Barriers to Equality and Cultural Responsiveness in Three Urban Norwegian Primary Schools: A Critical Lens for School Staff Perceptions

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Abstract

Literature regarding the gap between the conceptualization of inequality and school staffs' perception of it in Norwegian schools is scarce. Therefore, we explore the challenges that Norwegian school staff have experienced as they work to ensure inclusive education at three schools. We address this challenge by examining three purposefully selected maximum variation schools that are located in a large Norwegian city. This is a qualitative study based on 25 in-depth interviews with school personnel regarding their understanding of anti-oppressive education of children. A relational approach and critical theory are used to organize and explain nested contextual systems. The narratives from school staff are used to identify their perception of their roles in combatting oppression, their patterns of interaction with others within the school community, and their constructions of "otherness." The theoretical approach comprises a framework that is based on a social network analysis, trust and belonging, and the staff's perception of their school's context in relation to anti-oppressive values in critical race theory. We identify various challenges at each urban school that relate to social and organizational factors and discuss how investigating professionals' meaning-making enables more nuanced images of the Nordic educational model.

Keywords Urban primary schools · Nordic education · Anti-oppressive education theories · Critical race theory · Trust and belonging

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Springer

Introduction to Inequality in Nordic Schools

Educational inequalities are constructed by specific conditions around and within a school, as schools play an essential role in equal opportunities, processes, and outcomes (Oppedisano & Turati, 2015; Trinidad, 2019). This article explores the Norwegian context and the challenges identified as unequal opportunities in education, specifically focusing on how school personnel address inequality and work to counteract exclusion. Educational inequality could result from systemic inequity, which results in negative experiences and unequal access to learning for students (Anderson et al., 2022; Nilsson & Axelsson, 2013). Educational inequality can also result in the neglect of pupils if these pupils' cultural backgrounds do not match the culture that dominates their specific educational system or school (Beach et al., 2019; Broer et al., 2019; Burner & Carlsen, 2022; Reisel, 2011). Educational inequality can also be manifested through poor support for students (Oppedisano & Turati, 2015), as a lack of support can prevent them from engaging in academic learning and social involvement and impede their access to educational resources (Jaffe-Walter, 2013; Scharenberg et al., 2019; Tonkens & Verhoeven, 2019).

Interrelationships within the school context and the staff's roles, practices, and values could contribute to more socially just and equitable outcomes for children. For example, students could learn from pedagogical actions (Väyrynen & Paksuniemi, 2020), such as social justice pedagogy (Gerdin et al., 2020), collaborative learning processes (Davidsen & Vanderlinde, 2016), or practices that compensate for and minimize differences (Möller, 2012; Wold, 2013). However, researchers have also highlighted that this is not an easy task; teachers often feel frustrated and lost when dealing with a diverse population because they lack resources, adapted curricula, and a culture of excellence (Gidlund, 2018).

Researchers who have studied equity in Nordic schools have also focused on the interrelationships in school communities. Several researchers have concluded that students (Van den Broeck et al., 2019) and parents (Antony-Newman, 2019; Danielsen & Bendixsen, 2019) are key actors in building a school's culture. Simultaneously, the lack of emotional support for students from peers and teachers and the resulting loneliness can be used to predict students' early departures from upper secondary schools in Norway (Fandrem et al, 2021; Frostad et al., 2015).

Following previous scholars, staff members who belong to professional learning communities could address inequality. Subsequently, multidisciplinary teams could participate critically in working toward equity in education (Hesjedal et al., 2016; Kaarby & Lindboe, 2016; Mælan et al., 2020; Svanbjörnsdóttir et al., 2016). For example, staff members could learn from each other by acquiring new knowledge, accepting what is necessary, and acknowledging the choices that are made (Matre & Solheim, 2015). Specific staff strategies such as receiving collegial support and acknowledgement, combined with a positive professional climate and the ability to constructively solve problems, can inhibit both teacher-targeted bullying and exhaustion (Pyhältö et al., 2015).

However, researchers have described how school staff have formed negative and stereotyped perceptions about working with groups of students who possess

different abilities (Johannessen et al, 2020; Rosnes & Rossland, 2018). Matthiesen (2017) has stated that school staff perceive it as unfavorable when school practices differ from the practices that students' parents use to raise their children. These perceptions could lead to a discriminatory understanding of certain practices and negative stereotypes and stigmas about minoritized groups (Matthiesen, 2017; Thomas et al, 2016). Minoritize means to make a person or a group subordinate in status to a more dominant group or its members. Many scholars have highlighted factors that create inequality in education; however, limited research is available about specific contextualized experiences of school staff who deal with inequality in the Norwegian context. In this article, we seek to explore how school personnel from three socio-demographically different Norwegian schools work to ensure inclusive education and understand the types of challenges they face in their work to organize resources.

Systemic Factors that Create a Norwegian Unequal Education

This first section aims to review the main factors creating inequality of the Norwegian educational context and the challenges experienced in the classroom. Norway is often described as an example of a Nordic model and is characterized by a decentralized equalitarian welfare system (West & Nikolai, 2013). Chzhen et al. (2019) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)'s latest Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) reports indicate that schools in the Nordic countries display a slight variation in performance. Low- and high-performing students are clustered into the same schools less often than the OECD average (OECD, 2018). Data from Norwegian schools demonstrate that human resources across the country are homogenous. Teachers have benefitted from below-average teaching hours, and the teacher–student ratio is one of the lowest among OECD countries (OECD, 2020).

Despite low degree of inequality, measured by PISA (OECD, 2020), previous scholars have identified specific systemic challenges in Norway's equalitarian system. Since 2013, the Norwegian policies shifted to marketing in the educational system and establishing competitive goals (Bjordal, 2016; Dovemark et al., 2018; Lundahl, 2016; Volckmar, 2019;). The competition involved in reaching the top of the PISA ranking created by the OECD prompted the national government to develop new educational policies such as the Knowledge Promotion Reform, also known as LK06 (Fasting, 2013; Kunnskapsløftet, 2006; Pettersson et al., 2017; Sjøberg, 2016; Tveit, 2014; Udir, 2006). Furthermore, government policies recommend sharing decisions on individual curricular adaptations, developing optimum differentiated education for all pupils, and promoting a positive learning environment among classroom staff, departmental managers, and school directors (Buli-Holmberg et al., 2014). The policies state that schools must choose their pedagogy, teaching methods, and classroom organizational methods and emphasize that the owners of the schools—often the county governor on behalf of the municipality, except private schools—must be involved in the decision-making process (Germeten, 2011). In the Norwegian system, 96% of the primary school population attends state schools with

the remainder attending non-profit private schools (UDIR, 2022). Resources are distributed by municipalities, and schools autonomously redistribute the resources they receive (Government of Norway, 2017; Hopfenbeck et al., 2013). Decentralized schools are owned and run by municipalities that use quality assessment systems documenting performance data, budget, staffing, student admission, and follow-up contact with families handled at the school level (Paulsen et al., 2014; Prøitz et al., 2022). School staff are expected to operate in demanding and competitive contexts, which can result in tensions between independence and control (Abrahamsen, 2018).

School performance is based partly on output indicators for students such as PISA evaluations, national tests in years 5 and 8 (Pettersson et al., 2017), and external assessments (Hall, 2018). Thomas and Breidlid (2015) described how the national tests, mainly the English section, have created another layer of discrimination against students from immigrant backgrounds, particularly for students from Asia, Africa, or South America. Some researchers have found that national test results are not always statistically representative and do not always accurately indicate the quality of schools (Hovdhaugen et al., 2017). Many schools use various types of programs to counteract any sense of exclusion. As with policies, these standardized programs must be translated into the specific school context and be adapted to the individual to be useful. Even if Norwegian policies are clear in providing equity in education, researchers have found that these policies often have unintended consequences in practice (Rapp, 2018).

Previous Research on Staff Experiences Regarding Inequality in Norwegian Schools

Very few scholars have explored how staff in Norwegian schools have responded to the challenges described in the previous sections. In the Norwegian context, classroom decisions are made collectively because many schools use a co-teaching model in which two or more staff members teach multiple classes per school year (Bjørnsrud & Nilsen, 2019). In some co-teaching settings, teachers solve problems together through informal discussions and collaboration (Kvam, 2018, 2021). Furthermore, in some schools, teachers expand their cultural resources by collaborating with bilingual teachers. Some research points that bilingual teachers are scarce; they are not recognized as "genuine" teachers at Norwegian schools (Valenta, 2009), and many feel invisible among their peers (Spernes & Fjeld, 2021). Most schools could use the services of a translator, but few researchers have explored their role in Norwegian schools.

By law, schools are not required to provide translators to talk with parents, but the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training recommends that the owners of schools and nurseries facilitate the use of interpreters. Additionally, the directorate recommends that the regional government bear the responsibility of informing school staff members on how to use an interpreter to avoid any misunderstandings. Furthermore, 2022 saw the implementation of the policy of interpreters, accompanied by guidelines on how to perform the communication and specifying that it is the role of teachers to request their use. In 2015, the Directorate of Integration and

Diversity reported that only one in seven teachers said they were using interpreters for their communications with immigrant families. Half of the school staff said that interpreters were used in many of their conversations, while one in four stated that an interpreter was used in few or none of their conversations. The most-cited reason for not using interpreters is that others, such as students who know both languages, are present and are participants in the formal conversations. When a clear regulation is lacking, the decision of whether to use a translator is based on the specific circumstances of the school staff, and, on many occasions, qualified staff are not participating in the conversations. Nyikach et al. (2022) have found that interpreters are normally not trained to talk with children and lack a background in intercultural communication.

Rosnes and Rossland (2018) describe how teachers taking an online training on intercultural competence learned that they play a key role as communication helpers in collaborating with parents. Specifically, Bjørnsrud and Nilsen (2019) found that participation in a national program of school development regarding sharing a culture of inclusion allowed school staff members an opportunity to reflect on their teaching practices. However, statistics reveal that insufficient numbers of Norwegian school staff members are participating in professional development activities. In one study, 57.7% of Norwegian teachers reported that they had not engaged in professional development in the prior two years (Buchholtz et al., 2020).

Furthermore, Elkorghli (2021) highlighted the assimilative and adaptive perceptions of minoritized groups that teachers form when interpreting educational policies in Norwegian schools. Abram (2018) noted that these perceptions of equality in the Norwegian context are different when they are analyzed by outsiders. Some respondents decided they would not include children in evaluation processes to avoid making the children feel oppressed (Aursand and Rutkowski, 2021). Staff in Norwegian schools are also implementing a flexible policy interpretation regarding students' learning outcomes and assessments. In some cases, tools for evaluation have been used to determine the content of a curriculum, or *rammeplan*, without considering necessary individual adaptations that may need to be made, which has negatively affected some children (Mølstad et al., 2020; Haugen, 2013). Cultural and individual factors also influence values, beliefs, and stereotypes that create inequality. Harlap and Riese (2021) pointed out that it is a cultural practice to avoid talking about racism and that race evasiveness is common among Norwegian university students. Color-blind approaches are also described by Flintoff and Dowling (2019: 126) in physical education teachers' narratives regarding treating all students the same. Van den Broeck et al. (2020) pointed out how school staffs' expectations can significantly affect students' educational aspirations. Teacher–student relationships are critical predictors of students' expectations, particularly for certain racial, ethnic, and generational groups (Cherng, 2017).

Some scholars have stated that Norwegian society operates under a cultural feeling of "sameness" that produces generalized behavior, such as avoiding situations in which an individual might have to empathize with differences (Abram, 2018; Maguire, 2019). Fylkesnes (2019) explored this white perception and the socially accepted "pedagogy of amnesia" by examining the thoughts of six Norwegian teachers regarding cultural responsiveness. According to research, it seems that many are

"blind" to the effects of racism when they do not meet with a popularly agreed-upon ideology (Gullestad, 1996, 2004). In the majority of the country, the culture of the working class features hard workers and a socially responsible majority that is commonly taken for granted by ethnic Norwegians. No clear pattern of hostility against minority groups from other European countries is visible (Skarpenes, 2021).

Hidden discrimination takes the form of performance through belonging (Strømsø, 2019). In cases where encounters of difference occur, there is also a precise measure of the performative criteria of inclusion in Norwegian society regarding what is expected in relational processes. This can be interpreted as assimilation, where immigrants are "progressing" and sometimes become the "same." Further understanding of immigrant experiences can be based on identity and belonging as part of shared communication (Nagel, 2009) and how to negotiate identity in a context of discrimination (Mas Giralt, 2011).

Norwegian students have identified trust in teachers and feeling part of a school class culture as factors that allow them to build equal relationships (Sturm, 2019). In summary, teachers are constantly exploring challenges, and it is important to understand that their experience of inequality is formed by structure, culture, and individual thoughts.

Theories for Exploring Inequality Through Interrelations in Schools

To explore the challenges that Norwegian educators experience while working to ensure inclusive education, we use complementary theoretical orientations such as relational theory to interpret the micro-social aspects of school cultures and to understand how interpersonal transactions produce changes in inequality (Tilly, 2001). We also use critical social theories (Bonilla-Silva, 1997, 2006; Kumashiro, 2015). For this research, we studied how three Norwegian schools approach educational inclusion through the eyes of their school staff and explored the individual school's approach to inequality by describing the key informants' social networks.

Macready (2009) developed the concept of learning values, attitudes, and behaviors through social interactions at school. Currently, the importance of inclusion, equity, and social justice has influenced international political agendas such as Norwegian educational policies and has taken a central role in schools. Actors from a school's community are expected to maintain socially responsible attitudes and actively prevent discrimination. Social relationships produce a wide array of social phenomena, including social trust and equity or durable inequality (Tilly, 1995, 2006). Following organizational theories, Tilly defined *trust networks* as "commitment-maintaining connections" within long-term enterprises such as educational organizations that can claim attention or aid from each other based on the commitments involved in those organizations (Tilly, 2005). Therefore, trusted relationships can develop as work-generated solidarities or as the relationships and commitment that are fostered by school staff and students (Hanagan & Tilly, 2010). The relevant dimension of trust networks depends on whether they are incorporated into public life and are included in society or whether they marginalize the people forming them

(Szybek, 2013). The concept of trust networks is useful when exploring a teacher's role in dealing with inequality.

Critical social theory focuses on structures such as discourse (Fairclough, 2000; Leonardo, 2004), policy (Calhoun, 1995; Fairclough, 2013; Forester, 1987), and practice (Agger, 2006; Leonardo, 2004) as well as the reproduction of inequality and inequity through structures (Bell, 1995) and, later, in educational systems and settings (Kumasi, 2015; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn & Parker, 2006). Critical race theory (CRT) is an academic approach or theory and is a subcategory of critical social theory. The CRT movement originated in the United States in July 1989 at a workshop for law professors in Madison, Wis., with the aim to "develop a coherent account of race and law" (Crenshaw, 2001) finding its way into the political process (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Gillborn, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1998). The foundational focus of CRT analyzes race, racism, power, and the law, where the law is a structure and a site for reproducing inequality and inequity (Chapman, 2011; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2017; Parker & Villalpando, 2007). Contemporary critical race theorists continue to address both structural inequity and interpersonal relationships within educational institutions and examine how racial inequities are formed and fulfilled systematically and individually within these institutions by stories or counter-narratives to explain how racism operate and functions (Anderson, 2018; Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Dixson & Rousseau, 2018; Liou et al., 2019; Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015; Solorzano, 1997). Scholars in CRT have described the structure, processes, and discourses in critical social theory analyses within teacher education (Childers-McKee & Hytten, 2015; Iverson, 2007; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Yosso, 2002a, 2002b). Following CRT, deficit discourses—disempowering patterns of thought, language, and practice that represent people in terms of deficiencies and failures—serve to rationalize discrimination, deficiency, and difference in processes related to curriculum adaptation or to segregate educational placements and educational organizations.

Furthermore, anti-oppressive approaches drawing on CRT highlight that subjugation is a result of harmful understandings and actions that can lead to the oppression of others (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Watkins Liu, 2018). The term "oppression" originates from a discourse that describes how people think and interact, creating oppressive values and perceptions (Kumashiro, 2000, 2002). On certain occasions, oppression happens in interpersonal relationships within a school community (Sidanius et al., 2017; Tappan, 2006). Following this theory, it refers to a separation among groups: the majority and the racially minoritized students, who are designated as "others" (Bondi, 2012). For example, oppression can be caused by school staff attitudes toward and knowledge about "others" (Capper, 2015; Sleeter, 1993), communication with "others" (Yosso, 2005), and the implementation of teaching practices designed for a diverse and differentiated curriculum (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, 2002a, 2002b).

Moreover, organizational factors such as a school's culture and norms could privilege certain groups. Following a CRT approach, several scholars have described how being part of the majority includes being white in a majority-white society; this can affect a white teacher's color-blindness, leading them to ignore thinking and reflecting about racism in their daily lives (Blaisdell, 2005; Picower, 2009). By denying that they even noticed children's races, school staff members avoid talking

about it (Atwater, 2008), while being conscious and sensitive could create their own "visible identities" (Crowley, 2019). "Color-blindness" denies expansive views of equality and equity and perpetuates the myth of meritocracy (Crenshaw, 1987). The interpersonal interactions between school staff members and students can take place at many levels of society (Kumashiro, 2000). However, through the limited language proficiency typically found at schools, many labels can generate oppression, such as "whiteness" and "authenticity" (Warren, 1999). When we talk about anti-oppressive pedagogy (Lee-Johnson, 2019), it is based on Kumashiro's approach to anti-oppressive education (Kumashiro, 2000). Researching relationships in schools requires trust to mediate these connections between staff and pupils (Goddard et al., 2009; Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2011). An example of an anti-oppressive approach is maintaining expanded notions about students' achievements; doing so can significantly improve the trust that exists among staff and school leaders (Handford & Leithwood, 2013). Furthermore, school leadership values, ideologies, and practices, as well as culturally responsive pedagogy (Galloway et al., 2019; Rychly & Graves, 2012; Sleeter, 2012), are relevant to the discussion of race and equity (Welton et al., 2019). Critical race theory advocates the critique and transformation of structures and ideologies to develop consciousness and empowerment (Yoso & Garcia, 2007). Following this pedagogy, it is expected that the staff members' own races are relevant when discussing racism (Epstein, 2019; Glazier, 2003; Jupp et al., 2016), reflecting on the racialization of "others" (Rollock, 2012), and examining the cultural responsiveness of white teachers (Matias, 2013; McIntyre, 1997; Nayir et al., 2019).

The preceding discussion demonstrates that it is important to understand structural, cultural, and organizational factors that relate to oppression in a school context. All of these elements are embedded in the chosen theories and were applied in the analyses as tools to understand how schools deal with inequality and work to ensure inclusive education.

Study Context and Methods

This is a qualitative study (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) that is based on 25 in-depth interviews with school personnel from three urban Norwegian schools. The interview studies approach (Roulston & Shelton, 2015) offered the opportunity to gather and use multiple sources of information; we chose to study three schools to access three worlds and to explore each school's institutional context and its relationships with students and parents. As school staff members share the responsibility for children's wellbeing and must uphold clear policies that require self-organization, we sought to learn more about how these staff members make decisions as part of their daily duties. We were interested to learn how staff members relate to each other concerning social inequality, for which they are responsible, and other school-related challenges. We also wanted to examine how this phenomenon might vary according to local organizational conditions. Therefore, we pose the following research question: *How are educators experiencing social inequality and discrimination in their schools and how do they work with anti-oppressive education techniques?* To answer

this question, we explored the school staff's views regarding the importance of their actions in anti-oppressive education and recognized their perception of "otherness" in challenging inequality in education connected to the organizational context.

In the following sections, we describe our participants, data collection process, analysis procedures, and positionalities.

The Three Participant Schools

The second and the third authors used purposive sampling to strategically select the schools, based on the city demography and urban segregation. The researchers had looked for specific schools educating students in Years 4–7 that matched the aims of this qualitative interview study (Johnson & Christensen, 2019). The sample has a maximum variation of the school population within the urban context (Seidman, 2006) involving different locations and school population characteristics within the same Norwegian city. One of them is a historically white institution located in the city center—a "white urban school"—which uses the pseudonym of Eik primary school. The second school is located in a similar geographic area but includes multiple minoritized groups within its school community. This "multiracial urban school" uses the pseudonym of Gran primary school. The third school is a "multiracial (sub) urban school" that uses the pseudonym of Furu primary school. It educates a substantial proportion of students who come from ethnic or racial minority backgrounds and is located on the outskirts of the city.

Participants

The current study included 25 educators. The participants were teachers, school leaders, health and psycho-pedagogical personnel, and assistants. The participants in the study held stable positions as staff members at the three selected primary schools (see Table 1). While these schools have been participating in a project on educational inequality for the past 10 years, the head of each school is new and the researchers are new to this project as well. The researchers contacted the leaders of the schools that had agreed to participate, as these schools already had a contract with the research group (Parker et al., 2019). The school principals and key participants agreed to act as the gatekeepers regarding access to the participants (Kawulich, 2011), with the heads of each school planning the appointments with school staff members who wished to participate in the research and facilitating flexibility in their work schedules. The interviews took place during the participants' working hours.

For this study, we conducted a qualitative analysis (Cohen et al., 2002) of data gathered through individual in-depth interviews with staff that featured open-ended questions (Rinaldo & Guhin, 2019) regarding their schools' organization and practices. All participants were white and ethnic Norwegians. Each of the participants had more than 15 years of experience working for schools, except for two after-school program (ASP) assistants, who had fewer than five years of experience. The interviews lasted approximately one hour each, and time was allotted for follow-up

Table 1 Demographics in the participating schools

(Statistics Norway, 2021/ Skoleporten 2021)	Percentage of the population who are either immigrants themselves or have parents that are immigrants	Unemployment among families (%)	Percentage of students' mastering the English language (50 (41–59) points regional government mean) in year five national test	Percentage of students reading Norwegian 50 (42–58)
School 1 Eik Primary School (300 approx. students) Teacher-student ratio: 15	10%	Around 4%	43–65 points	44–59 points
School 2 Gran Primary School (200 aprox. students) Teacher -student ratio: 12	25%	Around 5%	37–54 points	40–58 points
School 3 Furu primary school (500 aprox. students) Teacher-student ratio: 14	40% (the largest share of non-western immigrants) from Turkey, Africa and Iraq	Around 11%	41–55 points	41–54 points

questions and the further development of rapport between the researcher and the participants (see Table 2). The project was approved by the regional committee for research ethics (Norwegian Centre for Research Data, NSD) in Norway and was conducted according to international ethical and legal requirements.

Authors' Positionalities

In this reflective, dialogue-based piece, the matter of positionality of the authors is especially important. Their experiences could critically influence the analysis of the interviews. Some of the authors have personal experience as teachers: Two have worked for primary schools for more than 10 years and all three have worked at institutions of higher education. The first and second authors are first-generation Spanish and Swedish immigrants, and the third author is ethnic Norwegian. The second author has more than 25 years of experience working within the Swedish and Norwegian educational system in various roles. Among other pursuits, the second author has been working with newly arrived refugees in Sweden. The second and the third authors are sociologists with interests in educational research on inequality.

Since 2020, the three researchers have been working together on a Nordic research project about social inequality and the risk of marginalization for children and youth. The project concentrates on counteracting the marginalization of children and youth by identifying risks and using research-based knowledge to strengthen education and welfare services in the Nordic countries.

The first author is one of the few employees at their university for whom Norwegian is not their first language. This author went through the process of family reunification to legally reside in the country, taking part in the obligatory courses on language and Norwegian culture and social studies (civic education courses). Additionally, the author was asked to present a bank guarantee amount and demonstrate economic support from a father-in-law. Lastly, the author was interviewed by the police, who sought to determine whether their relationship with the ethnic Norwegian was real enough to warrant approval for residency; this entire process made the author feel quite powerless. With regard to the language requirements, the content of the language and culture instruction required basic memorization and lacked any interactions with ethnic Norwegian speakers. The author attempted further second-language training at several formal learning institutions over the past decade with similar results and still lacks sufficient language skills to pass the Bergenstest level C1, which aims to demonstrate cultural and linguistic competence.

As a parent, the first author also experienced a lack of intercultural sensitivity by school staff members regarding children of monolingual Spanish parents. The children's difficulty with language acquisition resulted in their being labeled as easily distracted or having a reduced attention span, thereby leading to exclusionary placement positions. Anti-oppressive practices, featuring a non-judgmental approach that valued previous knowledge and supported the transition from a first to the second language through daily routines, helped reduce the children's silence and invisibility. The first author has taught CRT for more than a decade, using personal examples of implementing anti-oppressive practices at urban schools during in-service sessions

Table 2 Research participants' site and position

Type of school	School 1 Eik primary school	School 2 Gran primary school	School 3 Furu primary school
Participants (n: 25)	8 participants	7 participants	10 participants
Managerial level	*School principal* (qualified teacher and master's degree in school management, with > 10 years as teacher, < 5 year as inspector; 2 years as principal at small school; > 5 years as principal at schools in this municipality) *Department leader years 1–4* (master's degree in pedagogy and in adult learning; experience teaching in other schools; same municipality. Working at the same school > 10 years)	*School principal* working as a teacher and department head for a few years in another urban schools, qualified with master's degree in school management and started working here as a leader one year ago *Department leader* qualified teacher; > 10 years as teacher in another school and another 10 years as department head, < 5 years in other school in same municipality and here	*School principal qualified teacher,* > 10 years working as a teacher in this school and two years as a principal in this school *Department head 1* qualified teacher, started in autumn to take the master's degree in school management. Worked in < 5 different schools before this school. > 5 years working in this school *Department head 2* qualified teacher < 5 years in other city area, > 10 years in a small village. > 5 years working as a leader in this school
Teachers	*Teacher 1* (qualified teacher; > 20 years working at this school) *Teacher 2* (qualified teacher; > 10 different roles no relate to education > 15 years working in this school) *Teacher 3* (qualified teacher and < 5 years of teacher further education. > 20 years working in this school, except for 1 year he/she was at another school in the city)	*Teacher 1* Qualified as a teacher and 1 year in special education, worked 5 years in another school same council and started working in this school > 15 years ago teaching > 5 subjects per year, different levels *Teacher 2* Qualified teacher and 1 year's special education, started > 25 years working in this school. Previously worked as kindergarten assistant *Teacher 3* Qualified teacher and one year of experience working as a teacher in this school	*Teacher year 4* qualified teacher and only working here > 15 years *Teacher year 5* qualified teacher and only working here > 15 years *Teacher year 6,* stayed home with children until starting to work here > 15 years *Teacher year 7* qualified teacher > 20 years working in this school

Table 2 (continued)

Type of school	School 1 Eik primary school	School 2 Gran primary school	School 3 Furu primary school
Health and psycho-pedagogical personnel	*Special educator* (bachelor in specific subjects with teaching specialization, and master's degree in special pedagogy, worked >15 years as substitute, teacher and special pedagogue and <5 years in this school)	Retired divide among the management team with 2 teachers with a master's in special education and they will hire a new one (no SENCO to sit in an office)	*Special educator 1* qualified teacher and master's degree in special education. <5 years as teacher and special pedagogue in a bilingual school in a big city, <5 years working in this school, 50% teaching and 50% special pedagogy, <5 full-time special pedagogue. *Special educator 2* > 20 years working in this school
After school activities staff	*SFO employee* (bachelor's degree in pedagogy and 1 year of specialization; experience as kindergarten assistant, 50% contract with the SFO and school and 50% studying a bachelor's in dance science > 10 years working in this school) *SFO leader* (early years qualified teacher and a specialization in outdoor activities; 4 years early years as leader, > 10 years of experience as head of SFO in primary secondary schools and <5 in this school)	*1 SFO employee* children and youth specialist, teacher training in sports. Worked as assistant in schools and secondary schools and now is full time employee in SFO, <5 year working in this school. *2 SFO employee and department leader* child welfare educator, worked in a kindergarten in a big city and as a child welfare assistant working both in SFO and school. > 20 years in this school	*1 SFO employee* environmental therapist, <5 years working in this school. Previously care units and kindergartens as assistant

for teachers. Additionally, the author has encouraged white Norwegian university students to reflect on their definition of "others" and on how to include "others" through the curriculum, as related by Fylkesnes et al. (2018) and through schoolbooks stereotypical content (Nordman, 2021).

Data and Analyses

Each verbatim interview transcript was double-checked by a pair of researchers (Johnson & Christensen, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The authors developed a list of possible codes for interview transcript analysis during the first stage of analysis (Freeman et al., 2007). The individual codes fell into broader categories that included role definition, structures and resources related to children or other staff support, responsibilities, staff responsiveness, and involvement. During the second stage of analysis, the complete set of codes was applied to the transcripts. We used the qualitative data analysis software NVivo as we coded and analyzed the data via cross-case comparison across schools and staff using a taxonomic approach (Roulston, 2010; Saldaña, 2009). While the first author categorized and organized the discursive themes, the second and third authors closely read and validated all of the discourse that emerged from the analyses. The second part of the analysis also involved selecting meaning units. In this section, CRT was the aim of our analysis, and we strongly agreed to describe the experiential knowledge of participants in minoritized groups. Additionally, we sought to identify racism, stereotypes, and deficit discourse (Cabrera, 2019; Malagon et al., 2009). Data was also classified as the "reported view of others" when participants talked about parents or other professionals (Roulston, 2011).

We created a summary document to express our findings in a narrative form in which the quotations from the participants at the three schools—Eik, Gran, and Furu—are expressed in the same order. This process was carried out in several phases that we present in the following section.

Results

The results include excerpts from our participants' school narratives (see Table 3). Once we constructed them, we revised the data to develop three main categories, five generic categories, and 12 subcategories. The first main category is the self-perception of their own actions, including the generic category of the meaning of ideals and values related to students' wellbeing. The second main category is the school staff's perception of others' participation in anti-oppressive education, including three generic categories: 1) the meaning of addressing students' wellbeing as part of the advisory role, 2) the meaning of collaboration with other professionals in preventive and intervening measures, and 3) the meaning of collaboration with families. The third main category is their perception of the influence of the organizational context, including the generic category of the meaning of learning environments and management commitment to organizational conditions.

Table 3 Categories, subcategories and location of units of analysis

Main category	Generic category	Subcategory	Location of units of analysis School 1 (Eik Primary School), School 2 (Gran Primary School), School 3 (Fur Primary school)
1. Self-perception of their own actions	1A Meanings of ideals and values related to students' wellbeing and equality	1AA) Deficit perspectives of children with immigrant background and communicating with a variety of languages	(1) (2) (3)
		1AB) Deficit perspectives of children's behavior	(1)(2) (2) (3)
2. Recognise the school staff's perception of others' participation in the anti-oppressive education	2A Meanings of addressing student's wellbeing as part of the advisory role	2AA) Awareness in supporting and caring	(3)
		2AB) Trust, reliability, empowerment and appreciation	(2) (3)
	2B Meanings of collaboration with other professionals in preventive and intervening measures	2BA) The leader's turnover, results in lack of support and isolated staff	(1)(2)
		2BB) Trust networks among the staff collective support and healing	(2)(3)
	2C Meanings of collaboration with families	2CA) Exclusion, Inherited culture and expectations	(1)
		2CB) Whiteness", "otherness", "ethnic segregation" and cultural assimilation towards multicultural families	(2) (3)
		2CC) From professional to personal relationships	(3)

Table 3 (continued)

Main category	Generic category	Subcategory	Location of units of analysis School 1 (Eik Primary School), School 2 (Gran Primary School), School 3 (Fur Primary school)
3. Perception of the influence of the organizational context	3A Meanings of Learning environments and management commitment to organizational conditions	3AA) Teachers overwhelmed, their workload and lack of time	(1) (2) (3)
		3AB) Disappointed with the services from the external agencies from the municipality	(1)(2) (3)
		3AC) Pressure from the academic expectations from the municipality	(3)

All themes share the explicit focus of how the participants make sense or meaning of a situation, how they experience being professional actors at each of the three schools, how they are informed about anti-oppressive education within their specific learning communities, and how constructions of "otherness" related to organizational factors create tensions for the participants.

The Meaning of Ideals and Values Related to Students' Wellbeing and Equality

Our analyses demonstrate how the informants in the three cases work to ensure what they call "inclusion" and meet the challenges that relate to inequality. In the following section, we explore the shared values of deficit perspectives of children with immigrant backgrounds and other native languages that are not the dominant Norwegian language at each of the three schools—Eik, Gran, and Furu (Fylkesnes, 2019; Yosso & García, 2007). Both urban schools (Eik and Gran) exhibited deficit perspectives regarding children's behavior that can be considered challenging. Both schools have implemented a system of mapped relationships between the children and the staff and a reward system to ensure that everyone adheres to the disciplinary policy of "control." Both multiracial schools (Gran and Furu) have implemented control strategies targeting children's behaviors through a system of discipline, rules, and demanding expectations.

Deficit Perspectives of Children With Immigrant Backgrounds and Communicating With a Variety of Languages

Starting with the first subcategory, the Eik primary school is characterized by accepted cultural attitudes regarding the reproduction of sameness (Abram, 2018; Maguire, 2019). The teachers at this school stated that the school community shares joint values and that there is a lack of multiculturalism (Turner, 1993). The sameness was highlighted by Teacher 2 from Eik: "We have got a very homogeneous group, so it is perhaps easier to take care of the kids who are here because, as I said, we are also called a 'white school.'" However, the school attempted to add diversity to its culture by bringing it in from the outside. At Eik, the understanding of culture is associated with signing temporary work contracts with assistants who lack any power (Yosso & García, 2007). The leader of the Eik ASP said, "We are consciously taking people into work practice from different cultures; we are including apprentices from minorities." Although whiteness dominates at the school, the staff has experienced challenges related to coping with "good diversity" within groups of children who are linked with the stereotyped perception that white parents have issues because they overwork. One middle leader at Eik stated, "Yes, we have children with all kinds of challenges … those who do not have very present families [because they work much of the time] and need some sort of advice. You must work extra hard, so these children don't feel left out." Many of the participants from Eik said that using differentiated methods to ensure quality instruction for all students is a significant challenge in their teaching practices. Teacher 1 from Eik said, "Someone comes with behavioral difficulties, so they are likely to ruin the class. You have

planned activities that get disrupted, at least if you do not have an assistant. If there is no one to help you, it is terrible. However, I have no one who needs curriculum adaptation. We have a couple of students who are weak readers, but then we do have a reading course." At Eik school and during the ASP activities, staff members highlighted the importance of students assimilating the Norwegian language, particularly when staff are mediating critical situations and encouraging relationships through oral communication. They also have an instrumental view of relationships. Teacher 2 from Eik said, "For example, we all shake hands at the start and end of the day, so each child hears their name twice a day." However, staff members at this school are neglecting suitable strategies to examine their own attitudes and beliefs to enhance cultural competencies, knowledge, and skills and to engage all students (Haskins & Singh, 2015). Their statements highlighted that challenges that relate to values and stereotypes can affect groups of children at this school. We gathered from the participants' responses that in a homogenous group, even small differences can be experienced as difficult.

The participants from Gran primary school said that when dealing with diversity, challenges can be resolved by teaching Norwegian as a first language to all, supporting monolingualism, monoculturalism, and normativism (Kubota, 2010). The staff assume that some children reach academic competencies partly by obtaining Norwegian linguistic competencies. For example, Teacher 1 from Gran said this about a pupil from an immigrant background: "She is usually like an interpreter for other minority children; she is so good at school that I don't need to worry about her at all. She is going to be the best in the Norwegian school system soon, even though there are a lot of ethnic Norwegians as well." This statement represents a perception that this student has a high motivation to be the best, despite a perception that immigrants may not succeed (Yosso, 2002a, 2002b).

At Gran, other teachers' comments indicate a lack of cultural responsiveness (Fylkesnes, 2019): "I don't know the number of languages in the classroom; there are a lot" (Teacher 2, Gran). The staff agree that having a native language other than Norwegian generates "conflict." The ASP assistant at Gran said, "Lots of children that come from multilingual backgrounds may struggle with Norwegian. They struggle to play games because they can be misunderstood; it creates a lot of conflicts. If those who come from low socio-cultural backgrounds had mastered the language, there would have been more commitment. Ethnic Norwegians have more resources, and it's easier for them to get involved." At this school, ethnic Norwegian teachers and students do not speak other languages and have not developed multilingual games or games that rely more heavily on social and non-verbal communication to foster inclusion. This indicates that the conflicts do not stem simply from another language.

At Furu primary school, language homogeneity is expected (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), and staff members also exhibit a lack of cultural responsiveness (Fylkesnes, 2019; Yosso & García, 2007). A Year 7 teacher at Furu described a similar situation to that at Gran: "If you ask me how many languages are represented, I have no idea. We work together as a group, and everyone must accept each other. Everyone feels welcome; you do not have to be special." This statement indicates color-blind perspectives and relies on the same argument to cover for insensitivity

to the students' backgrounds and the lack of responsiveness to their needs (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Many participants at Furu shared different narratives based on a clear deficit perspective (Cabrera, 2019; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001) by stating, for example, perceptions about chaotic homes for children from minority groups. The teachers view the school as a place for redemption and as a resting place. A Year 7 teacher at Furu stated, "Several of them struggle at home; they get a kind of freedom when they are at school. "An environmental therapist from Furu highlighted, "… but then it may be the child who needs adult support. They need… a way of seeking contact with an adult, perhaps because of a lack of support at home." Another teacher from Year 4 at Furu remarked, "If I know there is chaos in a pupil's home, it is extra important to make sure it is less chaotic when they come to school. … Sometimes, it seems that chaos is about to become the norm; it is kind of scary …" The Year 7 teacher at Furu said, "I call it a resource-lacking area when the students have felt that school is their safety. They meet adults with whom they can talk. … They feel secure when they come to school. Many are struggling at home mentally, physically, or financially."

Deficit Perspectives of Children's Behavior

Regarding the second subcategory, staff members at both Eik and Gran schools are mapping relationships and using a relationship-building program that is supported by the managerial teams to reinforce expected behavior during school and at the ASP. For example, an Eik, the ASP leader explained, "We start during the autumn holidays, and we map the children's relationships. We conduct surveys, and we compare the employees based on the social interrelationships that they have initiated with their students." Teacher 2 from Eik was confident that "all students have someone they know; they can reach out to a person they trust."

The staff at Gran school use the same strategy. The head of one section from Gran mentioned that "reverse relationship mapping means the students are the ones mapping their teachers and adults regarding good relationships; teachers have done this a couple of times during the semester." It seems that relationships are measured and used as an instrumental way of ticking the to-do list and proving to the managerial team that staff members have done a proper job. However, the school does not provide guidelines for how to work on relationships in depth and over time to ensure an inclusive learning environment (Hajisoteriou et al., 2019). Trust is not considered to be a two-way relationship; it is only a means of giving time. The quality or content of the relationships was not explained any further.

Participants from Gran and Furu highlighted the functionality of strict behavioral control policies instead of focusing on multicultural pedagogical strategies (Väyrynen & Paksuniemi, 2020). Teacher 1 from Gran said, "I have to be strict because you have to achieve calm; they need the ability to sit still. The ones that I have to be stricter with are the ones I have the best relationship with; they more often come to me." The principal of Gran blamed the staff for implementing some exclusionary practices: "I saw that a child was sent to the hallway with an assistant. Then this student was overlooked because the teacher has 30 others and didn't plan

for their lesson, and then my teacher relied on this young teaching assistant." Participants from Gran primary school said they felt overwhelmed by violence at their school, citing emotional moments for both students and school staff members related to the lack of safety. Teacher 1 from Gran said, "We have someone who has been throwing knives and someone who has been throwing boots and shoes." Teacher 2 from Gran explained that school staffers must be ready for everything: "You must dare to intervene in fights and break up conflicts between children. You might get punched or bitten." Teacher 3 related that "once, we had to lock our classrooms because we were afraid." One ASP staff member from Gran said that "you get so close to the kids, and you often experience things that might really stick with you. Occasionally I have been unable to leave an issue when I get home, and I struggle to sleep." Teacher 1 from Gran also said, "It is difficult to sleep in the evenings because there is too much to process."

The same leader from Gran highlighted, "Some of the violent incidents we have had here could have been prevented if we had slightly different types of teaching and language learning methods. … The students are restless, and the teachers think that the solution is to sit more still." This example reveals that there is tension between teacher assumptions that control and order take precedence over the actual preferences of the school leaders. The managerial team at Furu recognized the challenges that result from demanding teaching situations. The department middle leader from Furu explained, "A student with a bit of a personality disorder interrupted all the time. The managerial team from Furu said, 'These are the kids you have to deal with'; in 90 min, I had been interrupted 200 times." At Furu primary school, episodes of violence have negatively affected the learning environment and the working conditions for school staff. Special Educator 1 from Furu said, "I saw an environmental therapist who was beaten, and [was] completely red on his legs and arms. We have a lot of teachers, environmental therapists, and assistants with bruises and bite marks." Some leaders were critical of staff members' actions and fault their staff, such as the leader at Gran; in contrast, at Furu they are blaming the students.

The Meaning of Addressing Students' Wellbeing as Part of the Advisory Role

In this section, we explore the multifaceted nature of a teacher's role. The staff at the multiracial schools, Gran and Furu, claimed to do important work concerning their students' wellbeing.

Awareness of Supporting and Caring

Presenting the first subcategory, at Furu primary school, the teachers, the special educators, and the ASP staff highlighted the relevance of acting in a supportive and caring role for students inside and outside the classroom based on their narrative of becoming the saviors of ethnic and racial minority children (Ladson-Billings, 2009). A Year 6 teacher at Furu explained, "It is important for me that I am engaged; the

job must be meaningful. I am here because I want to make a difference." A middle leader from Furu emphasized the need to empower children by pointing out a deficient discourse that their role is to make children feel valued: "We have the opportunity to create good relationships with the children and help them believe that they can succeed."

Trust, Reliability, Empowerment, and Appreciation

Regarding the second subcategory, staff at Gran primary school highlighted the importance of being recognized as trustworthy and reliable helpers and saviors. The school principal at Gran said, "When I come here, I am like a pop star. The children come straight up to me to say 'Hi' and give me a hug. I have been in three different schools, and I haven't experienced this before." Teacher 1 from Gran described child–teacher relationships: "Learning does not always take place while teaching the subjects; it happens in the transitions. All the children should go home with a smile." A middle leader at Gran highlighted low children's expectations and their focus on expected challenges attached to negative stereotypes by saying, "I know the students, and I help them, particularly when they are struggling. You can end up in a situation where you are stuck in a room with kids throwing scissors into the wall. I calm them down, and then there is a feeling of calm, and then you can create a good relationship." Many of the participants at Furu expressed how supporting and caring for the students is regarded as a collective duty. "We work together, and I am supportive. It is fantastic to be able to contribute even though situations are not as enjoyable when students for some reason get upset." Said the Year 4 teacher. Added a Year 7 teacher from Furu, "Children contact me when they need to; I can go home and be happy to have had good conversations with individual kids."

In summary, participants from the two schools that teach multiracial pupils are the ones who most clearly described their role as advisors to their students and pointed to the deep socio-emotional relationships they have developed as part of their deficit perspective of them.

The Meaning of Collaborating with Other Professionals

Based on discussions with the participants about the meaning of collaboration with other professionals regarding preventive and intervening measures, our analysis highlights the importance of having a system that automatically activates when teachers face great challenges in addressing social inequality and providing inclusive education. In the following section, we explore two main subcategories: a) the systemic barriers that teachers perceive when collaborating to address challenges of inclusion and b) the perceived importance of collaboration to achieve inclusive education.

The Leader's Turnover Results in Lack of Support and Isolated Staff

In the first subcategory, participants from Eik and Gran schools described turnover in leadership as a structural barrier that staff members encounter when engaging in collaborative work, resulting in isolation and a lack of professional support from the managerial team. Teacher 1 from Eik stated, "Principals have changed four times in the past four years; we get tired of new leaders coming and doing new things." Teacher 3 from Eik agreed, saying, "[I have had] 21 principals in the time I worked here … with a new focus each time we got a new leader." According to the teachers at Eik, the absence of a stable leadership team complicates the maintenance of a strong school vision. The staff also said Eik is characterized by a reluctance to change, as evidenced by the lack of professional learning communities (Giles & Hargreaves, 2006).

As a result, teachers at Eik work separately on their instructional strategies. Teacher 3 from Eik emphasized, "My colleagues self-direct their actions and some doubt the new leader's plans; they continue with our traditional teaching." Teacher 1 from Eik, who decided to simply work alone, explained, "I do what I need. … You come up with ideas and make a plan that suits the kids without asking anyone." Teacher 3 from Eik highlighted, "We are not working together. We don't have a collective culture of professional development; it is a shame because I am very interested in further development. In other words, we have to take responsibility ourselves, and I think the principal is struggling to get us involved." Regarding organizational changes at Eik, the principal pointed to a lack of communication among professionals at the school, saying, "Those who have been here the longest just want a leader who makes everyday life easy." However, the principal viewed this as difficult, explaining, "I should get to know the organization; it is very fragmented. Around 50% have been here for almost 30 years, while the new arrivals have been here for two or three years. Therefore, it is difficult to create change. There are informal leaders; there is little space for me, and they are very hesitant to give up their places, so it is a challenge for us. I have not been here long enough to create the culture we want." At Eik school, a middle leader highlighted how this situation affects children's wellbeing because the school staff is limited to traditional ways of teaching. As a consequence, children who are in social or academic trouble might struggle even more.

Participants from Gran primary school also reported a high turnover of principals, resulting in a lack of support and organizational tools to intervene when there are challenging circumstances in the classroom. As is also the case at Furu primary school, the Gran teachers also are committed to avoiding any changes. The department head from Gran stated, "The situation has been very difficult here. When children come to us in tough circumstances, we don't know what to do; it is challenging for us." Teacher 3 from Gran explained that there is "little communication between the managerial team and the teachers. I am not sure exactly what they want."

The teachers who have long histories at the school share strong relationships, but new teachers are left alone. Teacher 2 from Gran, who has many years of experience teaching at the school, stated, "We support each other, we talk openly. We discuss our issues with the special pedagogue; if that does not work, we go

to the manager." One of the Gran teachers who is new to the school said they felt lonely and a frustrated at the lack of a school vision. This teacher added that relationships between leaders and school staff are not clearly defined, and both groups are lacking communication tools; consequently, staff members at both Eik and Gran experience limited contact with their colleagues.

Trust Networks Among the Staff Collectively Support Healing

As defined in the second subcategory, trust networks (Tilly, 1995, 2006) between the teachers at Gran and among the school staff at Furu are strong. The school leader from Gran stated, "The teachers support each other very much when dealing with challenging students, but not in learning; they do not discuss this…" This leader also explained how the staff use collective support: "[When I started working here], I met a group that is very concerned about protecting their 'culture.'" Teacher 1 from Gran explained the importance of trust: "I think that trust is important. I do not want a principal who is taking control of the pedagogy in the classroom." Nevertheless, this trust network contributes to a conservative pedagogy. The department head from Gran explained: "I want to get rid of textbook-teaching style, which is the old-fashioned way of thinking."

At Furu primary school, the school staff had a similar culture of trust, and this was shared by the entire school personnel, while there was seemingly little room for critical reflective pedagogy (Brookfield, 2017). A Year 5 teacher from Furu described the school in the following way: "Our work environment is so collegial; it is good to meet my colleagues. We are all accepted. Teachers share a common responsibility for the kids. … I think the management is helpful and provides support when we are worried about a child." A Year 6 teacher at Furu added, "We have a high degree of teamwork. We start the day with a cup of coffee and chat a bit before going to the classrooms. After class, we have another cup of coffee and go to prepare lessons; it is very nice. We work so closely together." The department head from Furu echoed this culture by saying, "We always find room for cooperation." The staff described the school as an "open space for collaboration" where staff members are "running to help each other." Furu teachers also described having a strong commitment to their tasks and enjoying strong trust networks (Tilly, 1995, 2006) with connections to traditional pedagogical practices.

The Meaning of Collaborating with Families

This section reveals that collaboration with families was important still very little to no collaboration with families from immigrant backgrounds at any of the three schools while demonstrating how deficit perspectives prevail again and providing some comments that reflect empathy and compassion.

Exclusion, Inherited Culture, and Expectations

The first subcategory identified in our research described how exclusionary practices are created by cultural sameness and various expectations in the institutional surroundings. At Eik primary school, Teacher 1 highlighted the importance of sameness and the negative stereotypes associated with ethnic and racial minorities: "Here, everyone comes to parent meetings … not like in other city areas. I have not been there, but I have heard of it. Parents here are a bit conservative, and it suits me well." This is the deployment of "whiteness as property" (Harris, 1993). Teacher 3 from Eik described how certain families had difficulty fitting in with the tightly connected school community, saying, "There was a family who moved to another school, and I was happy for them and their decision. They were refugees, and the mum stayed at home with the child. They didn't have social support here, and they moved; this has improved their quality of life." Teacher 3 from Eik described how the families create a specific environment where they hide certain issues and have resources to compensate in several ways: "I don't think the parents are very inclusive with each other. I know that many parents struggle with their children at home. Parents who have kids with challenges may feel excluded. The families who are struggling do not accept help; it is a facade because it is important to be successful here. Families purchase external help for their kids to help them with homework and have expensive holidays." The special educator from Eik added, "I think the types of jobs and the education level of the parents generates high expectations for the school."

Deficit Perspectives of Multicultural Families

Regarding the second subcategory, Teacher 3 at Gran primary school pointed to expectations that connect to the concept of whiteness: "For children to have a place here, parents must maintain what is said at school. Continuity is important for children in everyday life because it helps keep a stable foundation." Regarding otherness within the school and the practice of pathologizing families (Bonilla-Silva, 1997), or seeing a symptom or indication of a disorder within them, one department head from Gran explained significant contrasts between ethnic Norwegians and Norwegian language learners of other races: "Their views of the world make each child unique. They grow up quite differently. Some ethnic Norwegians find it difficult to bring classmates home with them because doing so may not be culturally acceptable. They view them with skepticism. In my experience, this often involves a misunderstanding or a language barrier." The school principal from Gran explained, "Children come from different starting points every day" and mentioned issues with abuse at home for some refugee families. One teacher expressed surprise that some ethnic and racial minority families were not familiar with Norwegian cultural practices, such as skiing. Teacher 2 from Gran made exclusionary comments: "You have foreign parents who hardly speak Norwegian, and you also have parents who are highly educated and work in the system in a high position, so there is a gap there." This teacher also acknowledged that learning Norwegian means being culturally accessible: "Language has a significant meaning here; everyone wants to

contribute and participate, but there is a language barrier. Families from immigrant backgrounds do not participate in activities such as birthdays or class gatherings." Teacher 3 from Gran said, "[Some children] struggle a lot with the homework. They also do not speak Norwegian; it is a completely new challenge for me. Some have illiterate parents, so you cannot send a message home, and the child's responsibility becomes huge. I mainly get in touch with those who have a Norwegian background; they are often those who show up most at school."

From Professional to Personal Relationships

Regarding the third subcategory, at Furu primary school, there is a shared under-standing that staff members approach their jobs both professionally and with the intent of pursuing personal relationship with parents (Matias & Liou, 2015). Teachers at Furu stated that different groups of the school community have certain assumptions about each other. Special Educator 1 from Furu described how some white parents question the capabilities of ethnic and racial minority children. The department head explained how this expression of otherness became a problem at the school: "The white part of the population poses great pressure, while we have to put pressure on the immigrant community, so we have ethnic differences." Special Educator 2 from Furu said they believe families have difficulty understanding the school's communications: "The Kurdish and Turkish [students] with parents that had little schooling or maybe [are] illiterate, there are things that they do not under-stand. For some, it is a bit like a cultural thing. Maybe they have a poor mother tongue mix with Turkish and Norwegian, so developing a good language here at school is challenging." A Year 4 teacher at Furu spoke about cultural assimila-tion and noted that different cultures have varying views on child-rearing attitudes regarding school and education: "Some of us, Norwegians, start strict but become lenient eventually. However, some of the minorities have very free [upbringing approaches] initially. This changes as the children get older. Most behavioral prob-lems are found among Norwegians, while problems concerning learning are found among minority language speakers. Many mothers stay at home. However, now the second and third generations of immigrants starting school here have slightly dif-ferent attitudes toward school than their parents. The diversity becomes negative. Many immigrants do not use Norwegian in their free time … hence, their language development is delayed."

A Year 7 teacher from Furu also discussed the problem with "illiterate parents" at the school: "For example, a mum who deals with five children is exhausted. We have another parent group that is governed by Islam; for example, they cannot eat beef because it is not halal-slaughtered. We are now working with a second-generation Kurdish family who came here in the 1980s; they went back, married, and brought new illiterates." A Year 7 teacher from Furu spoke about her extended responsibili-ties not only as a teacher but also as a neighbor, describing them as an unspoken discourse between the good white community and the problematic communities of color (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001): "It's probably not good to say, but we sometimes have to be teachers for parents who are recovering from marital breakdowns. This is

a police task, and you don't have anything to do with advising on these matters …" A Year 6 teacher from Furu added that "sometimes, you have to negotiate between the different cultures; for example, for a school event one parent did not allow their girls to stay the night at the school with boys." Consequently, the staff from Furu illustrate how certain beliefs based on stereotypes can become exclusionary.

By examining the various aspects of collaboration with families, we see how norms of whiteness in the educational system generate expectations and pressure at all of the schools, and beyond that, pressure on the staff members who assume the role of saviors at the schools with ethnic and racial minorities.

The Meaning of Learning and Work Environments

When schools face many challenges concerning social inequality, several difficulties can arise, creating structural challenges regarding testing and other evaluations, access to resources, and support. We found that the types of pressure experienced at the three studied schools have a somewhat different source.

Teachers Overwhelmed by Workload and Lack of Time

Regarding the first subcategory, teachers at the three schools are overwhelmed by their workload and the lack of time. At Eik primary school, school staff said they are not prepared to handle bureaucratic demands and the rising complexity of expectations placed upon them. Teacher 2 from Eik said, "I do not manage everything I want to; my impression is that we should have done more, taken more responsibility. All phone calls must be documented, and you should register all contact. Students must all be tested and assessed, so there is little room for autonomy." One department head from Eik noted that "I have quite a large workload. Three people are standing at my door to whom I should answer; it is stressful. You are not just a teacher: You are a psychologist and a social worker." Teacher 4 from Eik stated something similar: "There is too much documentation. There are increasing demands from the management." An ASP employee from Eik complained about their "heavy workday [and] little salary in relation to the work tasks." Teacher 2 from Eik also said that "[a major] problem is time; you are always busy."

Based on this information, it can be concluded that Eik primary school has issues related to systemic challenges on a national level (Bjordal, 2016, 2022; Volckmar, 2019. We find similar issues at Gran and Eik schools. Teacher 6 from Furu complained, "There is a lot of paperwork and a lot of meetings. We get really tired and feel like we are working ourselves to death." Teacher 7 from Furu stated: "There is too much documentation. There are also many demands in relation to the facilitation for each student. … We all work very closely, but not everyone is a contact teacher here, so I am constantly available on my phone." The school principal from Furu stated that "the most important job for us is that students learn more—but at the same time, our time is spent on a lot of organization, documentation, and administrative work."

Disappointed With the Services From the External Agencies From the Municipality

Regarding the second subcategory, the staff from all three schools in this study were frustrated with the services provided by the municipality. Under Norwegian policy, the municipality is designed to be the main resource for the schools' work on inclusion (Fasting, 2013) and adapted education (Rapp & Corral-Granados, 2021). The department leader from Eik primary school was disappointed by a lack of information sharing: "We are not allowed to communicate; they come and observe. We have an interview with the child afterwards while not knowing anything, which is irritating." The special educator from Eik highlighted problems with a long waiting list for external assistance: "Children who should be examined must wait; the waiting list is so long. … It is 12 months before the [psycho-pedagogical services] come to the school." Teacher 2 from Eik offered a similar description: "Sometimes, it feels so difficult with these in-between [various external welfare agencies]—then the papers. It takes a long time, almost 1 ½ years from the time you sign up and want help until you get the first contact."

Teacher 1 from Eik said, "I have two students who need to be tested for dyslexia; we don't get anyone from the external agencies who can come here and test or screen. Bureaucracy is creating issues." The school principal from Eik added, "We got several children [who experienced issues]; the school was not prepared to receive them at all, and neither was the parent group. I worked day and night with child welfare for months; we never received information from them. I was disappointed with the municipality. I am waiting for their answer, and I haven't had any communication with my manager in an entire year." A middle leader from Eik claimed that "last year, we had [children] with big challenges [explaining issues] so we had many meetings with child welfare and family services for a long time. … We experienced a lack of support from the municipality. Many emails were sent during that period."

Instability in the work environment is connected to municipal policy, which negatively influences the learning environment. Issues in the learning environment must be understood in terms of the municipal policy for housing. The population at Gran primary school has only a temporal connection to the school because of social housing, creating an instability in relationships between staff and families. An employee from ASP at Gran said, "This is a "transit school"; some are here for just a shorter time. They move because there are many small apartments; a lot is happening." The department head from Gran agreed that "there are kids who are not doing well. They do not have a permanent residence; therefore, they come here." Added the school principal from Gran, "Kids come into school for short periods." Furthermore, we have identified issues related to a lack of communication between professional staff and the community, creating a risk of marginalization (Matthiesen, 2017).

The participants from Furu primary school said they have encountered similar circumstances in relation to the municipality. A Year 4 teacher stated, "We just fill forms and references, and we never receive any feedback. There is no information to follow up on the cases. … There is a lack of specialized staff here; there is no nurse or doctor." Special Educator 1 from Furu also agreed that an external psychiatric service has withdrawn from many cases, and children have not received treatment. A Year 5 teacher from Furu said, "We have to wait for a long period, so there is a

lot of frustration sometimes. If we hear things are not right with someone at home, we send a message of concern to the children's welfare service. We don't know exactly what to do. Should I invite the father to have a contact conversation? Some kids struggle, and we do not have the skills needed to help them." Teacher 3 from Furu said, "There is a lack of communication with agencies; they keep information from students and do not relay what is happening and claim that they have a duty of confidentiality."

Pressure from Academic Expectations

Furthermore, and as a last subcategory, at Furu, the increasing emphasis on measurement and national school reforms generates extra tension, as the population has difficulties meeting the standards. A Year 7 teacher at Furu claimed, "You have the national test, all the publications of the results, comparisons of schools, and we know the baseline. We know that we never will reach the top. We are above average, but we know where we are struggling, [as highlighted by] journalists, mass media, and the municipality." The department head at Furu shared frustration about comparing the school's language learners to a constructed national average and stated: "We must adapt to the social environment because we have a high number of students with reading and writing difficulties; due to their ethnic/racial minority backgrounds, we cannot have the same demands for them." A Year 6 teacher at Furu said that "the curricula have become more and more demanding." Therefore, we see that structural factors create challenging working conditions in contrasting school areas.

Based on our analysis, under the heading of learning and work environment, we can say that a complex welfare organization system of national and local policies creates difficulties in developing the necessary tools for professionals to counteract various forms of exclusion and discrimination among students from immigrant backgrounds.

Discussion and Conclusion

Our research findings have both practical and theoretical implications. Theoretically, this research adds to the limited literature on Norwegian educators' mindsets, attitudes, and organizational environments. Practically, we learned how school staff at three Norwegian primary schools perceive their professional practice environment concerning anti-oppressive education. Designated intervention programs are needed to shape the relationships among the actors, which are described by law but are not implemented in practice. Programs have a tendency to become superficial. Perhaps Norwegian educational system could benefit from a more culturally aware educational system that offers teachers and other school staff the possibility to learn more about how discrimination can take root even though the participants have good intentions. Without support and shared communication, effective work with families and the extended learning community will continue to be difficult (Wenger & Snyder, 2000).

According to previous research, children from diverse ethnic backgrounds and lower socio-economic backgrounds suffer underachievement in school. These three urban school cases have exemplified how oppression results from an educational system lacking in social inclusion. This issue is a multicausal matter. In this article, we have suggested that it is essential to explore the topic from the perspective of key informants in schools and to obtain a deeper understanding of their interrelationships. In this research, we have identified many staff members' perceptions of challenges in addressing social inequality and creating inclusive education and have explored various levels of analysis.

There are also tensions within the schools. We found that Eik primary school, where "sameness" is a solid normative expectation, experiences issues related to a lack of shared responsibilities, unstable leadership, and an individualized working culture.

Additionally, we found that at Gran primary school, the leadership team communicates well regarding inclusive practices, but still lacks any direct implication for staff practices. From a perspective of ethnic and racial minority, the collective perspective of teachers acting as emotional saviors does not necessarily solve issues that result in serious violence in which staff and children are at risk. Staff member described rich and complex examples of deficit perspectives. Furthermore, the school community is under heavy pressure from their institutional surroundings to handle these severe challenges, and we relate that to a lack of common multicultural pedagogical strategies at Gran as well as in the Norwegian educational system (Väyrynen & Paksuniemi, 2020).

At Furu primary school, we found an established understanding of how to handle inequality through assimilation and found that the teachers are firmly committed to maintaining a strong network of trust.

Using critical race theory, we observed that values that distinguish between "us" and "them" intersect ethnicity and class to position the white Norwegian at the top of a perceived hierarchy, whereby examples in this article point out the major differences between the predominantly white and ethnic Norwegian school and the other two schools regarding inclusion, particularly through the exclusion of ethnic and racial minorities and how they are pathologizing families (Bonilla-Silva, 1997).

In line with Abram (2018), Gullestad (2004), Maguire (2019), and Fylkesnes (2019), the participants in our study demonstrated blindness to cultural homogeneity and expressed monocultural and monolingual expectations. Regarding these experiences, the staff at Eik primary school accepted that children should cope within the school's framework by working to become accepted by the predominant culture. In some cases, children have changed schools because they do not fit in. Even if teachers at the three schools work hard with issues of inclusion we find that Norwegian educators have a naïve understanding of issues related to urban segregation and new sources of social divisions in a country that has experienced little immigration until recently (Pettersen & Østby, 2013). Participants from Eik primary school said they choose to assimilate children into the majority, and the participants from Eik and Furu schools used the fact that they have so much "diversity" as a justification for ignoring children's cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

Trusted relationships can occur as work-generated solidarities or as the interrelation and commitment between school staff and students (Hanagan & Tilly, 2010). The relevant dimension of trust networks concerns whether they are incorporated into public life and society or whether they marginalize the people forming them (Szybek, 2013). We found that in multiracial schools, a system of mapping relationships is implemented to avoid the exclusion of students. However, a lack of cultural responsiveness and related strategies has resulted from an absence of pedagogical tools in combination with lack of professional development. The staff converge by using a system of strict rules and by establishing behavioral expectations for the children to prevent rebellions. Again, these are done according to deficit perspectives of children's behavior related to multicultural issues and schools and an educational system not acknowledging issues related to minorities and multiculturality.

Concerning their roles in addressing children's wellbeing, the staff at Eik and Furu schools were noticeably empathetic and compassionate, seeing their roles as saving ethnic and racial minority children. However, the way the interviewees identified themselves as essential helpers became problematic because they sometimes pathologized families from ethnic and racial minority backgrounds, considering them "illiterate". Family-centered practices are urgently needed at these schools, as well as communication with all families (Kumashiro, 2000).

At all three schools, the staff experience a high turnover in the managerial teams. We believe an improved system for retaining managerial personnel could stabilize the organizational relationships. The lack of continuity in leadership positions results in a lack of support for staff, significantly affecting their practices. The *trust networks* (Tilly, 2005) that the staff maintain are strong, particularly among those who have been working together for a long time in the same setting. The communication and collaborative systems among the networks flowed as described by Kvam (2021), particularly at Furu primary school. The network the staff created inside the school was connected to networks outside the school—such as with children, families, supportive teams, and the municipal administration. Yet, inequality is reproduced at the school.

Tilly (2004) stated that trust networks can contribute to reinforce beliefs and close the network toward others. We saw how the staff work alone, creating consistency in their practices because they avoid structural changes. At Eik primary school, the staff avoided changes by preserving their cultural sameness. At Gran primary school, the staff avoided changes by continuing to teach following an instructional practice rather than by using child-centered pedagogical practices. In this way, trust networks can help to explain how the school staff prevents the implementation of a more responsive diverse pedagogy. Therefore, schools need stronger and more integrated assistance systems, to prevent a widening gap of exclusion among their diverse students.

A significant challenge that these three schools also experienced is the neoliberalism in educational policies. Beach et al. (2018), Smith (2018), and Østerud (2005) describe how these policies have created a more competitive educational system in Norway. In our study, we see how national structural factors influence schools with the increased focus on results, while there is a lack of support from external agencies. At Gran primary school, the staff discussed being physically attacked while

waiting for external assistance. Surprisingly, the school lacked a psychologist, special needs support, or a doctor when these support services were acutely needed. As a result of the lack of a structure to provide this necessary and reliable support, trust networks (Tilly, 2007) are created as alternative sources of immediate support for staff. Consequently, trust networks can promote discrimination and even restrict socio-economic mobility and current forms of social interaction (Cook et al., 2005), when families because of cultural barriers benefits differently from the universal educational system. We conclude that it is essential to listen to practitioners' perspectives about race, equality, and cultural responsiveness and to identify the professional development opportunities in that sector that could challenge the invisibility of the realities.

In this paper, school staff members described critical experiences that are rarely acknowledged as adversity in the Nordic context. We believe that not being racism as concern in the school system and educators not considering that students are excluded or discriminated, resulted in staff won't be able to protect their students and their communities. Finally, we conclude that acknowledging adversity should be a crucial step in a systemic change toward appropriately understanding and supporting all students and communities. The next step should be to work with educators to develop strategies to promote equality and cultural responsiveness that move beyond their own racial biases.

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