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Equal Individuals into Unequal Roles?

A discourse analytical perspective on equality and inclusion in Norwegian governmental education policy

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Norwegian University of
Science and Technology

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Abstract

The starting point of this thesis is the duality between education perceived as based on the ideals of equality, and education as a continuous factor in reproducing social divisions. Within this duality resides an interest to investigate how a consensus on equality in educational policies across the political spectrum can be argued to cover up different and contradicting understandings of social inclusion. In this project I examine governmental discourses on equality in education and the aim toward social inclusion. My research question is centered on what types of rhetoric that are apparent in governmental documents on equality in education, and how they reflect contradicting relations between equality and inclusion. The relevance of the research question is drawn in line with an increased body of sociological and pedagogical criticism towards national developments in education policy. I also point to social research on rises in mental health issues and achievement pressure among Norwegian youth.

The data material I base my project on is two central Norwegian governmental white papers on *early intervention* and inclusion in education, in addition to the regulative Core Curriculum. The white papers are differentiated within the time-frame of 2006-2020, and between governmental periods of left- and right governments (here represented by the Stoltenberg Government and the Solberg Government).

Methodologically I draw on inspiration from Michel Foucault and critical discourse analysis. I seek to challenge the reality of education, knowledge, equality and inclusion that is put forward in these documents, in an effort to reveal how educational discourse do something *more* than describe the ideals and goals of education as a welfare institution. My theoretical framework is in line with my methodology inspired by critical theory and poststructuralist, interested in the performativity of power in modern society. I turn to Foucault's notion of power, subjectivity and governmentality, accompanied by Axel Honneth's theory on the power of recognition. My theoretical framework also draw on the contributions of David Grusky and John Meyer, as they make up an important background for understanding the concept of equality and the internationalization of education policies.

My findings show that the values of equality and inclusion is communicated trough several and at times contradicting rhetoric. On the one hand, equality and inclusion are put forward as ideals, premised on the inherent value and respect each individual possess. On the other hand, the opportunity to be included and recognized in society is closely linked to mastering education and the pupils' ability to mobilize their capacities and conduct themselves as resilient individuals. The implication of my study is that there is work to be done to understand how educational discourses have powerful consequences on the possibilities for children to obtain social value when placed in an educational system with an increased focus on making children the entrepreneurs of their own success.

Sammendrag

Utgangspunktet for dette prosjektet er motsetningene mellom hvordan utdanning anses som basert på idealet om likhet, og utdanning som en sentral faktor i reproduksjonen av sosiale skillelinjer. Denne motsetningen er interessant for å undersøke hvorvidt en tilsynelatende konsensus om likhet i utdanningspolitikken, på tvers av politiske partier, kan anses som å dekke over ulike og motstridende forståelser av sosial inkludering. I dette prosjektet undersøker jeg den statlige diskursen om *Likhetsskolen* og målet om sosial inkludering. Problemstillingen spør hvilke typer retorikk som kan identifiseres i styringsdokumenter om utdanning, og hvorvidt disse reflekterer motstridende syn på likhet og inkludering. Problemstillingens relevans forstås opp mot økt sosiologisk og pedagogisk kritikk mot dagens utdanningspolitikk, i tillegg til forskning som viser økning i psykiske problemer og prestasjonspress blant norske barn og unge.

Datamaterialet jeg baserer prosjektet på er to sentrale stortingsmeldinger om *tidlig innsats* og inkludering i utdanning, i tillegg til Overordnet del av læreplanen fra 2020. Stortingsmeldingene er differensiert innenfor en tidsramme fra 2006 til 2020, og mellom venstre- og høyreorienterte regjeringer (her representert gjennom Stoltenberg-regjeringen og Solberg-regjeringen).

Metodisk bygger prosjektet på inspirasjon fra Michel Foucault og kritisk diskursanalyse. Det innebærer å utfordre hvordan en virkelighet om utdanning, kunnskap, likhet og inkludering settes frem i disse dokumentene. Det innebærer videre et forsøk på å avdekke hvordan dagens diskurser om utdanning gjør noe *mer* enn å beskrive idealene og målene som ligger til grunn for utdanningssystemet som en velferdsintitusjon. Prosjektets teoretiske rammeverk er i tråd med mitt metodiske utgangspunkt inspirert av kritisk teori og poststrukturalisme. Her er jeg interessert i maktens performative karakter. Jeg bygger på Foucaults teoretisering om makt, subjektivitet og *governmentality,* i sammensetning med Axel Honneths teori om makt og anerkjennelse. Det teoretiske rammeverket trekker også på bidragene til David Grusky og John Meyer, som utgjør et viktig bakteppe for å forstå fenomenet likhet og internasjonalisering av utdanningspolitikken.

Mine funn viser at likhet og inkludering som sentrale utdanningspolitiske verdier kommuniseres gjennom flere og tidvis motstridende retorikker. På den ene siden er likhet og inkludering beskrevet som idealer, basert på ethvert individs iboende verdi og respekt. På den andre siden er muligheten til å bli sosialt inkludert og anerkjent nært knyttet til hvorvidt eleven mestrer utdanningssystemet og evner å mobilisere sine kapasiteter. Implikasjonene av dette prosjektet er derfor at det er arbeid som gjenstår for å fullstendig kunne forstå hvordan utdanningspolitiske diskurser har maktfulle konsekvenser for hvorvidt barn og ungdom opplever anerkjennelse - når de plasseres i et utdanningssystem som i økende grad formes av en retorikk om å gjøre barn kapable til å være sin egen lykkes smed.

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As a student enrolled in the teacher education program at NTNU, the professional relevance of this project is that it provides insight into political views, influences, and changes with consequences for the regulative framework and value-base I will place myself within as a teacher in the future.

Several people deserve acknowledgment for their contributions to this project. I would first like to thank my supervisor, Håkon Leiulfsrud. Despite having a lot on your plate, you have continued to greet me with thorough feedback, and encouraged me to reflect on my own choices and possibilities. There are only a few people who are able to make my sociological brain cells twist and turn in the ways you have done. I wish to thank you for your patience, and for allowing me to define the path of this project in line with my own terms and other commitments. I have the utmost respect for your knowledge of sociology, and I am honored to have had the opportunity to take part in it. Further, I would like to thank my master college, consisting of Elise Aarøe Aasbø, Ingrid Hallquist, Malin Wevang, and Øyvind Holm. Running in between our desks, lending each other books, sharing questions, (partly desperations), and someone to share my engagement with has been a great deal of fun.

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To the former pupil of mine who once said to me that he appreciated the way I saw him and who he was, 'despite' of him not putting heavy efforts into his schoolwork – I hope you and the ones coming after you will learn that your value in other eyes is not defined by your academic achievements.

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1. Introduction

The Norwegian education system has since the post-war era founded itself on the democratic principles of the welfare state. Education in the context of the welfare state are to a high extent intertwined with goals to promote equality, solidarity, and democracy (The Education Act § 1-1, Ministry of Education and Research, 1998). Education is put forward as an active force in developing independent, responsible citizens in an inclusive society, where a small degree of inequality between groups is seen as ideal (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017a; Rapp, 2018). This vision of education has been reflected in policies across the political spectrum (Hovdenak & Stray, 2015; Schaaning, 2018; Thuen, 2010). Social scientists further describe that education is considered an important arena for life chances and future prospects, and thereby has become an institution increasingly important to succeed in (Eriksen, 2021; Haugen & Hestbek, 2014; Hovdenak & Stray, 2015). To ensure equality and that every individual has the opportunity to succeed, policies directed at 'equal opportunities' have been central in educational policies the last decades (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006-2007b, 2019-2020a).

Despite the perception of education as inherently equal, research on social inequality continue to show that Norwegian education reproduce long lasting and durable social cleavages and social divisions. Despite political efforts and educational reforms to change this account, these trends are persistent over time (Bakken & Elstad, 2012; Hjellbrekke & Korsnes, 2012; Rapp, 2018). This means that equal access to education has provided means for educational mobility, but it has not managed to erase inequality in result. Sociologists Else Øyen (1992, p. 19), amongst others, raised a question on how organization of society and its institutions is practiced both to preserve, and limit to what degree inequality gets to unfold - and to do so in a way that creates acceptance for certain levels of inequality (Hansen & Mastekaasa, 2005; Schaaning, 2018).

Equality and inclusion are values that in the official domain are rarely disagreed on[1], even when the content of these values are vaguely defined, or filled with different content (Hansen & Mastekaasa, 2005; Haug, 2020). The question becomes whether the current system of education and developments in educational policies works to ensure equality, or if it works as an effective force in the ordering of social divisions and the public acceptance of these unequal consequences. As Michel Foucault famously problematized: also the institutions that comes off as egalitarian are arenas of power, which work to maintain certain relations of domination through individuals' internalization of specific norms and knowledge, which makes them conform to given authorities (Engelstad, 2005, p. 49; Foucault, 2020 [1978], 2020 [1979]; Youtube, n.d.). In this perspective, education as an institution comes with its own form of hegemony, shaping how individuals view the importance of education, certain types of knowledge, and to what degree they view themselves as successful in mastering what society puts forward as valuable. In the extension of this, it is interesting to investigate how a consensus on equality cover up different and contradicting understandings of social inclusion. In this respect, Foucault is also relevant for understanding language and power, and especially

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[1] Argument based on 'the official domain', or as in relation to 'political correctness'. More economic oriented theories would argue that division of labour, and thereby social inequality, is in part functional for society and a premise for it working as a social system (see for example Davis, K., & Moore, W. E. (1945). Some Principles of Stratification. *American Sociological Review*, *10*(2), 242-249. (Americal Sociological Association) and Øyen, E. (1992). Ulikhetens dimensjoner. In E. Øyen (Ed.), *Sosiologi og ulikhet* (3 ed., pp. 11-24). Universitetsforlaget.

within areas where people seemingly agree (without an awareness of what they agree on). Education, thus, can be understood in terms of power, social inequality, and recognition. As these terms are an important part of the sociological vocabulary, it is relevant to investigate how it is possible for our current education system to continue to reproduce social inequalities, while at the same time placing equality and inclusion as the core credentials in the discourses that dominate education policies in Norway today.

My contribution is to question and examine how the rhetoric of 'equal opportunities' in education policy put forward certain ideas about education, what content these ideas are filled with, and point to how these ideas have powerful consequences for individuals. To do so, my project will be a theoretical and methodological informed discourse analysis of public government documents, inspired by critical theory with Michel Foucault as reference point. By taking this approach, my project opens up for the opportunity to examine the implications of discourses on education: taking a critical glance at the language used, what that content highlights, and what it places in the background.

Research Question, Delimitations and Relevance

My analysis of educational policies will center around the following research question: *What kinds of rhetoric can be identified in governance documents on education, and in what ways do these reflect contradicting relations between equality and inclusion?*

I aim to identify continuity and gaps in discourses of education and the role of children in it. The project will include an aspect of time by examining public governance reports from different eras, to see how politics, economics and pedagogies have power to influence central educational policies, and their understanding of equality and inclusion in Norway. My research question will center on limited aspects of equality and inclusion, as these terms have changing connotations in different contexts. The main focus in the empirical part of this study is to investigate how these terms, together with the notion of 'equal opportunities' contribute to shape what I argue to be a limited discourse on education, and problematize in a wider sense how today's narrative of education, equality, and inclusion have powerful implications for the interpretation of these texts as 'objective facts'. My chosen theoretical and methodological glasses thus work as a tool to limit the scope of my research. My sociological scope is inspired by poststructuralist theories, looking for how power resides in the official discourses of our public welfare institutions, their practices, and norms, and how the language that dominates these areas contribute to shaping our understanding of society and ourselves.

The relevance of my approach can be understood in relation to a growing skepticism from social scientists in the fields of pedagogy and sociology, emphasizing different facets related to the ongoing developments in educational policies, both nationally and internationally (see for example Hansen & Mastekaasa, 2005; Haug, 2009; Hestbek, 2014; Hovdenak & Stray, 2015; Schaaning, 2018, 2020). In a report from 2018, NOVA (Norwegian Social Research) document a significant increase in self-reported physical health problems in secondary education, and that in general, students' belief in a fulfilled life in the future has declined (Bakken, 2018). The same report from 2020 shows that these trends have not increased, but that they are persistent (Bakken, 2020, p. 2). Similarly, a Norwegian study published in 2021 describes how middle-class youth report increased mental health problems linked to achievement pressure, and that their view of self-worth heavily relies on achievement (Eriksen, 2021). Professor Espen Schaaning who has studied educational policies in Norway from a historical perspective, argues that contemporary education policy is based on a rhetoric he label 'exclusive individualism'.

One aspect of this is a lack of problematization from authorities on how education and school itself could be understood as the premise for mental health issues among youth (Schaaning, 2020).

In sum, a wide corpus of critical perspectives have drawn together issues such as New Public Management, knowledge, merit, accomplishments, and recognition, and the consequences on today's youth who grew up being told they had every opportunity to succeed in life. Sociological theories of power and recognition represent useful tools to analyse these current trends. I will turn to Michel Foucault and Axel Honneth who both provides critical perspectives on the performativity of modern society, and how power, subjectivity, and violence have found new forms in individuals' self-perception and self-worth.

Presentation of Data Material

The chosen data for this project consists of three documents, spanning from the early 2000s, up to the year 2020. The first document is Report No. 16 (2006-2007) to the Storting, the Norwegian Government's white paper titled *Early Intervention for Lifelong Learning* (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006-2007b). This report was published by the Stoltenberg Government and is one of many reports on the educational field that was presented in the years following the implementation of *The Curriculum for Knowledge Promotion in Primary and Secondary Education and Training* in 2006 (in Norwegian 'Kunnskapsløftet'). In the introduction of Report No. 16, it states:

> The Government will pursue an active policy to reduce the differences in society […]. When social inequality increases, efforts to combat the differences must be intensified in the education system. This white paper presents the Government's policy for how the education system can make a greater contribution to social equalization (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006-2007a, p. 1)

A consistent part of this white paper is the idea of initiating measures in early childhood, and at an early state in all levels of the education system (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006-2007b, pp. 3-4). To do so, the report stress that efforts must be made to identify children who fall behind in learning processes, so one can ensure that every child "acquires the knowledge and skill they need to complete secondary school with satisfactory results" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006-2007b, p. 4, own translation). Further, the white paper explains that the education system needs to contribute to a solid basis for 'lifelong learning', meaning that education should stimulate and motivate individuals to strive for learning and reaching their potential throughout the course of their lives (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006-2007a).

The second selected document is Report No. 6 (2019-2020) to the Storting, the Norwegian Government's white paper titled *Early intervention and inclusive education in kindergartens, schools and out-of-school-hours* care (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019-2020a, 2019-2020b). This report was published by the Solberg Government. In the white paper, the Government describes several measures to improve the quality of education through early intervention and inclusive practices. 'Early intervention' is here described as a "good pedagogical provision from early childhood, that kindergartens and schools work to prevent problems, and that steps are taken promptly when a problem is identified", while 'inclusion' is explained by the children's sense of belonging and being valuable (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019-2020a, pp. 11-12; 2019-2020b). The aim of the report is to "improve quality in kindergartens and schools so that all children

and pupils are able to learn, experience a sense of achievement, and develop in an inclusive environment" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019-2020b).

The third document is the *Core Curriculum – values and principles for primary and secondary education* (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017a). This document has status as a regulation, alongside the rest of the Curriculum and The Education Act. The Core Curriculum was laid down by Royal Decree in 2017, and was implemented in 2020 as a part of a wider renewal of the Curriculum from 2006 (in Norwegian 'Fagfornyelsen'). The Core Curriculum consists of a total of three chapters: *core values of education and training*, *principles for education and all-around development*, and *principles for school's practice*. As the value-based regulative of education, the Core Curriculum highlights fundamental values and principles such as human dignity, equality, identity and unity, inclusiveness, democracy, participation, and responsibility. It further gives explanations to the aims of learning the basic skills (in Norwegian 'Grunnleggende ferdigheter'), and the foundation for the three interdisciplinary topics that were decided for the renewal of the Curriculum: health and life skills, democracy and citizenship, and sustainable development (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017a, pp. 12-16).

Thesis Outline

The following chapter 2 and 3 make up the theoretical basis for my project. Chapter 2 works as a backdrop and account for the influence of New Public Management and OECD on Norwegian education policy. Further, chapter 2 provides insight to previous research on social inequality and education in Norway, where I shortly account for the contributions of Hjellbrekke and Korsnes (2012) and Hansen and Mastekaasa (2005). Chapter 3 accounts for the theoretical framework of the project, where Grusky and Meyer (2014) are used as an important background, while Foucault and Honneth make up the main foundations. The terms subjectivity, governmentality, power, and recognition are presented, and functions as my theoretical tools.

Chapter 4 is the chapter on methodology and method. This chapter provides insight to the inspiration I have drawn from discourse analysis, the process of selecting the data material and undergoing the analytic process. In this chapter I also account for several methodological reflection on my case and interpretative framework. Chapter 5 and 6 make up the main part of the thesis, where I present my findings and discuss them in reference to discourse analysis, the theoretical backdrop and the theoretical framework. The focus in the analysis is on aspects of both continuity and gaps between the empirical material, while the discussion focus on ambivalences in my findings on educational discourses of equality and inclusion. In the last chapter, the conclusion, I provide a short summary of what I have found, followed by an explicit answer to the research question.

2. Backdrop: Human Capital vs. Structural Inequality

This chapter provides the reader with a basic overview of relevant developments to understand the Norwegian case. This overview refers to education policies, such as the influence of OECD on Norwegian education, and sociological research on social inequality and education in Norway.

New Public Management and the Influence of OECD

New Public Management (NPM) involves new ideas and ideals of management in the public sector, which dates back to the neoliberal political era in Great Britain and the US during the 1980s (Haug, 2009). The basis for NPM is a notion that the public sector is best driven by the logic of business, emphasizing effectiveness, competition, and maximizing the quality of results based on a given input. In this cost-benefit logic resides a premise that institutions should continue to strive for improvement and quality of practices and results. The ideas and ideals of NPM resonate with an economic model where results should reflect and make the best possible use of the resources put into education. To ensure the quality of education (as it appears in its result); testing, control, and measurements of results made their way into education policies (Haug, 2009; Hovdenak & Stray, 2015).

New Public Management further places itself within a continuous growth of internationalization, meaning that countries look to each other and transnational organizations for comparison in an effort to develop their own sectors and institutions. Hence, 'the internationalization of education' has become a key feature of educational changes in the last decades (Hovdenak & Stray, 2015; Meyer, 2014). In the case of Norway, this is explicitly described by the Stoltenberg Government in a report on the internationalization of education from 2009:

> The value creation of the future presupposes global competitiveness. This requires relevant and high-quality education, and citizens with international knowledge and experience. […] Internationalization entails exchange of ideas, knowledge, goods and services between nations, […]. In education, internationalization is the process of integrating international culture and global dimension into goals, organization and practice (Ministry of Education and Research, 2008-2009, pp. 5, 6, own translation).

The report further explains that initiatives from OECD and EU have been of great importance for the ability of educational systems to 'talk' to each other (2008-2009, p. 14). OECD, the transnational *Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development* has since 1987 provided Norway with reports and propositions for changes in the education sector based on own data and documentation of quality (Haug, 2009; Smeplass, 2018). According to OECD, Norway spent a large amount of economic resources on education, but failed to have a system in place to control the output of these resources (OECD 1989 in Haug, 2009, p. 25). OECD therefore recommended a system for information, evaluation and control, making quality and results an institutional responsibility.

In the decades that followed, the interests of the marked became more apparent in the education system, based on questions of whether education produces the kind of knowledge that was necessary for the future, and for increased international competition (Smeplass, 2018, p. 99). Based on new visions of education, educational reforms and prepositions have been heavily produced in Norway over the last decades. Many of these have been concerned about quality at all levels of the education system, from

kindergartens, primary- and secondary education, to tertiary education and teacher education. At the beginning of the 2000s, international standards and goals for education had established themselves as general political values, Smeplass argues (2018, p. 102). The government made it its mission to ensure that results between schools became more similar, and to do so the solution was put forward as more focus on tests and measurements of pupils' knowledge and competencies across the national board. PISA became one of the international studies applied as a tool for evaluation. PISA (*Programme for International Student Assessment*) is facilitated by OECD, and tests pupils' competencies in reading, science, and mathematics at the age of 15. The data collected through PISA is then presented in a report by OECD, comparing results between countries on a scale ranging the best practice (OECD, 2019b; Sjøberg, 2014). The Norwegian PISA results are then used to evaluate the quality of the national education system, and to implement measures to strengthen the quality of results (Smeplass, 2018, p. 92). According to OECD, PISA is today "the world's premier yardstick for evaluating the quality, equity and efficiency of school systems, and an influential force for education reform" (2019b, p. 5). OECD goes on to state that:

> PISA is not only the world's most comprehensive and reliable indicator of student's capabilities, it is also a powerful tool that countries and economies can use to fine-tune their education policies. […]. That is why the OECD produces this triennial report on the state of education around the globe: to share the evidence of the best policies and practices, […] (OECD, 2019b, p. 4).

Organizational Body and Educational Premises

OECD's organizational structure consists of three bodies, where the Secretariat is the body carrying out the work of OECD on "evidence and analysis" (n.d.-b). The Secretariat consists of 3 300 employers with backgrounds as economists, lawyers, scientists, political analysts, sociologists, digital experts, statisticians, and communication professionals, as OECD's website explain (OECD, n.d.-b). The main goal of the organization is to "promote policies to improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world" (OECD, n.d.-a). On education, OECD stress that achieving "greater equity in education" is not only about social justice, but also to use "resources more effectively" and "fuel economic growth" (2019a, p. 4). In the second volume of the report on PISA results from 2018, OECD explains:

> Equipping citizens with the knowledge and skills necessary to achieve their full potential, to contribute to an increasingly interconnected world, and to convert better skills into better lives needs to become a more central preoccupation of policymakers around the world. Fairness, integrity and inclusiveness in public policy thus all hinge on the skills of citizens (OECD, 2019a, p. 4)

In this citation, one can see how OECD's emphasis on 'equipping citizens' and placing policy as 'hinge on the skills of citizens' are arguments that resonate with the notion of *human capital.* Human capital involves an idea that knowledge, competencies and the intellectual capital of the population are the most important form of capital that a nation-state possess. Thereby, education has become one of its strongest investments (Foucault, 2008 [1979]; Haug, 2009; Hovdenak & Stray, 2015). The human capital notion in OECD's context involves creating individuals with a 'growth mindset', so that students can recognize that 'challenges are external', and a growth mindset is as such believed to foster resilience (OECD, 2019a, p. 70).

In a report on education from 2021, OECD has also increased their focus to areas of the individual well-being, stressing that building the individual through education is also a

commitment to better health, civic engagement, happiness and low crime levels (OECD, 2021). The report further emphasizes that developing basic skills and knowledge is an important aim to "prepare students to enter further levels of education or the labor market and to become engaged citizens" which is seen as beneficial for both society and the economy (2021, p. 175). Early childhood education and 'starting strong' are put forward as important in this respect (OECD, 2017, 2021). In sum, working against social inequality and towards inclusion is here communicated as based on a premise of empowering the individual, building its capacities and resilience.

Pedagogical Perspectives

The influence of OECD on Norwegian education policy has been met with a lot of opposition from the pedagogical field (Haug, 2009; Haugen & Hestbek, 2014; Hestbek, 2014; Sjøberg, 2014; Thuen, 2010). Many of these contributions problematize how the PISA results of 2001 lead to a public 'shock', functioning as a kind of Pandora's box which led to several concerns about the quality of Norwegian education both among politicians and in the media. For example, Sjøberg (2014) argues that PISA is a political project premised on the idea that competition promotes quality, and that this idea has undermined the wider democratic mandate of education. He also critiques how PISA has been set forward as presenting a type of 'truth' on the quality of Norwegian education, while many of the results from the PISA survey are not of statistical significance, and that there are many important knowledges and competencies that PISA does not take into account (2014, p. 33). Similarly, Hestbek (2014) argues that the influence of OECD and PISA, and the marked-based rhetoric that comes with it, place the teacher in a professional dilemma between a broad value-based understanding of children and learning, and the increased pressure on testing and results. Pedagogical perspectives thus find themselves within a tension between economic perspectives that are often understood as 'rational' or 'common sense', but that at the same time put forward the effectiveness of learning as the most important function of education in society (Smeplass, 2018, p. 22).

Research on Education and Social Inequality in Norway

Sociological studies on education and inequality in Norway often draw their scope back to the developments of the modern welfare state. With the growth of the post-war social-democratic welfare system, equal access to social rights became a prime ideological foundation. Education as an open and accessible institution for everyone became prominent, alongside the idea that every individual should have the same opportunities to realize their talent and capacities (Hjellbrekke & Korsnes, 2012). Social and educational mobility became a question of justice – inequalities could only be fairly based on *merit*, and not restraining factors such as the socio-economic status of one's family (Hjellbrekke & Korsnes, 2012, p. 13). The basis on merit reflects a *meritocratic* idea that distribution of goods and social rewards only fairly can be a result of individual talent, intelligence, and effort.

In the Norwegian context, The Education Act gives every child the right to cost-free public primary and secondary education (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006-2007b, p. 17), and the establishment of 'Lånekassen', a state administrative body that provides loans and grants to students in upper secondary and tertiary education, is seen as an important historical step in the effort to make education available for all (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006-2007b, p. 21). Research on social mobility and equal opportunities in Norway has shown that both liberal and socio-democratic governments

have built their policies upon meritocratic principles (Hjellbrekke & Korsnes, 2012, p. 18). Still, despite of placing the notion of 'equal opportunities' at the core of education policies for decades, research shows that the education system continues to reproduce social divisions. Researchers therefore began to ask whether the meritocratic principles place themselves within social class structures in the education system itself (Hansen & Mastekaasa, 2005; Hjellbrekke & Korsnes, 2012).

Hjellbrekke and Korsnes (2012), and Hansen and Mastekaasa (2005) point to different theories on *cultural capital* to provide possible explanations for why meritocratic principles such as 'equal access to education' does not change the systemic forces of social stratification. The hypothesis behind such theorization is that for as long as the education system (its practices, language, and contents) favors certain kinds of cultural capital, equal opportunities will not lead to equality in result. In line with such theories, tendencies have shown that children from highly educated families are more likely to perform best in school (Hansen & Mastekaasa, 2005, p. 80; Hjellbrekke & Korsnes, 2012, p. 113; Leiulfsrud, 2004, p. 269). There a several possible explanations for this, one presented is that the culture of the higher classes has laid the foundation of what types of knowledge education is based on and teaches, and thereby, the children who can master these cultural codes and languages are more likely to achieve results and succeed in education. In similar lines, education is regulated by specific values, meaning that controlling and setting the basis for the content of teaching involves power over people's views and thoughts (Hansen & Mastekaasa, 2005, p. 86). As long as these values are generally agreed upon, this form of power is not necessarily experienced as means of domination. It is therefore possible to argue that the notion of Norwegian education as egalitarian with 'equal opportunities for all' can be understood as a form of domination, or *symbolic violence* against those who do not succeed in education (Hansen & Mastekaasa, 2005, p. 88).

Two Alternative Approaches to Social Inequality and Social Inclusion

This backdrop reflects contradictions between different modes of understanding inclusion in education. The perspective put forward by OECD have recently undergone a shift in focus from academic achievement/output towards human capital. This is exemplified in OECD reports from 2018 and 2021.The focus is now on the pupils' capabilities and resilience, meaning an investment in building the individual *despite* the structural barriers and constraints they are subjected to (socio-economic background, disabilities, minorities). Inclusion in the new OECD approach is thus based on a belief on individual growth, resilience and potential resources. This emphasis on human capital opens up for an alternative understanding of inclusion, compared to the mainstream sociological perspective. Sociological perspectives on inequality in education on the other hand are typically more preoccupied with durable systemic inequalities and power relations, i.e. more on barriers and constraints than individual resilience (see also chapter 3).

3. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I present the contributions of David Grusky and John Meyer on social inequality and modern education systems as an important background for my research object. This is followed by an elaboration on Michel Foucault's theorization of power, knowledge and subjectivity, and Axel Honneth on power and recognition. Foucault and Honneth are applied as my main theoretical framework. Foucault´s writings on subjectivity is especially relevant to trace and analyse contradictions between the individualistic and systematic understandings of equality and inclusion. Honneth adds another layer to the analysis by accounting for individual consequences of recognition (or the absence of it).

Grusky on Social Inequality

In *Social Stratification,* David B. Grusky present an extensive collection of contributions in the field of social inequality. A recurrent question in this volume is the concept of *equality*. Most people today will say they believe in equality, but people's definitions of equality are full of contradictions and ambivalences (see Jencks et al., 2014, p. 517; Meyer, 2014, p. 1118). Equality comes off as a social logic stating that every individual possesses value, and that this value is absolute. Grusky and Weisshaar (2014) place this logic in the roots of the Enlightenment premise that individuals are to be equally valued, regardless of their standing. At the same time, Jencks et al. explain, most people also believe that individuals have different competencies, and that these should be rewarded by success (2014, p. 517). Equality then becomes a matter of *equality of opportunity;* meaning everyone should have the opportunity to participate. According to Atkinson (2015), equality of opportunity is fulfilled when variables such as socio-economic background do not play any part in the resulting outcome. In societies where the outcome is based on a competition of differently valued goods, one deals with a competitive form of equality of opportunity, where the outcome is inherently unequal. The weight of policies is therefore based on ensuring that the race is a fair one (Atkinson, 2015, pp. 9-10). As Jencks et al. (2014, p. 517) argue, this "general principle of fair competition is almost universally endorsed", which resonates with the previous chapter on educational policy developments in Norway.

When equality over the years has defined itself as one of society's core commitments, most highly developed welfare regimes have put political action towards legislations aimed at reducing inequality of opportunity, such as enabling open and free education programs (Grusky & Szelényi, 2014). Inequality in outcome is thus only legitimate and tolerated if the opportunities for attaining rewards are understood to be equally distributed in the first place (Grusky & Szelényi, 2014, p. 19). The widespread sentiment of today's welfare policies is that "at a minimum, contemporary social systems should guarantee all citizens the opportunity to participate in economic life and hence avoid the most extreme forms of social and economic exclusion", also known as *the social inclusion account* (Grusky & Szelényi, 2014, p. 17). Inclusion then may seem to be defined in individual terms. By this, I mean that the welfare state bears the responsibility to *provide* individuals with the means of inclusion, but it can only be fulfilled with the efforts of the individual itself.

Meyer on Equal Persons, Unequal Roles

In his contribution to Grusky's *Social Stratification,* John Meyer shed light on the universally endorsed idea of individual equality and value, while at the same time,

society's practices of stratifying these 'equal persons' into 'unequal roles' (2014, p. 1122). He critiques postmodernist accounts who view culture as subjective and individual, i.e. a view that focuses primarily on taste and social status (2014, p. 1117). Meyer rather calls for a cultural interpretation of modern stratification systems and the rise of education, stressing *culture* as institutionalized collective rules and models. Meyer explains the global rise of education and modern stratification in terms of a cultural shift onto themes such as equality, rationality, and progress. This is not just *an aspect* of social reality, but the *cultural rules* of modern systems, he argues. The cultural rule that all individuals are formally and ultimately equal, and the progress it has had on the collective good, help in Meyers's view to explain why national communities that are different in character, still tend to adopt these highly homogenous models (2014, p. 1121):

> The institutionalization of ideas of rationality and progress can help explain the surprising worldwide rise of education. Education provides a clear legitimating account of sources of improved capacity, and also locates this capacity in specific persons and groups (Meyer, 2014, p. 1121)

Through the expansion of education, modernity has made it possible to differentiate equal persons into unequal roles, he states (2014, p. 1122). In doing so, the founding cultural principle of individual equality is upheld, while at the same time, power and political control tend to reproduce unequally. In effect, the 'problem' of legitimation of unequal roles, reduces itself to only a need for accounting for individuals' variation of personal investment in education. With the growth of education in modern society, the population has from their childhood an individual responsibility to take control of their own lives, and make sure they contribute to collective progress (Meyer, 2014, p. 1119). This expectation of individual disciplinary capacity and responsibility, resonates with what Foucault refers to as *governmentality.* Education and education policies have the power to define and classify understandings and practices who people then discipline themselves according to, in an effort to be recognized as valuable. In this way, Meyers's perspective contributes to this project by enabling me to see how the notion of equality, development in education, and individual merit and failure as a legitimation of inequality, is directly linked to a universal institutionalization of a commonly upheld culture.

What we have here in the field of education is some terms, or discourses, that travel. They spread between countries and systems, and place new standards and understandings. Education in that sense is adaptive and internationalized (Meyer, 2014). With this homogenous adaption of educational culture, one can now ask how these discourses shape our understanding of what is important and valued in society, and in a "Foucauldian" sense, ask how this has powerful effects on subjectivity.

Foucault on Power, Subjectivity and Governmentality

"My objective has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects" (Foucault, 1982, p. 777). Foucault places two meanings on the word *subject*: to be subjected to someone else's control, and one's own identity through self-knowledge (1982, p. 781). In that sense, subjectivity is not reduced to forms of repression, but how power relations "instill forms of self-awareness and identities" (Gordon, 2020, p. xix). For Foucault, this is a fundamental development of the modern state, where individuals only "can be integrated under one condition: that this individuality would be shaped in a new form and submitted to a set of very specific

patterns" (1982, p. 784) meaning that human subject finds themselves within power relations that are very complex:

> This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life, which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize, and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which make individuals subjects (Foucault, 1982, p. 781).

This makes Foucault especially interesting in analysing the contradictions between structural relations of power and what can be found within an increasing belief and trust in building individual capacities (human capital). The concept of the individual in Foucault's perspective is linked to his notion of power and governmentality. In modern societies, Foucault explains, power is understood as ensuring 'salvation' in this world, meaning the population's health, wealth, and overall well-being (1982, p. 784). With the growth of sovereign welfare states, the government realized they had to manage a population, and to do so, political power made it its mission to administer *life* (Foucault, 1999 [1976], pp. 151-152). Foucault sees this in line with the tactics of capitalism: the liberal society is dependent on an economic logic where the members of society produce and conduct resources optimally, so to ensure that individuals fulfill their societal task, those who govern need to rule indirectly (Neumann, 2020, p. 10). To govern in a democratic state means creating subjects that will govern themselves. *Governmentality* can thus be understood as a specific form of power in which individuals govern themselves according to what they perceive to be their own truth. Instead of understanding power as violence in a physical sense, power became a question of where this specific 'will' has its origins (Neumann, 2020, p. 11).

Foucault (1982, p. 789) claims "the exercise of power consists of guiding the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome". Government in present society is thus not only about state affairs, but a design that direct the conduct of individuals. Power has a *positive* condition, meaning it produces and opens up the possible ways to act and conduct oneself. Power relations can in this view be found in every aspect of society, which is one of Foucault's most known directives – power relations exist "between institutions, economic and social processes, behavioral patterns, a system of norms and types of classification" (1972 [1969], p. 45). Drawing inspiration from Foucault enables me to explore how power and the process of making people subjects are carried out through the language on education. It is also of interest as Foucault points to how these power discourses impact individual's self-perception. Foucault's work is of sociological interest as it opens up for understanding and investigating the immense growth of educational systems in the last decades, and the educational discourses on 'lifelong learning', 'equal opportunities', and individual responsibility. It provides another lens to understand the marked-directed logic of modern societies, as reflected in the notion of human capital and New Public Management. As education in some views have become a business, it is interesting to ask what this social change means for power and subjectivity today.

Honneth on The Power of Recognition

Theory of recognition is of general interest in relation to power and subjectivity as recognition is central in all social conduct of including or excluding, of dividing subjects from themselves or from others. Honneth is of special interest in this study as he goes further than Foucault in the effects of recognition from a power perspective. Recognition can be defined as "a particular act of affirmation of positive qualities of human subjects

or groups" (Honneth, 2007, p. 329). Honneth stress that not only persons can grant recognition, but social institutions as well. The contradicting 'normative fact' here is the duality between all members of society as equal subjects deserving of respect, while at the same time, society's institutions value personal qualities unequally. Recognition in this form involves an ideological character:

> We live in a culture of affirmation in which publicly displayed recognition often bears the marks of mere rhetoric […]. The act of praising certain characteristics or abilities seem to have become a political instrument whose unspoken function consists in inserting individuals or social groups into existing structures of dominance by encouraging a positive self-image (Honneth, 2007, p. 323)

Here the link between Foucault and Honneth becomes visible. As they both are critical theorists who investigate the development of modern society, they open up for a perspective on power as an instrument for shaping people into specific power relations. "Subjects are encouraged to adopt a particular self-conception that motivates them voluntarily to take on tasks or duties that serve society" (Honneth, 2007, p. 323). Recognition has a *performative* power in this sense – being subjected to continuous forms of recognition creates an intersubjective experience of self-worth, which in turn works as motivation to conform to certain duties without it being characterized as a method of repression (Honneth, 2007, p. 326). Recognition in its ideological forms can in this perspective be understood as *symbolic violence*. This view on the power of recognition is based on a premise that people are dependent on experiencing recognition to obtain a successful feeling of self. If such a form of social approvement fails, "it tears up one's personality and fills it with negative emotions" (Honneth, 2008, p. 145, own translation). To be denied recognition is understood as one of the most dramatic outcomes for individuals in this view.

Further, Honneth questions the increasing mode of individualization in modern society. Today, he argues, an increasing amount of people experience that they have no chance of obtaining social value, because knowledge, work, and being the 'entrepreneur' of one's own life are central to modern society (Petersen & Willig, 2002). The process of individualization leads to disintegration, and an individual's experiences of being superfluous have become a key issue. In this sense, a specific hierarchy of values in modern society has a powerful impact on whether individuals have the opportunity to experience social value (Honneth, 2008). Honneth's contributions arguably open for a critical glance at whether social institutions create social acceptance for certain forms of contempt, meaning that in recognition exists a feature of domination and a rhetoric that form individuals into hierarchical structures. It is therefore a part of his aim to "dissect and spell out the conditions under which forms of recognition are applied" (Honneth, 2007, p. 328).

In Summary

The theoretical framework inspired by Foucault and Honneth provides a lens for understanding and discussing how systemic premises of modern education systems can be understood in terms of increased pressure on individuals to adapt and adjust to new conditions. The theoretical framework makes visible the contradictions between a structural focus on equality and inclusion, up against an individual focus and solutions. It displays tensions between human capital and growth (an individualistic approach), and systemic premises which pressure the individual into being raised under new social conditions.

4. Methodology and Method

Introduction to Research Design

My study is inspired by discourse analysis both as a theoretical and methodological framework. That means that my interpretive framework is critically oriented, investigating relations between language and power. In this chapter, I will present and discuss the methodological implications of my project. The aim is to provide insight to the research design. I start by accounting for the inspiration I have drawn from discourse analysis. Further, I will elaborate on the data material and analytic process, and at last, I provide reflections on my interpretative framework, scientific positioning, and the quality and credibility of this research.

Discourse Analysis as Inspiration

As I wanted to conduct my research project on official documents, their language, and how they produce an understanding of equality in education, I found inspiration from discourse analysis from the very beginning of the research process. In social sciences, discourse analysis is typically understood as an umbrella term, meaning it can be explained differently between sciences and include a vast variety of subjects and approaches (Cameron, 2001, p. 7). In sociology, discourse analysis places itself within a traditional concern of questioning how social order is produced and reproduced through the process of actors' behaviors and the patterns of social behavior (Cameron, 2001, p. 48; Swedberg, 2021, p. 13). This entails looking at the production of meaning through what people say and how they say it. In that sense, discourse analysis is viewed as providing insight to how people understand reality, and how discourses in many cases work as means to some other end (Cameron, 2001, pp. 7, 14). In accordance with the theoretical basis for my project, one could place this thesis in line with what some term *critical discourse analysis* (CDA). Doing CDA in practice entails asking critical questions to the material, and challenging traditional views on reality, subjectivity, and knowledge (Cameron, 2001, p. 50). To limit the scope of my project, I first and foremost focus on analysing the rhetorical character present in my material, and ask how the language in question is based on, or put forward, certain ideas about equality and inclusion in education, and children's rights and responsibilities in it. I also look for signs of consensus and continuity between the documents, and on the other hand, if I can identify any contradictions, ambivalences, or changes between them.

In my project I draw on a discourse analytic inspiration that has close ties to critical theory, and where Michel Foucault is an important reference point (Cameron, 2001, p. 50; Tjora, 2017, p. 185). In addition to more general theoretical contributions I draw methodological inspiration from Foucault´s concept of discourses. The work to be carried out in my study is based on discourse as:

> […] practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak. Of course, discourses are composed of signs; but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things. It is this *more* that renders them irreducible to the language and to speech. It is this 'more' that we must reveal and describe (Foucault, 1972 [1969], p. 49).

Foucault's view on discourses is intertwined with his notion of power. When experts are "licensed to define, describe and classify things and people", words become powerful, and they are powerful because "the authority to categorize people are inseparable from the authority to do things to them" (Cameron, 2001, p. 16). Discourses have an

ideological character, where institutions have the power to define the normal and abnormal (Tjora, 2017, p. 185) Critical discourse analysis for my purpose entails analysing institutional 'talk' to show how discourse as a specific language also works as a social practice that constructs, in a performative sense, the objects they speak of (Cameron, 2001, p. 123). It is based on a premise that discourses provide an understanding of how identity and stratification are produced through the practices of institutions. As Foucault argues, no statement is free or independent, it always plays a part in the field of other statements, either in support of them, or in separation to them, and all statements thereby play some kind of role (1972 [1969], p. 99). Discourse analysis, in summary, gives insight to how language both reflects, and produces beliefs, ideas, and conceptions of social reality.

Data Material: Criteria and Selections

Since I wanted to investigate the development of education policy across time, I considered document studies as an appropriate method to gain information on education policies from a specific point in time. An important aspect of credibility in this respect is to make it clear how I located these documents, based on which criteria, how I conducted the analytic process, and how I place the documents in context (Tjora, 2017, p. 183).

The empirical foundation of this study consists of three key public governance documents on equality in education. I made a strategic selection based on a list of criteria in line with my research objectives: first, I made time span a criteria, as I wanted to understand and be able to discuss the link between contemporary ideas on equality and education, and the development of these ideas in a historical perspective. The time span I decided on was the early 2000s and up to the present day, around 2020. This limit was based on a consideration of the early 2000s as central to changes in Norwegian educational policies due to the first PISA results that later resulted in the new Curriculum of 2006. The second criteria I made were differentials in government. During previous courses in my education program, I heard many argue that education policy in Norway has been relatively stable and continues despite changes between left- and right-winged governmental periods, and this was a matter of curiosity I believed to be relevant for my research question. The third criteria were to choose both public reports (white papers) and legislative, regulative documents. This criterion was decided on due to an interest in documents that arguably reflect or represent official political views of a time, and curiosity about how these are able to influence (or stand in opposition to) education regulations. Last, the fourth and maybe most important criteria were that the chosen documents had to be centered on the educational system as a whole, and say something about fundamental principles of education. One such principle I searched for was equality and equality of opportunity, and thereby both equality, opportunity, and social inequality were some of the words I wanted to identify as central themes in the material.

To locate and select the data material I turned to the official website of the government[2], where they have a search engine for the public to locate documents published by different departments. On this page, I limited my search to the subject of education, department to Ministry of Education and Research, and switched the search between different periods from 2000 up to 2022. I early on experienced that education reports have been widely produced over the last twenty years, and I couldn't dive into all of

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[2] https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokument/id2000006/

them. Based on their titles and abstracts I narrowed it down to eight documents[3], and after looking at each closely, I decided on (1) Report No. 16 (2006-2007) to the Storting, the Norwegian Government's white paper *Early Intervention for Lifelong Learning*, (2) Report No. 6 (2019-2020) to the Storting, the Norwegian Government's white paper *Early intervention and inclusive education in kindergartens, schools and out-of-school-hours care,* and (3) the *Core Curriculum – values and principles for primary and secondary education.* The last one was familiar to me from before due to my practical training as a teacher in secondary education in Trondheim, but the other two I had only heard of briefly.

Due to the comprehensive content in both the white papers, I chose to focus on the chapters that were most relevant to my research question. In Report No. 16 (2006-2007), these are primarily chapters 1, 2, 3, and 5. In Report No. 6 (2019-2020), I focused most on chapters 1 and 2, but the analysis still draws on citations from other parts.

White papers and Regulative Documents – Functions and Aims

White papers are one of the ways for the government to present and address issues to the Storting regards to areas for evaluation and preposition for new policies, often in the shape of a report. In this way, white papers reflect certain official governmental views of the time: their political ambitions, values, and ideals within a field (Moen, 2006). In the context of this project, Report No. 16 and Report No. 6 are attempts to change, or influence, measures taken on equality and inclusion in education. The reports both present a certain status of education today (based on preceding research and reports from both national and international contexts), which is followed up by both a general governmental agenda, and specific measures the government wants to implement (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006-2007b, 2019-2020a). The white paper and its evaluation in the Storting often function as the foundation for future concrete bills (Ministry of Finance, 2021).

Both the white papers in my project place themselves within a time period of extensive development of educational policies and a comprehensive body of propositions and reports to the Storting. Not only focusing on actual regulative documents as data material, but also white papers, arguably provides me with a basis for understanding and discussing how political ambitions contribute to shaping perceptions of these objects. Since the reports possibly lay the foundations for new regulative measures, the institution of education – its everyday practices, content, and regulative framework is, in effect, changed (Moen, 2006). As Cameron puts it: "the institutional authority to categorize people is frequently inseparable from the authority to do things to them" (2001, p. 16).

While the white papers function as propositions and reflect governmental political aims, the Core Curriculum is a regulative educational policy document together with the rest of the Curriculum and The Education Act. Its function is twofold: it is a tool for national regulation, and it put forward the professional and pedagogical platform for those who work in the education system (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017a; Aasen et al., 2015). When it was implemented in 2020, it replaced the former 'general part' of the Curriculum. The justification for a new Core Curriculum was explained in a press release by former Minister of Education, Torbjørn Røe Isaksen: "we need to make the

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[3] Among these was also NOU 2012:15 «Politikk for likestilling» (Official Norwegian Report), NOU 2010:7 «Mangfold og Mestring», and NOU 2019:23 «Ny opplæringslov»

fundamental values of education relevant for all subjects and teaching, […] and bring these values into the classroom. The wider democratic mandate of education needs to be taken seriously in Norwegian education" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017b, own translation). The implementation of the Core Curriculum can be understood as another step in the development of education, where progress and the ability to adapt to changes both in the global world and to a more diverse Norwegian society are put forward as important:

> Norway and the world have changed a lot since 1993[4] […] We need a new general part of the Curriculum, so children will be equipped in the best way possible to live and work in a future society different from ours today (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017b, own translation).

The new Core Curriculum can also be understood in terms of reflecting education as a contested ground, where several different actors fight for the impact of their aims and perspectives (Engelstad, 2005). In the case of the Core Curriculum, both efforts to bring the wider democratic mandate of education 'back in' are explicitly put forward by former Minister Isaksen, while at the same time, the references to international actors and ideals are also present. This I will get further into in the analysis.

Analysing the Data

As I had finished the first phase of selecting documents, I turned to the second phase: analysis. The analysis consists of several steps. The line between these steps has not been completely linear, but I will provide a brief description of the process.

In the process of deciding on documents, I had already undertaken a superficial look at the documents. The next step I did was therefore to take a more comprehensive and in-depth look at them. I started the analysis with Report No. 16, which is chronologically the first document. The report consists of 112 pages. I read through the document in its entirety, using a digital marker tool to mark out relevant sections, sentences and words. I also wrote reflective notes as I worked through the document, in an effort to systematize the material and remain open to thoughts and possible interesting points to elaborate on later in the process. I repeated this process with Report No. 6, consisting of 132 pages, and at last, the Core Curriculum consisting of 19 pages.

A part of this process that I need to make clear was that after I had conducted my analysis on Norwegian-written data, I decided I wanted to write my thesis in English. Therefore, I decided to partly repeat this process with the English versions of the same documents. On the government websites, I located the Core Curriculum in a full English translation (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017a). The white papers do not exist in full English translations, but I found English summaries of each of them (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006-2007a, 2019-2020b). I decided to include the English versions and summaries as a provider of credibility, meaning that where citations exist in English, I use these as 'original' empirical pieces, avoiding problems related to misinterpretation and translation. Where my findings from the original Norwegian data are not found in the English versions, I have chosen to translate these myself. This will be made clear with the addition of 'own translation' in every reference.

The next step I conducted was making a thematical map for each document. The aim of this step was to gain a clear overview of the thematical lines of each document. While

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[4] the year of implementation for the previous general part of the Curriculum

doing this step I had the reports open again, and found more elements to mark out. The last step of analysis before I set out on the actual writing, was making a common conceptual map for the three documents. By doing this I was able to sort out and link notions together, seeing similarities in rhetoric, and developments and contradictions between documents. As I mapped out the 'stories' of the documents and discussed the findings with my supervisor, I realized I needed to go back to theory, as my findings consisted of content I did not have sufficient theoretical perspectives to elaborate on. In that sense, I worked *abductively.* Instead of following a clear inductive or deductive approach, I have worked reflexively in the context of data, theory, and analysis, in an effort to remain open to what I discovered in the material. In this sense, abductive strategies are often understood as a creative tool for sociologists, built on a premise that no single theoretical framework has a complete explanatory potential when faced with complex social phenomena (Smeplass, 2018, p. 72). This is also the reason why I ended up adding Honneth's theorization of power and recognition to my theoretical framework.

The abductive strategy further followed me into the process of writing my thesis. In the process of writing, I turned back to my conceptual map and the material, and as I was writing I discovered more interesting findings. Identifying the rapid use of the connotation "every child" for example, was one such finding that stood out. The writing was thereby not a completely separate stage from the analysis: "by trying to organize your thoughts in written form you clarify what you have actually discovered – and, equally important, what problems still remain to be solved by going back to the data and doing more analysis" (Cameron, 2001, p. 188). As Richard Swedberg puts it: When one theorizes, one does not simply proceed from 1 to 2 to 3, but go back and forward between them, following a non-linear logic (2021, p. 20).

Concluding Methodological Reflections: Theoretical Case, Interpretive Framework, and its Implications

As documents make up my case of study, issues related to research ethics, quality, and credibility are somewhat different from other forms of qualitative research (Cameron, 2001). To provide transparency and credibility to my research project is thus closely related to reflections on how I conducted the research: how my case came into being, how I conducted the interpretations, and which implications this process has on my findings. It is here important to provide some reflections on "the *process* leading us from our initial theoretical assumptions and explanations and their consequences for the object under research" (Leiulfsrud & Sohlberg, 2021, p. 3).

First of all, as studies of documents are an unobtrusive method, issues related to privacy and research ethics are considered less problematic because these documents already exist, and are designed for the public domain (Cameron, 2001, p. 21; Tjora, 2017, p. 182). Accounting for the interpretations of the documents in a hermeneutic sense is more a matter of relevance to my project. Hermeneutics as an interpretive discipline entails both practical works with texts and a theoretical reflection on the premises for interpretation and understanding (Engdahl et al., 1977, p. 7). In this respect I have strived for a hermeneutic understanding, looking to identify key elements in the texts, and at the same time reflect on my horizon of interpretation: meaning that my interpretation of the case is never an objective reconstruction, but shaped by my position as a researcher (Engdahl et al., 1977). This means that in the hermeneutic tradition, the ideal of a complete objective researcher is partly rejected because as a researcher one is

always shaped by personal experiences and areas of interest (Kittang, 1977; Tjora, 2018, p. 83). As I have described in the preface of this thesis, my research objective is closely related to both my sociological interest in social inequality and questions of power and language, and by a professional relevance as a student in teacher education. My master's project thus started with a curiosity related to my own experiences from practical training as a teacher in secondary education, and how these experiences combine with sociological key questions.

Also of relevance for reflections on my role as a researcher is my scientific theoretical position. Here I draw on elements of critical theory and post-structuralism, emphasizing the character of power, language, and performativity. The theoretically and methodological-driven skepticism of these perspectives has made it possible for me to take an in-depth look at my chosen data material. My inspiration from hermeneutics and discourse analysis has helped me to remain open in the interpretation of the material. The continuous process of going back and forward between the empirical data and the theoretical framework have been important in enabling me to discover what is interesting about my case. Still, this research is not a complete hermeneutic method, which would have required a more comprehensive effort to understand the text 'on its own premises' (Engdahl et al., 1977). The same thing can be said for theoretical background: in my project resides no effort in looking for absolute truths or answers, but an effort to have a theoretically informed glance at these documents, understand them and open them up to an understanding that is not obvious.

With that said, possible areas of critique I have reflected on is that my data material consists of comprehensive documents. In the chapter on analysis, I present parts of the empirical data, but these make up only a fraction of the total amount of text. Thereby one could question which citations, sentences, and words I have picked out, and implicitly what is not elaborated on or presented, and why. My pursuit has been to pick out and present findings that I believe represent and reflect the thematical lines and rhetorical character of these documents, and also findings that show the ambivalent character of educational policies – because education, I argue, is a contested concept where several different discourses coexist. Not putting forward findings on that aspect I believe would not provide the reader with an understanding of the comprehensiveness of the rhetoric in education policy. At the same time, to be able to limit my project, it means there are parts of these documents I will not consider. For example, these documents go into several aspects of social inequality, such as socio-economic background, gender, children with disabilities or special needs, ethnic minorities, and their relations to achievement and inclusion in education. They also focus heavily on the quality of services for children with special needs (such as pedagogical-psychological services, in Norwegian *PPT),* the after-school program, and the role of teachers and their competencies (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006-2007b, 2019-2020a). The limitations of this project and the scope of my research thus mean that there are a lot of other areas one could conduct research on within these documents, which would have led to other findings and possibly another impression of the material.

In sum, to provide sources of credibility, I have strived to provide a detailed insight into the process of this project, from deciding on the research topic, to its methodological and theoretical basis, and the process of collecting and analysing the data. When it comes to the confirmability of the project, there arguably exist several possible ways to combine theory and methodology in a way relevant to finding valid answers to the research question. I have thought of several interesting ways to go within the frames of a more

comprehensive project, but in the context of this contribution, I have strived for confirmability through a clear presentation of the research question and how theory and methods have been picked out in a way that enables me to provide explanations to my object of study. Further, there is the question of whether my contribution can be said to have relevance in a wider perspective, and not only in relation to the specific data material of this project. As my findings are limited to three specific documents, they first and foremost represent themselves. Still, based on the glasses that previous research, the theoretical framework applied, and my analysis have provided me with, I argue that these documents and my findings can be understood as representative of a wider view on equality and inclusion in education in Norway, and explicitly how different views on the matter coexist and stand in opposition to each other. With that said, my findings are based on material limited to the years 2006-2020, and with the educational renewal of the Curriculum ('Fagfornyelsen') that has been implemented from 2020 to the present school year of 2022-2023, it could have been interesting to investigate if the rhetoric and discourses I found have been continued.

To summarize - with this chapter on method it has been important for me to show reflections on how I have conducted this research, and doing so in such a detailed way because I believe it to be highly relevant in accordance with key issues with discourse analytic methods. Here my ambition has been to be as transparent as possible, enabling the reader to fully examine my premises and their implications for the case.

5. Analysis

In this chapter the findings are placed within two main categories: the first one on continuity and common ground, and the second one on gaps and contradictions. The findings are analysed with a focus on rhetoric. The analyses exemplify how the documents both understand, present, and produce a certain reality on equality and inclusion in education.

Continuity and Common Ground

In the analysis of the data, I have identified and narrowed down four themes that present continuity across the time span of the documents, and across their specific character as white papers or regulations. These four are: equality and equal opportunities, education as an arena for everyone, the notion of a good life in the future, and lastly, references to OECD.

Equality and Equal Opportunities

References to equality and equal opportunities are present across all documents. The documents frequently refer to equality, equal opportunities, and equalization. In the Core Curriculum different versions of the term 'equal' are applied 15 times, and 'opportunity' 14 times. In Report No. 16 (2006-2007), the Norwegian version of the report includes 43 versions of 'equality', 96 versions 'opportunity', and the English summary of the report has 11 cases mentioned on 'possibility', and 7 on 'opportunities'. With Report No 6. (2019-2020), there are 30 versions of the term 'equal' and 67 versions of 'opportunity'. One example of how equality is presented is: "Good kindergartens and schools that empower all children irrespective of background are vital in creating a society with few inequalities and equal opportunities for all" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019-2020b). Further, equal opportunities are associated with inclusion:

> It is crucial that children and pupils experience that they can be themselves in an inclusive environment, and to have equal opportunities as everybody else to develop in line with their own prerequisites" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019-2020a, p. 11, own translation)

In these examples, the Solberg Government communicates a clear message that 'equal opportunities' is a fundamental premise of education, that it must be available for every child (regardless of background or other prerequisites), and that this premise is 'vital' for both the kind of society *we want* and for the value of the individual. This idealistic-oriented rhetoric plays on an apparent consensus of values and principles that are considered to be important and to strive for. The rhetoric is also identifiable in Report No. 16 (2006-2007):

> Everyone must have the same possibility of developing themselves and their abilities. A society characterized by community and equal worth provides the best setting for individuals to pursue their own life projects (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006-2007a, p. 1).

In the Core Curriculum, equality and equal opportunities are explicitly put forward as fundamental values of education, and based on human rights. For example: "The objectives clause is based on the inviolability of human dignity and that all people are equal regardless of what makes us different", and "all pupils shall be treated equally" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017a, pp. 4, 5). From another angle, the Core Curriculum also reflect a view on equality of opportunity that is found in the white

papers: "The pupils must also be given equal opportunities so that they can make independent choices" (2017a, p. 9), and "School must give all pupils equal opportunities to learn and develop, regardless of their background and aptitudes" (2017a, p. 17). Equality is here understood and presented as both an inherent quality of the individual, in line with a human rights perspective, as well as the responsibility education systems have to provide equal opportunities, which does not necessarily ensure equality in results.

A School for Everyone

Alongside an ideal of being a school based on equality, the Norwegian ideal is also presented as being a school where every child experience a sense of belonging, and as a provider of arenas for mastering and developing one's interests and qualities. One example of this is:

> The public education system shall be a diverse and inclusive system, and must be able to face every individual in a way where their individual skills and backgrounds are understood, taken care of, and developed (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006-2007b, p. 12, own translation).

In this statement, the Stoltenberg Government places Norwegian education within an ideal of inclusiveness. Every child should be able to be seen, valued, and further develop within the school system. This reflects a 'universalistic' or 'individualistic' rhetoric in similar lines to the previous point on equality. In this way, education is put forward as an institution that makes sure to take care of individuals in their *individualistic* sense – meaning everyone has an inherent value, and that is something that education cherishes and guides. This is also reflected in an often-used connotation of 'every child and youth'. For example: "the Government wishes that every child and youth shall have the same opportunities in the education system, regardless of family background or gender" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006-2007b, p. 12, own translation). This rhetoric is opposite of an understanding of education as inherently unequal, meaning an institution that favors certain qualities or characteristics of individuals, or conforming individuals into a narrow framework of knowledge and competencies.

These rhetorical lines are also present in Report No. 6 (2019-2020): "all children deserves a good start in life", and "we want an education system that allows everyone to feel a sense of achievement and experience the value of knowledge and community", "everyone should feel that they belong in society, that they are of use, and that their perspective and opinions matter and are valuable", and "inclusion means that every child should feel they have a natural place in society, that they are valuable and that they all have the same opportunities to develop" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019-2020a, pp. 7, 8, 11, all own translations; 2019-2020b). Another interesting feature of this report is the usage of the connotation 'every child', which is mentioned 99 times in the document.

The same type of rhetoric can be identified in the Core Curriculum: "a good society is founded on ideals of inclusiveness and diversity", and "Schools must give all pupils equal opportunities to learn and develop […]. To create motivation and joy of learning in the teaching situation, a broad repertoire of learning activities and resources is needed" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017a, pp. 6, 17).

A Good Life for the Future Self

> Education, knowledge, and skills contribute to inclusion in the workplace, to better economy and better health, to greater participation in society and to a lower crime level. Furthermore, participation in training and education has great significance for self-realization. Including each individual in a learning environment that stimulates life-long learning is an important contribution to creating a good life (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006-2007a, p. 1)

The citation above is one example of the explicit use of the denotation 'a good life' in the white papers. This example is from the English summary of Report No. 16 (2006-2007). In this context, the government places the content of 'a good life' in the future in relation to the individual's inclusion in learning. Education, knowledge, and skills are drawn explicitly to success in work, economy, health, self-realization, and adolescence from crime. Self-realization and obtaining good health and a good economy are statements with a normative character, meaning they are words with positive connotations and associations.

The use of the denotation 'a good life' is also found two times in the Norwegian version of the white paper, where one of these states that have the opportunity to obtain skills, knowledge, and attitudes that are important to be able to live a good life, is one of the most important tasks of the education system (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006-2007b, p. 3). This rhetoric is also identifiably in Report No. 6 (2019-2020) both explicitly and implicitly. One example of such is "kindergartens and schools should light the spark that children and young people need in order to develop and learn, make a good life for themselves and prepare themselves for study and work" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019-2020b). Another example is:

> Knowledge provides the individual with opportunities to develop abilities in the best possible way and to live an independent life. Knowledge is also crucial for the development of society, and it is the basis for democracy and welfare (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019-2020a, p. 7, own translation).

This reflects that across these reports and the time they are situated in, the importance of education is communicated by explaining it to be a premise for a good life in the future, both for individuals and individuals' roles in society.

Norwegian Education in International Comparison

In Report No. 16 (2006-2007), references to OECD and PISA are evident. The word 'PISA' is mentioned 22 times in the report, and 'OECD' is mentioned 79 times. Throughout the document, the PISA survey results from 2000 and 2003 are used as a reference both to state the quality of education in Norway, and as a source of legitimate assumptions. In a case on application numbers to higher education, the report state that "it is reasonable to assume that ambitions correlate with to what degree pupils see it as realistic to success in higher education. This assumption is strengthened by findings from the PISA survey" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006-2007b, p. 60, own translation). The reference to OECD is applied on similar ground, comparing statistics from Norway to other OECD countries.

The report draws on both feedback from OECD on areas where Norway stands out positively in international comparison, and also on areas where Norway has low scores. For example on a matter of minorities: "minority language background has a stronger correlation to absence in Norway than in any other OECD country" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006-2007b, p. 45, own translation). Another example is on page 9 of the

report, where OECD is mentioned 4 times. Here, the government refers to an OECD report on equality in education from 2006, where OECD recommends Norway to continue its basic structure of education. At the same time, OECD critiqued Norway for a lack of strategies related to pupils with special needs or children who fall behind, and that in the years prior to the new Curriculum of 2006 ('Kunnskapsløftet')*,* there was a comprehensive lack of information and data on pupils learning in all levels of the education system (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006-2007b, p. 28). The document shows explicit reliance on OECD as a legitimate organization to state facts about the quality of the Norwegian education system, through the usage of words such as 'experts' or 'expert-panel' (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006-2007b, p. 22), and heavy reference to OECD reports in the literature list. The document also reflect how OECD is understood as an actor with the power to influence and shape education policy in Norway.

The reliance on OECD and international comparison are further reflected in Report No. 6 (2019-2020), where 'OECD' is mentioned 17 times, mainly in the literature list or as sources for facts. The content of the white paper from 2019-2020 is influenced by an OECD report from 2017 on the effects of 'starting strong' – emphasizing the effects of quality education in early childhood (OECD, 2017). This report and its focus points from OECD can be understood in terms of the white papers term 'early intervention' (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019-2020a, 2019-2020b).

Based on these findings, both white papers reflect an ongoing relationship with international organizations, tests, and comparisons as legitimate sources of the status of quality in Norwegian education, and as sources for measures to be taken in educational policies. The results of the PISA surveys and OECD recommendations are put forward in a sense that appeals to reason: if experts from an acknowledged international organization, based on "a comprehensive analysis of the Norwegian education system" reveals areas in need of improvement (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006-2007b, p. 22), it is 'reasonable', or a matter of 'common sense' to take it into account and make efforts of improvement – especially in a high ranking democratic country such as Norway. Questions on foundations, research design, presentation of results, methodological quality, or matters of statistical significance from the PISA surveys or OECD reports are not provided in the white papers.

Gaps and Contradictions

In this part I elaborate on some of the findings that I believe reflect contradictions and gaps within and between documents. These are structured around four themes: who bears the responsibility of social inequalities, what characteristics are inscribed on pupils, in what ways are recognition present or not, and last, how an economic discourse of education coexist with other discourses.

Social Inequality and Responsibility

In Report No. 16 (2006-2007), it is made clear that if a child falls behind in learning, the question to be asked is first and foremost if there are conditions in the education system that are at fault. One statement in this respect is that "the spotlight must be directed at the system" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006-2007b, p. 56, own translation). Focus on structural matters of inequality is also evident in the introduction to the report, where terms such as 'we' and 'collective responsibility' are applied: "when differences in learning so evidently follow social divisions as they do today, this is a collective

responsibility we must take on" (2006-2007b, p. 3, own translation). The report goes on to quote Professor in pedagogy, Peder Haug:

> Reality in schools today er still shaped by the notion that if a pupil fails in learning, the pupil is at fault. […]. The question should be: what is wrong with the school where this pupil attends when the pupil does not learn as expected? (2006-2007b, p. 56, own translation).

This quotation is interesting because it shows an awareness of how responsibility and failure often are placed on the pupil, and that the government wants to make clear that they take the collective and systemic responsibility for the reproduction of social inequalities seriously. The system is at fault, is the communicated line. At the same time, the notion of individual failure and responsibility can still be identified implicitly in other formulations in Report No. 16. Examples of this are in formulations such as learning children to take responsibility for their own lives, that their efforts are decisive for the learning outcome, and that learning is premised on the efforts of the individual (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006-2007b, pp. 8, 11, 61).

The gap between looking at systematic foundations for failure, and implicitly placing responsibility on the children is arguably also identifiable in Report No. 6 (2019-2020). In the first chapter of the report, the government state they have taken substantial measures to improve the Norwegian education *system*, and that they are intended to build on and strengthen the policies they have pursued (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019-2020a, p. 8). The aim of Report No. 6 is to present further concrete measures to improve the education system (2019-2020a, p. 10). One of the preceding reports the government draws on is the Nordahl report on *Inclusive education for children and young people* (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019-2020a, 2019-2020b). The Nordahl report suggests several wide-reaching changes to the education system. The government assessment is that on the general level, the current rules and regulations are well equipped to ensure a good educational offer to all children (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019-2020a, p. 48), but they agree with some of the points of the Nordahl-report. The mentioning of "the government will" is applied 116 times in the report, communicating an offensive will to make the education system better, and thus, that the government takes responsibility for ensuring quality, equality, and inclusion. Still, an implicit 'individual responsibility' line is also identifiably in this material. Examples of this are descriptions of children and their challenges which put them in need of additional support, children that struggle, and the explicit focus on pupils' efforts as a premise for succeeding in school (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019-2020a, pp. 11, 14). An explicit statement that is repeated two times in Report No. 6 is: "the government is clear that it is the pupils' efforts, engagement, and talent that should determine how well they do in school", as an opposite, or despite factors such as gender, residence, or family background (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019-2020a, pp. 14, 21; 2019-2020b). It is further reflected in the notion that education is responsible for 'empowering children' so that they in turn can take responsibility to contribute to society in the future (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019-2020b).

Capabilities and Empowering Children

The material dating back to 2006-2007 shows an explicit concern on structural premises for inequality and communicates governmental aims to take responsibility to change it. As already shown in the section above, one can identify tendencies of an individualistic logic in both white papers, but it is more evident, (or fulfilled) in Report No. 6 (2019-2020).

The rhetoric on capability entails the education system has the responsibility to provide opportunities, so that children can make good use of them. The rhetoric is visible in statements such as: "a good education is our most important instrument for providing everybody with the opportunity to succeed, regardless of background" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019-2020a, p. 21, own translation), "pupils must be equipped to take care of themselves and others" (2019-2020a, p. 32, own translation), and also in the quotation from the part on equality and equal opportunities, that schools must 'empower' all children (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019-2020b). The intent of the report on early intervention and inclusion then, is to empower *all* children, and one way to do that is (according to the report) through early intervention:

> Early intervention entails a quality pedagogical offer from early childhood, that kindergartens and schools strive to prevent challenges, and that measures are applied immediately when challenges are uncovered (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019-2020a, p. 12, own translation).

The rhetoric on capabilities can also be understood in line with the increased focus on 'early intervention' and 'starting strong', that have dominated education policy both nationally and through the influence of OECD in the last decades. One example is:

> When new needs arise over the course of their schooling the children and pupils must swiftly be given help and specially adapted provision to prevent any problems from building up. This is important in order for each child to feel they are a valuable part of society and be given opportunities to develop and learn. It is also of value to society that everyone receives the help they need at an early stage so that everybody who is capable of it can develop into active citizens who participate in work and contribute to value creation in the country (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019-2020b)

This finding reflects an ambivalence between understanding inclusion and measures on early interventions as a boost for the individual, and (or) as a process of lifting vulnerable groups (such as children with disabilities or minorities). The description of the importance "for each child to feel they are a valuable part of society" on the one hand, and "it is of value to society that everybody capable of it can develop into active citizens" on the other is interesting in that respect.

The idea of empowering children, and education's role in building the capability of the individual is also present in the underlying communication of the broader democratic education in the Core Curriculum. The Core Curriculum highlights the importance of education in creating, or forming, individuals into capable beings: for example, the basic skills thought in school are "important for developing the identity and social relations of each pupil, and for the ability to participate in education, work and societal life" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017a, p. 12). It is also evident in statements such as: "The school shall stimulate the pupils to become active citizens and give them the competence to participate in developing democracy in Norway" (2017a, p. 15). The latter example points to a similar notion in education today: a discourse centered on the idea of human capital. The pupil is understood and produced in terms of being a future citizen, and therefore, creating responsibility and self-regulation in pupils is set forward as a key feature of education.

Human Capital and socio-economic gain

Despite an increased focus on human capital and social resilience in recent OECD texts, there are still typical economic and market-based terms used in the Norwegian reports such as 'efficiency' and 'resource-intensive', see e.g. Report No. 16 (2006-2007):

> There will also be pupils at school who are in danger of falling behind in learning and mastering. There are a number of effective measures that help to get vulnerable children into a good learning process. The earlier these measures are initiated, the more effective and less resource-intensive they are (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006-2007a, p. 3).

This citation is clearly based on a vocabulary of 'effective measures' and places efficiency in relation to time. This presents, or put forward, learning and the obtainment of knowledge as something that should be effective. The citation also states that 'falling behind' in learning is a serious matter, something that put the pupil in 'danger', and hence, pupils who do not master education or have 'satisfactory' (p. 4) progress are in this sense presented as someone in need of intensified measures to keep up. To have as many pupils as possible 'keeping up', is thereby the goal.

Traces of the economic logic can also be found in the attention given to the profit of an educated population for society. In Report No. 6 (2019-2020), the government stress that early intervention and better quality of education will enable more pupils to finish secondary education, and thereby become a part of the workforce. "This will in the long run enable lower costs and higher income to society" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019-2020a, p. 117, own translation).

Recognition in the Core Curriculum vs. the white papers

One of the findings on gaps between documents is how the Core Curriculum explicitly puts forward recognition as important in school's practices. Recognition is put in line with inclusion, diversity, and the pupil's experience of being a valued part of the group:

> School must consider the diversity of pupils and facilitate for each pupil to experience belonging in school and society. We may all experience that we feel different and stand out from the others around us. Therefore we need acknowledgment and appreciation of differences (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017a, p. 5).

Other examples are that "diversity must be acknowledged as a resource" (2017a, p. 16), that acknowledgment is important for the appreciation of others and oneself, and children's sense of belonging. The Core Curriculum state the importance of not only lifelong learning and the children as future citizens, but also that "school must recognize the intrinsic value of childhood and the adolescent years" (2017a, p. 10). The document also states that the best interests of each pupil must be the foundation of all levels of the education system (2017a, p. 22). These findings reflect a highly idealistic rhetorical line, which has close ties to the universal idea of individuals' inherent value. It places itself within an educational discourse where education is put forward as a place for everyone and reflects the inclusive ideal of society on a bigger scale.

In the white papers, this focus on acknowledgment and recognition is not present in the same way. In Report No. 6 (2019-2020), recognition is described in relation to kindergartens' purpose and aims, and specifically within sections on early intervention and quality in kindergarten (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019-2020a). In Report No. 16 (2006-2007), the word 'recognition' is only found 3 times, and only one of these is related to school practices (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006-2007b, pp. 19, 25, 59). It is possible to identify recognition as underlying in other communication lines, such as the first page describing that the goal of education is not to get everyone into higher education (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006-2007b, p. 3), which can be understood as a need of the time to clarify that higher education is not the only fully acceptable choice for children going through the education.

6. Discussion

The results confirm a view of education and knowledge linked to equality, inclusion, participation in society and economy, better health, self-realization, and successful life for the future self. Education is communicated as crucial for the opportunity for the individual to realize their 'life-project' and display their full 'potential'. Education is also seen as crucial for the greater good of society – for socio-economic gain, democracy, and welfare. On the general level, my findings show that this is primarily words and a vocabulary filled with normative and positive connotations. On paper it is difficult to disagree with ideas of equality in education and pupils' wellbeing. The rhetoric character identified in my empirical material thus contributes to place great importance on education, and thereby implicitly also on mastering education and willingness to learn. The interesting question is not the references to what is a universal grammar of human rights, but that the question I now ask is what these terms and discourses mean, if they mean the same, what their meanings are impacted by, and the implications this rhetoric produces. In this chapter, I will draw on my theoretical framework in order to discuss what these discourses *do* – meaning their performative character on power and subjectivity.

The Duality of Equality

My findings show that in these documents, the concept of equality is understood within two lines of thought. On the one hand, equality is understood as an inherent property of the individual. Equality is about 'equal worth' (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006-2007a, p. 1; 2017a). This type of equality is communicated through a rhetoric emphasizing the universal value of individuals, in line with a human-rights perspective. On the other hand, equality is communicated in the direct link to opportunities, as I have exemplified in the two first citations in the analysis. To ensure equality, then, becomes a matter of ensuring that everyone has equal opportunities. This means that the foundational concept of equality in my material in itself can be understood as a contradiction – and within this contradiction exists the ability for education to both display itself as egalitarian, while at the same time produce inequality.

Following Meyer, to understand the reproduction of inequality, the scope should arguably not be limited to theories of class and status, but also account for how education, equality, rationality, and improvement have become a *cultural shift* in modern society. Within this specific shift in 'equality of opportunity' resides a way of legitimating inequality in result. By stating several times throughout these documents that the government strives to provide 'all children' with the same opportunities, and explicitly using 'the government will' or 'we take responsibility for', a clear line of help and effort from the government is communicated. This implicitly communicates a message that those in power do *everything they can* to ensure the equality and inclusion of their citizens; an idea that resonates well with Foucault's theorization of modern governance as ensuring 'salvation' in this life. This message or narrative could also be seen as a rhetorical way of communicating that strengthens the view of the institution as egalitarian and a force intended toward 'the greater good'. The rhetoric follows a 'positive politeness strategy', meaning it is a way of personalizing communication (Cameron, 2001). Throughout the universal-rights rhetoric, education policy place itself in order with the commitments of the modern social democratic state where social relations and policies only fairly are based on equality, rather than social distance:

> In this view, institutions are adjusting to, or playing their part in, a general shift away from the formal and hierarchical relations of the past, which are no longer felt to be appropriate in modern society. […]. It reinforces the widespread belief that society is becoming more egalitarian (Cameron, 2001, p. 132).

This line of rhetoric is also identifiable in the analysis of school as a place for everyone, in citations such as "all children deserve a good start in life" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019-2020a, p. 7). The sociological contribution here I believe is to understand how this discourse on equality and equal opportunities work as a mean to another end – it does something *more,* as Foucault emphasized (1972 [1969]). This "more" can be understood as shifting the responsibility of inequality as a result of systemic factors and on to being viewed as a result of individual choices. This shift is not necessarily apparent, as equality is also communicated as an inherent value of every individual: an individuality that the school makes room for and cherishes (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017a). As the race comes off as a fair one; a race where the opportunities for attaining rewards are seen as equally available for all in the first place, the responsibility of those in power to legitimate social inequality is *reduced* to explaining differentials on the individual level (Atkinson, 2015; Grusky & Szelényi, 2014). This is reflected in Report No. 6 (2019-2020), where it is the pupil's "effort, engagement, and talent" that should determine if they succeed in education (2019-2020b).

When everyone seemingly has the same opportunity to succeed, inequality in its results is in turn understood as the result of individuals' qualities, effort, and willingness to work. In line with Grusky and Meyer, communicating the Norwegian education system as an institution with equal opportunities for all, arguable shifts the responsibility for bearing the consequences of social inequalities elsewhere. The school system is not to blame for inequality in result, because is it 'obvious' in a sense that both politicians and the schools do *everything* they can. The results are also in congruence with Grusky and Meyer showing how education is central for society to be able to hold on to the ideal that every individual possesses the same value, and continuously stratify people into different professions and roles with different attainments of goods.

By playing on, and shifting between two different understandings of equality, Norwegian policy of education put forward an understanding of education that is in line with the international commonly upheld idea that all individuals have an inherent value, and the Norwegian social democratic tradition – meaning it keeps education intact with the values that 'we all agree' on. It also opens up for the possibility to stratify 'equal persons' into 'unequal roles', as Meyer coined it (2014). What is interesting in this respect is that the school practices of assessment, testing, and evaluation of pupils that follows them through secondary and upper secondary education are widely missing in the documents. The Norwegian Core Curriculum provides a short account for assessment in school and stresses that assessment must be used in the *correct* manner: "unfortunate use of assessment may undermine a person's self-image and prevent the development of a good learning environment" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017a, p. 18). Here, the duality between equality and inclusion in education is found.

In 'a school for everyone', inclusion is described as crucial for every child to feel a sense of belonging, that their opinions matter, and that they are valuable (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019-2020a). But as the pupils enter into secondary education, they are also subjected to assessment and grading which in turn is crucial for their enrollment into upper secondary education or vocational training, and later on into tertiary education or the labor market. Being graded arguably stand in contradiction to the idea that school is

a place where everyone feels that they are valued on their own premises. In effect, this duality between equality and inclusion makes the education policy come off as a tale of inclusion based on the inherent equal value of individuals, but this tale also has undertones of a more economic facet emphasizing effectiveness, results, competition and a cost-benefit logic.

In line with Foucault, developments in education with an increasing focus on testing and measurements of results could be understood as new forms of subjectivity. Through education, children are from a young age placed in a system that assesses them as someone who masters education, or as someone who doesn't. This is communicated in both reports stressing 'early intervention': Report No. 16 states that efforts must be made to identify children who fall behind in learning processes (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006-2007b), and Report No. 6 state that kindergartens and schools must work to prevent problems, and take steps necessary if problems are identified (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019-2020b, see also page 10-11 in the thesis). When pupils later on receive gradings in secondary education, every child arguable are made explicitly aware of themselves and whether they conduct themselves 'satisfactory' in education and learning. This awareness, together with the repeated importance of education that is put forward, the link to increased mental health problems and reporting of self-wort as premised on academic achievement (Bakken, 2018; Eriksen, 2021) may not be so surprising.

Human Capital and its Implications for Subjectivity

The duality of discourses on equality and equality of opportunity can be understood in line with the findings on human-capital-based rhetoric, and the political influence of OECD. As I described in chapter 2, already during the 2000s, the Stoltenberg Government showed willingness to make education more internationalized. This is reflected both in the heavily used references to PISA and OECD in Report No. 16 (2006-2007), and in the report on internationalization from 2009 (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006-2007b, 2008-2009). As my analysis presented, Report No. 16 (2006-2007) references to OECD and PISA is done 79 and 22 times throughout the paper. OECD is described as 'experts', and results from PISA are presented as a source of facts on the status of Norwegian education. By doing so, the Stoltenberg Government placed explicit trust in OECD and PISA as indicators of the quality of Norwegian education and as a source of truth. The governments tendencies to adopt PISA results and OECD recommendations as 'objective truths' and indicators of quality can be understood as problematic in line with Hestbek (2014); and Sjøberg (2014) arguments. Several important aspects of education is not a part of the tests (for example other subjects than reading, math and science), some findings are not statistically significant, and the test is removed from national context, for example in regard to the national Curriculum. For Sjøberg (2014, p. 34), it is then a paradox how PISA is still presented and understood as valid measurements for the quality of the education system in its entirety. In similar lines, Smeplass (2018, p. 22) explain that a problem with economic perspectives on education with assumptions of causality is that it is applied as objective proof for political implementations that are taken out of context and its institutional frames.

Further, OECD's own policies can be viewed as mirrored in Norwegian educational policy already in the early 2000s, as the focus on 'early intervention' in Report No. 16 mirrors OECD's policies on 'starting strong' from 2001 (OECD 2001b in Ministry of Education and Research, 2006-2007b, p. 102). In addition, I believe my findings from Report No. 6

(2019-2020) reflect a more comprehensive approach towards OECD's foundational premises, such as an individualistic perspective on human capital.

OECD described themselves as "the world's most reliable indicator of students' capabilities", and that the PISA results work as 'evidence' for best practice. Their educational policy center on 'equipping citizens' and making individuals capable of 'converting their skills into better lives', and that the 'skills of citizens' are crucial for building a fair and inclusive society (OECD, 2019a, or see thesis p. 13). Equipping citizens is drawn in line with building individuals with a 'growth mindset', enabling them to perceive challenges as 'external'. Similarly, in Report No. 6 (2019-2020), the Solberg Government emphasizes that the education system has the responsibility to provide opportunities, so that children in turn can make good use of them. The report uses the words 'empower', and goes on to describe that pupils must be equipped to take care of themselves and others (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019-2020a; 2019-2020b, pp., see also thesis p. 33). This is also reflected in the interesting finding from the analysis, where the government state that it is valuable for society that every child is helped, in order to - if they are capable - develop into active citizens who in turn contribute to value creation for the country (2019-2020b, see also thesis p. 33). What this quote implies, is that education is an investment in humans, so that they in turn can use their capital for the interests of society. The governmental emphasis on 'early intervention' is thus continued, with several references to another OECD report on 'starting strong' from 2017 (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019-2020a, pp. 21-22; 2019-2020b; OECD, 2017).

Since OECD is an inherent economic organization with an emphasis on building human capital, it makes sense that social scientists argue that the left-oriented government has taken upon itself the politics of the right (Hovdenak & Stray, 2015; Thuen, 2010). As this movement toward human capital has become intensified, one could explain it by the fact that political parties on the right have governed Norway for the last eight years (Solberg government 2013-2021), but one could also argue in line with Meyers perspective that this shift is not about differences in government, but rather about an international cultural shift, which has had important implications on the institution of education and educational policies across the political spectrum. It is a *culture* of education that has spread, become internationalized, and has been universally adopted (Meyer, 2014). This means that the discourses on equality and inclusion are not necessarily linked to a position or a political wing, but are discourses that co-exist and is used and pick up on according to context. For example, former Minister of Education, Torbjørn Røe Isaksen was a representative of the Solberg Government, which was the government that argued for a renewal of the Core Curriculum and the need to put the foundational values of the Norwegian school 'back in' (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017b).

This duality between core values in the Norwegian Core Curriculum as co-existing with an increasing emphasis on human capital is interesting because it displays the ambivalences between governmentality as a socio-economic logic, and the importance of recognition and inclusion. In Foucault's notion of governmentality exists a premise on an economic logic where society is understood as dependent on a specific conduct of individuals. Individuals need to conduct themselves in a way that optimally produces values and resources, and the political power of the modern state, therefore, needs to siege and steer life from beginning to end. My material reflects this with the emphasis on starting strong, early intervention, effective learning, lifelong learning, and knowledge and competencies as something crucial for both the well-being of individuals and society.

Through this very specific discourse of education as important for the success of the future self and the best for society, pupils are from early on disciplined into thinking of education as something 'for their own good', and 'a good life' for their future selves – an opportunity provided by the government for their own 'salvation'. It is also reflected in how recognition comes off as a tool of ideology. When the government places heavy emphasis on education and communicates education through normative and positive terms, mastering education and putting willingness into learning provides the pupils with a good sense of self. Education is put forward in a sense that encourages a positive self-image by following *the rules of the game,* or as Honneth puts it: "subjects are encouraged to adopt a particular self-conception that motivates them voluntarily to take on tasks or duties that serve society" (2007, p. 323). Those pupils who master being the entrepreneur of their own lives are thus granted recognition, while those who don't experience a lack of chances to obtain social value. Honneth (2008) views the lack of recognition as damaging for individuals' sense of self – an awareness that is reflected in the Core Curriculum's emphasis on the *correct* use of assessment. This raises a paradox: there seems to be an awareness of how schools practices and educational policies can in consequence affect children's sense of self-worth, but a critical glance at how the structure and practices of education contribute to mental health issues, difficulties in learning or a decrease in pupils' belief in a good life in the future are not addressed in these documents. The discourses of equality and inclusion thus undermine how education also is an arena where children experience lack of recognition and their scale of chances to obtain social value, following Honneth's perspective (2008; Petersen & Willig, 2002).

In sum, what we have here are discourses on education that place knowledge as the premise for individuals' equal opportunities, as the premise for a good and independent life, and as a crucial premise for the economy, society, democracy, and welfare (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019-2020a). What my findings display is that within the rhetoric of capabilities and empowerment, as investing in human capital – we find different connotations to inclusion as 1) a boost for the individual, 2) a process of uplifting 'vulnerable' groups, and 3) an underlying story of socio-economic gain. Education is communicated as enabling every individual to live good lives, based on the idea of individual inherent worth - but in a more critical perspective the discourse of education could also be understood as a political power of conduct, as subjecting individuals to a specific individuality accompanied by limited opportunities for recognition. I argue that this ambivalence is under-communicated in the educational discourse.

Consequences for Inclusion and Recognition

Report No. 16 (2006-2007) states that "education, knowledge, and skills contribute to inclusion in the workplace, to a better economy and better health, to greater participation in society […]" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006-2007a, p. 1). Similar understandings of education as empowering or building the individual into a responsible citizen of the future are also reflected in Report No. 6 (2019-2020) and the Core Curriculum. Following from this, I argue that working against social inequality and towards inclusion today, with the influence from internationalization of education, is based on a premise of empowering the individual, building its capacities and resilience. If education properly *provides* the individuals with opportunities and make effort to build the individual's capacities and resilience, individuals thus can enable themselves to participate in the race – hence social inequality can be overcome - but that hinge on the skills and effort of the individual itself.

Inclusion in this sense seems to be based on a belief that individuals can be included in society (despite background), on the premise that they mobilize their individual resources. A critical question is if this notion of human capital arguable put forward structures of inequality as something *that just is,* and what one *can fix* – is building the individual and enabling the individual to overcome 'external challenges' (OECD, 2019a). The problem with this line of thought is that within this specific discourse on inclusion in education, there also exists a feature of exclusion and contempt. When education is perceived as giving every child every opportunity, exclusion becomes a result of personal failure; and since it is 'only' your own fault, the question of how education could have played a part in that failure is undermined. In this respect it is interesting to ask why exclusion, to the extent it appears in the documents, is limited to speaking of exclusion in terms of bullying or as affected by pupils' background, for example with language barriers (see for example Ministry of Education and Research, 2006-2007b chapter 3; 2019-2020a chapter 2). My findings suggest an argument in line with Haug and Schaaning, that a critical glance at the education system and the discourses it is dominated by in itself could be a cause, or in correlation to dissatisfaction, problems with learning, or mental health issues - is widely missing in educational policies. Haug's argument in Report No. 16 is thus still relevant: "reality in schools today is still shaped by a notion that if a pupil fails in learning, the pupil is at fault" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006-2007b, p. 56, own translation). This idea that it is the pupil who, for example, has challenges with self-regulation, reflects how the discourses and ambivalences on education are related to each other. When education is put forward as *doing everything it can* for pupils, then the logic one is left with is that is *must be the child* there is something wrong with. That this is not necessarily intended, does not mean that it doesn't exist.

In consequence, my findings suggest that the policy on education in Norway today is premised on the self-regulation of the pupil. As a pupil, one is dependent on adopting and obtaining a specific set of knowledge and is subject to specific systems of norms, types of classification, and behavioral patterns to be fully included. As Foucault (1982) argues – the institutions of modernity allow individuals to be integrated under the condition of a new form of subjectivity. The discourses on education as it is reflected in my material thus has powerful undertones. The notion of human capital has shaped the educational 'talk' in Norway to put forward an expectation of the individual's disciplinary capacity and responsibility, with strong references to governmentality. Through these very specific discourses on equality and inclusion in education, the government contributes to shaping how the public, and maybe more importantly, how pupils today think of education, success, personal failure, and place themselves within a classification of mastering or not, which have proven to have negative consequences for their perception of self-worth (Bakken, 2018; Eriksen, 2021).

'Is it Really this Bad?'

At this point, I need to make clear that even though my findings and theoretical framework enable me to make these arguments, I do not believe that the Norwegian education system has become a full-on business, or that the Norwegian education policymakers blindly adopt every available international idea. Several critical pedagogical perspectives argue, such as Haug (2009); Hestbek (2014); Hovdenak and Stray (2015); and Thuen (2010), that New Public Management, the influence of international currents, and economists are increasingly playing a part in educational policy. My findings display several hints and elements of such rhetoric and line of thought, especially in the discourse on equal opportunities in education. Still, I argue that my findings also display

the contested ground that education is. Several discourses coexist and get to play their part in varying contexts. Pedagogical perspectives and rhetoric are still very present, for example in the Core Curriculum explicit description that "school must recognize the intrinsic value of childhood and adolescent years" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017a, p. 10, see also thesis p. 35), and the ideal of recognition where every child should be able to feel that they are valued and appreciated in school.

Further, there are examples of recommendations from OECD that Norwegian policymakers have taken a clear distance from. One example of this is from Report No. 16 (2006-2007), where OECD recommended Norway to reevaluate the principle of free access to tertiary education (in Norwegian 'gratisprinsippet') (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006-2007b, p. 88). The Ministry's reluctance to raise the bars for access to tertiary education reflects that Norway, despite being a small country, has some traditions that weigh heavy. Another such tradition is the two-fold mandate of education as both knowledges on the one side, and democratic education on the other: a tradition that the new Core Curriculum was to 'bring back in' school (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017b). Another relevant development in this respect is the renewal of the Curriculum that has been partly implemented from 2020 and up to the current school year of 2022/23, in Norwegian known as 'Fagfornyelsen'. The renewal emphasizes more practical competencies, new practices and ways of conducting teaching in schools, and a more creative approach to the different subjects in education. There has also been attention directed at lifting the application numbers for vocational training, and in general investment in vocational training, both from the Solberg Government and the current government of Jonas Gahr Støre (see for example Asheim, 2021; Ministry of Education and Research, 2022a, 2022b). The question remains if these changes are followed up by changes in what educational discourse put forward as valuable and successful.

7. Conclusion

The inspiration for this project started with a curiosity on how it is possible for the education system to reproduce social divisions, while at the same time placing equality and inclusion as the core credentials in the discourses that dominate education policy today. The focus of this project has been to identify ambivalences in why it is so hard to talk about inclusion. It seems that everyone agrees, but my findings suggest that a perspective on inclusion within the rhetoric of human capital place heavy importance on the ability of children to be the entrepreneurs of their own lives. The power relations within the logics of business in educational discourse is first apparent in its consequences. These very specific discourses on equal opportunities and inclusion is where power has its performative character – the success you obtain (or fail to), reduces itself to being perceived as a result of own choices and efforts. It allows power to become transparent, to not call attention to itself, and to allow education to come off as a place that cherishes every child and youth.

Rhetoric on Education and their Ambivalences

My findings show that there are multiple rhetoric that can be identified in governmental documents on education. The white papers play on and switch between both political, economic and pedagogical arguments in order to put forward a specific view of the importance of knowledge and education, and put forward a view of education as inherently equal and based on the ideal of inclusion. The Core Curriculum has a stronger hold on a universalistic, human-rights bound, pedagogical rhetoric, but elements of the human capital rhetoric is implicitly present. Still, all the different types of rhetorical arguments and notions I have identified on equality, opportunities, inclusion and human capital coexist and is dependent on each other. Only when put together are they able to make education come off as egalitarian and for the greater good of both individuals and society, while at the same time to stratify recognition – which have powerful effects for those who do not succeed in education.

I argue that the inherently contradicting and ambivalent discourses on equality and inclusion in educational policies today have powerful effects on pupils' abilities to be granted recognition and to be fully included. With a heavy emphasis on mastering education, accompanied with a human capital rhetoric that place the responsibility for social inequality and social exclusion on the basis of individuals efforts, these discourses on education create a hierarchy of values in Norwegian society that have powerful impacts on subjectivity.

The Sociological Scope

The sociological contribution of my research, I hope, is that it highlights how analysis of language, power and educational discourses on equality and inclusion also should be included to fully understand inequality and power relations in education. Drawing inspiration from Foucault and Honneth in my project have displayed how power in educational polices produce new forms of subjectivity. The problem with these discourses of equality and inclusion is that they create acceptance for contempt towards those who are not able to subject to the rules of the game, while at the same time as education is *allowed* to appear and legitimate itself as a place for everyone. We have an educational discourse that advocates itself as for the best of every individual, and at the same time put forward limited options for full recognition. That is a problematic duality. Several

children manage well in today's educational system, but for the ones who don't, the consequences are hard to escape. Children spend the majority of their young lives enrolled in education, and the consequences for those who everyday are made aware of their failure, one can only begin to guess. As Eriksen (2021) findings show, youth today view being 'a bad student' and 'a bad person' as two pieces of the same pie. The heavy importance placed on education as a premise for a good life in the future, leave youth with a perception that "if they failed now, they failed their future selves" (Eriksen, 2021, p. 610). This does not mean that education is inherently *evil*, but my contribution is to reveal and dissect out the problematic aspects that become visible in the effect of these discourses. *The social inclusion account* – coined by Grusky and Szelényi (2014) may be available for everyone, but stratification of recognition is scattered within it. The problem with stratification as such is not only unequal distribution of resources, but stratification of recognition and social value.

The implication of my study is that there is work to be done to understand how educational discourses have powerful consequences on the possibilities for children to obtain social value, when placed in an educational system with an increased focus on making children the entrepreneurs of their own success. The implication of this project thus opens up for an interesting way forward to extend research on (in)equality and inclusion in education to account for children's own experiences and perceptions of education, knowledge and success.

8. Literature

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