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A Gift or a Challenge?

Establishing collaboration between teachers and researchers

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A gift or a challenge?

Establishing collaboration between teachers and researchers

By David Mehlsen & Raffaele Brahe-Orlandi

Abstract

Our paper works with the empirical material through the lens of different anthropological theories of how relations are established or denied. Working from seminal contributions on the gift (fx. Mauss, 2014), we examine how our invitation to collaborate was at times perceived as a welcomed gift, thus establishing collaborative bonds. At other times, the demands put on the schools through the sheer complexity of our project and its aims for radical pedagogical transformation, instead shaped unintended interpretations of our project as a challenge more than a gift.

Yet, in the negotiations after the denial of these initial attempts to shape bonds, other more concrete gifts or challenges circulated too. Coffee, chicken/bacon sandwiches, or even complaints of the lack of direct monetary compensation were brought up. In these mundane, yet complex and multi-faceted exchanges, inspired by Bourdieu, we discuss how a more strategic feel of gifts and challenges comes up in the material, as both practitioners and researchers alike (sub)consciously worked with different positions vis-a-vis the counterpart (Bourdieu, 1977).

27th of October 2022, based on fieldnotes by Raffaele

It was a warm autumn day. Me and David got on the train together, still a bit tired because of the departure time early in the morning. We were heading towards a town in Western Jutland, known for both its conservative politics, but also for being one of the most progressive in expanding on technological climate solutions. Seemingly a great fit for our current research and development project, GreenEdTech, which we spent the travelling time discussing.

In GreenEdTech, the ambition is to create a digital platform with citizen science educational materials on sustainability and green transition. First, we discussed how the platform could allow the schools to collaborate with external partners such as local companies, municipalities or NGO's that could provide authentic sustainability cases for the pupils to grapple with - a key feature of the citizen science approach that we wanted to pursue. And how could we make the materials truly interdisciplinary?

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Another challenge was to get schools onboard to test and help us develop the materials along the way. The platform was to be co-designed with 15 public schools with students from 7th to 10th grade participating. Our trip was part of this quest, as we were going to visit a resource center for local schools. The aim was to establish a good relationship with Sune and Mads who run the place, so we could use their local knowledge to contact schools in the area, and possibly their facilities. I felt my identity to be somewhere in between a researcher and a travelling salesman.

Nevertheless, it had been a while since I had left the city, so I also felt relief driving into the open rural landscapes, all covered in the beautiful red, brown, and yellow autumn colors. Upon arrival, we walked on foot until we reached the center. Here, we were welcomed by Sune and Mads. The place was a lot bigger than expected. It was part of a community with different smaller start-ups and offices for small businesses. There was a fully equipped makerspace, spacious rooms with workshop-like tables and highchairs.

Mads offered us a Pepsi before we were shown around. Both Sune and Mads were educated science teachers, and a couple of years ago, they got involved in developing pedagogical designs and integrating digital media tools into subject learning in schools. After a couple of years, they received funding money to build the learning embassy, and since then they have worked with giving courses and having workshops with teachers and students from public schools in the municipality.

The place reeked of the entrepreneurial spirit and the hard-working ethics which Western Jutland is known for. With pride in their voices, they pointed towards a hydroponic garden outside, continuing to show us their laser-cutters, before explaining how they recycled off-cuts from tree production. A vague smell of burned wood was evident. Their rundown was indeed impressive, but after an hour of guided tour, I started to be a little impatient.

We still hadn't had the chance to present our own project when we returned to the main workshop-room. Here, Mads pulled out a couple of sandwiches from the local bakery, as he politely said, "I figured that you would be hungry after the long train drive. There are both chicken and bacon sandwiches, and bacon and chicken sandwiches" he finally laughed. Sune followed up with what happened to be a joke, "I hope you are not Muslims!"

I looked at David, and both of us seemed not to know how to react to this statement. Possibly noticing our slight delay in response, Sune continued saying that he didn't hope we were vegans,

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before explaining that they had visitors some weeks ago who refused to eat the meat dishes at a meeting because of their vegetarianism.

“We really do have a lot of meat around here,” Mads added as if this statement explained the situation. Being an area with approximately 70 percent of the land used for agriculture; meat is a fundamental part of the local culture. In a Danish context, vegetarian food is often seen as a status symbol which underlines an increasing divide between rural agricultural areas and urban larger cities like Copenhagen and Aarhus, where David and I reside. Implicitly, this also touches on the question of how to achieve the aims of green transition, and what kind of role the agricultural system would play in it.

I knew for a fact that David is a vegetarian, but I also know that he *does* eat meat if there isn't any other option. I could see David weighing his options for a brief second before grabbing one of the sandwiches, not saying anything about his food preferences. I felt a little bit more self-aware now, noticing that both me and David wore bright-colored sneakers in red and green. Had they read our shoes as flashy symbols of urban fashion lifestyle? They had seemed very keen on proving that their local practices were valid.

Symbols of urban vs. rural Denmark seemed to proliferate throughout the room now, along with obvious differences in values and culture. However, as we hadn't had the chance to present our project properly yet, David and I started taking turns explaining how the project was funded with a total budget of 40.000.000 Danish crowns (app. 5.368.000 Euros) and which partners formed part of our consortium. We unfolded the visions of working with authentic problem-solving, interdisciplinarity, digital materials and citizen science.

Both Sune and Mads seemed to shoot down most of our ambitions rather quickly, mostly due to practical circumstances. Further, they already collaborated with external partners and schools on sustainability issues at the center. The calculation seemed to be straight-forward. Why would they need a 40.000.000 crowns national project like GreenEdTech to do the same as they already did locally? For a short while, it felt like we had either offended them, or appeared as two well-off researchers living detached from reality.

I tried to talk about interdisciplinarity across boundaries between the humanities and the natural sciences, but it also turned out to be problematic. Both me and David have backgrounds in the humanities, me being an educational researcher and Danish teacher, and him as an anthropologist.

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As such we provided another anti-thesis to the obviously skilled science teachers which we were talking to.

As a last resort, I turned to “Bildung” as a concept and unfolded how I thought pupils should learn competences for our common future with focus on democratic and action-oriented skills and values. Here, we found common ground it seemed, now giving examples of how our different practices aligned.

After a couple of minutes in this mode of conversation, we asked if Sune and Mads could possibly provide a link to some of the public schools and suggest some specific ones to pursue. They provided us with contact information for certain teachers who they knew would possibly be interested, before offering that we could borrow their facilities for meetings if we needed any place to stay if we were in town again.

David said that it would be a great feature if we could have Sune and Mads alongside us when we collaborated with the schools, as they were already great at carrying out some of the external collaborations which we wanted to explore in our project. I offered that they could come to VIA and make use of our facilities too. As Sune had to leave to pick up his children, we wrapped up the conversation with Mads before returning to the station. Here we had a chat about how the meeting had evolved.

Returning to one of the more peculiar details of our meeting David said, “I really felt that I HAD to eat that sandwich. The whole thing reminded me of some kind of ceremonious exchange of gifts! There are these classical anthropological theories on gifts and exchanges, which state that the gift functions to establish bonds between different, often competing, groups. If you deny the gift, for example the sandwich, you deny the relation. However, while the gift can indeed establish bonds, it also manifests as a play of honor,” he told me, as he unfolded some of his theoretical background.

We both laughed about the gift-metaphor used as a lens to see our meeting with Sune and Mads through - as some kind of ceremonious exchange of gifts to establish bonds and fighting about honor between two competing tribes. On my side, I came to think of practice learning theory where learning happens in the complex field of positioning oneself and each other, negotiations of meaning, values and actions to take – and in the end about adding to one's preferred identity narrative.

Analytical intermezzo #1 - Back to the gift

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As we continued to meet up with more practitioners during the following months, we kept returning to the idea of the gift as an analytical focal point, reading up on the literature. We started with Marcel Mauss, who wrote the seminal *Essai sur le don*, often just abbreviated to *The Gift* in English (Mauss 2014). Mauss raised the question which had also touched David, when he was offered the chicken and bacon sandwich at the resource center, even if he in principle did not eat meat. *How come you feel obliged to participate in the exchange of gifts?*

Mauss, who mainly studied smaller state-less societies, argued that while the gift initially seems voluntary, it is obligatory and necessary, if you want to avoid war and hostility. Thus, there is an obligation in gift exchanges to give, receive and reciprocate. However, both a minor time delay and a difference in the object given is also essential for a proper exchange to be carried out. Denying the gift *denies* the bond, while accepting the gift *establishes* bonds.

Further, the gift doesn't just function because of its use-value, but because of its larger symbolic value, which reaches far beyond its sheer use. Mauss even claimed that the gift is a total social fact, and that it reached into all aspects of societies, power and status included. Could we use this theory to explain how we had tried to establish bonds with Sune and Mads?

We could read that Levi-Strauss' backed him up with the insight that "goods are not only economic commodities, but vehicles and instruments for realities of another order, such as power, influence, sympathy, status and emotion" (Lévi-Strauss 1969:54). However, this was also the case in Western culture, where exchanges can help 'domesticate the relation to a stranger' (ibid.: 59). Was the sandwich a way to domesticate the relation between us, bridging gaps between our different politics, thus forcing David to accept if we wanted to establish a bond?

Other scholars pointed towards the fact that there are other moral grounds for establishing relation other than gift exchange per se. Possibly, the sandwich could also only have functioned as an example of what Graeber names *baseline communism*, where people give away their help, things and more, just because the need is great enough, or the cost is low enough. In contrast to gift exchange baseline communism "never extends to anything", as no debt is established in this moral ground for establishing relations between two parties which are often allies before-hand (Graeber 2014:69–70).

Nonetheless, briefly after the sandwich situation, we started to exchange courtesies as the conversation took a turn towards the Bildung-oriented approach. Here, we started to one-up each

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other on hospitality, offering locales, facilities and more to each other, if we were visiting Aarhus or Western Jutland again soon. Certainly, the situation seemed livelier and more dynamic at this point, and we managed to establish a trust-worthy relation. Here, the situation resembled a more traditional exchange situation a la Mauss, establishing relations between two competing groups, even if the proposed necessary time intervals between our exchanges weren't present.

However, it didn't really feel like the above-mentioned theories had captured all the dynamics of identity building and power embedded in the situation. Working through our field notes from other meetings with practitioners, we found plenty of examples of exchange situations allowing for further analysis and identification of patterns throughout the collected material.

The 9th of November 2022, based on fieldnotes by David

Arriving directly from 7-eleven with a to-go cup of coffee in my hand, I jumped on the train towards a suburban city in the middle of Jutland, Denmark. It was a beautifully bright autumn day as the sunlight spread throughout the cabins together with the scent of the coffee that I held in my hand. With a small bump, the train set in motion.

I had recently landed my first job after ending my studies at the anthropology department at Aarhus University. Here, I was to convince schools throughout Denmark to participate in the national research- and development project, GreenEdTech, where schools and local external actors were to co-design authentic sustainability challenges to use on a new digital learning platform.

Taking on the task, I was very aware that the Danish schools were both time-crunched and economically under pressure. Now on my way to one of my first visits to an actual school I couldn't tell whether I had been drinking too much coffee, or if I started to be a little anxious. Raffaele and I had a quite odd experience when we visited a resource center a couple of weeks earlier, so I wasn't quite sure what to expect.

Going through my slides that I had prepared for the occasion calmed me down a little. The budget for our project was around 40.000.000 kroner, an amount I figured would serve as a great way to highlight the resources available in our project and the ambitions connected to it. Further, who wouldn't be interested in improving teaching for sustainability? What subject could be more important for the pupils of today? I knew little about that what I expected was a generous offer from

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our side to participate in a prestigious research project on sustainability, could be interpreted and complicated in a multitude of different ways during my upcoming visits to different schools.

After a little less than an hour of travel, I arrived at my destination. As I stepped out, the smell of wet soil and an unusually warm breeze compared to the normal weather conditions in November, hit me. Located in a rural-suburban setting in the middle of Jutland, this town is known for having a large national company located in their local environment - which also happened to be one of the collaborators in our project. I figured that this school could be a low-hanging fruit recruitment wise, as we could provide them with a local company to collaborate with from the start.

When I arrived at the school and met one of the leaders of the school department that we were to collaborate with, I was told that the meeting was moved to a different part of town, where another department of the school was located. Margaret, as she introduced herself, offered me a ride there. At the other department, I was offered a cup of coffee as we waited for the vice-leader of the school, Mikkel, to show up. They really seemed busy, I noticed. Finally, we all settled down in a meeting room and I started my presentation on GreenEdTech.

I went through the structure and key themes of our project. I then told them that the project entailed 2-3 workshops on sustainability, entrepreneurship education and more for the teachers. These would function as a competence boost. Afterwards, I told them that the educational materials were free and that they were to be tested in practice by their teachers after these workshops.

As we have just recently launched the project, some parts of it were still rather unclear. Thus, when describing the project, I often retrieved into general statements such as “we want to have some continuity over time in the project, so that we can follow the progression of the students”. As I talked, I spent equally as much time noticing how my presentation was received, jotting down small notes on my observations. What I saw wasn’t quite uplifting.

Margaret gazed indifferently at her note-block, while Mikkel frowned almost as if to underline that my points didn’t really seem to be that clear. After finishing my last slide, a few seconds of silence followed, before Margaret asked “so... what are the teachers actually supposed to do in your project?”

I tried to sketch out some examples of the still rather loose course modules that we had discussed in the project. Was I out talking with the schools far too early in the project, I wondered? Pointing out the overall visions and ambitions of the project seemed to arouse their interest.

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However, the concrete links between their current practice and our project seemed to be vague. What were they receiving if they accepted our “gift” and thus to participate, and what kind of demands would that put on them? What kind of obligations would it entail participating in this exchange with us?

Mikkel raised a new concern, “The thing that differentiates us among the other schools here in the area, is that we are usually the first ones to be contacted by research projects like yours, because of our large local company here. As such, we get a lot of offers. And we have done a fair amount of work with the natural sciences and innovation through engaging with them. We have done a lot of modules with the company too, so we are already quite full on that. So, my question to you is, what is it exactly that differentiates your research project from the others?”

It then dawned on me. Why would one accept a gift if you already have the thing gifted to you? I had already played some of the cards that I considered to be the strongest in making GreenEdTech stand out: authentic problem-solving, external collaboration with local actors, interdisciplinarity and more. Now, I started to wonder if I had blown it. I desperately juggled around with a few more insights about our project. As a side-comment, I told them that we also had teacher experts in Danish, social sciences, and history on board in the project. Luckily, this caught Mikkel’s attention.

“It could be quite interesting if we could include the humanities more. It is always the teachers from the natural sciences who participate in these kinds of sustainability projects. I would also like to give the teachers from the social sciences the opportunity to work with these things” he said while his voice and body language opened.

Our project in GreenEdTech also works across the arts, however, green transition and sustainability is often connected to exactly the natural sciences and innovative technological solutions, in a Danish context. When I told Mikkel and Margaret about interdisciplinarity, they presupposed that it was among the subjects in the natural scientific domains. Here was my chance, I thought, and continued to elaborate on the ways in which we could contribute with a more social science-based approach.

A new spark lit up in the eyes of them both it seemed. Now, Mikkel caught on to some of the elements that I had already laid out before, but which didn’t seem to have caught his and Margaret’s attention in the first place. “I also like the part about getting the students motivated from within. That the move towards green transition is something that comes from *them*”. It started to be clear

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what I was offering them, and regardless of my vague attempts to flesh out the demands that our project would put on them, they wanted more of what they were hearing about.

I continued with a few insights from Raffaele's Ph.D.-project, which emphasizes a student-centered approach to education (Brahe-Orlandi 2019). The relation was alive, it seemed as Mikkel started to conclude and wrap up the meeting. As a last question, he asked whether the school would be compensated for having to buy out the teachers from normal teaching activities for the workshops in our project. As briefed by the project, I told them that this wasn't the case. "Alright, yeah, I didn't expect that either," Mikkel said before asking what the next step would be. He would like to see if we could include the humanities in the project and re-design a certain course for them.

We agreed on another meeting with Raffaele and some of the teacher educators from the humanities groups, if I could get positive feedback on the idea of a more-humanities based course. On my way back home on the train, I kept thinking in the lines of exchange theory.

Analytical intermezzo #2 - Strategy and misreadings

Back home at VIA, we started to search for theories that could unravel more of the patterns that we observed. Here, Bourdieu helped us with his critique of the rather mechanical and objectivist models of exchange which anthropological theory has often offered (Bourdieu 1977). These models do not account for the fact that individuals also act with a sense of agency in exchange situations, he argues. For Bourdieu, they are strategic plays of honor and status, and it is in the time delay between the reciprocation that these tactics are unfolded.

The exchange situation as such is also about having a feel for the game which is unfolding before you. While there isn't much time to play out your tactical feel when you only have 1-hour long meetings with practitioners you have never met before. We were drawn to Bourdieu's insights in the way that these meetings were also inherently strategic in nature, without it being an explicitly stated thing. Even if this also denied some of the fundamental logics of gift exchange.

Bourdieu argues that a premise for exchange situations is that "the agents must not be entirely unaware of the truth of their exchanges, which is made explicit in the anthropologist's model, while at the same time, they must refuse to know and above all to recognize it" (ibid.: 6). In short, the agents are aware of these tactics, but do not explicitly acknowledge it. This transforms the logic of

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the gift, as Bourdieu moves gift exchange theory from a mechanical ‘rule of honor’ to a practice-oriented ‘sense of honor’ (ibid.: 11).

For example, Mikkel moved strategically towards the humanities as we exchanged ideas, hereafter highlighting the learner-centered perspective, as he saw the need for these elements at his school. Reversely, it didn’t make strategic sense for Mikkel to accept our gift up-front before we included this perspective. As they were already collaborating with the local partner on sustainability issues, the gift - participating in our project that is - seemed of little value, and he would rather deny the bond.

However, we both seemed to act strategically; moving the situation towards a traditional bargaining situation, where we sought a perceived equality in value between the things exchanged. According to classic gift exchange theorists such as Bourdieu and Mauss, mere bargaining without the in-between time interval, would deny the relation. Yet, it felt like we were reaching exactly a new bond here.

At this meeting we also realized that the gift can also be susceptible to failure and misreadings. The exchange receives its meaning through the response of the recipients according to Bourdieu (ibid.: 5). Re-reading this, it became evident to us, that we had to account for the fact that our “gift”, participation in our project that is, could be misinterpreted or be received differently from what we had expected.

For example, Both Mikkel and Margaret seemed to wave-off my initial attempts to establish a bond, as the resemblance with other collaborations and natural science projects was too big. They had read GreenEdTech as a merely natural science project due to normative cultural understandings of sustainability teaching. In hindsight, it seems obvious that the project wasn’t laid out exactly clearly due to the recent initial start-up, which made it particularly easy to misread. This initially seemed to make the whole exchange situation rather murky and complicated, thus providing us with very poor chances of establishing bonds.

As we re-read the fieldnotes from the follow-up meeting, it also became evident that exactly the notion of status played an even bigger role than what we had expected. Furthermore, a new object seemed to enter our exchange spheres: money.

4th of January 2023, fieldnotes by David

Almost two months later, we held another meeting with the school, and this time both Raffaele and I travelled together. Two teachers participated in this session as well, Mathilda and Annika. We had cleared up the idea of creating a more humanities-based course for our platform together with this school. Once again, I started with the more structural framework for our platform, presenting the partners, how we are funded through Innovation Fund Denmark, again pointing out the budget of 40.000.000 crowns. I had considered leaving this last bit of information out, as I felt it positioned us disproportionately high in status but decided to keep it. Maybe it could give us a strong vantage point for negotiating, I had reasoned.

Me and Raffaele then took turns in presenting ourselves before I once again went through our themes and the tentative time plan for the project. As the platform was supposed to be developed on the workshops together with the collaborating schools, we couldn't present a fully developed module, and instead decided to present a fictive case on sustainability and commercials, linking ideas of sustainability to the ideas in Raffaele's PhD (Brahe-Orlandi 2019) which I had success with at the last meeting.

After going through our case, a short exchange of both positive feedback and critique was carried out. Mikkel raised a concern as to whether the teachers would get the chance to prepare the subjects beforehand, but then continued to acknowledge how the project sought to anchor the learning experience in the pupils themselves and their own concerns. The two teachers, Mathilda and Annika, asked a couple of questions about the compatibility of the platform with some of their current digital resources.

Hereafter, we continued a longer dialogue on citizen science and how to stimulate the pupils' action competencies in sustainability teaching. The dialogue felt dynamic and inspiring, and I had the feeling that we were moving towards a possible agreement on their participation in our project. Then Mathilda, as a side note, asked about economic compensation in the project.

I had already advised Mikkel about there being no economic compensation for the teachers to be bought free to participate in the workshops in our project on our first meeting. Apparently, that message hadn't been passed on to the teachers who really seemed to take this fact as an offense.

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In the blink of an eye, the temperature seemed to drop even further in the already cold room, as the heating was off due to the energy crisis caused by the Ukraine war.

A few seconds of silence and awkwardly looking around followed. Mikkel attempted to move the conversation along as he argued that it was a question of prioritization for the teachers. Raffaele caught his cue and ventured into a presentation of some of the key findings in his PhD. Raffaele's remarks seemed to cool off the tension a little bit more.

However, it seemed like we were trying to exchange in two different and non-interchangeable currencies here, and as the meeting proceeded towards the end, the conversation ended up at exactly the lack of economic compensation once again. Here, Mathilda used irony and teased us, asking whether we had taken all the money ourselves, pointing towards the screen where our slides with the budget numbers were still on display. I should have left those numbers out, I thought to myself.

For the non-Danish readers, it must be explained that the Danish public schools have been the subject of a lot of large political reforms throughout the last 10 years, which has been critiqued a lot by the teachers themselves. In 2013 a conflict between the state and the teachers even culminated in a lock-out by the state during collective agreement negotiations. In the brief awkward moments here in the meeting room, I recalled how I during that year had seen a group of teachers boo the current Danish prime minister from the Social Democratic Party during her 1st of May speech.

Not only did I feel like our project fed into the discourse of teachers feeling underprioritized. I also got the sense that our budget numbers signified us talking from a higher status than them, in the eyes of Mathilda at this point of the conversation, I started to feel very self-conscious. As we moved along using this irony-laden tone for a while, I briefly noticed that Annika glanced at my brand-new Garmin sports watch that I bought for some of my first salary money. "What am I actually expressing with my outfit?" I thought to myself, with a slight *deja-vu* to our experience at the resource center some months earlier.

"If you had told us that our teachers could be compensated from the get-go, we would probably just have said yes," Annika said.

"So", Raffaele responded, "Is it money to buy free the teachers from teaching on workshop days, or what is it exactly that you want to use the money for?" he asked curiously.

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“What we would need the money for is to buy the teachers some time for the workshops, but also extra preparation for these new materials. But I am aware that we also must fund some of this ourselves, when we participate in these projects”, Mikkel continued, trying to strategically mend the wounds between the project, which he apparently saw as a chance to give his teachers a competence boost towards integrating sustainability in classes.

“Okay, so let’s say we showed up with 50.000 kroner for example. What could you get for that kind of money?” Raffaele continued.

We then ventured into a more complex calculation that ended up with the conclusion that it would cost 50.000 kroner to buy free five teachers for one whole day. The dust seemed to settle as we concluded the meeting, until Mathilda teased us once again, saying that she was surprised to hear that we were going by train and didn’t have our own cars. I followed up with another joke; that we had parked our two new Audis further down the street, so that they couldn’t see them from the school grounds. I really tried to level out the perceived inequality in status with humor, which seemed to be the language Mathilda used.

As we put on our clothes, we had a brief talk about how it had become increasingly difficult for schools to participate in these kinds of projects. Mikkel looked at Mathilda and Annika, jokingly saying that his teacher staff sometimes seemed 10 years too old. As they simply didn’t have the resources to let the teachers receive input and competence boosts on workshops during workdays, the competencies would soon be outdated, he mourned. The conversation discreetly hinted at the political reforms without it being mentioned directly.

Already on the way home in the train towards Aarhus, me and Raffaele realized that we were probably going to have to fight for compensation from our main funder (Innovation Fund Denmark), as money seemed to talk. Half a year after this meeting, after meeting several other schools where the same scenarios played out, we reached an agreement between the project partners, so that the schools could be compensated.

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Analytical intermezzo 3# - Power and politics

Comparing this example with the previous two ethnographic vignettes, status popped up as an important factor once again. Our budget and the lack of compensation seemed to put us in an unproductive position, where we rather seemed to insult than collaborate with the practitioners. In short, it felt like we challenged them, rather than gifting them with our insights in the project.

Returning to Bourdieu, we found another important insight, in that the tactical practice-oriented sense is not only unfolded in the game of both gifts, but also challenges. These are two sides of the same coin. Bourdieu highlights the fact that both challenges and gifts, for both parties to engage in them without dishonoring oneself, must be carried out between actors with equal status. As he puts it:

“The gift is a challenge which honors the man to whom it is addressed, at the same time putting his point of honor (nif) to the test; consequently, just as to insult a man incapable of riposting dishonors oneself, so to make a present so great that it cannot be matched merely dishonors the giver. A gift or challenge is a provocation, a provocation to reply” (Bourdieu 1977:12)

As such, challenging a person in lower status than yourself also paves way for dishonoring yourself. As already mentioned, the gift can also be susceptible to misreading and only receives its meaning through the response it receives. The budget numbers evidently positioned us high up in a hierarchical situation where we didn't intend to be. As Mathilda used her sense of humor, she implicitly highlighted the dishonor that fell upon us for putting on a challenge on actors with a lower status than ourselves.

Yet, something peculiar had also happened to the objects of exchange. While we earlier indeed showed how exchanges of both ideas, words and sandwiches can function as subtle ways to establish or cut bonds between researchers and practitioners across different settings, now money had entered the conversation. And we fell short. The search to explain this new insight continued in the literature.

Concerning the function of money, we then stumbled upon Paul Bohannan's account of the Tiv economy (Bohannan 1955). He showed how the Tiv have traditionally ordered their economy of exchange in three different spheres: one with foodstuffs, one with objects such as cattle, and metal

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bars, and one with right in other people, particularly women (not that we approve of treating women as merely objects of exchange of course!). Objects can sometimes be exchanged across the domains, but these actions can both be morally approved and disapproved of.

However, one of the key insights of Bohannan is that while the Tiv had a well-functioning economic system based on these three spheres, something seminal happened when money was introduced. The Tiv moved from a multicentric economy to a unicentral one, where only one common value seemed to rule them all: that of money.

This turned out to have severe effects on how the Tiv were able to structure their economical aspect of society. While we have been accustomed to using money in our Western context, his insights resonated with us. Even if we had exchanged ideas or objects with the practitioners to forge bonds, the common value on which we now exchanged seemed to be money. And money has the ability peculiar to provide us with a common dominator for how much things are worth.

Normally, using money isn't applicable to gift giving theory because of its ability to be a common denominator, and thus its ability to eradicate the logic behind the gift exchange. However, what we saw was that money indeed highlighted some of the status logic which Bourdieu described, and that this influenced the other ways in which we had tried to establish bonds through exchange.

Further, both money, as well as non-monetary objects of exchange from our ethnographical description, for example the chicken and bacon sandwich from the resource center, also seemed to make symbols of politics abound in the room. This led us to suggest that all kinds of exchanges are spun up into larger political movements and cultural values, which couldn't be adequately accounted for in Bourdieu's practice-oriented theory.

We thus applied Schatzki's practice-oriented approach to extend Bourdieu's insights, as we needed a theory that didn't only include the meeting settings with the schools, but also larger societal movements (Schatzki 2016). For Schatzki the world is 'constituted by bundles, which are composed of and constituted by people's practices and material arrangements. These bundles suggest a flat ontology, as materials and people's agency influence each other (ibid.: 5).

Schatzki's idea isn't only applicable to a situationist analysis, as he argues that "practices also link to other practices in the bundle, whereas arrangements link to other arrangements" (ibid.: 6). Highlighting this fact also extends to the realization that all social phenomena to Schatzki are 'slices' of this larger mass of bundles. As such, these slices are not isolated entities, but are formed and

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influenced by other bundles that cut across our initial perception of time and space (ibid.: 6-7). To be clear, our meetings with the teachers and the resource center were bundles, which were influenced by other bundles in the realm of green transition politics and political school reforms in Denmark too.

An analysis which only accounted for the mere practices and material arrangements in which we exchanged, negotiated, and played out games of honor, status, and power with the practitioners, to use Bourdieu's words, wouldn't allow for the subtle ways in which these settings have been transformed through larger political practices and material distributions. However, this doesn't mean that the different actors in our meetings didn't use their practical sense of the game to influence these games of honor. This was evident in for example Mathilda's use of irony and humor to highlight our status and thus our dishonor.

Furthermore, the political movements in the last two decades meant that schools felt they lacked monetary resources. Thus, while smaller exchanges and gifts can indeed be exchanged to help establish or open relationships with practitioners, and while both leaders and teachers could see that our project could contribute with something important to their practices, money seemed to be one of the most important concerns for the schools. If not accounted for this inequality, the gift that we sought to offer them could end up being perceived as a dishonorable challenge instead.

Conclusion

What we have tried to sketch out above is not a guideline for which methods work best to create bonds with practitioners as researchers, rather we have sought to highlight the subtle ways in which different exchange logics and games of honor and status proliferate in particular settings. We have shown how gifts, such as sandwiches, can function as a way to domesticate the relation to strangers that might have different cultural values than ourselves. Also, people inhabit these meetings with a strategic feel for the game, even if the exchanges are also prone to different misunderstandings which might obscure the ways in which bonds can be established. Further, we have suggested that these situations are enactments of larger plays of power and status, which are then again influenced by larger political movements and tendencies - and vice versa.

Several times, the traditional gift exchange theories fell short too. For example, there isn't a large time delay in which to enact a tactical disposition in these 1-hour long meetings, as Bourdieu would

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suggest. Further, while money should initially be a common denominator which would make the logic of gift exchange superficial, the very logic of the sense of honor is still present. Instead of working with a theory of different divergent and exclusive exchange systems, spheres, and logics, we suggest a delicate attention to how these different elements might both intermingle, interpolate and conflict.

Thus, our aim has been to show how we as ethnographers have an ability to describe how different puzzling and particular arrangements might appear when we try to establish bonds with researchers, as they cut across complex domains of different exchange logics and micro/macro phenomena. We suggest that this analytical ability to curiously investigate and challenge common conceptions in these settings might be the best weapon we, as researchers, have to continuously improve our efforts to establish bonds with practitioners.

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