

Power and contexts: Some societal conditions for organisational action research – Clashes between economic-management and pedagogic-social discourses

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Based on action research co-operation with a team of teachers at a Social and Healthcare College in Denmark 2012-2013, the article raises the question: What are the conditions for organisational action research projects in a neoliberal context?

The article has three purposes. Firstly, we want to show that mapping and delimitating relevant contexts are critical in an organisational AR project, because it is always arbitrary what you delimit as your field of inquiry, initially. The consequences of ignoring this in the project described were fatal. Secondly, the article draws attention to clashes between two societal Discourses: an economic-management Discourse versus a pedagogic-social Discourse. Unfortunately, we were not aware of the strength and the extent of the economic-management Discourse before it was too late. Thirdly, the article speaks in favor of continuous context inquiring dialogues with immediate and additional stakeholders questioning, among others, if the action research project is practicable at all.

Key words: social and healthcare education, context inquiring dialogues, societal discourse, power, organisational action research, new public management

Purpose – The arbitrary and important delimitation

We have carried through many organisational development projects as consultants and action researchers within private and public organisations in Denmark since the 1980s. They have all been based on a hope; a hope of creating something which is better; a hope of fulfilling this achievement in co-operation with our partners in the organisation; a hope of co-creating practical, methodological, and theoretical improvements (Kristiansen & Bloch-Poulsen, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013a, 2013b).

Since the beginning of this millennium, increasingly our attention has been directed to the contexts, i.e., the various conditions in and under which the action research (AR) processes take place and the various directly and indirectly implied stakeholders. In this article, we distinguish between three kinds of interconnected contexts: The process context, i.e., the immediate stakeholders and power balances in the AR process; the organisational context, and the societal context. In many cases, these contexts seem to impede or even obstruct the realisation of hope.

This was the case, too, in an AR project that we carried through with a Social and Healthcare College in Denmark 2012-2013. The article describes co-operation with a team of teachers, the SSH-team, educating Social and Healthcare Helpers (see p.4). Based on our agreement with the team, the participants have approved all quotations and have been given new names.

The article has three inter-connected purposes: a general, a specific and a forward-looking/action oriented:

The general purpose is to show how mapping and delimitation of contexts are critical in an organisational AR project: Who are the stakeholders in addition to the immediately involved partners in the organisation? Whom would it be relevant to involve besides the field that we have “chosen” to delineate as our context (Burns, 2007, 2012)? We distinguish between the chosen context and chosen partners on one hand, and the additional contexts and stakeholders. We use the word ‘chosen’ to underline that it is always arbitrary what you initially delineate as your field of inquiry: like Bateson’s (1972) point of view about the arbitrariness of punctuation. In our case, that delimitation turned out to become fatal.

The specific purpose is to show how, during the project, our attention was drawn to a power struggle between two Discourses: a pedagogic-social Discourse voiced by the SSH-team and by the action researchers versus an economic-managerial Discourse voiced by a couple of municipal managers. The article describes clashes between these Discourses. They are demonstrated in different ways of understanding a Social and Healthcare College and its students, the relation between theory and practice, and between knowledge and knowledge production. Thus, the two discourses deal with fundamentally different views of colleges, students, knowledge production, interaction between theory and practice, co-operation, and participation. As mentioned, we interpret these clashes between the two Discourses as a power struggle. It entailed that during one year, the SSH team had used its energy on an AR project in vain trying to improve the relation between theory and practice. As action researchers, we did not become aware of the strength and the full extent of the economic-managerial Discourse before we interviewed the municipal managers and listened to the tapes from all the meetings in the project.

The forward-looking/action oriented purpose is thus to show that it is not only important to map the possible contexts and stakeholders. In relation to this mapping, context inquiring dialogues are necessary, too (Kristiansen, 2013). In these dialogues all stakeholders, including action researchers, co-operatively inquire into the possibilities and barriers for the AR project. This dialogic inquiry might result in a new project design involving new partners or it might result in a shared recognition that the project is not practicable at all.

With the wisdom of hindsight, it may sound banal, but the important point is that inquiries, mapping, and the context inquiring dialogues must take place as early as possible in the AR process. In the case we will describe below, they started after nearly a year. This created frustration for our partners in the immediate organisational context, presumably for the additional stakeholders, and certainly for the action researchers, too. On the positive side, it shed light on the situation.

Discourse and discourse and context

The concept of 'discourse' has many meanings (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000, 2011). Initially, we want to specify that 'discourse' in this article refers to a certain way of speaking and thinking, indicating differences between what counts as true, valid or right and what counts as false, invalid or wrong (Phillips, 2010).

As such, we see discourse as a paradigm.¹ Nevertheless, the meaning of an expression is not only to be understood by referring to a discourse or a paradigm, but to societal or organisational structures, too, as e.g., hierarchical position, educational background, etc. (Deetz & White, 1999).

Alvesson and Kärreman (2000) distinguish between discourses analysed on a micro- or meso-level and Discourses (with capital D) on a macro-level. The following analysis of a micro-level of conversations between partners and stakeholders will show, how they can be interpreted as clashes between two mutually excluding societal Discourses: A pedagogic-social Discourse, related to the welfare state and voiced by the teachers, the students, and the action researchers versus an economic-management Discourse related to the competition state (Knudsen, 2007; Pedersen, 2011), voiced by representatives from the municipality. It seems as if the management of the college is placed in a cross field between these Discourses. As such, it is simultaneously an analysis of a structural hierarchy between the Danish state/the government, the municipality, the college management, and the teachers.

Recently, American and European communication theory and organisation theory scholars have discussed if and how communication and language can be understood to constitute organisations (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004; Putnam & Nicotera, 2009, 2010; Taylor, 2009; Cooren, Kuhn, Cornelissen, & Clark, 2011). In relation to this discussion, the article problematises an

¹ Referring to Kuhn (1970) is too limited, because he speaks about scientific paradigms. We use the concept with the same meaning but a more extensive scope. We understand paradigm as a coherent pattern creating the basis for distinguishing not only between true and false in relation to scientific knowledge, but between valid and invalid in relation to all kinds of knowledge.

understanding of organisations as discursive constructions exclusively. Inspired by Giddens' (1984) view of the interaction between societal structures and social practice, we understand organisations as constituted by discourses and by structures (societal structures, hierarchy of decision making, etc.) (Kristiansen & Bloch-Poulsen, 2011).

The teachers: our immediate partners

In the spring of 2012, we received a request from the Social and Healthcare College. They wanted to initiate some projects on employee driven innovation in teams, first with social and health care institutions, later with teams at the school (Kristiansen & Bloch-Poulsen, 2010). The idea was that the social and health care institutions could give feedback to the educational contents of the school. The project was financed by a regional public fund. They were interested in supporting a project that might contribute to an innovative way of developing future education programmes at the Social and Healthcare College.

We co-operated with two teams at the school. They wanted to start with topics they were faced with when co-operating with supervisors in the social and health care institutions where students were trained in, e.g., homes for elderly people. Afterwards, the teams would address the input they received from the social and health care institutions. However, the project stopped before the final topic was addressed, as will be described below.

In August 2012, we presented a draft of an AR project to a number of teams of teachers at a Social and Healthcare College in Denmark.

The Social and Healthcare College educate students as Social and Healthcare Helpers, Social and Healthcare Assistants, and Childcare Assistants. All the educational programs are characterised by an interchange between periods with theory at the college and periods with practice and training in pedagogic, social or healthcare institutions.

Interaction between theory and practice and co-operation between the teachers at the college and the supervisors in the institutions, e.g. nursing homes, hospitals, healthcare centers or kindergartens, play an important role in the educational programmes and in the way they are conceptualised.

We succeeded in initiating co-operation with two teams. The SSH team, educating Social and Healthcare Helpers, and the SSA team educating students continuing as Social and Healthcare Assistants.

Our immediate context and partners were these two teams, SSH and SSA, as well as the head of their department, the management of the college, and an internal educational consultant. They were all represented in the project steering group. Continuously, this group evaluated the project and the cross-disciplinary issues, e.g. the project that the SSH team chose to focus on dealing with improved co-operation between the college/the teachers/theory and the institutions/the supervisors/practice.

The project was scheduled to last one year with 7-8 special team meetings. The purpose of these meetings was to inquire into existing work routines from a helicopter perspective: which routines were well functioning, which ought to be improved? The meetings were planned with an interval of 6-7 weeks and lasted 3 hours. The meetings were designed in accordance with a dialogic dissensus approach we had developed earlier (Kristiansen & Bloch-Poulsen, 2010, 2012). Through dialogues with the teachers, we attempted to co-produce the purpose of the project, to co-design the process, to co-evaluate the results. Within the dialogic dissensus approach, it is crucial to welcome dissensus: i.e. criticism, tensions, dilemmas, disagreement, as a possible vehicle of development (Christie, 1977). We try to do so by means of dissensus organising, e.g. by using pro et con groups, as well as by means of dissensus sensibility, e.g. by questioning changes in the energy level in the dialogues or by paying attention to who is being included or excluded. As such, we collaboratively inquire into the contexts during the process: what are the possibilities and barriers, etc.

The process did not pass off as planned. The college wanted to postpone the startup for four months due to work overload with their classes. Then the process was interrupted by a national lockout of teachers, which resulted in an interval of four months between the third meeting in the spring of 2013 and the fourth meeting in August 2013.

The rest of the article focuses on the co-operation with the SSH team. It consists of 8 teachers with a background in healthcare sciences or humanities, and a head of department/team manager who was also chair of the SSA team.

The article is based on written minutes and audiotapes from meetings with the SSH team and the project steering group, where the management of the college was represented as mentioned above, and on interviews with additional stakeholders (students, a supervisor from an institution, and two municipal managers).

**The SSH-team –
an improved dialogue with supervisors in the institutions**

At the first team meeting in December 2012 it became clear that the most important goal for the SSH-team to pursue was to improve the co-operation between the college and the institutions, i.e. between theory and practice. As mentioned, the SSH-educational programme has two dimensions: the theoretical part takes place at the college. The practical part in the institutions, i.e., in nursing homes for elderly people. It is critical for the SSH-teachers in the team that theory and practice is related so the students experience a meaningful connection between the theoretical part they are taught at the college, and the practical challenges they have to handle in “real life” when faced with, e.g., elderly residents in need of care. One of the students addressed the relation between theory and practice in an interview with us:

I think it is nice you can put theory into practice so to speak. I have thought a good deal about it when I was to help the residents: ‘Oh! That’s what they taught me at college. There I am, nearly getting stuck in the mud – and I can use the theory!’ ... For example, I had to help a demented resident, it’s important how I approach her ... Sometimes I was busy, so before entering her room, I took a deep breath to calm down, walking slowly towards her ... not talking too much, explaining to her what I did.

The example indicates that the student uses her theoretical knowledge to calm down. To strengthen this connection between theory and practice, the SSH-team wanted to establish an even better co-operation with the supervisors in the institutions who counsel the students when they are in practice. The SSH-team mentions several reasons to improve the co-operation with the supervisors in ways that would be meaningful to the students, e.g.:

- Sometimes, the students seem to have forgotten that they are to attend a practice meeting at the institution with their supervisor and a teacher from the college
- Sometimes, the supervisors do not show up at these meetings
- Once in a while, you are faced with questions from the supervisors like: “Tell me what the students learn, if anything, at the college?”, or “Why haven’t you taught them ...?”
- Some of the managers in the institutions do not pay attention to the learning or educational aspects of practice but use students as cheap labor
- Some of the supervisors consider us teachers as inspectors who are going to control them
- There seems to be a discourse that knowledge is more refined than practice meaning that what you are taught at college is superior to what you learn in practice in the institutions.

We think these reasons can be understood as dimensions of a social-pedagogic Discourse focusing on different forms of knowledge and trying to create a dialogue between supervisors and teachers and their different knowledge forms. Here, the pedagogic part deals with different understandings of students, seeing them as students in the process of learning, and not as cheap labour.

The SSH-team project of improving the relation to the institutions is discussed in the project steering group as well with the board of management at the college. As action researchers, we wanted to make sure that the board of management supported the project. Experience and literature show that managerial back up seems to be a necessary condition for projects like these to succeed (Smith, Kesting, & Ulhøi, 2008). Management reported back that the lights were green.

**Additional stakeholders –
former students and supervisors – are invited**

The SSH-team decides to invite several stakeholders to a meeting in February 2013. These include a number of supervisors and former SSH-students who now attend the SSA-educational programme as future Social and Healthcare Assistants. The purpose of the meeting is to find the hot issues in the teachers' co-operation with the supervisors. The meeting is prepared in detail at a meeting in January 2013. In the minutes we write:

"The agenda of the meeting on 26.02.13, 13-30-16.30 should be fairly open:

What are the mutual expectations between students, supervisors, and teachers?

If possible, how can we establish an even more meaningful co-operation for the three partners?

The meeting is planned according to this format:

Initial interviews (15 minutes):

Marianne & Jørgen conduct an interview with supervisors, teachers, and students successively

Discussions in the three groups of supervisors, teachers, students after the interviews (15 minutes)

Short presentation on dialogues by Marianne & Jørgen (5 minutes)

Dialogues in groups across professional background: the three most important improvements (30 minutes)

Vernissage: each group presents the improvements on a flip chart (15 minutes)

Plenary dialogue:

- Prioritising the improvements
- Action plan and future organising of the cooperation."

We understand the aspiration of balancing expectations between supervisors, students, and teachers as part of the social-pedagogic Discourse conceptualising knowledge production as co-production.

In hindsight, we wonder why we accepted to conduct an interview with supervisors and students, because we were the least knowledgeable about their contexts.

The meeting in February turned out to be a failure. The teachers had not invited the students. Some supervisors had been invited but only one showed up. The rest of them declined to participate due to lack of time or lack of payment. We understood the situation in line with what we have experienced several times lately: It seems to us as if day-to-day production has won the struggle with development and long term improvements. If this interpretation is valid, we might understand the supervisors' reasons of not attending the meeting as expressions of an economic-management Discourse focusing on quid pro quo and on immediate usefulness. Maybe we should have heard the alarm: was it realistic to imagine improved co-operation with supervisors who declined the invitation?

The single supervisor, who showed up, expressed how she perceived the college and the teachers as partners and not as controlling inspectors. She spoke in favor of maintaining the practice meetings in the institutions where students, teachers, and supervisors met.

The team decided to invite some new supervisors and some educational co-ordinators to our next meeting in April. Once again, we did not hear the sign of alarm. What is an 'educational coordinator'? We thought they were someone the teachers and the supervisors were all familiar and comfortable with. Without checking our presuppositions, we imagined they were employees in the institutions who co-ordinated practice meetings. Later, our unchecked presupposition had fatal consequences. The next meeting was postponed to August because the Danish Ministry of Finance locked out all teachers in Denmark including the SSH-team.

A double-participatory AR project

Until now, we thought it was reasonable to carry through the AR co-operation between the SSH-teachers and us heading at improved co-operation between the SSH-teachers and the supervisors in the institutions. As such, we talk about a double-participatory endeavor focusing on the co-operation

between the SSH-teachers and the supervisors and between the SSH-teachers and the two of us as action researchers.

Participation means to take part in. Within organisational development, this raises at least two questions: Who participates in whose projects? Which degree of influence do you have as a participant? There is a wide spectrum of answers ranging from pseudo-participation ('I manage, you participate', Saxena (2011, p. 31) to co-determination and control (Kristiansen & Bloch-Poulsen, 2013b, 2014).

We have developed an approach within dialogic, organisational AR where researchers and so-called practitioners participate as two groups of professionals in a shared project. It is a cross disciplinary co-operation between different professionals with different competences and knowledge. A co-operation which aim at improved work routines, enriched theoretical understanding, etc. (Kristiansen & Bloch-Poulsen, 2013a).

In relation to the mentioned degree of influence, there is a distinction between minimum and maximum participation within politology (Carpentier, 2011). Transferring this distinction to organisational development means that the so-called practitioners can enact a variety of functions on a continuum from passive observers and informants, where the researcher is endowed with the monopoly of interpretation and truth, to codetermining partners. In the project, we are heading at full codetermination. We expect the teachers and the action researchers to co-operatively decide the purpose, design, evaluation, etc. of the project. We want to do research *with* instead of research *on* the SSH-teachers (Heron & Reason, 2008).

Other stakeholders – former students – are invited again

Practice meetings are to be maintained

When we finally convened again after the lockout in August 2013, we checked if the SSH-team was interested in continuing the project. The SSH-team was still keen on using their enthusiasm to improve their cooperation with the supervisors in the institutions.

The first meeting in August after the lockout was a full day meeting. In the morning, we conducted an interview with former SSH-students, while the

SSH-teachers were present and listened. We closed with a dialogue between all participants. In the afternoon, we intended to repeat the programme with the supervisors from the institutions and the management of the college, but the supervisors did not want to participate under the prevailing conditions.

The interview with the students dealt with co-operation between the college and the institutions. What do the invited students think to be efficient activities made by the college/the teachers and the institutions/the supervisors respectively? And what would they like them to improve?

The interview context was special, because only one part was present, i.e. the teachers in the SSH-team. The number of three students as well as this peculiar context makes us underline that the following is but one voice among many.

Across minor differences in points of view, the students' message was unequivocal:

You easily get the impression that you are treated as cheap labour because the supervisor is not serious.

My supervisor was not competent. She was a very kind and pleasant person ... The supervisors need competence development. My supervisor was not sufficiently theoretical.

I handed in a written paper each week, but I did not get a proper response. 'That's Ok', they said, but I couldn't use that.

I suggest you visit the institution a week before you start, just to say 'hello'. When I started, they exclaimed: 'Oh, my God, do you already start today. Well, your supervisor is on vacation'. And then they shouted to everyone in the room: 'Who can take care of this student today'?

However, one of the students said:

Well, I must say, I was invited. They were very friendly. No problem at all.

Finally, they agreed:

I think that the supervisors need to improve their competences.

Yeah, no doubt, the bottom line is that the supervisors have to improve.

The students suggested their teachers to consider if it was possible to give lectures on certain subjects earlier in their educational process, so that it would be easier for them to cope with these subjects when faced with them in the institutions:

Well, I would like the lessons on apoplexy to be placed in an earlier phase because there are many people suffering from apoplexy in the institutions ... maybe some lessons on how to cope with dying people, too. Three people passed away during the four months I stayed at the ward, and I did not understand the signals ... yet, on the other hand, you cannot have all the theories prior to your practical education in the institutions.

The students wanted to maintain practice meetings, where their college teachers from the SSH-team visited the institutions. The students liked to get feedback on their performance in practice from their teachers. Besides, they considered the practice meetings as a sort of control of the institutions trying to do their best:

I think that practice meetings where our teachers visit the institution, observe me practicing, check if I'm okay, if things are in order, I think they are a sort of warrant for me, because a teacher checks if I'm on track.

I feel comfortable when one of my teachers responds to how I'm communicating, how I relate to the residents in the institution.

Some teachers asked:

Teacher: Are we perceived as some sort of control when we visit the institution?

Student: I got the impression that they [the supervisors] pulled themselves together; because when the teacher comes, you better look prepared. So they fumbled around: what was the learning purpose for my training in the institution?

Teacher: Is that good or bad for you?

Student: It's certainly good, because they put serious efforts into my training.

Summing up, according to the teachers and the students, it seems reasonable to continue with practice meetings. Until now, we have focused only on what the supervisors in the institutions might improve. We might have heard

similar suggestions for the teachers, if the supervisors had interviewed the students, as one of the teachers said when the students had left the room.

Other stakeholders – educational co-ordinators or heads of the municipal educational program – are invited
– Practice meetings must be abolished – teachers are to be taught in the institutions

At the last meeting before the lockout in spring 2013, it was decided that we should conduct an interview with two educational co-ordinators similar to the interviews with the students, the supervisors, and the management of the college.

At the first meeting after the lockout in August, the situation has changed fundamentally without us knowing. We are not going to conduct an interview with some of the supervisors, because, as mentioned, they do not want to participate in the project for work oriented or economic reasons. We are not going to conduct an interview with two educational co-ordinators, but with two managers in charge of the municipal educational programme of the school and the institutions. In the situation, we did not pay attention to differences in titles and thus did not question the altered conditions. For reasons which will become clear later, we have decided not to include direct quotations from the interview, but only our own interpretations of it.

During the interview and later when listening to the tape, we realised that we had not focused sufficiently on additional stakeholders: only on the teachers, the students, the supervisors, and to some degree, the management of the college. By doing so, we had delimited the field of inquiry into our immediate stakeholders as described in the previous paragraphs.

During the interview we had a series of factual surprises:

- The students are employed by the municipality, i.e. by the heads of the municipal educational programme. As such, the students are paid by the municipality. Accordingly, the heads of the programme talk about them as ‘our students’. We thought the students to be the school’s students receiving grants from the Danish State Education Fund as other students do in Denmark. We did not inquire into the economic function of the munici-

pality and did not, until later, understand this as an example of an employer-employee relation, i.e. as an expression of an economic-management Discourse.

- The heads of education consider it their responsibility to take care of the students whether they are at the college or in the institutions. We thought they were educational co-ordinators, taking care of practice meetings, only. It appears that the educational co-ordinators refer to the heads of the municipal educational programme. Moreover, we did not check whether they were employed by the municipality or by the institutions and what kind of function or authority, they had.
- Practice meetings have been abolished at other colleges in the region and are substituted by different forms of co-operation. In a neighbouring city, college teachers are on a 2-3 days internship every year in the institutions in order to get a picture of the reality, their students will be facing. We understand the idea that the teachers are going to attend lessons conducted by the supervisors or to watch the supervisors guiding the students in the institutions as examples of an economic-management Discourse, too. Here, knowledge production is not seen as knowledge sharing, i.e. as co-production among equal teachers and supervisors, but as hierarchical knowledge transfer from apparently more knowledgeable (supervisors/practitioners) to the less knowledgeable (teachers/theoreticians) (Paulin & Suneson, 2012). It seems to be education for competence rather than the cultural education for co-management. Moreover, this solution is also chosen, because it is cheaper compared to the more expensive practice meetings.

During the interview, we realised, too, that, in principle, the municipality/the heads of the education programme could make a contract with different colleges and institutions. Seen from the perspective of the municipality, there is a clear-cut division of work: the municipality has delegated the responsibility for the theoretical dimension of the educational programme to the college and the practical dimension to the institutions. This resonates with a contractor-supplier way of thinking and can be understood, too, as an example of the economic-management Discourse where the college and the institutions do

not seem allowed to interfere or share different work experiences. Moreover, we get the impression that the municipality thought the teachers might benefit from an internship in the institutions. Their teaching at the college might become less theoretical and more practically relevant for the students and the institutions. However, the supervisors were not going to attend the college to get new theoretical knowledge. Thus, we thought this to be a one-sided relationship. As mentioned, this non-dialogical approach to knowledge production can be seen as an example of the economic-management Discourse. This implies, too, the understanding of the SSH-education as education for competence.

Finally, we understood that it was not worthwhile investing resources in the practice meetings when seen from the perspectives of the heads of the municipal educational unit.

Apparently, some supervisors felt controlled by the teachers at the practice meetings. We did not receive an answer to our repeated questions 'How many supervisors feel controlled?' We also understood that the heads of the educational programme did not think that teachers without a background in healthcare sciences could add to the value of practice meetings. We think that the heads of education would not pay for practice meetings, because they were too expensive based on a cost-benefit analysis. They did not consider these meetings beneficial for the students or for the institutions. When the students work as part of their training in the institutions, they can get what they need from the supervisors or the municipality. Should a conflict occur between a student and a supervisor, the student must learn to cope with it as part of their education without involving a teacher. This was not the impression we got when conducting the interviews with the students and the supervisor. They both talked in favour of keeping practice meetings.

It is our interpretation that we were faced with a special version of New Public Management during the interview (Juul, 2014). This is a special kind of economical thinking within public management trying to transfer principles from the private to the public sector, by doing so reducing citizens to customers in relation to the State seen as a market (Hood, 1995; Leal, 2011).

In more concrete terms, it means that the municipality is the employer of the students and that it works as a customer requiring a commodity from the

college and the institutions. The municipality is responsible for a commodity, in this case a social- and healthcare education. The municipality buys the theoretical part of this commodity as classes at the college. They pay wages to the students when attending the college and ensure that the college provides the students with an education in line with the purposes agreed upon. The practical part of the education is sub-contracted to the institutions. Thus, the municipality is the requiring/demanding customer, while the college and the institutions work as suppliers delivering a commodity. In this way, the college and the institutions are turned into enterprises.

This form of economic thinking appears as an altered view of colleges, students, knowledge production, interaction between theory and practice, co-operation, and participation:

The Social- and Healthcare College is no longer a school educating students to handle a number of social and health care functions within the welfare state. It is an enterprise. The students are no longer students at the college. They are paid by the municipality as future manpower within enterprises in the private and public, social and health care sectors. The relation between theory and practice is not understood as cross disciplinary knowledge production and knowledge sharing between the teachers at the college, the 'theoreticians', and the supervisors in the institutions, the 'practitioners', but as separate fields of knowledge. Apparently, the co-operation between the teachers and the institutions is conceptualised as a one-way relation in which, the teachers can learn from the institutions, but not the other way around. Involvement means that the teachers will be part of an institutional internship. We do not think this is participation understood as co-determination and co-production where both parties can learn from each other and become wiser together.

The conditions of the AR project do not seem to be on the agenda of the municipality/the heads of education, e.g., co-operation between college and university, teachers and supervisors, teachers with a background in healthcare science and teachers with a background in humanities, between theory and practice etc.

It was not until the interview that we understood that the current co-operation between the college and the institutions, the practice meetings were

going to be abolished. All of a sudden, there was no basis for a continuation of the SSH-project dealing with improving the co-operation with the supervisors, and, *eo ipso*, for our AR co-operation with the SSH-team of teachers.

In the situation, we were shocked by our own naivety. Prior to the interview, we did not inquire into if other stakeholders might influence the project. We could have asked, e.g.: Are there anybody who could impede the project? If so, who? As a corollary: Are there persons whom we should invite to participate in the project? We were shocked, too, because we had agreed to conduct the interview, when, notoriously, we were the least knowledgeable in the field. During the interview, we were upset especially by being confronted with outspoken economic employer points of view expressed by managers at a public municipality.

We did not fully understand the consequences and dimensions of the interview until we listened to the tape while writing this article. Retrospectively, we understand the interview in broader terms than expressing differences between two heads of education and two action researchers. Today, as mentioned, we see the interview as clashes between two societal Discourses characterised as a pedagogical-social versus an economic-managerial Discourse. We will return to this clash below.

The teachers' reflections on the interview

Immediately after the interview a follow-up conversation took place between the teachers, the heads of the municipal educational programme, and the two of us as action researchers. It demonstrated different perspectives on the practice meetings in the SSH-team of teachers:

Kitte: It does not surprise us what you [heads of education] say. In our team, we have discussed that maybe some supervisors perceive practice meetings as some kind of control. You know meetings where we observe how the students perform as well as how they interact with their supervisors. In my point of view, we, you and us, are aligned. Our shared business is to create well-functioning college-institution cooperation. I do not know if it has to be practice meetings. To me, it might as well be something else. I do not want to participate in practice meetings if they do not work well.

Cecil: I must admit I am a bit shocked. It seems to me that you [heads of education] do not believe that we can visit the institutions and ask questions contributing to the students' learning without some supervisors perceiving it as control. I am sure we can ask questions in ways that make the student as well as the supervisor reflect ... You [head of education] say that a teacher with a background in Danish language or communication cannot contribute to practice meetings. I am shocked about this because our purpose is to pose questions that facilitate the students' reflections. In these practical situations, we might complement each other, the supervisors and we the teachers. The supervisors with dirty hands, so to speak, and the teachers with alternative thoughts and questions might unite in ways where these differences could facilitate the learning process of the students, which is the focal point here ...

Cecil's perspectives on co-operating with the supervisors are in line with the dialogic dissensus approach that characterises the AR project: let us welcome differences and, hopefully, develop through dialogues between different knowledge forms and interests.

After the heads of education left the meeting, the SSH-team continues:

Cecil: I think it is fine we have got things clear. There is this employer attitude. They [heads of educational program] talk about the students' learning, but this is not more than what necessity dictates.

Bente: I simply don't buy the argument that the institutions do not have an hour for supervisors counselling the students.

Margit/head of department and team manager: Nevertheless, I think that's what the heads of education are told; and sometimes the supervisors don't even participate in the practice meetings. This has become more and more the rule that they do not take part in the meetings.

Kitte: It might be due to the fact that the present practice meetings are not meaningful to them ... But if we give up practice meetings then there will be less to share with the supervisors. That's worrying.

Margit: This employer rhetoric, it becomes more and more evident. There are two opposite things at stake here: their employer rhetoric and us talking about pedagogical development. Well, then, bottom line is decided by the resources. Are we to give up practice meetings? Is that what it's all about? I think its hotchpotch.

Here, Margit presents differences between the economic-management and the pedagogical-social Discourses in a nutshell. Mads continues voicing these differences:

Mads: We have strove for 'Hand-in-hand', a cooperation with the supervisors. Now, it seems to be 'Hands off!'

The SSH-team seems to think that the interview helped making clear the difference between an economic employer perspective and a pedagogical focus on the students' learning processes; that practice meetings are going to be abolished and that the cooperation with the institutions must find a different format.

Different stakeholders are invited: the management of the college – Between pedagogy and management, students and employers

In the afternoon, we conduct an interview with Julie from the management of the college. She introduces us to a new societal context:

Julie/associate director: In the Finance act of 2013, the government focuses on improved interaction between the vocational schools [as the Social and Healthcare College] and the enterprises [as, e.g., the institutions]. They think they can repair the big drop-out at the vocational schools. So, there is an intensive focus on our field.

We were taken by surprise that the idea of teacher internship in the institutions is advocated by the government, consisting of the Social Democratic Party, the Socialist People's Party, and the Danish Social Liberal Party. We think that referring to social institutions as 'enterprises' can be understood as part of the economic-management Discourse, too. In an inspiration paper from May 2013 to the Finance act, it was suggested that this internship was a way to continuously updating teacher competencies as told by Julie. This implies that apparently, the prakticist attitude we had been facing in the morning stems from the government, too.² The concept 'prakticist attitude'

² While writing this article, Danish newspapers mention that the government has suggested reducing class hours at the vocational and technical schools by 40% (Politi-

refers to a one-way relation between practice/training and theory, where the teachers are to learn from the supervisors, but not vice versa. Practice is superior to theory within this paradigm or Discourse.

When interviewing Julie, we get the impression that the management of the college is placed in a cross field between the different stakeholders trying to balance between pedagogics/the teachers and the heads of education/the municipality as requiring customers:

Jørgen: It is extremely difficult for me not to hear that practicist arguments are gaining ground?

Julie: That's right ... It becomes more and more evident that we are a vocational college. We are dependent on our employers [the heads of education in the municipality], because they employ our students.

Jørgen: And it's fairly new that they have started to make demands to the contents of the education at the college. Is that, what you are saying?

Julie. Within the last year, I would say. And it is becoming more and more obvious.

During the interview with Julie, we understand that the economic thinking does not only characterize the local municipality, but the Danish state/the government, too. This way of thinking implies an alternative approach to conceptualizing and running a college. We will address the differences between this way of thinking and the teachers' in the following paragraph.

Reflections between the SSH-team and management about college and vocational college

Afterwards, in the dialogue between Julie, the SSH-teachers, and the two of us as action researchers, Julie is asked to elaborate on her point of view that the college has had difficulties becoming a vocational college.

Julie: We are behind time in the process of becoming a vocational college, because we do not have a tradition for thinking our school in this way. Remember, it is only five years ago since we officially became a voca-

ken, January 1st, 2014, 2. section. p. 4). We think this is a new example of education for competence characterizing the economic-management Discourse.

tional school, and it hasn't been easy for us to match the prevalent understanding.

Cecil/teacher: Could you be more specific, because I think we are a vocational college, already, aren't we?

Julie: It has to do with this employer conception. The municipality is the employer who engages the students as manpower. As a vocational college, we are supposed to help the municipality with their employer obligations by focusing on absenteeism and things like that. We see ourselves much more as a college with our pupils as students. ...

Kitte/teacher: Does this imply that we have to focus more on economy and law? We are to register the students when they are absent, because this has economic consequences? The more students, the better economy; well, that's not pedagogy, is it? It's quite another view of human nature, a different way of thinking.

Julie: You are absolutely right ... The new frame work demands a new understanding ... The employer/the municipality is responsible for the vocational and professional dimensions of the students' education, but there is more to it: a capacity for adapting to a work life agenda. The students have to be fit for work life. The employer is continuously controlling whether we are sufficiently taking care of this agenda in the students' college periods. And that's when they tap me on my shoulder, saying: 'Tighten up your procedures ...'

According to Julie, it is not enough that the candidates from the SSH-college have professional social and healthcare competences. They must also adapt to a work life agenda. We think this is part of the economic-management Discourse and that college management is placed in a cross field between these two Discourses.

Nina/teacher: Actually, I think we have a tight focus on absenteeism. The students express that our demands are pretty tough ...

Cecilie/teacher: But isn't important that we stick to our view of human nature? I mean, we are not some kind of factory delivering a commodity.

Cecil continues to problematize the current, neoliberal mainstream economic-management Discourse and Julie answers:

Julie: Exactly, I must say, we have some very competent employers as far as the view of human nature is concerned. They agree that we have to stretch ourselves.

During the interview, Julie mentioned a single reason of abolishing practice meetings: She thought the teachers would not like the opposite meaning the supervisors observing their lessons. Some of the teachers disagree:

Cecil/teacher: I think it would be great to have some supervisors responding to my way of teaching classes. I would like to have their feedback.

Some of the other teachers: Me, too.

Cecil/teacher: They might even tear my classes to pieces telling me that I do not have the slightest idea of teaching. Then we could talk, I could invite them: 'Teach me, for God's sake.'

Some of the other teachers: Yeah, yeah, exactly.

Cecil/teacher: To raise the level, let's give it a try.

We think this can be seen as an expression of a dialogic endeavor being part of the pedagogic-social Discourse. Julie answers and they continue to discuss the contrasts between the two Discourses:

Julie: Well, it might be a way to rethink the situation doing things differently.

Cecil/teacher: And it's exactly the same in relation to the supervisors in the practice meetings: Apparently, some supervisors feel persecuted and controlled by us. We do not chase them. We are trying to make sure that this particular student gets the best from the situation ... That's the essence. What really matters is the student, not whether he or she arrives in time to classes, or whether he or she is stupid. And when you talk about a vocational college, then I hear that the student is removed and that the college has to fit into a certain format. I think along an opposite line that we have to help each other facilitating the learning processes of our students. That's the crucial point of our college song, and when they say 'vocational college', I hear that we are going to piss on our college song.

Julie: No, no.

Cecil/teacher: 'Are you in time for my classes, or are you not, student?' The song says nothing about that ... The students, not the employers are our core area.

Margit/head of department and team manager: That's a current trend in society: Ordinary disciplining of the work force. We are invaded by management thinking. There is so much focus on absenteeism. I would prefer to concentrate on pedagogical development and give something to the students ...

Cecil/teacher: It's as if the students are reduced to a commodity, I can't help thinking 'apparatus failure model.'

Ida/teacher: But that's the way, they think.

Cecilie/teacher: I feel I'm hit by this. I think: 'Good grief. Is that the world of today?' I didn't see it coming.

Marianne/action researcher: I would like to tell about the day when the whole college celebrated that some of your students had won the Danish Social- and Healthcare competence competition. Tears came to my eyes and I thought: "Just imagine that we have such a college in Denmark today. Your college song, your concern, and contact of the heart, when you talk about care, this is amazing. That's what I fought for as a young woman, that's what I have striven for in my work life, and that's what I see vanishing in so many situations in Denmark. I reckon you have a nugget of gold that it is extremely important to insist on. I see two possibilities: you can lie low or you can stand up for your moral. I think you have a lot of values, once widespread, but which today seems seldom in Denmark.

Ida/teacher: I would like to comment on that, too. When I started working at this college eleven years ago, I came from another Social- and Healthcare College. I remember thinking: 'Ah, this is quite some place to work. Here, you treat students as whole persons, and you care for the individual student. I wasn't used to that at the college I left. At the moment, I sense that this focus is moving away from the student. I think we shall make sure that we are not losing it.

Based on these remarks, it seems as if the teachers focus on the students and on cooperation between theory/college/teachers and practice/institutions/supervisors. Through mutual help between college and institutions, the aim is to make sure that the students get the best possible education. Simultaneous-

ly, several teachers express how it has become even clearer to them during these conversations how the economic employer way of thinking permeates into their work and the college.

The meeting closes with a decision: the teachers will continue trying to contact the municipality in order to inquire into the possibility of renewed cooperation with the institutions.

From 'hand-in-hand' to 'hands off'

At the next team meeting in November 2013, Bente and Kitte report from their meeting with the heads of the municipal educational program. Here, they experienced the points of view from the interview had been repeated:

- Its 'our' [the municipality's] students – not yours [the teachers']
- The teachers are welcome to attend lessons in the institutions, but not together with the students
- There will be no practice meetings in the future.

The team discusses several issues based on this message:

- Is this about a shift in paradigm from 'Hand-in-hand' as a metaphor of the college-institution cooperation to 'Hands off'?
- Is the college supposed only to prepare the students for the practical periods in the institution without interfering after that?
- Would it be possible for the municipality to come up with an idea to how the continued cooperation might be designed?

The team decides to meet with the management of the college to get to know their attitude towards the cooperation with the institutions.

Evaluation of the AR project

In December 2013 we meet the team for the last time evaluating the AR-project:

Cecil: In relation to our first aim about improved cooperation with the institutions, I have a clearer and more clarified picture. I'm not where I ex-

pected to be, but I have got a clear-cut picture of who they are and how they think.

Jørgen: Could you elaborate on that?

Cecil: I think that if we [the teachers] had carried through this project ourselves, we would not have had the heads of education in here for an interview. Then it would not have been so obvious how they look upon cooperating with us. This has become quite clear. You can be for or against it, but the impression is clear: That's where we stand, and that's how it is.

Mads: I'm incredibly disappointed that the project ended in this way. It's almost surreal. I dream about reconciliation, and I long for some explanation or dialogue, because the SSH-education depends on cooperation between college and institution. I think it's tragic they ended up slamming the door and that there will be no more practice meetings with us.

Nina: I feel like Mads. It's really a downturn after having been so enthusiastic about the cooperation with the institutions. I also understand from Kitte that they have returned to "our" college way of cooperating in one of our neighboring towns.

Ida: I was really surprised that they [the heads of education] expressed such attitudes in the interview. I think it's extremely discouraging, because I think cooperation is so important and that we have had quite a good cooperation with the supervisors until now.

Thus, it seems as if the AR project resulted in more clarity about future conditions for the cooperation with the institutions, as well as in great disappointment and wishes for mediation.

The evaluation continues at the closing meeting with the project steering group:

Jørgen/action researcher: The frustration in the SSH-team is intense. I sense that they are left behind with the question: 'What happened?' Can they contribute to some sort of mediation or what the devil their options are? I think this question is passed on to you as management of the college.

Marianne/action researcher: The critical question for the team of teachers as well as for us as action researchers is: 'What is exactly the reason for abolishing the cooperation with the institutions? Is it economy or?'

Julie/assistant director: I have explained to them [the SSH-team of teachers] that there are three reasons, but maybe I should repeat them.

Marianne: If one is about running the college meaning that practice meetings is too expensive, I think, this is understandable.

Julie: That's one of the reasons.

Marianne: Then, apparently there are two more reasons. I wouldn't be able to present them.

According to our information, the economic argument is that the costs of the college caused by practice meetings match the yearly salary of one teacher which could be used for classes instead. Still, we are not sure what the two other arguments are. One might be that some supervisors feel controlled by the teachers in practice meetings. Firstly, we don't know whether this is a general problem, or if it is just something the municipality assumes is a general problem. Secondly, the heads of education from the municipality expressed in the interview that the students should learn to handle conflicts with their supervisors; why does this not apply to the supervisors in relation to the teachers?

The conversation continues:

Margit/head of department and team manager: Maybe, I didn't even realize it myself, Julie. I thought there might be some loopholes ... I can't make it out completely. I'm affected by it, too, because I think practice meetings are a very good idea, so I feel like a rubbing brake. I must admit that. It's quite simply a crisis and a mourning process to lose something you think is well functioning.

Julie: I realize we have to talk more about this ... It's our failure. We should have stopped the [AR] process in spring instead of letting it continue. But we [the management of the college] agreed with them [the heads of education] that the [AR] process should continue. I mean, I have involved them, and the process just capsized in connection with the interview with you [Marianne & Jørgen].

This information is new to us that apparently, the management of the school and the heads of education from the municipality have had negotiations about eventually closing the AR project without involving the project steering group, us as action researchers, or the SSH team.

In the situation, we had some internal dialogues. Marianne interpreted the information as strategic communication, wondering why Julie did not earlier tell the project group and us about her meeting with the municipal heads of education. Jørgen doubted the validity of the information. We both wondered if this kind of hidden managerial agenda was typical in the school. We chose to ignore it in the situation and continued:

Marianne: So, that's where they decided to stop the process?

Julie: It's a signal to us that they think we control the supervisors and they dislike that, because the teachers come forward with much greater knowledge, different points of view and, of course, a more elaborate rhetoric. Therefore, some supervisors do not feel geared for practice meetings with the teachers and the students, and these are highly unpleasant for them. And there might be focus on items, too, they don't want to address.

Jørgen: On one hand, one could say that's a fair argument. On the other hand, one could ask ...

Julie: Why can't we cooperate about this?

Jørgen: Exactly, and is their statement biased? Is it just a few supervisors' discomfort? I mean, one little feather may grow into five hens, eh?

Julie: I have tried.

Jørgen: To find out?

Julie: Yes.

Jørgen: And what was the answer?

Julie: It's a general picture. The problem is they are our employers ... And their message is becoming clearer. We are not to interfere with the practical part of the education in the institutions.

Although we were not convinced, we chose not to problematize the claim about generality in the situation and continued:

Jørgen: No wonder the teachers are left with frustration. If I was a member of the team, I would have been frustrated, myself, because I simply can't hear the argument. I'm quite simply utterly frustrated. I'm fairly result oriented, so I'm irritated on behalf of the team. They have used so much time and energy to improve the cooperation with the institutions, and then,

all of a sudden, they are faced with a decision having the effect of a wet blanket.

Julie: I must admit, too, I had expected something different.

Marianne: I feel sorry for the team and the college. But I'm pleased that the SSH-team doesn't consider the AR project as a waste of time, because they have got a clear picture of the attitude of the municipality.

Julie: And that's really, really good. It makes me at ease, because the teachers have agreed to the terms.

AR learning

The third purpose of the article is concerned with learning points and suggestions for future actions drawn from the AR-project. This purpose is addressed in this paragraph moving from the nearer first and second AR person relations to the more comprehensive third person AR perspectives (Torbert & Taylor, 2008; Torbert, 2001):

The process demonstrates that we did not question our pre-understanding of participation by discussing it critically from a first person perspective. We are surprised. Previously, we have written about action researchers' self-referentiality (Kristiansen & Bloch-Poulsen, 2004) and demonstrated how the researchers' apriori categories and apriori ways of relating affect a project. We thought we had problematized our pre-judgments, but insufficiently, obviously. In the future, we will invite a critical friend into the project as a sparring partner who has contextual knowledge of the fields where we are incompetent.

With the wisdom of hindsight, we should have refused to conduct an interview with the heads of education from the municipality, because lacking basic knowledge of the context, it became obvious that this had fatal consequences, e.g., when seen from the amount of factual surprises during the interview. Interview and dialogue are not general "methods" to be used in context independent ways by simply acting openly and inquiringly as interviewers. In the next project, we will examine the contextual conditions as far as possible in advance. We might, for example, have asked the SSH-team, if they thought we ought to pay special attention to specific aspects. As external

action researchers we did not know, and we needed help from our internal partners. A help, we did not ask for.

In the future, we will pay more attention to the design of the interview situation, too. With the wisdom of hindsight, we question whether the interview context is participatory at all. The heads of education enter “our” project context in a room at the college, where we have just finished an interview with some students closing with a dialogue with the teachers. The heads of education are told that the interview will focus on college-institution cooperation, that they will be interviewed by us, while the SSH-team and their team managers are present, and that we will facilitate a follow-up dialogue between the SSH-team, their manager, and the heads of education. In advance, we did not inquire into their expectations of the interview, how they eventually wanted to contribute to the project, etc.

It is our interpretation that the interview is characterized by several aspects of power (Kvale, 2006). In retrospect, we think the interview setting contributed to exposing the heads of education from the municipality. Another aspect of power is that the interviewed persons have professional educations, while we are highly educated university teachers. Is the interview itself an example of what we are talking about, i.e. a meeting/cooperation between practitioners and theoreticians? Does the interview contribute to creating a short term polarization and an inverse power relation, where the team and we insist on a pedagogic-social Discourse, being the majority point of view in the situation, while their requiring customer point of view is the minority?

At the future, we will familiarize ourselves with the context in advance to a higher degree and inquire into if it was possible to establish some sort of consensus across differences in interests. Prior to the project, our awareness of the neo-liberal context was mainly abstract. However, as outside action researchers we always meet larger economic systems in local contexts represented by people. This means that general political and sociological knowledge must always be understood locally and contextually in ways that can seldom be predicted ahead of a project. The question whether organizational action research is at all possible in this concrete context characterized by a special Danish version of neoliberalism was not posed before the action

research process. We would also consider the power relations that might possibly emerge in the interview situation.

From a third person perspective, the process indicates that we should have enlarged our field of inquiry in order to reduce the amount of important factual surprises, because they problematized the basis of our cooperation with the teachers aiming at improving practice meetings. We still wonder if we could have known in advance if a decision was made by the heads of education to abolish practice meetings.

One might say that we should have tried to convince the teachers to embark on some sort of political action against the economic-management Discourse. In line with Cornwall's principle 'Save us from the Savors' (Cornwall, 2014), we did not intend to position the teachers as objects of our political project. We think this could have been an example of the so-called paradox of participation (Arieli, Friedman, & Agbaria, 2009).

Conclusion

The general purpose of the article has been to show how important it is that as external action researchers, you see beyond the end of your nose trying to map the contexts: which additional parties – besides your immediate partners – might influence the results of the project in a more or less favorable ways? In the described case, for example, we ought to have examined the position of the municipality in relation to the college-institution cooperation. Our approach is emergent, so this does not imply that we think you can predict everything in a project (Stacey, 2001; Phillips & Kristiansen, 2012). During a project at Danfoss, Denmark, a heavy snowfall in China made it impossible for the supplier to keep their appointments. This made the affected Danfoss team to put the AR project on standby in order to find an alternative supplier; during a project at Codan Rubber, Denmark, we had to handle a strike notice which, of course, suspended the AR project; in different organizations, a change of senior manager meant that years of development work had to be shelved, etc. As external action researchers, you are continuously faced with the unforeseeable, but this should not prevent us from screening relevant stakeholders and contexts. Our point of view is that the delimitation of your

field of inquiry is always arbitrary and that the tension between planning and unpredictability is a dilemma that, *eo ipso*, cannot be solved; for exactly this reason it must be continuously reflected on.

The specific purpose of the article has been to demonstrate how a struggle between two societal Discourses – a pedagogical-social and an economic-managerial Discourse – expresses itself in a local AR project at a Social and Healthcare College in Denmark between stakeholders with different hierarchical positions. We understand the first Discourse as a child of the welfare state and its principle about “cultural education for cooperation” (Pedersen, 2011, p. 177) which is in line with the teachers’ and the actions researchers’ endeavor towards participation. We understand the second Discourse as a child of the competition state and its principle about “education for competence” (Pedersen, 2011, p. 186). It becomes evident, for example, when college management talks about employer demands to the students as a capacity for work.

On one hand, we have the notion of the Social and Healthcare College as a school, where the students are talked about as ‘ours’. It’s characterized by a focus on learning, work climate and improved cooperation between theory and practice for the benefit of the students, for example by developing practice meetings with relevant stakeholders. This Discourse, marked by a wish for dialogue as knowledge production, is conceptualized as co-production (Philips, 2011). This line is supported by the students, we interviewed as well as by the supervisor, who chose to show up. From this perspective, improvement means an even better alignment of expectations between students, teachers, and supervisors about practice meetings and upgrading of skills for some supervisors.

On the other hand, we have the economic-management Discourse represented by the municipality and the Danish state/government. They are employers of the students, and consequently, these are spoken of as ‘ours’. Besides, the municipality is a requiring costumer of a commodity from the institutions and the college, a commodity they might as well require from different institutions and colleges. As mentioned, we interpret this Discourse as a version of new Public Management, in which the public sector is attempted transformed into a market. There is a focus on the school as a voca-

tional college securing relevant manpower (Juul, 2014). This Discourse is marked by a top-down view on education in which practice meetings are considered as college interference in the business of the institutions. These meetings are to be abolished as waste of resources without a dialogue with the relevant parties. Theory is subsumed practice, i.e. the teachers are to be trained in the institutions in order to raise the students' capacity for work. In this non-dialogic perspective, economic resources seem to be the ultimate argument.

This interpretation has three theoretical consequences:

- Firstly, a distinction between local micro-discourses and societal macro-Discourses (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000) cannot be maintained in this case. Without being discourse determinists ourselves, we think we have shown how the societal Discourses appear in the local discourses.
- Secondly, a modernist notion of organizations and contexts as only frames or containers must be abandoned (Axley, 1984; Putnam, 1999). The college context, the municipality context and the societal contexts express themselves, i.e. they are integrated in conversations of the local project context.
- Thirdly, organizations cannot be reduced to communication (Deetz & White, 1999). The Social and Healthcare College, the SSH-team, and the AR project are embedded in political-economic power games in which reduced economic resources and different positions in the hierarchy of decisions cannot be suspended communicatively.

The forward-looking/action oriented purpose has been to show, how context-inquiring dialogues with relevant stakeholders are necessary. The conversations with the students, the management of the college, and the heads of education from the municipality are all examples of such context-inquiring dialogues. The learning point is that they ought to be carried through as early in an AR-project as possible to throw light on the projects' practicability and to avoid unnecessary frustrations of too late conversations with the heads of education as created in the case described.

Based in this AR learning, there are two consequences from the present project:

- Firstly, the context-inquiring dialogues must take place continuously. The interview with Julie from the college management seems to indicate that the heads of education would have said ‘Go’ for the project, had we conducted an interview with them during spring. Thus, a continuous alignment of expectations with additional stakeholders seems necessary.
- Secondly, these dialogues must address the practicability of the project. Is it possible to carry through a development and change project under the prevalent operational conditions? Our experience is that operational conditions increasingly impede development projects in private as well as public organizations, i.e. that the unfolding of political-economic power reduces the possibilities of empowerment inherent in the AR endeavor for participation.

Maybe, dialogic, organizational AR is placed in a midstream? Or, to put it otherwise: what are the conditions for conducting organizational AR projects in a neoliberal context?

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