

Editorial: Open issue

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In this fifth volume of Confero we present four essays that in various ways relate to education, philosophy and politics, all imbued with social criticism and contributing to Confero's interdisciplinary focus and encouragement to essayistic writing. The four essays in this issue, although diverse in study subjects, methods, and theories, all share features related to the phenomenon of power asymmetries in different educational settings and arenas. Despite the diversity in terms of methodology, scope and perspectives they all relate to Confero's areas of interest: education, philosophy and politics.

Factors such as class, migrant background, gender, etc. have an impact on pupils' school results. Today, segregation between schools, based on socio-economic, and ethnic background are increasing. Moreover, marginalized students are at high risk of remaining marginalized as adults. Citizenship education is often closely linked with a promise to remedy and compensate for earlier discriminatory arrangements, and also to create desirable citizens of the future. However, citizenship education does not always pay attention to, or coincide with, students' and teachers' views and personal experience. It is therefore important to research how schools pay attention to the intersectional ordering of citizens based on gender, class and ethnicity. This is precisely the focus of this Confero issue's first essay titled "What are the gender, class and ethnicity of citizenship? A study of upper secondary school students' views on Citizenship Education in England and Sweden". Based on interviews with teachers and students in upper secondary schools in England and Sweden,

Laila Nielsen and Ralph Leighton compare how conditions of citizenship regarding ethnicity, gender, and social class are understood. One important result of the essay is that while participants from both countries describe class (and ethnicity) as central to the enactments of citizenship, they do this in a very different way. The Swedish participants' experiences and opinions highlight how the combination of class and ethnicity interact and make it hard for marginalized societal groups to gain the full meaning of citizenship. The English participants also paid attention to how both ethnicity and class can contribute to unequal social conditions. However, the English participants stated that social class is not of any actual importance today - rather an aspect of the past. Another difference between participants from the two countries is that in Sweden it was mostly the female students and teachers who drew attention to the importance of gender for citizens' conditions, while the English students identified this irrespective of their own gender.

A significant similarity between participants from both countries was the difference between the students' statements on different educational environments and home environments. Students from more resource-rich home environments and higher-level students demonstrated stronger identification and emotional connection to the goals and ideals that citizenship education represents than the resource-poor students who studied, for example, in vocational education. Among the Swedish vocational students some anti-immigrant ideas were expressed. The essay stresses the importance for citizenship and citizenship education in the light of the (neo)liberalization of schools and changes that depleted social citizenship and entailed greater demands and responsibilities for the individual in recent years. The study by Laila Nielsen and Ralph Leighton shows that educators and policy makers need to listen to what the students perceive as reality, to take into account their visions of the present and the future rather than introducing views of the past.

How unproblematised dwelling in the past hides and legitimizes asymmetric power relations is also central to the following essay in this issue. Rasoul Nejadmehr identifies "scientific education"

as the dominant educational paradigm of the present. Through a historical analysis, Nejadmehr shows how this paradigm is deeply embedded with racial, colonial, and Eurocentric biases. This essay demonstrates how Kant's educational theories were combined with thoughts of human perfection based on an imagination of educational ability along race and colonial divisions. The foundations of these assumptions have never really disappeared, but rather changed form, and still serve as part of the invisible assumptions about education. These assumptions rest on discriminatory classifications based on race, ethnicity, sex, and class. Thus, education is scientific, systematized, and linked to a purpose and a conformal idea of human perfection and happiness. Accordingly, the entire educational machine is run by economic rational rules such as computational ability, employability, and rational choice. Through the global expansion of neoliberalism, these values have spread throughout the world. Free market values become tangled with educational values, resulting in a limited concept of proper (scientific) education. Scientific education becomes a means of subordination and abolition of the will to be different. Scientific thought systematically works for a homogenization of the world's population in accordance with the imperative of the hegemonic European model, which in turn is centred around the idea of race in ways which preserve white supremacy.

However, this essay further seeks to find an alternative way of looking at this educational system. This is a great and important task all too often neglected in research that have criticism as their ultimate goal. The essay, on the contrary, sees genealogical critique as a diagnostic analysis and a first step. But as the author points out: "We cannot stop at this stage and blame modernity and its major thinkers like Kant for the educational problems of our time and free us from responsibility"(p.137). Thus, this great essay aims to find an alternative way to help resolve the problem of colonial, racial, and cultural subordinations in education.

After the first diagnostic step, a second step is needed in order to create change. The second step highlights designing discursive and practical tools with which we can remove obstacles standing

in the way of a better educational paradigm. If the first diagnostic step was to “philosophize with a hammer” in order to highlight the myths of neutrality and impartiality of education, the second step is to philosophize with a tuning fork, designing education and orchestrating a world where a number of voices, viewpoints and attentions creates education for all. Education based on these two steps and on the basis of opposition groups’ own empowerment, results in their own voices being heard and education towards freedom can be created. Nejadmehr proposes a basic principle of education, which strives towards ‘the common’ (i.e what we all are part of and take part in), an approach towards education as art rather than science. In Raouls Nejadmehrs own words:

Education for the common is an artistic education, since it is a work in progress, with no absolute beginning or end, but always in the middle of inventing and reinventing the human being at individual, collective, local, and global levels. (p.139)

Alternative questions of power and education are articulated in Marcus Samuelsson’s essay “Real time movies versus frozen snapshots: Audits of everyday life in classrooms”. The classroom is rarely seen by anyone else then the teacher and the pupils, thereby making the classroom, often referred to, a black box. But there are some exceptions. Occasionally officials from the The Swedish Schools Inspectorate (Skolinspektionen) conduct audits that are carried out by adults filling out forms and protocols. This is an official inspection that serves to control and evaluate schools, and the judgements made are of great importance for the notion of a school as successful or problematic. However, the pupils also carry out inspections that could be labeled as “unofficial”. For example, pupils post videos on Youtube displaying angry teachers yelling at pupils. An intuitive understanding of these contrasting phenomena would result in labeling the first one (the official) as rational, and the latter (the unofficial) emotional. However, the pattern is more complex. A more systematic analysis of the differences makes clear that each perspective has its bias.

The essay highlights 16 differences between official and unofficial audits, relating to from which perspective the inspection is made, how it is done, and why. More surprisingly there are also similarities between these vast contrasting practices. A formalized protocol from an authority and a youtube clip both tell stories that “are adding something to our collective knowledge of what happens in an encounter between teachers and pupils”(p. 184). Many implications and reflections could be made from the essay, both from the perspective of teachers who sometimes testify about an increasing vulnerability in relation to new technologies and media, and from pupils’ experiences of school and a participatory culture. The essay show how an unexpected and somewhat unorthodox comparison can render very relevant results.

In the fourth essay in this issue, ”The Paradox of Democratic Equality”, Tomas Wedin discusses changes in the Swedish school during the period of 1946-2000. There is an ongoing debate in Sweden regarding the status of the teaching profession and what the teachers’ assignment is. Frequently, problems in Swedish school are tied to the reforms launched around 1990. Wedin’s essay offers a deeper understanding of these changes, furthermore he argues that the changes are founded further back in time. Wedin manifests that the changes can be traced back to the school commission of 1946 where a new direction for the Swedish school was set. Two main tasks for school were pointed out: to contribute to society’s economic, social and cultural development and also promote for democracy. Wedin argue that these changes in pursuing a more democratic school have led to an increased adaption to the individual. Through the changes in the school, Wedin refers to an emerging paradox of democratic equality:

“It consists in the fact that the intensified attempts to create a school inspired by a public-oriented logic, in relevant respects seem to have helped paving the way for the clearly private-oriented logic that has characterized school development since the 1990s. As stated above, the post-war school policy was characterized by an effort to create a more democratic school: first through the comprehensive school, and then on in reforming the inner work.

However, a consequence of this impulse was that the common fabric in which the pupil was expected to be integrated, became more fragile as the importance of articulating/reproducing a common backdrop – in the name of democratic equality – was reduced.”(p.238)

In Wedin’s description of the shift in the teacher’s assignment from the post-war period to recent time the teacher emerges as someone who passes knowledge from previous generations to the present, to becoming someone who functions as support for pupils. The teacher’s role as a support-function for the pupils has contributed to the weakening of the teaching profession. This makes Wedin’s essay an important addition to the current debate of the school of today. With this historical perspective back to 1946 the view of what happens today suddenly seem broader.

We hope these four thought-provoking essays create further discussion and debate. We therefore welcome and encourage readers to continue discussing educational issues in Confero by submitting essays that problematize, debate, and discuss the questions and topics these essays raise.

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