

Absence of/as Cause

Conceptualizing the Causality of Absence from School

Jonas Yde Højgaard, Ph.D. student, Aarhus University, jonas@psy.au.dk

Absence from school is today an important measure of youths' lives (Ekstrand, 2015). Through an analysis of the literature, I will show that absence is conceptualized in two ways - often mixed together. Absence is both conceptualized as the absence of a cause (schooling) and as a cause itself. Indeed, it is because absence is associated with a range of negative outcomes (Kearney, 2008), and that absence is thought to be *causal*, that it legitimizes interventions in youths' lives. The problem is that it makes school the center of youth's lives: it only describes the school situation without taking note of what children do instead – simply assuming that it is negative. I argue that we should situate the causality of absence in two ways: in daily life of youths' and in school practice. 1) Situating the concept in youths' lives, the causality of absence of schooling requires a normative judgement of the daily lives of youths' against the daily life of schooling. For example, is learning a craft from your parents or watching TV is less valuable than learning math or school discipline. 2) If we focus on school *practice*, absences themselves have an effect on youths' lives: schools *react* to absences by making interventions into the lives of youths. Theoretically, these point to how absences from school are causal – as part of daily life and practice - without allowing other absent forces to be causal, which would invite an infinitude of absent causes (Wolff, Barbey, & Hausknecht, 2010).

LITERATURE

- Ekstrand, B. (2015). What it takes to keep children in school: A research review. *Educational Review*, 67(4), 459–482. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2015.1008406>
- Kearney, C. A. (2008). School absenteeism and school refusal behavior in youth: A contemporary review. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 28(3), 451–471. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2007.07.012>
- Schaffer, J. (2016). "The Metaphysics of Causation." In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2016). Retrieved from <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2016/entries/causation-metaphysics/>
- Wolff, P., Barbey, A. K., & Hausknecht, M. (2010). For Want of a Nail: How Absences Cause Events. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 139(2), 191–221. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0018129>