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# Pedagogic practices and learner identities in two Norwegian primary school classrooms with contrasting social compositions

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## ABSTRACT

Using a comparative case study, this paper explores the pedagogic practices for regulating behaviour in two Norwegian primary school classrooms with social compositions that become increasingly contrasted due to an increasing school segregation. Based on classroom observations and teacher interviews and using Bernstein's concepts of 'framing' and 'classification', the study has found that working-class students are subjected to a more visible pedagogic practice than middle-class students. The different behavioural expectations in the classrooms shape a passive and receptive learner identity in the former case and a more active learner identity in the latter case. Social class assumptions and neoliberal education policy may underlie the formation of these distinct identities. This paper argues that in an education system that advocates equal opportunities for everyone as the most important value, it is crucial to consider whether visible pedagogic practices promoted through evidence-based programmes rather contribute to reproduction of existing social inequality.

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## Introduction

The reproduction of inequality through education is a major area of concern within the sociology of education field. The relationship between social class and academic achievement has been documented in countless works, both historically and more recently (e.g. Reay 2017; Thompson 2019; Bernstein 1981; Bourdieu 1977; Schleicher 2019). School segregation plays an important role in this discussion. Research on school segregation consists of a large body of evidence and explanations relating to how school segregation is increasing in the USA and in Europe and what effects this is having on educational outcomes (e.g. Nieuwenhuis and Hooimeijer 2016; Boterman et al. 2019; Bonal and Bellei 2020; Owens and Candipan 2019). The scholars in this field suggest that segregated learning environments have a negative effect on both academic and non-academic outcomes. This debate mostly focuses on policies that might or might not increase school segregation, such as school choice and privatisation, and the effects of school segregation on other macro-level

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and statistical conditions, such as educational achievement, school funding, teacher characteristics and social integration. Remarkably, pedagogy at the classroom level is almost completely absent in this debate.

The increase in school segregation is related to the promotion of neoliberal education policy. It has been suggested that since the 2000s there has been a 'neoliberal turn' in the Nordic education model (Blossing, Imsen, and Moos 2014). This education model distinguishes itself from comprehensive education in other European countries due to its strong historical roots in a centralised system and values of 'social justice, equity, equal opportunities, inclusion, nation building and democratic participation for all students' (Imsen, Blossing, and Moos 2017, 568). While in the UK and USA scientific curricula, national goals and measurable outcomes have been emphasised, the Nordic countries have focused on an education for democratic participation and equality (Imsen, Blossing, and Moos 2017). However, as part of the global development wherein education is regarded as a major contributor to economic growth, the Nordic model has changed as a result of marketisation policies (Dovemark et al. 2018; Beach 2018).

The main features of these market-oriented policies are 'decentralisation, outcomes, competition, strong leadership in combination with accountability policies and centrally imposed quality indicators and quality assurance' (Blossing, Imsen, and Moos 2014, 235). A growing community in the Nordic countries is expressing their concern about the incompatibility of these features with the values of the comprehensive education model. Through their research, scholars describe the detrimental effects of market-oriented policies on the comprehensive schooling tradition and on equality, pointing to the increase in school segregation and a strengthened position of privileged students at the cost of marginalised students (Dovemark et al. 2018; Beach 2017; Haugen 2020; Bjordal 2022; Ljunggren 2017). Importantly, not all the Nordic countries have a similar adoption of neoliberal tools. For example, Norway is one of the countries that has been relatively hesitant when it comes to implementing privatisation policies (Bjordal 2022), while in Sweden the role of profit-making and private education providers has been enabled, leading to major changes in the comprehensive school model (Dovemark et al. 2018).

In the eyes of the international community, it might look as if there are no issues related to inequality in the Nordic countries, and specifically Norway, because they score well in terms of formal equality of opportunity in education (Vaahtera et al. 2017). However, the emerging patterns of social differentiation are in this national context highly relevant in describing what is taking place, and possibly changing, within the framework of comprehensive education (Dovemark et al. 2018). Dovemark et al. (2018) suggest that more research is necessary where analyses on political and structural trajectories are combined with empirical evidence on what is happening in schools.

While framed by trends at the macro level, namely school segregation and the neoliberal turn in the Nordic education model, this study focuses on issues of inequality through processes of transmission and acquisition in the classroom. As pressure for goal achievement and measurable outcomes rises, pedagogical consequences are inevitable. In this paper, the behavioural aspect, or in Bernsteinian terms, the *regulative discourse* (see theory section), is of particular interest. In the Norwegian political debate, a narrative originated in the 2000s about the need for order in classrooms and streamlining of learning. Behavioural aims made their way into the curriculum and teachers had to be encouraged to work more

effectively and efficiently (Imsen, Blossing, and Moos 2017). Since then, pedagogies for meeting the behavioural aims have been provided through a market of education suppliers (Beach 2017), and in Norway, the use of evidence-based behavioural programmes has increased significantly in schools (Haugen 2018). At the same time, decentralisation of responsibility for how schools are run makes it particularly interesting to explore how schools with different student populations choose to work with the behavioural aspect.

In exploring the pedagogic practices in two Norwegian classrooms linked to their social compositions, the purpose of this study is not to explain underlying causal connections. Moreover, rather than arguing for ‘the right’ or the most effective pedagogy, this paper attempts to provide a systematic understanding of pedagogic models (Singh and Sinclair 2001) employed in two classrooms with contrasting social compositions, and discuss their potential consequences. The first two research questions address these explorative features for understanding what is taking place in the classrooms, while the third question has been included to connect the empirical findings to the wider context.

1. What characterises the regulative discourse in two classrooms with contrasting social compositions and what are the teachers’ rationales for their pedagogic approach?
2. How do the pedagogic practices shape the teachers’ roles and learner identities in the classroom?
3. How can the regulative discourses in the classrooms be understood in light of the changing state of comprehensive education in Norway?

After presenting the theoretical and methodological framework, the paper will go on to present the analysis and discussion, followed by a short conclusion.

## Theoretical framework

Bernstein’s sociological work (Bernstein 2000, 1990, 1975) on transmission and acquisition through pedagogic practices has provided this study with important concepts. Bernstein (1990) explains pedagogic practice as a cultural relay: ‘a uniquely human device for both the reproduction and the production of culture’ (p. 64). This relay is done through relationships and communication between a transmitter (teacher) and an acquirer (student) in a social context (classroom) and is shaped by principles of power and control. The teacher makes meanings available to the students whereby selective acquisition takes place that shapes the students’ role positions, learner identities and consciousness. The construction of identities is embedded in participation in educational practice, and learner identity in this article refers to the recognition of how one is to participate in a learning situation (Coll and Falsafi, 2010).

According to Bernstein, the *pedagogic discourse* gives rise to a pedagogic practice and is a principle that contains two discourses: the *instructional discourse* and the *regulative discourse*. Instructional discourse refers to the selection, sequence, pacing and criteria of knowledge. The regulative discourse has a moral orientation and refers to control over the social base, the forms that hierarchical relations take and expectations about conduct, character and manner. Thus pedagogic discourse refers to *the what* that is transmitted, *how* it is

transmitted, and also which student realisations are considered to be legitimate (Morais 2002). Bernstein (2000) argues that the regulative discourse and instructional discourse are linked together in such a way that the former is always dominant. It creates the rules of social order and thus constitutes the order within both discourses. The theory of instruction used in a classroom belongs to the regulative discourse, and 'contains with itself a model of the learner and of the teacher and of the relation' (Bernstein 2000, 35). Thus, the specialised modes of communication between teacher and student, including whole class teacher monologues, seatwork activities (students work independently at their desks on tasks) and triadic dialogue (teacher question-student response-teacher evaluation) are also part of the regulative discourse (Singh 2001).

To describe the *inner logic* of a pedagogic practice, Bernstein developed the concept *framing* for analysing the rules of social and discursive order and the level of control over it. Where framing is strong, the transmitter has explicit control over selection, sequence, pacing, criteria of knowledge and the social base. Strong framing gives rise to a *visible* pedagogic practice in which the acquirer has little to no control over the communication, which may constitute learner identities as 'conscientious', 'attentive', 'industrious' and 'receptive'. Where framing is weak, the acquirer has more *apparent* control over the forms of communication and there is likely to be an *invisible* pedagogic practice. Here the rules of order are implicit and largely unknown to the acquirer, and the power is hidden by devices of communication (Bernstein 1990). Learner identities here may be constituted as 'creative', 'interactive' and attempting to make their own mark. Both forms of pedagogic practice do not in themselves solve issues of the reproduction of class inequalities but rather reflect an ideology and build on social expectations and models of the student (Sadovnik 1991).

Where framing examines the forms of control that regulate and legitimise communication, *classification* examines the power relations *between* categories. According to Bernstein, power refers to the insulation *between* categories of contexts, agents and discourses. What makes a category a category is the insulation between one and the other and power preserves this insulation. In the case of strong classification, there is strong insulation between categories, where each category has its own distinct identity, voice and rules. Where classification is weak, there are less specialised categories.

Classification and framing procedures act selectively on the *recognition rules* and *realisation rules* (Bernstein 2000). These rules are at the level of the acquirer, in this case the student. The classificatory principle indicates how one context differs from another. In this way, recognition rules are created whereby the student can orientate to the special features of a context. However, when students are able to recognise the specialised context, they also need realisation rules to produce the legitimate communication. Different framing values act selectively on realisation rules. In other words, 'recognition rules regulate what meanings are relevant and realisation rules regulate how meanings are to be put together to create the legitimate text' (p. 18). A text here is anything that attracts evaluation, such as a slight movement.

This article explores the general regulative discourse in two Norwegian classrooms. It examines the way in which the distribution of power and principles of control translate into pedagogic practices and how these act on the role position of teachers and learner identity formation of students. Moreover, Bernstein's theory enables the analysis of these micro processes in light of greater dynamics in society.

## Methodology

### Research context

The social class composition of the two schools was identified according to a survey on living conditions conducted by the local authority in 2011<sup>1</sup> as well as an inquiry into the occupations of the students' parents.

Aurora School<sup>2</sup> is located in an area where the inhabitants have the lowest average income in the city, the second highest unemployment rate and the highest share of only elementary school qualification. In contrast, Borealis School is located in an area with the highest average income in the city, the lowest unemployment rate and lowest percentage of only elementary qualification. Other living conditions, such as housing type, housing size and inability to work due to illness or injury, show a similar unequal distribution between the areas. Moreover, the survey shows that the Aurora area houses the highest proportion of non-Western immigrants in the city whereas the proportion at Borealis is well below the average.

During individual interviews with teachers, I asked about the parents' occupations. The job or profession that someone has tells us something about their lives and about their opportunities in life. Moreover, different groups of professions have different access to resources and power, and are thus part of a hierarchy (Ljunggren and Hansen 2021). Some significant features across professions allow them to be grouped into larger categories—classes—that differ from other groups of professions (Ljunggren and Hansen 2021). Occupation may therefore be a main criterion for classifying classes. Parents at Aurora School worked, for example, as a cook or waiter in restaurants, as a cleaning lady, teacher, kindergarten assistant, painter, bricklayer and cashier. At Borealis, the parents worked for example as a doctor, researcher, university lecturer, psychologist, family doctor and surgical nurse. According to the Oslo Register Data Class Scheme (ORDC), the professions of Aurora parents can be classified as lower-middle class and working class, both skilled and unskilled. The Borealis parents' occupations can be classified as elite and upper-middle class (Hansen, Flemmen, and Andersen 2009).

These features suggest that many families living in the Aurora area have a working-class, lower socioeconomic and minority background, whereas most families living in the Borealis area have a middle-class, higher socioeconomic and majority background. In the place where this study is carried out, school allocation is strongly controlled through a catchment area system, making the social composition of the schools largely a reflection of the residential composition (Cavicchia and Cucca 2020; Boterman et al. 2019).

### Data material

The analysis in this paper is based on data material derived from a larger four-year qualitative research project.<sup>3</sup> I spent six months in the Aurora classroom (August 2018–February 2019) and four months in the Borealis classroom (March 2019–June 2019) during which I used ethnographic methods to generate data (Hammersley and Atkinson 2019). Both schools are public comprehensive schools where the students in year five are nine or 10 years old. These two schools were chosen because of the stark difference between the social compositions of the areas that the schools are located in. The choice of the year five class

at Aurora School was based on the willingness and availability of the teachers to participate in the project. At Borealis I specifically requested to be in the year five class as well so that the same year levels could be compared.

I was at both schools an average of two days a week during which the teachers had planned regular lessons. I observed on each day of the week multiple times so that I covered all the subjects. When I was in the classrooms, I wrote detailed fieldnotes of my observations on teaching practices and interactions. I also engaged in lesson activities where possible, creating a participatory researcher role. For example, during seatwork and group work, I circulated in the classroom and assisted students when they asked for help. In this way I could have small chats with students as well as teachers and occasionally ask them questions about their work. My position as a researcher was mainly that of an outsider coming into the classroom context to learn from the students and teachers. The strength of this position was that I could have a humble, curious and open attitude (Merriam et al. 2001). Moreover, by spending an extensive period of time in the field and interacting with and getting to know the participants, I could in part reduce the extent to which my presence affected what was happening in the classroom.

In addition to the participatory observations, informal dialogues and fieldnotes, semi-structured interviews with four class teachers at Aurora school (Teacher A1, A2, A3, A4) and three class teachers at Borealis school (Teacher B1, B2, B3) are included in this paper. In both schools, these teachers divide the subject teaching among themselves so that each one teaches two or three subjects in the class. Some of them are contact teachers as well, meaning they are responsible for tracking the social and academic progress of each student assigned to them. All the teachers have an ethnic-majority and upper-middle-class background and have studied teacher education at a major Norwegian university college.

The analysis in this paper was done abductively in the sense that it has been neither data-driven nor theory-driven (Brinkmann 2014; Earl Rinehart 2021). This study began with the researcher's curiosity about what was taking place in the Aurora classroom. As I was observing and learning about the class, I wondered about the particular environment and teachers' practices. Whilst in the field, I searched for literature that could help me understand what I was experiencing. Basil Bernstein's concepts made sense to me, and I decided to use them in the analysis. The idea to compare the Aurora classroom with a classroom with the opposite social composition gradually came to mind. I felt the comparison was necessary to be able to make sense of what was happening and to explore aspects of inequality. The research questions in this study are a result of an interpretive process where I navigated my way to understanding the situation in the classrooms and where I used the theory as a tool to achieve that.

Even though this was an intuitive analytical process, I can identify several steps that were taken. First, I transcribed the interviews and read through all the material several times to familiarise myself with it. Then, I used NVIVO software to undertake open coding in the observation data (Strauss 1987), where I coded everything that I perceived as relevant to the sense-making process. The codes varied greatly in name and reflected directly what was said or observed. After that, I clustered the initial codes according to more general themes, see section below. At this stage, I integrated Bernstein's theoretical concepts into the analysis, which helped me to describe and interpret the observations in relation to power and control dynamics. The interview data were analysed more deductively, where I 'searched'



for the previously generated themes. In this way, I could connect the teachers' perspectives to the selected observation data.

## Analysis

In this section, I first explore the pedagogic practices for regulating behaviour in the Aurora and Borealis classrooms, based on participant observations and fieldnotes. Three main themes emerged from this data for comparing the classrooms: *rules, routines and rituals* (context), the *prominence and strictness of the teacher* (teacher role) and *student behaviour* (student role). Second, I investigate the teachers' perspectives on their practices based on the interviews.

### *Rules, routines and rituals*

This is a theme that recurred often in the observation data for both schools and is fundamental to regulating classroom behaviour. I will start with the following excerpt from my fieldnotes describing the start of the day at Aurora.

The school bell rings at 8:30 am and the students enter the building through the door that is designated for their class. They come into the cloakroom, take off their jackets and hang them at their designated spots, change shoes and wait in front of their spot. The students gradually settle down and once they are completely quiet, the teacher who is supervising in the cloakroom sends them in an orderly line into the classroom. In the classroom, three other teachers and an assistant are waiting at the door. Whilst the students walk in a line into the classroom, they pass the adults and each child and adult greet one another with a handshake and a 'good morning' while they look each other in the eyes. They then hang their schoolbags behind their fixed appointed chairs, stand behind their chair, and wait for a teacher to come to the front of the classroom and say, 'good morning Year 5'. The students return the greeting with 'good morning < all the names of the teachers >' and after that, the students are invited to sit down. Then one of the teachers goes over the schedule for the day and continues with the first lesson.

Fieldnotes, 21 August 2018

Each school day is observed as starting in the exact same way. The general regulative discourse in this classroom is characterised by strict rules, routines and rituals and a clear and established structure. It should be noted that I observed clear traces of a behaviour management programme called 'Respect', which was implemented four years prior to the fieldwork but not officially in use anymore. The 'Respect programme' aims to target the problem of disobedient students, off-task behaviour and bullying (Ertesvåg and Vaaland 2007). The intervention programme is based on principles for strengthening classroom leadership by emphasising adults as sources of authority and employing a consistent leadership approach in all their daily interactions with students.

This pedagogic approach creates and maintains strong insulation between teacher and student, which constructs distinct identities for both categories. Moreover, the framing of the social order in the classroom is strong where the teachers have full control over the communication and the students have little room to influence it. It is therefore explicit and visible who the boss is in the classroom: the teacher, and who are to obey: the students.

At Borealis, the morning typically starts as follows.



The school bell rings at 8:30 am and the students enter the building through one of the main doors. They go up the stairs to the third level where they change shoes and hang their jackets in their personal lockers in the hallway. No-one is supervising in the hallways or the stairs, the students play around and chat. In the classroom, one of the teachers (B1) has written on the board 'reading time'. The students come into the classroom at their own pace and find something to read. Some pick a cartoon, others a thick book, short story or a comic. There is some chatting in low voices. TA walks around and once mentions aloud the names of the students who are reading. Then all the students settle and read quietly, one girl sits in a corner of the room, the rest at their desks. At 8.42 the last student comes in, finds a book and sits down to read. TA walks in and out of the classroom, she is gone for five minutes while an assistant is present. At 8.57 TA says in a low voice that the students should finish reading their sentence and put away their books after which she says, 'good morning' and goes over the schedule for the day.

Fieldnotes, 12 March 2019

This illustrates that there is a form of morning routine where the day starts with reading time during which students can get ready for the day and settle themselves. There does not seem to be a strict rule about what time the students are supposed to be in the classroom nor about what they are to read and where they are to sit. The day starts in a less structured way than at Aurora, and as the framing of the social order is less strong there is space for students to control to a certain extent how and when they come into the classroom. The classification value between teacher and student is also not as strong as the teacher does not impose rigorous rules.

The way rules and routines are employed in each classroom shows how power and control work together through relations and communication to shape the roles of the teachers and students. In the next sections I will investigate these roles further.

### ***Prominence and strictness of the teacher***

The teachers at Aurora often take on a prominent leader role in the classroom. They regularly raise their voices to correct students for not following the classroom rules and routines. One day after playtime two students walked into the classroom before other students were finished changing their shoes and clothes in the cloakroom. Two teachers saw the students entering and asked in a strict tone: 'who gave you permission to enter the classroom?' The students were then told to go back to the cloakroom and wait until everyone was ready and the teachers gave the signal for entering the classroom. This example shows a strong framing of the hierarchical interactions and a strong classification between teacher and student. The teachers make explicit that they are the ones to give permission for students to enter the classroom, and students are not authorised to enter on their own.

The following excerpt from the observation data illustrates a similar situation at Aurora.

The children are eating fruit and Teacher A3 explains what they are going to do in the following lesson. One boy stands up and throws his waste in the bin. The teacher asks: 'why are you the only one who is allowed to stand up?' She does not wait for an answer and continues by saying that everyone must follow the same rules, including him. She repeats this a few times, the boy mumbles: 'ok, ok, ok'.

Fieldnotes, 21 November 2018

Again, students are instructed in no uncertain terms that they are not in a position of power to deviate from the strict classroom rules. These power relations visibly differentiate the student from the teacher, with the former positioned as having to show respect for the latter. In this *positional control system*, the students' behaviour is expected to relate to explicit social rules (Bernstein 1975; Singh 2001).

Contrary to this, at Borealis the teachers are often observed using a less prominent role in the classroom. On one occasion, a lesson in Norwegian is almost finished, and it is soon time for lunch. The students start to walk around and want to go get their lunch. Teacher B3 stands at the front of the classroom and says in a low voice:

'We'll soon finish; you all need to sit down. You need to stay in the classroom because we need to tidy up first before getting lunch. After tidying up, you need to sit down quietly and then you'll be able to get your lunch.' All the students start to walk around and talk, wash their hands, tidy up their work, etc. B3 sits down and waits, not saying anything. After a while the students settle and B3 then sends them row by row to get their lunch.

Fieldnotes, 4 April 2019

Part of the activity shows a strong classification and framing where students are to follow the rules set explicitly by the teachers and they are not allowed to proceed with lunch unless the teacher's expectations are met. But the process preceding their fetching lunch is weakly framed where the students get to choose how and when they will be quiet and where the teacher stays in the background. The control over communication differs from Aurora here, in the sense that there is some space for the students in which they are expected to regulate their behaviour themselves.

The following example at the end of a school day shows how teachers at Borealis use methods for regulating classroom behaviour whilst maintaining a discreet role.

Teacher B2 says at the end of lesson: 'Tidy up quietly now.' The students stand up, walk around, chat and tidy up. On the board she draws a smiley face and then starts to write names of children under the smiley face who are tidying quickly and who are ready, sitting quietly at their desk. After two minutes they are all ready and TB dismisses them by rows.

Fieldnotes, 12 March 2019

Without saying a word, B2 makes sure the students get ready quickly. In this situation, the relation between the student and teacher is strongly classified as the teacher ensures that the students comply with her expectations. However, the form of communication used by the teacher masks the power that she is exercising and creates some space for the students to settle themselves. While it appears that students have control over the situation as they are allowed to organise themselves, the hierarchic relation remains explicit.

### **Student behaviour**

Student behaviour in this section includes off-task behaviour and participation in lessons. Off-task behaviour is observed at both schools. However, the way the off-task behaviour plays out is different. At Aurora it is clearly visible while at Borealis it is more invisible.

The following observation during a plenary reading activity in the social sciences lesson illustrates how off-task behaviour at Aurora was manifested.

Students start to lose attention. Some of them look around, turning around and seeking eye contact with each other and communicating using sign language. Some are yawning frequently, some are playing with their hands, fingers, erasers, rulers or pencils. Some are rocking in their chair and looking outside. Some girls are fidgeting with their hair.

Fieldnotes, 24 October 2018

This type of off-task behaviour where students distract themselves and others around them was frequently observed during plenary activities, teacher monologues and seatwork activities—specialised modes of communication that characterised almost each lesson. As the students did not have much room to play or to act out due to the strong framing, the off-task behaviour occurred quietly and was hidden. The teachers sometimes did and sometimes did not notice this off-task behaviour. If they noticed, they would repeatedly tell the students to pay attention.

The first days of observation at Borealis, I was taken aback by the chaos in the classroom at times. This following excerpt describes a chaotic moment when the lesson was finished, and it was time for recess:

Teacher B1 tells the students to tidy up. It becomes chaotic in the classroom. Some children grab their schoolbags and start to walk around, boys start to wrestle with each other, there is screaming and playing. Students from the other classroom come in as well.

Fieldnotes, 12 March 2019

I also observed off-task behaviour during lessons. When students worked together in groups some of them were concentrated on their work while some were obviously playing and chatting. This was especially the case when the groups were working in the hallway without supervision. During individual and pair work, there was often chatting in a low voice, about the work and about other things. Sometimes the students walked over to a friend and had a chat about non-school related things, and then returned to their own seat. Frequently, the teachers did not say anything about this off-task behaviour. However, if the students did not return to their work after a while, they would walk over and ask the students to focus on their work.

Borealis teachers sometimes expressed their frustration about the chitchat during lessons and the chaos during in-between moments. I observed several occasions where they would have a talk with the class about this, for example, in this lesson where students are working on assignments and subjects of their choice:

B1 claps her hands and says everyone should face forward. She says she sees that many are working, but that there are also many who are not doing what they are supposed to do. She explains that some students are distracting others and that it should be quieter so everyone can concentrate. Then she says they can continue with their work.

Fieldnotes, 24 May 2019

As the control over activities is often observed to be weak in this classroom, there is space for students to do other things than schoolwork. No one is telling each student what to do, but a great deal of self-regulation is expected from the students to get themselves down to work. However, the example shows that the framing value is a dynamic continuum as the teacher moves from weak framing to stronger framing where control is taken away from the students.

When it comes to participation in lessons, the Aurora students were often passive participants listening to teachers and carrying out the imposed assignments, as in the following example. Preceding the excerpt, Teacher A1 gave 15 minutes of instruction about the Egyptian symbols Horus' eye, Ankh and Scarab. The instruction consisted mostly of the teacher showing the textbook pages with images of the symbols on the board, reading the accompanying text aloud and providing some extra information, combined with occasional triadic dialogue.

After the instruction, the students are given a worksheet where they are to write information about each symbol. I walk around and ask a girl what the Ankh symbol means. She reads a sentence from the textbook to me: 'a symbol of life'. I ask, 'but what does that mean?' The girl shrugs her shoulders. I encourage her to look closely at the picture of the symbol, asking her what the decoration on it looks like. She looks at me and says, 'We don't need to do that. We only have to read the text and then write it down.'

Fieldnotes, 31 October 2010

The way this girl responded was strikingly dissimilar from the active student participation in the Borealis classroom. Even though the same lesson structure and teacher-oriented instructions were often observed at Borealis, the students had a more inquisitive attitude. For example, I observed on several occasions that the science teacher deviated from the lesson topic because the students were enthusiastically asking him many questions. During a lesson about different types of rocks, he ended up talking about why the earth is round and not flat. So, while Aurora students are expected to behave obediently and follow instructions, Borealis students are expected to be active and make their mark. These expectations about conduct, character and manner are a result of how the regulative discourse is constituted in the classroom and how it has an effect on the instructional discourse.

### ***Teacher perspectives: Aurora***

I asked all four teachers at Aurora what they think important teacher skills are in the diverse classroom. Three of them say that clear classroom management, implementing good routines and clear rules, good leadership and a clear structure in the lesson are important. One teacher suggests this is especially important for students with poor language skills who otherwise do not catch up with all the instructions given by their teachers. Moreover, having clear expectations is considered to be an important skill. It is notable that the Respect programme rhetoric is used in some of the answers. The skills that the teachers mention reflect the observations described in the previous section.

When I asked why the clear structure and routines are important, all four teachers expressed that they think the students appreciate and need the routines because it makes them feel secure in a predictable environment without uncertainties. This contributes to calm lessons in which the students can focus on the subject instead of trying to figure out what to do, according to the teachers. In other words, management problems and transition times can be minimised and both teachers and students can then focus more of their attention on the academic content (Cazden 2001). Moreover, one teacher thinks that the stronger academic students in the class who are 'best adapted' can cope when things are disorderly and do not go according to plan, whereas the 'vulnerable' students they have in their class

need things to be clear so they know what to do. This resonates with what Bernstein (2000, 1990) suggests about social class assumptions. He argues that the education system is designed according to middle-class and majority norms, which makes middle-class students better adapted to schooling. Students with working-class and minority backgrounds may be used to different forms of communication which may be less compatible with the forms of communication required to be successful in schools.

Another teacher mentions that many students lack structure at home but when they come to school they know how to behave and this is non-negotiable because the rules in the classroom are as clear they are. Unnecessary discussions are thus avoided, according to her. What she is pointing out here is that due to the strong classification of the relation between adults and students, the students can easily recognise their role. Moreover, the explicit form of control over the communication enables the students to realise the legitimate text, which is often to be quiet, stand in line and listen to the adult. The teacher also experiences that rituals help to include more students who would otherwise have been excluded due to their failure to understand everything that is being said. Especially at a school where a little 'extra' is needed, Teacher A4 feels that:

Having some routines that they recognise makes things 'glide' so much easier. It's easier for everyone if things 'glide', and that you don't have to repeat things and do things over and over again.

Individual interview A4

Teachers use routines and rituals to communicate condensed, redundant, nonverbal and predictable instructions (Bernstein 1975). Rituals have a symbolic function of relating the students 'to a social order, to heighten respect for that order and to revivify that order within the individual' (Bernstein, Elvin, and Peters 1966, 429). In this way, the regulative discourse has a cohesive function that the teachers in this study experience as easing their work. Especially bearing in mind the heterogenous group of students they have in their classroom, this is considered to be an important aspect for the inclusion of all students.

### ***Teacher perspectives: Borealis***

At Borealis, I asked the teachers how much they emphasise rules, routines and structure. Two of them explain that routines are of great importance, expressing in much the same way as the teachers at Aurora that predictability creates security for the students. The teachers explain that they especially focus on rules at the beginning of the year where they set the boundaries and practise these boundaries. Another relevant aspect that all three teachers mention is the significance of getting to know each other well. Teacher B3 explains:

I have to know the group of students and they have to know me so that we can establish work methods and an environment that functions for everyone. I don't have a template, but I want us to understand what we're doing here. This probably requires some corrections along the way, no doubt.

Individual interview B3

This indicates that a good working environment is created through a complex form of interpersonal communication with effort and understanding from both the teacher and

the students, suggesting the Borealis teachers use a *personal control system* (Bernstein 1990). The teachers have clear expectations, and it takes time for the students to be able to behave according to them. Some corrections from the teachers are necessary, indicating a strong classification between teacher and student where the teachers take a leading role in establishing the desired working environment. All three teachers say that at the moment, this class is relatively new to them which is why there is some unrest in the class. They have yet to arrive at a common understanding with the students on a functioning working environment.

When we continue talking about classroom management and how the teachers see their role in the class for regulating behaviour, all three teachers express that quietness in the classroom is not the answer for everything. Teacher B1:

The fact that it's quiet in a room is not necessarily a guarantee that there is learning. And when the classroom is nearly chaotic, this can also be an indicator that there is a lot of learning going on here.

The teachers explain that quietness is sometimes needed and expected, but in many cases, there should be noise from the students as they chat about their work. In addition, Teacher B1 and B3 express two other interesting viewpoints about their role:

I want the students to be able to handle working without the adults making sure they are working. There is a way of getting there, but I don't want to exercise power or the solution in the classroom.

Individual interview B3

I also want them to choose to speak out if there is something they think is unfair. They must argue for something, against something. It's in a way part of being a citizen in a democracy.

Individual interview B1

According to the teachers, to learn such skills as self-regulation and arguing for an opinion, their role needs to be discreet and students need to be given the chance to try out, explore and speak up. That cannot happen in a quiet classroom where the teachers have all the power and control as Teacher B3 suggests. Students need to be given power to some extent so they can take control over their own behaviour. However, by mentioning 'there is a way of getting there' he suggests that students need to be guided in the right direction, implying a strong classification between teacher and student where the teacher sets the boundaries.

What is important to note here is that in these situations it *appears* the students have control. The data material in this study shows that there is a strong classification in the Borealis classroom, which the teachers disguise with their forms of communication. On the one hand, this might make it difficult for some of the students to recognise the power relations in which they are involved and their position in them. That, in turn, has the risk of disabling some students from realising the legitimate text and, consequently, from being successful in school. This is a concern the Aurora teachers express. On the other hand, less strong framing at times encourages students to make more of themselves public and gives them the opportunity to practise other life skills. This sometimes leads to noise and chaos

in the classroom, and during activities, teachers will sometimes switch from weak framing to strong framing to gain more control.

## Discussion

The regulative discourses described in this paper and the teachers' rationales for adopting such approaches correspond with what Bernstein suggests about how visible and invisible pedagogies carry social class assumptions (Bernstein 1990; Sadovnik 1991). As communicative competences needed in school may not be made available in the working-class family, the child is less likely to be self-regulating at school (Bernstein 1990). It is therefore assumed that students from the lower social classes benefit from a strongly framed social base at school so they can recognise the practices and pedagogic context and be able to contribute the appropriate text. It seems, thus, that in this study, some 'essential social class assumptions about the child, the teacher, the role of the family, and the process of learning' (Sadovnik 1991, 53) are reflected in the pedagogic relations in both classrooms.

The contrasting pedagogic practices resonate with findings from previous comparative studies on power and control through pedagogy in classrooms. Carried out in contexts known for larger societal and social differences than Norway, namely the USA (Anyon 1981), Brazil (Da Silva 1988) and the UK (Hempel-Jorgensen 2009), these studies describe an unequal distribution of pedagogy among different groups in society. For example, Hempel-Jorgensen (2009) found that as a result of the pedagogy in the classrooms, the 'ideal pupil' at a working-class school was perceived as passive and conforming to school discipline and the wishes of teachers, whereas the 'ideal pupil' at a middle-class school was perceived as a more equal and active learner. As such, the differentiations in pedagogic modalities described in this paper might not be a complete surprise to many international readers. However, understood in light of Norway's history of comprehensive education and equalitarianism, the findings raise serious questions regarding equality and the consequences of popular narratives on improving efficiency in education.

The recent changes in comprehensive education in Norway towards a neoliberal market approach may favour a visible pedagogy over an invisible pedagogy as it helps to streamline learning to satisfy national goals. This visible pedagogy is increasingly supplied through private actors in the form of evidence-based behaviour programmes, such as 'Respect' (Ertesvåg and Vaaland 2007), as seen in this paper. Some say that this is a market solution for an economically effective and efficient delivery of educational justice and equality (Beach 2017). Justice is then understood as everyone being equally able to score high on national and international tests.

However, it is fascinating to learn that the Aurora teachers consider a visible approach to be necessary in their context while the Borealis teachers do not. As a result of the different pedagogic approaches, at Aurora, the students are expected to conduct themselves obediently, work quietly and comply with the teachers' instructions, whilst at Borealis, the students are expected to regulate their own behaviour, be active participants and voice an opinion. These different learner identities that students develop in school



are crucial to their subject formation as they frame how they understand themselves as learners and more broadly as human beings (Vaahtera et al. 2017). This may reinforce the low positioning assumed by these students in the school and can also make their access to important life skills more difficult (Neves and Morais 2005). In this way, it can affect the students' future prospects, which may then have consequences for society in terms of the reproduction of inequality (Bernstein 1975).

Given the small scale of this study and the complexity of the relationships in the context, the data is limited when it comes to drawing conclusions about what the cause and effect is of the observed practices. Further research should be undertaken to investigate whether schools with student populations from working-class and ethnic minority backgrounds are overrepresented when it comes to the use of evidence-based behavioural programmes promoting a visible pedagogy. This might then say something about whether the state's efforts to streamline education and maximising test scores contribute to silencing the voices of some students.

## Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been twofold: 1) to understand the workings of different pedagogic practices by investigating their inner logic and 2) connecting this with the wider societal context. Two Norwegian classrooms were used to discuss contrasting approaches and their possible consequences, not to draw causal conclusions.

This study found that the social backgrounds of students may play a part in how pedagogic practices, the role of the teacher and learner identities are constituted in a classroom. Groups of students with ethnically diverse and working-class backgrounds may benefit from different classification and framing values than groups of students from majority and middle-class backgrounds. However, a pedagogic practice characterised by strong framing, even though it can be initially advantageous for students from lower social classes, influences the development of their learner identities, and this may have consequences for their position in society.

Importantly, this paper addressed that visible and invisible pedagogies in themselves do not solve issues of educational inequality. Rather, they reflect an ideology and build on social expectations and models of the students (Bernstein 1975; Sadovnik 1991). It is therefore important to carefully consider the power relations and forms of control that bring about a pedagogic practice. It is essential to be aware of underlying social class and ideological assumptions if we are to understand the possible consequences of a pedagogy. Especially in an education model that claims democratic participation and equal opportunities for all as the most important values, it is important to question whether educational market policies lead to pedagogic practices that contribute to the idea of education as a vehicle for social mobility instead of doing the opposite, that is, reproducing social inequality.

The descriptions and analyses in this paper are meant to encourage reflection and discussion on pedagogic practices and the reproduction of inequality. Further work needs to be done to explore whether these findings represent a trend in the whole country or are merely a local coincidence.

## Notes

1. This paper does not include a reference to this survey for confidentiality reasons.
2. All names of schools and participants in this paper are pseudonyms.
3. Ethical approval for carrying out this research project has been obtained from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) with reference number 156107, confirming the study complies with data protection legislation. Informed consent was obtained from all research participants. Information about the study was given through a verbal explanation and a written information sheet. The students and their parents, as well as the teachers, signed a consent form approving voluntary participation in the study.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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