he positions himself as a historian of the present. He experiments with charting an alternative diagnosis of the contemporary and its taken for granted regimes of truths. This is a diagnosis aimed at challenging dominant grids of intelligibility concerning education and everyday life, as expressed in dominant curricular thinking, the triplet child, parents, school and so forth.

Hereby he alerts us to the grave enterprise of «*making kinds of people*» as it is done in the organized endeavor of education and – increasingly – the boundless endeavor of optimizing bodies and minds that is expressed in terms and projects like Life Long Learning as well as in global comparative endeavors, such as PISA, to make people more visible in order to better optimize them or induce them to optimize themselves. Popkewitz' contribution thus encourages us to explore whether this grid could be challenged by a rethinking of educational research.

In total, we believe that the four distinct and thought-provoking articles presented in this theme issue of Nordic Studies in Education may inspire and enrich Nordic research literature on education and everyday life.

Literature

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