

The politics of home-school relations

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I approach the question of home-school relations with the methodology of critical institution analysis inspired by social constructionist tradition and Michel Foucault's theory of institutions. Home and school are the principal socio-emotional contact points between generations and as such the primary vehicles of socializing, educative and civilizing processes during childhood and youth. A multitude of societal processes are undermining the functioning of both families and schools as life-worlds of children. The socialization situation of children and the young can be described as anarchic in the sense that it is lacking appropriate institutional mechanisms for tackling the challenges of generational reproduction from a holistic care and education point of view. In Finland the dominant discourse on the problems of children and youth describes the situation as reflecting the lack of good parenting. The families are seen as the main cause of the health and behavioural problems of children, many of these manifesting in problems at school. This has put the schools and the families on different sides of a political debate on the theme "who is to blame, where is the ultimate responsibility for our children?". In my view, this ideological battle reflects a centuries old dualizing discourse on care and education in western societies, where the primary and most important part of care and upbringing and the basis of morals are considered to be built in the family and the school is seen as an a-moral and professional institution functioning in the interests of the political and economic sphere. The idea of dualism is based on feminist analysis of western patriarchal and neo-patriarchal societies (Pateman, Okin, Feld). Its effect in educational theory and discourses has been to divide the question of generational reproduction in two qualitatively distinct spheres: on the one hand there is the societally unseen, often ignored and relatively unresearched work of care, upbringing and education of children at home, in the women's sphere. On the other hand, there is a very specified and technically thematized discourse on learning and teaching, which has been the prevalent discourse in the construction of the school as a public institution (men's sphere). A holistic view on the growth and development of human beings as societal actors is lacking, which also effects the way the question of home-school relations is approached in public discussions. Home-school-relations have entered the political agenda recently (OECD). One should question why.