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Collaboration and co-research as a way of expanding problem-understandings – situated inequality in education as an example

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Although co-research has recently gained political and institutional traction, we argue in this article that the concept risks becoming an overly broad label detached from its theoretical origins and critical ambitions. Drawing on practice theory and a subject scientific tradition, we emphasise that knowledge is situated, exploratory and produced through people's engagement with conflictual social practices. Co-research is therefore not a technique, but an epistemological commitment to investigating common problems together with participants as knowledgeable subjects. To illustrate how processes of co-researching can change our understanding of a problem we involve different conceptualisations of inequality in education – moving from emphasising deficits related to children and disadvantaged backgrounds to exploring institutional conditions in societal practices. Through collaboration that examines participants' subjective reasons for acting, co-research can illuminate the institutional dynamics behind individualisation – and generate relevant knowledge that resists reduction to decontextualised, managerial or instrumentally driven research.

Keywords: Co-research, Practice research, Situated inequality, Situated Knowledge, Subjectivity

Introduction

In the light of the theoretical assumption that people's activities in everyday life presuppose inquiry, exploration and collaboration, this article will discuss the concept of co-research as a key concept in practice research. In relation to the theme of this special issue, which is about conducting research with, rather than on, other people, we emphasise

that when we do research, we engage with an everyday social practice that is already exploratory. Knowledge is at stake in everyday social practice and is developed, adjusted and negotiated in processes of managing social life and societal problems in societal institutions. Nevertheless, most scientific traditions are fundamentally shaped by the notion of a dissociation between social life and scientific knowledge, which leads to the idea of isolating issues in order to explore them (e.g. Burman, 1994; Haraway, 1988; Schraube & Højholt, 2019). The term 'co-research' is not an innocent term but represents a fundamental break with such approaches to human beings, research and development of knowledge that have been dominant in modern society (Dreier, 2007, 2009; Holzkamp, 2013, 2016; Juul Jensen, 1999).

At a time when concepts of practice research, co-researching and collaborative research is gaining traction – in Denmark it is even becoming a significant demand of of research funding – it seems relevant to return to some of these breaks and debates. In a situation of political demands of using research to increase the quality of professional work in societal institutions (Andersen et al., 2020), the term practice research may be at risk of becoming an almost empty label. Hence, the term may be understood and used as a method or technique that can be added to any kind of research for either ethical reasons, to improve implementation or to make research more applicable to the development of a specific practice. We find it somehow contradictory that practice research and co-research in this way can become associated with the management tendencies, objectification and hierarchical concepts of knowledge to which they were originally an opposition. In this sense, we find that the popularization of practice research provides a welcome opportunity to return to discussions on the methodological issues that, in our view, underlie the concept.

In this article we will illustrate how our practice research approach has consequences for what is possible to obtain knowledge about and how co-research can change our understanding of the problems we study.

In the article we will use the problematic of inequality in education to illustrate how the approach of co-research shifts the focus of inequality from groups of people who are incapable of fitting into institutions, to institutional *conditions* and the processes of societal conflicts, mutual resignation, and powerlessness that lead to the categorisation of individuals and displacement of problems. The point is that acknowledging everyday

knowledge and incorporating the perspectives of those involved can contextualize research problems, helping researchers to understand the conditions of the problems they study. In our case, what is perceived as a child's shortcomings in managing school life, related to a disadvantaged background, becomes connected to conflictual and cross-contextual processes involving many parties (Røn-Larsen, 2016, 2018; Højholt & Røn-Larsen, 2021).

The article starts from the methodological discussions behind the way of conducting practice-research in close collaboration with co-researchers – the various people involved in the practice we wish to understand better. In this context, the co-researchers are not treated as 'objects' for study, intervention or development; they are involved in the process of exploring *common problems*. In general, research processes are understood and organised as mutual learning processes that creates opportunities for taking advantages of the connections between knowledge creation, practice development and theoretical development (Højholt & Kousholt, 2019). To discuss these relations, we will touch on the concept of knowledge as part of social practice, and on the concept of co-research as linked to an approach to subjectivity understanding conduct of everyday life as explorative processes (Dreier, 2008, Schraube, 2015). For instance, this provides an insight into how professionals working in societal institutions collaborate on contradictory common tasks through investigating and adjusting institutional conditions (Røn-Larsen, 2019, 2024). The article then elaborates on more practical question of organising opportunities to exchange different perspectives on common problems. Finally, we will demonstrate how this research approach can transform our understanding of for example educational inequality and how this is linked to specific analytical concepts for guiding fieldwork and analysis.

Practice-research – a broad and theoretically diverse endeavour

From being a rather marginalized position within the research community, these years we see an increasing curiosity related to practice research. This sudden popularity can be linked to the critique of increased demand for evidence-based professional practice in recent years. As this demand has grown, so has the demand to integrate research into practice, for example in social work. In a somewhat paradoxical way, both this demand

and the critique of it, has led to an increase in ideas about practice research (Andersen et al., 2020).

Fundamentally, practice research reflects an international broad and shared ambition of knowledge-development in relation to inform and improve practice, policy and future research through collaborative processes between researchers and multiple stakeholders in practice. The research collaboration is often organized in ways seeking to minimize power differentials between the different participants in ways that address the gap between research and practice (Fisher et al., 2016). At the same time though, as practice research evolves, it becomes clear, that it does not simply represent a specific research method, but rather a variety of approaches with different ways of understanding and defining practice research, based in multiple theoretical lines of thinking, hence leading to different foci and points of interest (Andersen et al., 2020; Uggerhøj, 2011). This broad interest in practice research has formed the basis of fruitful discussions on the relations between research and practice – for example in a line of national and international gatherings and conferences across e.g. psychology, anthropology and social work (Austin, 2020; Joubert & Webber, 2020; Uggerhøj, 2014). However, the rising popularity is not without challenges. For us it is especially important to return to and emphasise some of the fundamental disruptions with understandings of knowledge, societal development and subjectivity in traditional positivistic science, that forms the basis of our way of developing practice research.

As we will unfold in the article, our position in this field has its origins in social psychology of everyday life and its methodological roots in the philosophy of practice and the science of the subject. We will now delve into the concepts of knowledge and co-researching – and later discuss their influence on our curiosity regarding children's unequal access to social resources in child institutions.

Knowledge from somewhere and not from nowhere

We began this article by stating that practice research and co-research are not only a moral or ethical decision but also depends on a particular concept of knowledge. Here, we draw on practice philosophy and would like to underscore the banal point that knowledge is not something arrived at by isolating, abstracting, and disengaging oneself from social practice and subjectivity. Such opposition to the idea that knowledge neutrally refers to

an unambiguous essence in the world, which we must examine by separating ourselves from the context of which it is a part, is shared by several other thinkers. This opposition is grounded in a broad critique from many contextual thinkers, such as Foucault, who analysed the relationship between power and knowledge, and how knowledge creates subjects (Foucault, 1980, 1982); and Haraway, who highlighted how knowledge does not originate from nowhere, but always from somewhere – how knowledge is situated (Haraway, 1988).

Formulated from a practice-theoretical and subject scientific perspective knowledge is part of subjective dealing with everyday social practices – contextual, historical and situated. (e.g. Juul Jensen, 2015; Lave, 2019). Knowledge is an integrated part of everyday life and in people's subjective ways of relating to each other, their tasks and their conduct of everyday life. Consequently, knowledge is many-sided and complex, and from different perspectives different persons have different – still relevant – knowledge about the "same problem".

The field of children is illustrative for this. An example could be how a child from a teacher's perspective could be described as unteachable, from the leisure-time professional's, he is *'an interesting kid'* (it is the teachers, who are creating the problem), seen from the psychologist it's a problem of (missing) collaboration, and the mother states: *'Of course we have problems at home too, no parents are perfect, but the school problems don't come from home.'* These perspectives are not randomly different but can be analytically linked to different positions and contributions in a historical division of tasks and responsibilities (Dreier, 2008; Højholt, 2006). In this way, we may understand a problem and its context by investigating and analysing such differences. Conflicts about how to understand a problem often relates to structural arrangements and to the specific context the professionals find themselves in. Their different perspectives reveal insights into how childcare has been arranged historically and what is currently at stake in these structures. Starting from the basis that people act within situated, interconnected practices, the specific participants can show us something about general relations. In a sense, the generalization of knowledge begins by connecting different perspectives to the shared world from which they originate (Schraube & Højholt, 2019; Busch-Jensen & Schraube, 2019). Differences reveal insights into general connections in social life. For

example, they reveal connections between different perspectives and areas of responsibility, tasks and conditions.

Research is part of conflictual processes about how to understand societal problems and is still often called upon to resolve disputes about how to qualify professional practice (as for example evidence-based research, Andersen et al., 2020). Currently, we experience the risk of practice research becoming an instrument for implementing quality from above and from 'outside' interests, involvement and engagement. Acknowledging the situated character of knowledge illuminates that knowledge from 'outside' is not neutral but just represent other interests and engagement – from another social practice as for instance management practice. Furthermore, a one-sided approach to solving conflicts from 'above' remains blind to what those involved are grappling with and the conditions essential for understanding the problems as they perceive them. Rather than resolving conflicts in a one-sided manner, we argue that the task of research is to shed light on and *analyse conflicts* in order to understand the problems. When we use research to determine decontextualized 'best practice', we miss the opportunity to grasp how problems are connected to specific differences and conflicts.

Knowledge from different kinds of social practices

The discussion above is based on a key criticism of hierarchical concepts of knowledge, such as the idea that some people create knowledge and others merely use it. Already in his work on the reflective practitioner, Schön demonstrated the problem in the abstraction of viewing, thinking and acting as separate processes (Schön, 1983). When we act, we create knowledge; we reflect, investigate, analyse and collaborate to manage our everyday lives and tasks (Mardahl-Hansen & Højholt, 2025). Professionals orient themselves within complex social situations of which they are a part, continuously assessing, investigating and experimenting (Røn-Larsen, 2019). To gain knowledge about these processes and their conditions, we need to collaborate with professionals and learn from their ongoing exploration.

Still, such contextual knowledge may not count in the negotiation about the problems. The dominant idea seems to be that knowledge from a person not involved in the everyday practice with the children (e.g. a psychologist) or knowledge from a kind of technique – as a test or a scheme for scoring - represent a more refined knowledge. This

kind of hierarchical thinking about knowledge permeates institutions in children's lives and influences the positioning between users and professionals, ranging from educators and teachers to university-educated experts (Mehan, 1993; Røn-Larsen, 2018).
In this way, knowledge from different kinds of practices is differentiated into distinct forms of knowledge. For example, knowledge relating to everyday experiences with concrete children is opposed to more abstract or general knowledge. Such distinction between different types of knowledge appears to hark back to the notion of a hierarchy, where 'real' knowledge is conceived as emerging from outside of social practice – from nowhere.

Our concern is that this tendency to separate and hierarchise forms of knowledge restricts exchanges about the everyday life of a child and the possibilities for contextualisation and insight into the social conditions of a problem, as well as restricting the expansion of practitioners' professionalism (Røn-Larsen, 2016, 2024). While knowledge from professional practices may be recognised as personal, unique experiences of specific issues, it is still considered subordinate to scientific knowledge about more general concepts.

Valsiner points out the paradox, that also general and scientific knowledge originates from unique events (Valsiner, 2019). He illustrates how generalization in science is always abstracting from unique events. In practice philosophy we would formulate that our analyses and generalisations are developed through insight into concrete variations in social practice. In continuation of this, concrete relations carry general aspects, and general knowledge does not stem from a scientific practice beyond the concrete (Dreier, 2007; Juul Jensen, 1999, 2015).

Through these thoughts, we argue that different practices imply different ways of working with knowledge, rather than a different nature of knowledge. *In professional practice*, knowledge is part of the process of investigating and solving problems. Although this may involve comparing to other situations and experiences and analysing general connections, these everyday exploration processes and analyses are seldom conceptualised. In professional practice, theoretical development and generalisation are rarely the main tasks. In *scientific practice*, analysing, conceptualising and writing articles about general knowledge and theoretical development is precisely the task, and

the conditions for observations, curiosity and analysing variations, differences and connections are arranged for this purpose.

When we problematise the differentiation of different types of knowledge it is because such an idea can place participants on an unequal footing, silencing some and resolving conflicts in an unambiguous and one-sided manner that bypasses those involved. Professionals report that evidence based standardized concepts and methods express a simplified approach to their work and undermine their professionalism, rather than supporting and strengthening it. As researchers, we are already structurally linked to professional practices – in this sense, we are part of the problem – and we must 'shake up' our positions. This cannot be achieved with a declaration of intent, but rather through processes, organisations and ways of collaborating, as we shall return to shortly.

Co-research and object of research

Above we have tried to unfold how we consider development of knowledge as part of social practice. This is a starting point based on a critique of an essentialist and abstract concept of knowledge 'from nowhere'. At the same time, we have elaborated on the concept of social practice as structured collective activity, characterised by cooperation concerning specific, changing societal tasks within historical institutions (Chaiklin et al., 1999).

In this section the concept of co-research as based on a subject science is discussed, emphasising the exploratory aspects of subjectivity (Holzkamp, 2016; Dreier, 2008). Thus, the exploratory processes of everyday life form the basis for collaboration in our approach to practice-based research. Through collaboration with co-researchers from the social practices, we may learn about what is at stake in the institutions and how different participants have different conditions and different perspectives on their tasks, aims and problems. The participants continuously reconcile different concerns, dissolve conflicts and adjust conditions in order to handle tasks, manoeuvre in contradictions and search for solutions. Rather than isolating the development of knowledge from these processes, we can learn from ongoing everyday exploration, different perspectives, and the ways in which those involved encounter dilemmas, conflicts and deadlocks – as well as solutions.

To strengthen this opportunity, we argue for explicitly involving co-researchers in the different aspects of the research process, from the initial curiosity and research questions to the design, and the exchange about observations, hypotheses, analyses and generalisations.

This endeavour disrupts prevalent positionings and the relations between researchers and different groups of professionals. It is not easy, it involves many reflections, considerations and continuous adjustments of the collaborative processes, but in our experiences, we obtain a richer empirical material and more relevant analyses through developing a community that transcends the knowledge hierarchies associated with research. In such a community, the potential for both researchers and co-researchers to feel safe in asking questions and contributing knowledge and perspectives may be strengthened (Kousholt & Højholt, 2022).

Furthermore, the effort to create research communities with co-researchers reflects a rupture with processes of 'othering'. This is also part of the formulation of the research problem and the research object itself. From a practice research perspective, we focus on conducting research together *with* and *from* the standpoint of people regarding *common* problematics (e.g. in our current research children's unequal possibilities of participation in their everyday life in societal institutions). It is these common problems that constitute the object of research, not "the others". Such approach is therefore a part of the broad critique of objectification, problem displacement, individualisation and othering. The focus is on analysing *general* social connections in social life rather than targeting specific individuals or categorizing groups of persons.

Co-researchers are viewed neither as objects of investigation nor as representatives of a particular group of people, discourse, ideology, hegemonic norm or way of thinking. Rather the persons involved are approached as subjects relating to such structural conditions and societal modes of thinking and understanding. As participants in societal institutions, we all have different perspectives on these structures, and we adapt and find our way through them. In doing so, we simultaneously reproduce and change them. Through collaborative research, characterised by open and mutual curiosity, we can explore personal *reasons* behind actions and understandings and analyse and gain insight into significant conditions for problematic processes. As we will exemplify in the

following, this is demanding processes of continuous investigation, reflection and organisation together with different co-researchers – both children and adults.

Emerging research positions

How can we develop research positions that enable collaboration, and exchange of curiosity and different perspectives? We are often asked how it is possible to develop a research position that does not simply replicate existing power structures.

Firstly, we will emphasise that this can never be a definite process, planned and decided upon in advance. Rather, it is a continuously emerging process of mutual exploration, identifying possible ways to collaborate and approach each other. Mostly it evolves across different research settings, such as practice research meetings with e.g. different professionals, various forms of conversations and interviews as well as participant observations in different practices. During these research activities everyone involved (including the researchers themselves) is exploring, what kind of research positions and forms of collaboration can be developed.

We are often met with the argument that power prevents the exchanges we need. Yes, power is at stake in these processes, unfortunately more often powerlessness. However, we would not conceptualize power as unambiguous or static structures. Regarding co-research, we find it particularly relevant to analyse the knowledge hierarchies of which we are a part. Research is not neutral but is part of assessing, targeting and governing professional practice. In this way hierarchies and unequal positions are always at stake, but not as unchangeable structures.

Against this backdrop, practice research continuously engages with these hierarchies and their positionings. To challenge hierarchies, researchers often need to withdraw from privileges and refrain from adopting expert positions. Instead, co-researchers are invited to join us in shared curiosity, making ourselves available to learn from them.

This is both a question of the philosophy of science (How is knowledge created and developed, and what is the relationship between the development of knowledge and the development of practice?) and a very practical question (How are we situated in a physical and social space? How do we in research democratize access to speaking, asking

questions, being knowledgeable, having a perspective on a problem, and on what constitutes relevant development of practice?).

An example of such processes can be seen at practice research meetings, where we strive to participate on an equal footing with the co-researchers. For instance, we involve the co-researchers in the research questions asking them what kind of knowledge is needed seen from their perspectives. As part of the initial orientation rounds, we share our dilemmas and insecurities. We take part in workshops, discuss the project's progress and present our observations, encouraging everyone to do the same. We also exchange analyses and discuss their potential significance for practice (Kousholt & Højholt, 2022). In our work, we prefer to bring together different perspectives in our meetings, but due to the situation, the research questions, concrete projects and participants, we sometimes need to divide participants. Some questions may be better discussed with colleagues who have similar professional backgrounds, while others benefit from a variety of professional perspectives. Furthermore, teachers and pedagogues tend to communicate differently when their manager, the school psychologist, and a municipal consultant are present. Similarly, managers may find it vulnerable to share their doubts and dilemmas, when their staff are present.

In relation to our research collaboration with children, we must reflect on and negotiate similar issues to avoid becoming caught up in classic power dynamics. In this regard, it is interesting how children themselves engage explicitly in negotiations of the research position. At the beginning, they often seem to test, whether the researcher is just another professional to help, control and assess what is going on.

Co-researching with children involves continuous efforts of negotiating and earning the position of ‘the curious adult’, with the task of understanding and creating knowledge about their life. It involves a process of explaining how little we know about, what it means to be a child in their everyday life, staying with the curiosity and refraining from reprimands and advice. Researchers need to consider, where to position themselves in a room, where to chat with children (a formal interview in an office seems to reproduce a scholastic relation between child and adult) and how to make oneself available to their wonder, curiosity and questions.

Over time, we observe the children tell each other*, 'She wants to know what it's like to start school'*, and telling the researcher, *'You should write this in your book'* or *'If you want to understand school, you should know about this...'*

When the children explain the rules and significances to us, and they want us to notice things that they find important, the positions of more and less knowledgeable are disrupted. The children seem to become aware, that we are unfamiliar with rules and do not enforce them. They also seem to sense that we are not useful in relation to giving permission, making decisions or resolving issues (Kousholt, 2016).

The common thread in our interactions with both adults and children is our ongoing attempt to signal that we want to understand the practice of everyday life from their perspective. As we have illustrated, developing this kind of research position involves continuously considering the researcher's position in relation to the co-researchers, as well as the co-researchers' positions in relation to each other. It involves ongoing, concrete questions relating to the organisation of practice research. These questions cannot be solved using a specific model or method but rather require a great deal of discussion and investigation in order to continuously develop collaboration. Through these processes, the research collaboration emerges in respect of the participants, their conditions, and their perspectives on the research itself.

Analytical concepts exemplified through the issue of 'situated inequality'

In this section we want to illuminate how researching from and with co-researchers can shed light on institutional conditions behind the kind of individualisation often criticized in psychology. The issue of different approaches to inequality presents such an example of how problem understanding may change through research processes.

Through this example we want to discuss co-research, as a shift in focus from researching on people to researching with them in their conflictual and complex everyday lives. In other words, to understand the dynamics that create inequality in relation to possibilities for taking part and contributing to the social life of education, we must accompany people in their everyday lives, where they grapple with these issues. We need contextual knowledge from everyday life and from different perspectives, but as discussed, this challenges the hierarchical concept of knowledge, which implies isolation from local conditions, subjectivity, and interests (Thorgaard, 2010).

Building on these considerations, we insist on exploring institutional conditions from the subjective standpoint of the people experiencing them in their everyday lives. This is particularly evident in relation to research into inequality: Despite starting from unequal distribution of social resources, much research tends to focus on 'the others' and overlook the unequal conditions (Højholt, 2024; McDermott & Vossoughi, 2020). The focus is typically turned to special individuals who seems unable to handle unambiguous tasks in more or less harmonious contexts overlooking that practice is, by definition, conflictual and full of dilemmas for the participants (Højholt & Kousholt, 2020; Mehan, 1992). In this way, the fact that completing the tasks here requires cooperation and access to social resources is overlooked – for both children and adults.

Children develop their conduct of everyday life together and learn through participating in communities across different contexts in their lives. They are constantly faced with many demands and considerations, which are often conflicting and they use each other to orient in transitions, new situations and conflicts, and to create meaning and coherence in their lives. Unequal access to participation in children's communities means they have unequal access to the social resources essential for their development and learning, and for them to successfully navigate their lives (Højholt & Kousholt, 2018).
But often, such unequal conditions for participation are translated into understandings of individual social background or deficits. Through practice research processes, we gain access to situations where children meet conflictual conditions for taking part in institutional communities and are understood decontextualised from the social conditions they try to handle. We also gain access to the complex landscape of conflicts between different groups of professionals and parents, as well as among children, that underlie the individual categorisations and influence the conditions for and access to possibilities of participation (Højholt, 2016).

When cooperation breaks down, powerlessness and mutual resignation accelerate, conflicts about problems may lead to displacements of problems and individualisation. Focusing solely on social background as a measure of inequality can cause us to overlook such dilemmas and social dynamics. This points to the importance of not only criticising individualisation but also exploring the *conditions* for understanding problems.
In this way the concept of 'situated inequality' highlights the social situations and institutional conditions experienced by children and adults in institutional settings.

Through the collaboration with co-researchers, we recognise that professionals' experiences of their tasks and their opportunities to handle these in collaboration with others significantly impact what can be achieved in these institutions.

So far, we can see that situated inequality occurs in processes and interactions of many parties across different contexts. These processes appear to be characterised by unresolved conflicts, powerlessness, pressure and mutual resignations. This can involve children giving up on each other, children giving up on being part and finding friends, adults giving up on parts of their tasks, and giving up on opportunities for cooperation and interaction both between the children and about the children (Højholt, 2022; Røn-Larsen & Højholt, 2025). The key point here is that exploring a problem within its context, together with those involved, can lead to a new and potentially meaningful and relevant understanding of the problem.

To be relevant for practice we need to move away from one-sided, abstract and decontextualised generalisations such as 'it doesn't matter where he is; there's something about him'. Instead, we argue for situated generalisations and a movement towards multifaceted investigations of general connections in concrete social practice, such as 'his participation is linked to who he is with, what is at stake and the conflicts he is involved in' (Schraube & Højholt, 2019).

This kind of generalising is based on analyses of what a problem is connected with – it is a contextualisation of the problem. In the research proses we become aware of these connections through *subjective reasons*. The involved co-researchers are aware of the problems and can through common exploration identify what they relate to, such as feelings of powerlessness, the various contradictory tasks, and threats to their professionalism. By collaborating with those affected, researchers can *analyse* the significant conditions of the problems by understanding their reasons for acting. An analytical point is that personal reasons are related to conditions that cut across different contexts (Røn-Larsen & Højholt, 2025).

In this way, the concept of co-research implies not only collaboration but also an approach to co-researchers as knowledgeable subjects acting in relation to their specific conditions. This approach involves understanding people's actions in context, e.g. as attempts to deal with complicated everyday situations involving dilemmas and conflicts. This means that we make use of *analytical concepts* of subjective reasons related to

specific conditions, in order to guide our joint search for the relevant conditions of a problem (Dreier, 2008).

Summing up – children's possibilities for participation as well as research processes are fundamental political

In this article, we have highlighted some issues related to co-research by discussing practice research into children's unequal possibilities of participation in societal institutions. We have demonstrated that adopting a co-research approach does not signify a distinct method, but rather a distinct attitude towards the people with whom we conduct research. This attitude of mutuality extends from the formulation of research questions to the ways in which we collaborate, interview, observe, analyse and present our generalisations.

Furthermore, this is also a theoretical endeavour related to analysing human actions within a specific context. It requires analytical tools and forms of theoretical thinking that are based on a critique of decontextualised research, which isolates and otherises research subjects.

Rather than seeking to eliminate subjectivity as sources of error, it is important to recognise that research is based on intersubjectivity and contextualisation. As mentioned, co-research is not an innocent term, but a particular approach to people, research, knowledge, and to how social practice develops.

Regarding our problem of inquiry, we have also tried to illustrate how involving contextual issues through co-researching have shed light on institutional conditions 'behind' individualization of problematic in specific contexts. Children are fundamental social resources for each other, yet they have unequal access to these resources. This unequal access appears to be linked to conditions beyond the individual child's 'social background' or 'level of social competence'. By researching from and with co-researchers we realise how this inequality is also linked to institutional conditions for children and adults, as well as to the cooperation and conflicts between the various adults in institutional contexts.

Child institutions are both highly politically debated and contexts in which a bustling everyday life unfolds. The possibilities for taking part, contributing and having influence on these institutions are simultaneously linked to structural, legal, economic

and administrative conditions outside e.g. the classroom, as well as to conflicts and collaborative processes involving children, families, professionals and administrators. Therefore, to understand the dynamics that create inequality in children's life contexts, we need knowledge about institutions and institutional conditions as experienced by participants living their everyday lives within and across these institutions. This is an argument for co-research and for how the involvement of the people struggling with the research issues in their everyday practice enrich the research with knowledge about what the problems are connected with.

Co-research can provide new perspectives on inequality as linked to concrete everyday life conditions for participating in institutional communities and conducting one's life across contexts. Numerous co-researchers (children and professionals), each with different positions and perspectives, can shed light on conflicts and historical contradictions within the educational field - thereby providing insight into the creation and possible transcendence of inequalities in institutional contexts.

There are many different opinions about how educational institutions should be developed and currently a dominant political answer to disputes regarding quality and purpose with societal institution is evidence-based regulations. Evidence-based development pretends to rise above all these interests. However, we would argue that, to develop possibilities for participation for all children, as well as identify what prevents this, we need to analyse the different perspectives on what is important for children and what is relevant. Understanding such conflicts are essential for grasping the problems.

It seems crucial to the possibilities of overcoming inequality in child institutions that professionals have the opportunity to work flexible with uniting contradictory aspects of their societal tasks. This implies working exploratively in collaboration with each other, other professionals, the children's parents and the children. Practice research cannot solve the problems but contribute to the priority and acknowledgment of these aspects of professionalism**.** Exploration is already an integral part of professional practice, and practice-based research has the potential to enhance the exploratory processes of everyday life and the development of theory. Professionalism is not about following manuals; it is about examining problems based on knowledge, understanding and experience within a specific field.

Hopefully we have illustrated how practice research and co-research are not expressions of a specific schematic method or a particular moral obligation or ethical attitude towards inclusion of specific perspectives. Rather, they are a specific practice theoretical scientific approach with a particular understanding of knowledge, research subjects and subjectivity.

The discussions in this article are also linked to the very purpose of research. Historically, research has been associated with the improvement of social life through measurement, prediction, control and ultimately management. However, research has also been conceived as a means of developing possibilities for actions and contributing to the development of practice by changing conditions, structures and understandings. While these conceptions of research may not be that distinctly separated in everyday practice and politics, they still build on irreconcilable conceptualisations of knowledge and knowledge production, and they advocate different approaches to organising research. It might be relevant to consider the relationships between how we want to use research, who should use it, and who should benefit from it – and how we collaborate in and about research.

In any case, research is structurally linked to other societal practices and forms part of the ongoing political conflicts concerning how problems should be understood, how resources should be prioritised and who should have a say in the development of societal institutions. Hence, research is also part of democratic efforts.

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