Time and Temporality in Danish Elementary Schools

This paper is based on an on-going ethnographic study on the temporality of children’s every day lives in the Danish public elementary school - ‘folkeskolen’. By micro-analytical explorations of schooling through the lens of time, the study sets out to shed (new) light onto aspects of institutional norms and socialization within formal education. The overall research questions are; how- and with which logics and practices are children’s’ lives in Danish public schools organized temporally, and how do children experience, make sense of- and act in relation to temporal norms in schools? These are questions constructed with assumptions and priorities given to temporality as a multi-dimensional analytical category (Zerubavel 1979, Elias 1992, Flaherty 2011), as well as an emphasis on children’s experiences and practices (James et al., 2005). The empirical anchor of the case study consists of five months of fieldwork in two elementary schools, located in socio-demographically different suburban areas outside the Danish capital, Copenhagen. Children - in this setting conceptualized as ‘students’ - at grade 1, 6 and 9 are followed throughout their schooldays. In doing so, the study does not rely on a certain age, but makes use of the institutional division of age in western formal education as a way of creating methodological contrasts and reflections (Bourdieu 1978, Christensen & James, 2000:161). The study relies predominantly on qualitative ethnographic approaches, with the use of participant observations, conversations and interviews with children and teachers, photos taken by children and researcher, and children’s drawings and timetables. The presentation highlights methodological reflections and empirical examples from an on-going fieldwork, related to the pursuit and challenges of grasping multiple institutional temporalities as situated cultural norms and practices.