

# Absence of/as Cause

## Conceptualizing the Causality of Absence from School

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Absence from school is today an important measure of youths' lives (Ekstrand, 2015). Through an analysis of the absenteeism 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 can legitimize interventions into youths' lives. I will argue however, that this 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 less valuable than learning math or school discipline. This is important, as it helps us understand *when* absence from school matters. 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. This is important as it points to how our interventions and reactions to absence may play a part in the negative consequences associated with absence.

## LITERATURE

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## BIOSKETCH

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Employment history: Jonas graduated from his master's degree in psychology January 2018, with a project on young persons' reasons for absence as seen in the context of their own life conduct. During his years in Psychology he, among other research related activities, was employed as a research assistant to the Danish project "Back2School", doing interviews with parents and school personnel on how they handled absence. Currently, he is doing a Ph.D. exploring how communication patterns evolve over time between teachers, parents and youth in cases of absence, utilizing participant observation and interviews.