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Becoming a person in Denmark: Inclusion and exclusion in education

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Reviewed: Children of the Welfare State: Civilising Practices in Schools, Childcare and Families
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From the early 1960s, Denmark possesses a high quality, professionalised network of child care facilities, covering the whole country. These arrangements were established in a time when public spending and the growth of the welfare state were not under discussion. Danish child care institutions had acquired a strong position before the costs of welfare arrangements came under attack. Universal childcare has therefore become a responsibility of the Danish welfare state, and the Danish invest a great deal of time and money in long-term public childcare. The upbringing of children is seen as too important to leave it to parents alone. In 2015, nearly 90 per cent of all children between six month and two years were in public-funded daycare, more than 97 per cent of the three to five year-olds were in public kindergartens, while after that age a 12 year long period of compulsory education follows.

This raises the question of which consequences an extensive education outside the family has for the character formation of children, for their social relations, for the distinctions they make between social groups, and for the way they position themselves and others in society. These questions are answered in the ethnographic research project 'Civilising Institutions in a Modern Welfare State', such institutions including day-care institutions, schools and families. In 2012 the Danish research report was published; in 2017 an English version, *Children of the Welfare State: Civilising Practices in Schools, Childcare and Families*, edited and revised by Laura Gilliam and Eva Gulløv, was published. One of its focusses is the issue of what kind of people educators, teachers and parents see as their ideal, and how they try to reach that goal in everyday interactions. The researchers undertook observations in different educational institutions, and interviewed children and adolescents as well as educational professionals and parents, and they give an enlightening analysis of their research material. The research took place during the last decade of the twentieth and the first decade of the twenty-first century. All chapters are part of the same project, using the same theoretical perspective; most are written by the editors, some by other researchers. That gives the book the character of an anthology, something in-between a monograph and an edited volume.

The ethnographic approach of the researchers implies detailed descriptions of the ideals and practices in the class room, transcripts of conversations and many direct quotes. It does not take much effort to imagine the scenes happening in the class room. That's one of the strengths of the book, although the elaborate accounts are sometimes repetitive and could have been better tuned to each other. The editors try to solve this problem

by linking the different chapters in an introduction and a conclusion, in which they draw theoretical lines and come to general conclusions.

The research project is an example of both the anthropology of children and the sociology of childhood. Theoretically, the authors position their work in relation to Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, but the main analytical frame is the civilisation theory of Norbert Elias, with 'civilisation' as its core concept. Childrearing and education can be understood as one of the most encompassing examples of a 'civilisation offensive', in which young and old are involved in different roles. The researchers prefer Elias's concept of 'civilisation' above concepts like 'socialisation' and 'discipline' to stress the fact that in the upbringing of children all parties involved are concerned to mould children's character and ways of emotion management in a certain direction, compatible with the social structure of society, in this case the highly integrated Danish society. The efforts to teach children 'civilised' behaviour are seen as a reflection of existing power relations within society, and at the same time as a cause of the formation of differences and hierarchies between social groups. Institutions for children function both as 'a model of' and 'a model for' the ideal society. Practices in schools, childcare and families can be considered to be part of processes of integration and disintegration, assimilation and distinction.

This research project shows how the concept of 'civilisation' makes it possible to understand many contemporary issues: the tension between the socialisation of individual personalities and the forming of individuals as social creatures, 'the paradox of civilisation', pointing to 'civilising' as inclusion and as marker of distinction, to teachers who try to 'civilise' and to integrate the 'uncivilised', but at the same time, often unintentionally, stigmatise or even exclude some of them. The perspective of Norbert Elias demonstrates the way how the triad of civilisation–integration–distinction works out in contemporary situations.

Educational ideals in different settings

The educational structure in Denmark comprises public arrangements, beginning with the very young up to young adults. From the data the authors have gathered by means of interviews and observations in day-care institutions, kindergarten, elementary school, and secondary school, it becomes clear that the educational ideology and the educational practices are, generally speaking, similar. Of course, caring and teaching ask for different practices according to age and academic level, and of course ideology and practices do not totally correspond and often are negotiated among pedagogues and children. But the goal is the same throughout the whole educational hierarchy, that is to form 'civilised' persons and 'civilised' communities – harmonious, egalitarian and homogeneous.

The essence of the upbringing, starting with the smallest children, and repeated in every age group is the development of 'balanced' personalities. In the first place children should be allowed to develop their own character, their own talents, their own individuality. Every child is seen as different and has a right to be accepted and valued as such. But at the same time, and somewhat at odds, is the second ideal – the creation of the social child. Much time is devoted to teaching the children social norms and interactional forms that constitute 'good pupils', 'good citizens', 'good humans'.

'Civilised' behaviour involves manners as well as relationships. From a very young age children learn to regulate and discipline their bodies. In class they are not allowed to shout, to scream, to run, to kick, to fight, and as soon as they are able to conform to these standards they have to sit still, raise their hand if they want to say something, and they have to speak with 'soft voices': all this in order not to bother other children and grown-ups. Although children are taught to be aware of their own needs, they have also to heed those of others. They are trained to be empathic, to notice the emotions and reactions of their class mates and react in

appropriate ways. Teachers put these lessons into practice the whole day long. They do so in the formal setting of group discussions and role playing about feelings and emotions, about fairness and unfairness, about how to recognise happiness and sadness in themselves and in others. Teachers also intervene in daily interactions between the children. Pupils are taught to be thoughtful and considerate to their class mates, to ask or say things in a 'nice way', not to quarrel, but talk things over, not to discriminate or exclude each other.

In this way a balance must be reached between individuality, self-confidence, initiative, and self-awareness on the one hand, and social sensitivity and empathy on the other hand – a balance between assertiveness and submission, overconfidence and meekness, between too loud and too quiet, too active and too passive, in short between the extremes of 'too much' and 'too little'. The behavioural requirements include individual emotion management as well as social skills.

These norms become particularly clear when they are violated – when children overstep the psychologically and culturally appropriate 'boundaries'. Such transgressions are seen as 'uncivilised' behaviour. One of the social competences the Danish children have to learn is the awareness of each other's boundaries. They should not threaten the boundaries around other people, they should not take up too much physical and psychological space, and they should not allow others to invade their own personal space. Such forms of self-restraint go together with processes of informalisation, as formal politeness becomes less strict. Both self-awareness and self-restraint are seen as necessary conditions for 'good interactions'.

'Civilised' communities

Becoming a 'civilised' person in Denmark is a process of balancing, which goes further than the 'civilising' of individuals. The caretakers and teachers in Denmark aspire to influence the children at different levels. They approach them as individuals, they address their interactions and they treat them collectively as a group of students in the same school class. They aim to mould the classes into 'civilised' communities. First of all the children have to learn the social behaviour they need in order to be able to participate in the 'civilised' community of their school class. Even the playing of small children is not only seen as playing, but also has the function of learning to interact 'in the right way' and to establish social bonds between class mates. Academic skills are for later.

In Danish society social bonds are seen as elements in the construction of a harmonious and 'civilised' community of 'good citizens', where everyone is accepted, where everybody feels at home and nobody is excluded. The children have to adapt to these norms. The ideal is that there is 'room for everybody', but the definition of 'everybody' is selective and is changeable. Sometimes 'room' is restricted to the class community, and friendships with pupils from other school classes are discouraged because such contacts are seen as impeding the formation of 'communities'.

Gilliam states that the ideal of inclusion is defined according to the age of the children. For young children inclusion is restricted to their own school class, while the definition of the 'civilised' we-group is widening when they are growing up. Then, Denmark as a nation and in particular 'the resourceful' people – economically, socially and emotionally – are presented to the students as 'we' and as 'civilised'. And after that stage, the circles of identification become even broader, encompassing the free world, the Western world, the Christians, as representing 'civilised' standards. A hierarchical, moral map of the world is elaborated, involving several models of 'civilisation' and distinction. In this way the children are presented with more and more complex and refined 'civilising' ideals. The rational, the egalitarian, the democratic, the considerate, and the compromising are contrasted with the amoral and the inappropriate, and these different ideals are positioned in a hierarchy of more or less 'civilised'.

The creation of established and outsiders

Two research sites are chosen at opposite ends of the economic spectrum: a privileged school and a school with 'resource-weak' children. The first is an example of a 'good class', the second is seen as problematic. That does not mean that affluent children never make trouble, neither that 'resource weak' children are always difficult, but these two cases are used to illustrate the contrast.

In the class with a reputation of being 'good', the children behave 'decently' and teachers do not feel forced to police their conduct. But the lessons still have a normative dimension, explicitly or implicitly. The children debate about lifestyles, ways of caring for children, consciousness about climate change, interactions between people, and they discuss what it means to be 'civilised' or 'uncivilised'. In talking about their self-perception and their experiences with social stratification they prefer indications like 'high' and 'low', 'upper' and 'under', 'in the city' and 'in the suburb', rather than the concept of 'class'. They see 'the rich' as egotistical with too much interest in material wealth, while 'the poor' are supposed to have social problems which impede them from behaving appropriately. They locate themselves in the middle, as 'people of normal wealth' and as morally superior because of their 'civilised' codes of behaviour. Such feelings of moral superiority are prompted by the way their teachers talk with them.

In the 'resource-weak' class, with a substantial amount of children from foreign, non-Danish backgrounds, the so called 'bilingual classes', teachers find it hard to instill the kind of personal and social behaviour they see as ideal and as the norm. Immigrant children, 'Muslims', 'foreigners' – especially the boys – cause more trouble than the 'Danish' children. They are less inhibited and more aggressive; they fight, shout, scream and run, and they are less considerate towards their class mates. Such differences between children are seen as problematic and in conflict with 'civilised' forms. They threaten the social cohesion which is based on similarity and equality. Children who resist the established codes are seen as challenging harmony in the school class. They incite 'uncivilised behaviour' in other pupils and that is a legitimate reason to reprimand them, or even to exclude them and to see them as suitable cases for special treatment. As the teachers say: 'They will be better off in another type of institution, they don't belong here'.

The teachers make a distinction between the ethnic Danish and the minority children, between groups of pupils who do comply with the 'civilised' standards of behaviour and those who do not, resulting in a hierarchy in terms of behaviour, school achievements and expectations. They criticise the minority boys as a category: 'You lot are always disturbing the others'. The boys internalise such stigmatising criticism, but not always in the sense that they feel ashamed when they make trouble. On the contrary, their reaction to the disapproval of the teachers is to convert the 'civilised' ideal into a 'counterculture' and to identify with other bad boys: 'We are the immigrants, we are the troublemakers', and in this way they construct for themselves a collective identity and a sense of belonging.

In order to explain this less 'civilised', 'wilder' behaviour of the foreign boys, the teachers point to specifics in their family culture. They speak of families that have not learned to respect the physical, emotional and social boundaries which are the norm in present-day Danish society. In contrast, they present the behaviour in Danish families as superior and as supportive of the educational goals of the schools: the formation of a 'balanced' personality, socially responsible and well behaved – self-development within boundaries, and education of children into social persons.

Teaching the 'right' behaviour is always a struggle, but dealing with resistance is particularly difficult when teachers try to conform to contemporary 'civilised' standards of interaction. Today, raising children in a 'civilised' way implies that adults have to consider the child's emotions and they have to respect the individual child's personality. Authoritarian treatment and the use of violence are no longer permitted. Danish

pedagogues hate to manifest power and they feel ashamed when they nevertheless have to play the bogeyman and to intervene authoritatively. They defend such interventions by saying that these 'troublemakers' ask too much of their attention and that they impede the teaching of other children.

But are these rational arguments the whole story? Just like Norbert Elias, the authors see 'civilising' norms as a function of the dynamics of the figurations that people form with each other. The behavioural forms which teachers propagate in the class room also reflect and mediate more general ideas about 'civilisation' in Danish society. The hierarchy between groups in the 'difficult class' corresponds to the power relations in wider society. The dividing line between the two groups, the 'good' and the 'bad', often follows ethnic lines. The researchers demonstrate very clearly how the children with a Danish family history are constructed as 'the established' children, while the foreigner, immigrant or Muslim boys become 'the outsiders', with the foreign girls acquiring a position in the middle.

It is distressing to see how the expectations of the teachers about their students function as self-fulfilling prophecies, reflected in school results and extending to the behaviour and identifications of the difficult boys. The teachers do not succeed in teaching them their world-oriented ideals, like universal tolerance and egalitarianism. The interactions in the school class are a sad example of the dynamics of 'civilisation offensives', of inclusion and exclusion, of integration and distinction, resulting in the failure to integrate children from different backgrounds in democratic and egalitarian institutions.

The researchers see the 'civilisation project' in child care centres and in schools as part of more informal relations between adults and children, social classes and genders, and as promoting this informalisation. The habitus formation that is described in *Children of the Welfare State* is partly specific for Danish society in the second half of the twentieth century and the first decades of the twenty-first century; the researchers assume that the sociogenesis of this more sensitive approach to children by their educators is related to the experience of the two world wars and to the establishment of the Danish welfare state, but they do not articulate this connection.

The book ends with some bleak considerations about contemporary Danish society. The authors observe changes in global interdependencies, an increase in the fear of immigration, global competition, terror and polarisation. They note a decrease in trust in the 'civilised' behaviour of others, going together with processes of formalisation, with more external control and more surveillance, and with nationalism. They even speak of a decivilising spurt and they wonder if this is a minor fluctuation or a substantial shift in the balance between self-constraint and external control. At school, such developments go together with more emphasis on academic skills and on Danish history and culture, while integration of immigrant children within Danish society has become both a problem and an important objective. The same has happened in other European countries.

The merit of *Children of the Welfare State* is that the book gives a detailed and vivid account of the working of a civilising offensive, and relates daily practices in the class room to large-scale social changes. This connection could be theoretically further elaborated, but the research material is rich, it tickles the imagination, and it raises many interesting questions. One of those questions points to the paradox of civilising: to the complicated relationship between 'civilisation' and 'distinction', between integration and segregation, between inclusion and exclusion, in a society in which social inequality is increasing.

Norbert Elias's Lost Research: Revisiting the Young Worker Project

John Goodwin and Henrietta O'Connor
Farnham: Ashgate, 2015, £70.00 hbk, ISBN:
9781409404668
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This brilliant and fascinating book draws on a wealth of empirical material in opening up a 'new' aspect of Norbert Elias's contribution to sociology that was, quite literally, assumed lost forever: youth studies and school to work transitions. The discovery of original data collected 40 years earlier by Elias's team of researchers during an ill-fated, 'long lost' research project – the *Adjustment of Young Workers to Work Situations and Adult roles* – represents an extraordinary sociological find with the potential to make a huge contribution to our understanding of youth transitions, both historical and contemporary.

The failed project centred on interviews with over 850 young school leavers in Leicester in the UK in the early 1960s. The research explored their school to work transitions and the subsequent adjustments they made in adapting to shifting labour markets. Remarkably, not only have Goodwin and O'Connor painstakingly re-assembled and analysed that dataset, they also managed to trace 100 of the original participants of the research and re-interviewed them some 40 years on, providing for a truly unique longitudinal insight.

The book makes a significant contribution on several levels: empirical, historical, methodological and also theoretical. The latter through the exposition of Elias's little known 'shock hypothesis' on the problems young people face in adjusting to adult life. Beyond that wide ranging contribution *Norbert Elias's Lost Research* is simply a fascinating read – a trip back in time packed full of sociological insights (on consumption, friendships, aspirations etc.), many with the potential to be developed and explored further, which Goodwin and O'Connor invite.

The text resonates loudly with contemporary debates on intergenerational disadvantage, the stigmatisation of youth and notions of a youth in crisis, exemplified by growing concerns around youth mental health and well-being, which some would deem to be at 'crisis' level. The data also shed empirical light on a wealth of historical questions around school experiences, family relations, individualisation, youth leisure and consumption, gender relations and informal employment access in the 1960s. Yet the book offers even more through a fascinating inside account of the Leicester Department of Sociology in the 1960s. The authors draw on research team correspondence and documentation from the fated project which offers a rare insight into research management in that era (how times have changed!) on what was a sizeable grant from the Department for Social and Industrial Research (DSIR) – a forerunner of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). That information (e.g. minutes of meetings and letters between Elias and the team) is treated with sensitivity and caution but does provide a window into the workings of the research team and the ongoing disputes between Elias and the researchers, one of whom was a young Anthony Giddens. The fallout within the team is suggested as a key factor in the project's failure, in the research remaining 'lost', and perhaps in damaging Elias's reputation within British sociology, though that reputation has only grown since.

The scale and scope of the book captures the enormity and ambition of the project and the massive potential the dataset offers. In this regard the book makes a particularly important methodological contribution and situates its approach alongside a handful of other similar longitudinal studies (e.g. Laub and Sampson, 2003). Indeed the breadth and depth of the data is such that Goodwin and O'Connor acknowledge that they have merely 'scratched the surface' in terms of their analysis. 'For Elias, the research could not simply focus on young people's move from school to work but had to encapsulate the entirety of their experiences' (p. 32). This is a hugely challenging endeavour and in 1962 must have appeared particularly demanding to the research team, when one considers that this notion is still today considered quite ground-breaking.

The challenge 'to learn the "behavioural standards" of adulthood' is a recurring theme and is evident in contemporary concerns today – reflected in notions of 'youth transitions', 'Generation Rent' and the pernicious concept of 'employability'. Elias was somewhat ahead of the game: 'The more complex a society, the more complex this process of transition to adulthood or the learning of adult norms becomes' (p. 36). The notion of shock and the limited preparation for the world of work provide a fruitful avenue in developing our understanding of contemporary youth transitions, which for some groups are particularly painful and are marked by uncertainty, trauma, anxiety and fear. In this regard, Goodwin and O'Connor further Elias's 'workable synthesis' and its relevance today. The conceptual underpinnings of the lost project, and indeed of this book, are characteristically consistent with Elias's conceptual thinking and the project is situated neatly within his writings on 'The civilising of parents' (in *Essays II* of the collected works, University College Dublin Press) and *On the Process of Civilisation*.

The book brings together previously published research by Goodwin and O'Connor over the last 15 years or so with new material and challenges some of the taken for granted assumptions of the 1960s. For example, the widely held view that transitions from school to work were straightforward in the 1960s is problematised by explicating the non-linear moves of those in the sample; and the wealth of historical data questions the notion of the 'Swinging Sixties' as all pervasive within British society; Leicester seems largely unmoved by early "Beatlemania" for instance. The text is packed with such historical, empirical challenges to contemporary thinking.

The book is structured around eight chapters, book-ended by an Introduction and Reflections. An attempt to 'conclude' is rightly avoided and instead the authors reflect on the future possibilities from this 'never ending story'. Chapter 1 details the origins of the project, as well as the controversies and conflicts that dogged it, providing a rare window into the functioning of the (at times arguably dysfunctional) research team. Chapter 2 presents Elias's theory on the 'shock hypothesis', providing the first critical engagement with this framework, one which contemporary scholars of youth transitions would be foolish to ignore. The second chapter also provides an explanation for the ultimate failure of the project which rests on the 'conflict of ideas' – an indication of the huge demands of Elias's figurational sociology for those unfamiliar with the approach. Chapter 3 makes a significant contribution to the history of social research through a rare analysis of the field notes of researchers from the early 1960s, which reveals class and gender bias and illustrates how far debates on reflexivity have actually advanced since then. Chapters 4–6 focus on the empirical material from the 1960s project and make for compelling reading as the reader is seemingly transported back in time. I found myself immersed in this material which not only provides fascinating historical insights but also raises many questions, both historical and contemporary.

Chapter 4 centres on the complexity of transitions and provides a much-needed critique of some contemporary research in this area. The presentation of material is also sensitive to the geographical and labour market context within Leicester. Chapter 5 details the gendered nature of transitions and questions the extent of occupational segregation along gender lines, at least for those young people whose aspirations were thwarted: boys and girls towards the lower end of the labour market often ended up in similar roles in 1960s Leicester. Chapter 6 focuses on youth culture and leisure in the 1960s and discusses how young people spent their time and money, their level of independence (or not) and provides a remarkable contrast with today's youth experience. The fact that the historical data covers so much ground is testament to the original project and its commitment to understanding young people 'in the round'. Chapters 7 and 8 present the primary data collected by Goodwin and O'Connor from the sample they re-interviewed 40 years later. Chapter 7 asks what happened to the young workers , while Chapter 8 follows the careers of 10 women from the study and provides detailed life histories, which again challenges conventional wisdom on the nature of employment shifts since the 1960s.

There is so much in this book that it is not possible here to do justice to the empirical and methodological depth it offers. It showcases some outstanding scholarship and methodological innovation and will be of interest to social scientists across disciplines but particularly those interested in youth studies, 1960s youth culture, labour market studies, gender relations and historical and qualitative methodologies. The book, and the areas of inquiry it opens up, also provides further ammunition with which to disseminate Elias's neglected approach and to articulate the contemporary relevance of his theorizing. More broadly, I would recommend this book to anyone with an interest in the development of Higher Education, research practice, reflexivity and longitudinal analysis. Ultimately, the book highlights the need for more social research which follows this long-term perspective of re-visiting past datasets. Challenging as that may be, the important contributions showcased within this book suggest that such endeavours would certainly prove very worthwhile for our understanding of both historical and contemporary society.