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## Overskridelse af lærerudbrændthed og ADHD--diagnosticering af børn

*En social praksisteoretisk udforskning af indskolingsbørn og deres lærerteams mulighed for overskridende læring i klasserummet*

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## **Dissertation abstract: Transgressing teachers' burnout and ADHD diagnosis of children**

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This article based dissertation is written on the background of a social practice researchproject, that examines teachers' and students' co-participation in in-schooling practice in two Danish Primary Schools. The main focus of the project lies in unfolding societal contradictions that may lie behind teachers' difficulties that are accounted for and treated as burnout, and childrens difficulties that are diagnosed as ADHD. How the contradictions are lived in in everyday life is unfolded from the first person perspective as dilemmas, doublebinds and limitations of possibility-conditions for teachers and students.

### ***Background***

Teaching in the Danish Primary School at the present time shows to be a stress-filled job. Teaching ranks as the profession that has the sixth highest level of stress, and in 2010 half the danish teachers who had at the time received early retirement accounted for it as due to burnout. There are manifold explanations for this, but there seems to be a growing tendency of blaming children with special needs for teachers burnout difficulties.

At the same time the number of (especially boys) children that are diagnosed with ADHD has increased explosively over the last 10-15 years. Uneasy and disturbing behaviour is in schoolcontext to a still higher degree handled by diagnosing and medicating students.

The correlation between and the opposition of teachers' burnout and students' misbehaviour has currently been underlined by a political focus on inclusion of more children with special need in the ordinary schoolcontext.

### ***Theoretical standpoint***

The project places itself within a social practice theoretical research tradition that has its roots in historical, dialectical materialism, and with a theoretical understanding of learning as aspect in socially situated participation in communities of

practice. This approach works at unfolding 1.persons' participation in practice as historically mediated in societal structures and in structures of meaning. Practice theoretical practice research has a double aim of developing theory as well as concrete practice.

The project has an ambition of transgressing teachers' burnout and ADHD diagnosis of children. Burnout and ADHD are seen as practiceproblematics meaning, that both are aspects in subjects' participation in societal contradictions from marginal positions in communities of practice. School as action context is understood as a societal arrangement, where specific structures, meanings, discourses, actions and artefacts mediate participation. The project here draws on Foucault's theory of power. Especially the concept of selfgovernmentality and the concept of technologies of power are central.

### ***Empiricism and methodology***

Two first classes in two Danish Public Schools and their teachers' teams make up the empiricism of the project. I situated myself in the two school practices for periods of 10 months and of three months. Through participant observation, videoobservation, semi-structured qualitative interviews, focusgroup-interviews, individual and collective photobased interviews with children and through collective biography work the practice problematics have been worked through and analysed in cooperation between the researcher and the co-researchers (the teacher teams and the students in the two school classes). I am a former teacher, a music pedagogue and a school psychologist and I have throughout the researchprocess consciously drawn in my experiences from all positions in the reference transformationprocess.

### ***Abstract of the articles***

#### **Expansive Learning – ADHD as example**

The article represents a critical approach to expansive learning in relation to ADHD as a practice problematic. In this approach individualistic understanding that seeks a cause for the problem either within the child or in its context in the shape of parents lack ing abilities for raising the child or in the shape of teachers

lacking pedagogical competencies is transgressed. The article sees dualistic understanding of the problematic as in itself bringing about problem displacement and guilt allocation. This may strengthen oppositions and contradictions as they are experienced in school as societal arrangement by both teachers and students.

In the article it is unfolded how Mikkel, a seven year old boy, and his supportpedagogue, Katja, participate in schooling discourses and practices of rulebound and contentless structures. Mikkel's possibilities for action are limited in these structures. He reacts by leaving the classroom in anger, and this again is understood by his teachers as ADHD behaviour and in individualised terms of lack of impulse control, deficit in attention and hyperactivity. To hinder the behaviour, teachers surveil Mikkel, and they sharpen the structures by planning in detail the teaching activities so they have an inner logical and generalised progression. In this way they again sharpen what is right behaviour in classroom and what is wrong. Katja - as supportpedagogue - is entangled in administering the structures. She makes pictograms and sees to that Mikkel and all students in class know in advance what they will be doing during the day. But both Mikkel and Katja experience the contentless structures as limiting their action possibilities.

By initiating a game of 'round ball' as a play, where verbal instruction and de-situated rulestructure becomes unnecessary it is shown how Mikkel for a short moment transgresses his marginal position in the community of practice of the class. Through initiating a jam session without verbal instructions, and without de-situated and contentless rulestructures - following only the structures of blues - and by mediating access to the music-community of practice as equal legitimate member, Mikkel is interpellated as an active and responsible participant in the community of practice. The smoothness of the common third process' structure thus shows to recontextualise potential conflicts into collectively negotiating rules and actions.

### **Do Teachers Leave Their Ethics at the School Gate**

Here I analyse how Mikkel's teachers, Dorte and Malene, participate in critical moments of conflict in everyday life, where Mikkel reacts on rules and structures

that from his point of view seems meaningless and leaving no action possibilities, and that hinders him from becoming recognizable in the community of the class. In one moment he throws a heavy chair through the classroom and leaves in the other he leaves the classroom and climbs onto a staircase landing. In the article the two incidents are unfolded.

It is shown how the selfleading teamstructure that has been implemented as management technology, instrumentalises relations between the teammembers hindering collegiality and intersubjectivity between them to develop. Dorte being the teamleader and being educated withing special education is urged to take on responsibility to monitor all work in the team , including that of Malene, Pernille and Katja, and to control that nothing unexpected and unplanned takes place. In doing so, she explains her need for control with her inner personal deficit. She feels, that she needs more knowledge about fx Mikkels' behaviour, and about how to structure things so he does not 'pop up' in order to be recognized in the school context.

In this state Dorte comes to perceive the children's play and having fun as her lack of authority. And from this position diagnosing and medicating Mikkel seems to be the best may to help him.

Malene participates in the selfleading teamstructures and in the teaching structures passively and in an unsolvable double bindbetween contact with the students as her reason for action and fear of becoming more marginal and unrecognizable in the position of 'one who cannot control children's behaviour'. Malene feels that she cannot contribute in the teamactivities. What she senses does not achieve meaning and participating from this position she becomes depressed. She gives up on struggling agains instrumentalisation of relations in the team, between her and the children.

So participating in the management technologies of school the teachers are lead to confuse ethics with moral. Instead of asking: what and how is it to be this? they measure subjects in relation to an imagined ideal. Doing so, they find themselves acting and relating in ways they themselves find unethical.

Through collective biography with Dorthe, Malene, Katja and Pernille, where we collectively told about, wrote about and unfolded mo(ve)ments of being checkmated in our participation in school as teachers, the team came to new understandings. Dorthe came to see her vulnerability to management technologies and ideals and that this lead her to selfgouvernmentality. Malene came to recognise her actual contact with Mikkel as legitimate and important to her as well as to Mikkel. So she gained the courage to start acting intolerant to what she saw as unethical.

### **Curiosity extends communities**

The article shows how both Heidi from her position as teacher in 1.b and Emil from his position as student participate in insecurity between inclusion and exclusion, between being healthy in opposition to having ADHD, and between beingan ordinary teacher as opposed to being an expert teacher educated to deal with ADHD children. Heidis reasons for action when she acts a stressed up controlperformance in order to hinder Emil from behaving ADHD -like is that she wants to keep him from becomin marginal among his classmates. But performing this she finds herself faulty and afraid of being excluded and maybe even fired. So she lets no moment stand open to curiosity and differentiation. Differentiation meaning: A continuum where intensities invite to become different from oneself. The children in1.b are held in categorically different positions and this hinders Emil from becoming anything else than ADHD.

During collectively unfolding intense and critical mo(ve)ments Heidi partly transgresses unsecurity. She comes to see that the need for control is not her personal deficit and that when she judges herself to be insufficient she draws on individualistic learning dicources that are predominant in the schoolcontext.

In a collective biography inspired session with children and teachers in 1.b the students takes a step towards extending their community of practice when curiously asking Emil about his reasons for action in mo(ve)ments of conflict and when carefully listening to every detail of the remembered mo(ve)ments. A germ is planted to transgress a culture of fault finding.

### **ADHD Medication and Social Selfunderstanding in a Danish Primary School**

The article documents Dennis' and Heidi's dilemmas and struggles for becoming (responsible) person among others. Dennis is a student in 1.b who is medicated with Ritalin (an centralstimulant used to treat ADHD) and Heidi is his classroom teacher.

Dennis does not want to take the medicine and repeatedly states that he wants to die rather than being forced to take it, and the article shows how coming to understanding with himself, the classmates and others about who he is and what he can become in 1.b is difficult when being drugged.

The article documents how Dennis makes a strong effort to avoid taking his medication, his reasons for action and his lifeinterest being becoming a recognisable and appropriate person, and it documents how Heidi, in the position of classroom teacher, takes on the duty to force the drug on him, her reasons for action being, that she must help Dennis to not act ADHD, and to see to, that the disease is treated right and that it does not get out of control.

In a collective biography inspired session the children manages to ask questions that transgress the common sense explanations of Dennis' actions and his wish to die, namely, that it is because he is sick with ADHD.

### **Collective Biography as Positive Critique**

The article accounts for collective biography as a research methodology. It argues that CB is a fruitful way of examining complex practices such as school practice. It also argues that CB is a way of examining vulnerable and marginal participation in an ethical way.

In collective biography work 'moment' and 'movement' are integrated in the term: 'mo(ve)ment'. In this way focus is put on the moments potentials for change and expanding agency. By collectively unfolding mo(ve)ments in a way that makes them bodily felt and visible to everybody, the collective biography makes it possible to recognise each body's vulnerability to societal structures, structures of meanings and discourses.

The article accounts for an example of how Dorthe, Malene, Pernille, Malene and the researcher in their collective effort to unfold stories of remembered mo(ve)ments transgress individualistic and personalising structures of meaning and discourses and come to more action potent understandings.