

PAPER 2

Field and Distinction

- social space and inequality from the perspective of Bourdieu

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Abstract

This paper is the second in the series of fourteen electronic publications about the Danish research project “Action competences in pedagogical work with socially endangered children and youths – effort and effect” (The ASP-project).

Danish research has pointed to a number of explanations when understanding socially endangered children. The background of this paper is the ASP-project and the paper serves to pin down selected aspects of relevance for the project. Among others, it emphasizes how the theory of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu enhances our empirical understanding, and it presents the problem of selection in day-care and primary school, which is further developed by approaching the issue with Bourdieu’s theoretical basic concepts, in particular symbolic capital, habitus and distinction, field and linguistic habitus.

The paper draws on existing research in schools and in particular day-care institutions as the primary focus. By the use of “La Distinction” a model of social space is demonstrated and later combined with the spaces of life styles. The argumentation underlines that life style has nothing in common with free choice, since it is tied to groups and collectives who demonstrate their dissociation from other groups and collectives. Thus, the overall struggle is one of a ‘right and wrong world view’. The space of life style is thus a symbolic expression of the social space. Moreover, the author discusses the basic concepts of Bourdieu’s theory in relation to the central concept of field. Bourdieu has done much research in fields like school, science, fashion, political power, economy, media and art, but never in day-care institutions. The paper discusses the importance of linguistic capital, which is a rather important part of any communication and education. In a Danish context, linguistic screening (of for example immigrant children in day-care and school) plays an enormous role, wherefore the research project found it necessary to deal – at least theoretically – with that matter.

This paper contributes to the ASP-project by shedding light on the unintended effects of the everyday pedagogical practice in relation to the problem of social exclusion, which is implicit in the overall problem of social inheritance and social inequality defined in the project. The author’s suggestions for inclusive aspects in the ASP-intervention are based on this Bourdieu-inspired theoretical approach. To a higher degree than is the case today, the professionals are invited to become aware of their own role, the impact of the social space and the child’s position as well as the implicit exclusion mechanisms in the institutional life.