

Education, Democracy, Diversity & Geography

Abstract Gry Paulgaard, gry.paulgaard@uit.no for ESAI Conference 2023

Based on the overall theme Education, Change and Democratic Societies the conference asks for new imperatives and creative responses to focus on the ethical, political and democratic dimensions of education. This is both important and challenging. In my talk I will respond to this challenge by referring to some of my research in the North of the Northern part of the world. The Nordic and Arctic regions are characterised by ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity, long distances, rural areas and small communities.

As we know, the world of education and work manifests itself somewhat differently in different places. This means that it is important to discuss how to meet diversity in a world where education have become more standardized and internationalized, - more universalized. According to Biesta (2006, 2015) democracy is in itself a commitment to a world of differences and plurality. This represents a paradox to an unilinear and common framework, and definitions of our humanity that has been upheld, and still constitutes a basic condition of living together in the world of difference. Critical discussions of such a framework are important to discover and open “Invisible Fences” (Gullestad 2002), to create social justice and democratic dimensions of education for a diverse variety of children and youth.

In my talk I will criticize a common framework based on two forms of universalisms: i) the metrocentric norms and goals of the curriculum as well as the educational system, and ii), the implicit deadlines within an age-segregated social order (Vogt, 2018; Lødding & Paulgaard, 2019). “Metrocentricity”, refers to the invisibility of how place and geography represent changeable and contingent conditions in children’s and young people’s lives, and the ‘implicit deadlines’, refers to culturally specific norms defining how life shall unfold to given ‘time-tables’. In contrast to theories and ideologies that emphasise unfettered possibilities for young people today, the overall aim of the presentation is to demonstrate how place and geography matters when it comes to young people’s experiences of opportunities and options for education.

References:

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