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CULTURAL BELONGING AND PEER RELATIONS AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN MULTI-ETHNIC NORWEGIAN SUBURBS

Abstract

The article elaborates on young people's sense of cultural belonging, based on interviews held with 41 pupils with an immigrant background. All of the interviewees lived in the suburbs of a Norwegian town and attended schools where the majority of pupils were ethnic Norwegians. The article focuses both on how the young people constructed themselves in terms of cultural belonging and their experiences of inclusion in peer groups. The findings reveal that the sense of cultural belonging among pupils was closely linked to their parents' cultural origins, and that the pupils' social and cultural practices functioned as key to their inclusion in or exclusion from their peer community.

Keywords: cultural belonging, multi-ethnicity, peer relations, social and cultural practices

Introduction

A sense of collective identity and the feeling of belonging may take many forms. People may identify with other members of a group but not feel that they belong in the sense of being accepted, or they may feel that they are accepted and belong, but do not fully identify with other members of the group (Anthias, 2006). Belonging is about emotional attachment and about feeling safe and at home (Yuval-Davis, 2006). To belong is to share values, practices, and social, symbolic, and material ties. It is not merely a question of identification or ethnicity. In this sense, belonging is closely related to shared experiences and to the feeling of inclusion and exclusion.

Studies have shown that children with an immigrant background often strive hard to be accepted or included in peer groups of the majority culture (Fangen, 2009; Lappalainen, 2006; Lindgren, 2010). Norwegian schools are not free from social exclusion and bullying on the basis of racism (Fandrem, Ertesvåg, Strohmeier & Roland, 2010; Jahren, 2006). Friendship is a basis for belonging, equality, and trust, furthermore the lack of close friends is found to be disastrous for young people (Frønes, 2002). The attainment of friendship, popularity, and competence is generally judged and valued on the basis of the peer group (Bigelow, Tesson & Lewko, 1996), and the position of the peer group is strong when it comes to normative influence and group pressure (Seltzer, 1980). To have close friends and to belong in a peer group plays a significant part in young people's personal development, upbringing, and socialisation, while to be excluded or bullied can generate morose feelings of being left out, being misjudged, and devalued. Beach, Dovemark, Schwartz & Öhrn (in this Special Issue) found that young people with immigrant background living in multi-ethnic suburbs in Sweden supported each other regardless of differences in cultural backgrounds and languages. They developed a strong loyalty to each other and a commitment to stick together based on shared experience as 'Non-Swedes' (Schwartz & Öhrn, 2012).

However, not only peers, but also family and cultural background are important factors for young people's sense of belonging. It has been found that focus on the individual versus the collective perspective varies among cultures and that this may influence people's worldview (Berry, 2005; McCarthy, 2005). Cultural identities are often more fluent than stable and people's sense of belonging is constantly in some form of construction or reconstruction, fluctuating according to new encounters within a group or with new members of the group.

The purpose of this article is to shed light on how young people with an immigrant background experience cultural belonging and inclusion in their peer group in communities where the majority of the young people are ethnic Norwegians.¹

Theoretical framework – a sociocultural and constructivist approach

From a sociocultural point of view, it is assumed that the adult generations lead their children in their traditions and the values of their culture. Further, this tradition holds that normative categories, here defined as implicit patterns of reasoning, are conveyed in order to enable the next generation to understand how social conventions function and are perceived in their community. In this way, children learn what is regarded as competent and desirable behaviour. The fundamental normative categories are established by participation in different activities and form the foundation for how individuals understand and value social and cultural practices (Wertsch, 1991; Wertsch & Stone, 1985).

Social and cultural practices are seldom learned directly from what other people say or do, but rather through participation and conversion, where the new is made personal (Rommetveit, 1985; Vygotsky, 1978). In order to take part in activities that are common within a given context, one has to master the tools used in that context (Wertsch, 1998).² Language and semiotic tools hold a special position within sociocultural thinking and are regarded as decisive for the development of mental processes. Since knowledge of an object or a fact is established simultaneously as the concept of the object or fact is understood, one cannot be conscious of whatever one does not have a concept of.³ Participation in social and cultural activities demands mastery of the tools used in such activities, and linguistic skills ease access to participation. Different societies develop different semiotic tools and conventions depending upon their historic and cultural context, and this may lead to differences regarding a child's opportunities to understand what is happening and hence their ability to take part in activities (Wertsch, 1984).

¹ Statistics Norway (Statistisk sentralbyrå 2010) defines persons with two foreign-born parents as immigrants (first-generation immigrants). Further, persons born in Norway with two parents born abroad are defined as Norwegian-born immigrants (descendants). In this article, I use the term 'immigrant background' for both groups, with reference to their transnational heritage.

² Tools refer to different instruments used to perform certain activities, including lingual activities.

³ The theory of non-conceptual content has another viewpoint (Evans, 1982)

Since we often presuppose that other people share our patterns of reasoning, certain elements in communication are taken for granted (Rommetveit, 1985). This is a challenge when people with different cultural backgrounds engage in communicative activities. Implicit patterns of meaning may come to the surface, and what seldom is explained has to be verbalised. Consequently, communication across cultural barriers may be complicated and it may be difficult for someone to explain personal views to a stranger with a different cultural background (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). In addition, people often have a restricted horizon of understanding when it comes to interpreting other people's expressions, thus making it difficult for them to understand other people's point of view.

Since a word can be used with different meanings, Norwegians with an immigrant background may have difficulties in understanding the Norwegian words and expressions. It is not until such words are made one's own and used in conversations with others that one can reach a thorough understanding (Rommetveit, 1985). When this happens, the utterances become linked in a chain that is also called 'polyphony', meaning that other voices blend into our own. How we understand an utterance is related to what social and cultural activities we have participated in and to the voices that have contributed to the development of our own horizon of understanding (Bakhtin, 1986). The environments in which we grow up and the tools we learn to use either provide possibilities for or impose restrictions on the development of new horizons of understandings and what activities are available to us. Social and cultural conventions and practices can be changed or developed by the mastery of new tools (Wertsch, 1998) and in this way the horizon of opportunities can be expanded. To summarise, according to the sociocultural perspective, access to participation in social and cultural activities is dependent upon an individual's degree of understanding of tools, categories, and conventions (implicit patterns of meaning) tied to the different social and cultural practices that they engage in.

The sociocultural tradition is closely related to social constructivism. Although there are several approaches to social constructivism, four premises bind them together: (1) historical and cultural contextualisation; (2) critical attitude to obvious knowledge; (3) connection between knowledge and social processes; and (4) connection between knowledge and social action (Burr, 1995). Discursive psychology, which rests upon a social constructive foundation, emphasises that identities, behaviour, and social groups are constructed discursively and socially, and that the reality of the subject is constructed through the

language. Other central points are that identification and categorisation processes are historically and socially context bound. As a result of how identities are negotiated in social practices, people construct several flexible identities that are products of different discourses (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1996).

Our access to reality is through language maintained by discursive patterns and practices, and discourse analysis is designed to understand such rhetoric (Potter & Wetherell, 1996).

Discourses include all kinds of utterances - oral and written - and together they function as a repertoire of interpretation from which an individual can view the world. Knowledge and the conception of reality are not mirror images of the world, but rather products of people's way of categorising (Burr, 1995). In this article, I aim to illustrate how the experience of belonging and social and cultural practices are interrelated, and my focus is more on the construction of cultural belonging than on the construction of individual identity.

Methodological approach

Data is based on seven videotaped focus group interviews with 41 pupils (19 girls and 22 boys) in the age range 12–16 years, all of which had an immigrant background. The strength of the method is the production of rich data regarding individual experiences, practices, and values, and the ability to gain insight into understandings shared by the members of a group (Patton, 1990; Marková, Linell, Grossen & Orvig, 2007).

The data was collected at six different schools in multi-ethnic suburban districts on the outskirts of a Norwegian town. Most of the suburbs were inhabited mainly by ethnic Norwegian families, but also by families of different immigrant backgrounds. However, almost exclusively immigrants from Turkey and the Turkish part of Kurdistan inhabited one of the suburbs. The pupils came from families where the average income and educational levels were below the city average and few of the pupils had working mothers. All of the pupils spoke Norwegian, but their fluency varied according to how long they had lived in Norway and which suburb they lived in. Two-thirds of the pupils only spoke their mother tongue at home, while the rest spoke both Norwegian and their mother tongue. In total, 22 of the pupils had come to Norway at preschool or school age, 11 had lived in the country for two or three years, and 8 were born in Norway. The pupils had ethnic backgrounds from Turkey, Kurdistan, Kosovo, Somalia, Ghana, and Afghanistan.

The pupils were given permission by their parents to participate in the study and were informed that a video camera would be used for recording purposes. All interviews were conducted with two interviewers and in groups of between five and seven participants in rooms at the pupils' school.⁴ The interviews were based on semi-structured, open-ended questions, contextualised in the pupils' sense of cultural belonging and inclusion in their peer group. The video recordings were transcribed to text, which also included the pupils' body language, turn-taking, group interactions, and the way the pupils talked about the themes. When reviewing the recordings, it was apparent that the pupils were enthusiastic to participate, and that the presence of a video camera did not seem to inhibit them.⁵

Discourses are used as an analytical tool in order to develop a framework to limit the study material (Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999). The process of analysis started during the data collection when I listened to recordings containing key information related to the research topic. By alternating between the videos and the transcribed text, I became familiar with the content. In the preliminary analysis, I tried to identify discursive patterns. I was especially interested in identifying mechanisms that contribute to how individuals or groups are able to put forward their interests on behalf of others. The aim of discourse analysis is not to get 'behind' the utterances, but rather to work with content analyses to see how matter is expressed and to explore the logic and premises that the utterances actually express (Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999). Moreover, the purpose of discourse analysis is not to characterise people or to find out whether utterances are true or false, consistent or inconsistent, but to identify how social and cultural practices are constituted and maintained. This implies that the researcher constructs something, rather than reveals something. Most social constructivists regard their work as discursive constructions, representing a possible picture of the researched topic.

During the coding process, essential themes and interactions were identified, such as utterances mirroring emotions, silence, and sudden changes in themes or conflicts. In the first analysis, critical incidents were identified, such as oral expressions, bodily expressions

⁴ When I use 'we' in this text, it is with reference to the interview situation where there were two interviewers, my assistant and I.

⁵ In accordance with ethical considerations we decided to stop filming if sensitive situations occurred (Carey & Smith, 1994). For example, in one group consisting of only girls, all of whom were very outspoken about their relations to ethnic Norwegian peers, especially girls, it was necessary to stop video recording the discussion.

(silence, hesitation, giggling, looking sad or embarrassed, or signs of being surprised or troubled), and group dynamics. On analysing the data, three main discourses were identified: *sense of cultural belonging*; *peer relations*; *inclusion/exclusion*; and *social and cultural practices*. The three discourses are described in greater detail below.

The sense of cultural belonging

All of the pupils in the study said they had two cultures and two languages. Regardless of where they had been born they expressed that they identified most strongly with the culture of their parents. In an open conversation with a group consisting mainly of pupils with a Turkish background, the pupils talked about ‘belonging’. One girl aged 15 years, who had grown up in Norway, said:

We are in two cultures; you know ... I feel a little bit Norwegian too sometimes, for we are in two cultures, both the Turkish and the Norwegian, and then we sometimes feel a little bit Norwegian (Girl 1, Turkey).

Two girls aged 13 years, who had been born in Norway, described their situation as follows:

I feel Turkish since I come from there, and since [at home] we mostly speak Turkish. My younger sister does not speak Turkish fluently, and in order to learn it, we always have to speak Turkish at home. She understands Turkish, but she is putting Norwegian words into the sentences when she speaks Turkish. (Girl 2, Turkey)

I speak Turkish with my mum and dad, but Norwegian with my siblings. (Girl 3, Turkey)

The pupils emphasised language as a marker when they spoke of cultural belonging (Bakhtin, 1986; Wertsch, 1998). Some of the pupils who had been born in Norway did not speak Norwegian fluently. Pupils living in neighbourhoods where most of the families belonged to the same ethnic background fell into this group. These were the pupils living in the suburbs where most of the families had a Turkish background.

When the pupils visited Turkey, it seemed that they had not quite figured out how to accomplish new activities in which they participated. This is evident from the following conversation with a girl aged 12 years, who had been born in Norway to Turkish parents:

Girl 4 (Turkey): When I am in Turkey, I feel a little bit Norwegian, for instance together with my cousins. There, I feel a little bit more like a Norwegian.

Interviewer: What do you mean by that?

Girl 4 (Turkey): For example, I do not do the same things as them.

Interviewer: Could you give an example of what you do differently?

Girl 4 (Turkey): Housework and things like that.

Interviewer: But what is the difference concerning the housework?

Girl 4 (Turkey): They [young Turkish girls] have a huge amount of housework there, in Turkey, but in Norway girls do not do so much housework and things like that. And I am used to doing it like I have been doing it in Norway, so when I am in Turkey, they tell me that I cannot manage to do what they are doing. Do you understand what I mean?

A girl aged 16 years, who had lived in Norway for 13 years and whose parents were from Kosovo, said:

I do not intend to end up like my mother. She has to go around and wash all the time and if I had been living in my home country it would have been the same for me. Therefore, I am really glad that we moved to Norway because I do not wish to spend the rest of my life being at home washing and taking care of the children all the time. I want to get an education. (Girl 1, Kosovo)

The latter two quotes from the girls respectively aged 12 and 16 years are strongly gendered, and in both cases the girls were negotiating the gender-specific expectations in their cultures. According to Yuval-Davis (1997, 46), Women, have their “proper” behaviour, their “proper” clothing, embody the line which signifies the collective’s boundaries. The girls in my study had started to observe and reflect upon how cultural practices differed and that some girls had to take part in domestic work, while others did not. Participating in Norwegian society had caused them to reflect on gender roles and cultural reproduction.

The pupils’ relationships with members of their families were discussed in several focus groups, and the importance of respect was eagerly discussed among the oldest pupils. A boy aged 15 years, who was originally from Somalia and had lived in Norway for 5 years, said:

I have not yet met a Norwegian boy with respect for his mother. [They say] ‘Shut up, I want pizza’ and things like that, you know? What kind of respect is that? And what I hate most is when they say something bad about *my* mother (Boy 1, Somalia).

In the same group, Boy 1 from Kosovo, who was aged 15 years and who had lived in Norway for 12 years said: ‘Ask [any of] us in this group [and we will tell you that] our mothers are highest of all on the list. That’s a rule, and all [of us] know that.’ The pupils in the group said that it was important to respect their parents and family. One of the boys said that this was a matter of course for them, but not for Norwegian adolescents. Girl 1 from Kosovo (aged 16 years, and who had lived in Norway for 13 years) added:

I am not going to speak badly of anyone, but I know a Norwegian girl who says ‘My mother is a damned bitch!’ and things like that. I would never say such things, because if I did not have my parents what would I do then? It is my parents who provide for me. What could I have done without them? So, naturally, I have to respect them!

According to Anthias (2006), one may feel that one belongs in the sense of being accepted in a group, even though one may not fully identify with the other members of that group. The pupils in the above-mentioned group did not identify with ethnic Norwegian adolescents and they were astonished by what Norwegian adolescents could say to their parents and especially to their mothers. Girl 1 from Kosovo seemed resigned when she said that she had even heard an ethnic Norwegian girl say that she *hated* her mother. She thought that it was wrong to say such things, and added that for young people from her homeland this would be unthinkable. The older pupils considered it wrong that young people scolded their parents. Boy 1 from Kosovo added: ‘We cannot scold our parents, even though we do not agree with everything they say. We respect them, and we respect all they say.’ Respect for family values and traditions was highly emphasised in all groups, and this was one of the ways the youngsters perceived themselves as different from their Norwegian peers.

Peer relations: inclusion and exclusion

Popularity and relationships with friends were eagerly discussed issues, during which loyalty emerged as a sub-discourse. A boy aged 15 years who had been born in Norway to parents who were from Turkey, said:

When you start school here, for example in the lower secondary school, you find yourself a friend. When you finish the school, he will forget you. But Turkish people, you know, they will never forget. You have a friend for life (Boy 1, Turkey).

The boy did not experience a real sense of inclusion among his ethnic Norwegian peers. It was evident from many of the pupils' statements that it was difficult for them to find friends and feel welcome among ethnic Norwegian adolescents (Fangen, 2009). A boy aged 15 years, from Kurdistan, who had lived in Norway for 3 years, said that he had no ethnic Norwegian friends. He found it difficult to get to know ethnic Norwegian peers, and he reflected on friendship as follows:

For example, when you get to know someone in your class, and we are together all day, tomorrow he will forget me. Do you understand? If I meet someone from Kurdistan, we will also be together tomorrow. All the time we will be together, you know. But, when you meet a Norwegian boy, we only see each other for two days and then he forgets me, so you only get to know him once, in a way (Boy 1, Kurdistan).

When I asked what the reason for this situation might be, he answered that he believed that Norwegian adolescents had a different way of behaving compared to young people from Kurdistan. He had discovered that different cultural practices limited his access to activities shared among peers (Potter & Wetherell, 1996; Wertsch, 1998).

In two of the lower secondary schools, girls with a Turkish background informed that they preferred to be together with peers from their own homeland during the breaks, but added that they also had ethnic Norwegian friends. However, they had never been invited to those girls' homes and they had never taken the girls to their own homes. One of the girls aged 15 years, who had been living in Norway for 12 years, explained:

One week they are really good friends, and later, after we return from a school holiday, they forget [our friendship] and leave us for other girls. This is what I have seen many times, but we cannot do it like this, we are together all the time. (Girl 5, Turkey)

In a focus group, in which four of the five adolescents had come from Turkey, all participants considered that it was safer to have friends from their own culture, as connection to their

family and language established a safe platform for them (Wertsch, 1991). However, the findings in general indicated that the young people constructed a kind of togetherness and a sense of belonging based on experiences shared by young people with an immigrant background, rather than on the sense of belonging derived from coming from the same culture (Beach et al., in this issue; Schwartz & Öhrn, 2012). Constructions of belonging reflect emotional investments of feeling safe and welcome and a willingness to share or accept values, practices, and interests (Anthias, 2006; Yuval-Davis, 2006).

At one of the lower secondary schools there were vivid discussions about friendship, popularity, and appearances. The girls held that nice clothes and appearances were important. The theme was discussed by three adolescents aged 15-16 years, namely Girl 1 from Kosovo and Boy 1 from Kosovo, and in addition, another from Kosovo, Girl 2, aged 15 years and who had lived in Norway for 6 years: In this group, as in several of the other groups, the youngsters addressed themselves as ‘foreigners’:

- Girl 1 (Kosovo): Some believe that if you have the right clothes then you will more easily become part of the popular clique, but I do not think like that.
- Boy 1 (Kosovo): It is not so difficult to afford nice clothes in Norway. At home it was not like that.
- Girl 2 (Kosovo): Yes, but I believe that we foreigners, or at least some of the girls, wish that we could have such cool clothes as some of the other girls. Anyhow, this is how I feel.
- Boy 1 (Kosovo): Why is that so?
- Girl 2 (Kosovo): I do not know. It is just like that, and I feel a little bit embarrassed when I do not have such cool clothes as the others. I believe that many foreign girls feel the same. You have seen the clothes the Norwegian girls are wearing?
- Girl 1 (Kosovo): Fashion clothes!

Girl 1 from Kosovo added that one should not look at people's clothes, but at their personality. Boy 1 from Kosovo added that if his friends did not like him because of his clothes, they were not true friends. While the adolescents in this focus group discussion connected expensive clothes to status differences in Norwegian society, others were of the opinion that clothes were so easily acquired that everybody could buy nice clothes if they wanted to, and thus they had deduced that clothes were not the most important means of securing friends. After a long discussion, they concluded that expensive clothes were more important to ethnic Norwegian adolescents, especially in the case of girls, than to themselves:

Girl 2 (Kosovo): It is important to have friends who not only find you interesting because you have money or expensive clothes, because that means that they really like you.

Girl 1 (Kosovo): I have a best friend whom I have had for a long time. I really do not care what she wears; we are friends because I like her.

In another group discussion consisting of girls only, all of who were aged 12 years and had been born in Norway, there was a more vivid and eager discussion of inclusion and exclusion than in any of the other groups. The discussion started when one of the girls said that she had been bullied. She cried when we asked her to describe her experiences as someone with an immigrant background, and she said it had been hurtful to be excluded. Her utterances led to a reaction from all other girls in the group and some of them started to cry, because they had had similar experiences. Popularity, friendship, and friction within or between groups had been underlying causes of the bullying, in addition to skin colour, ethnicity, and appearances, and thus such bullying is closely connected to social exclusion and racism (Bigelow et al., 1996; Fandrem et al., 2010; Jahren, 2006). As with the above-mentioned group, also clothing and popularity were discussed in the group consisting only of girls. A girl in this group, whose parents were from Ghana, said:

But the popular girls can wear whatever clothes they wish, [such as] ugly clothes and jogging suits, [and] they are still popular. But if *I* use such clothes, they say; 'Gosh, what ugly clothes you are wearing!' or 'Do you always have to copy us?' (Girl 1, Ghana).

She described how the bullies had more power regarding what was permitted to say or do than the victims had. The girls in this group had noticed that the most popular girls were ethnic Norwegians and that those girls had the power to include and exclude others. The girls in this discussion group who had been bullied were accused of being stupid or copying the popular girls, and they were bullied regardless of what clothes they wore. Moreover, they were told that expensive clothes were not for immigrants and they were labelled as greedy if they wore clothes that were not cheap. Although the girls in the discussion group identified with the ethnic Norwegian girls and wanted to be like them, they did not feel safe and welcome, and they did not feel accepted and included.

The group of girls aged 12, had discovered that there were different rules for ethnic Norwegian girls compared to girls with an immigrant background. The girls were very reflective during the discussion and they noted that the majority decided what 'right' and the minority had to adapt to the 'rules' in order to be accepted. Bullying was used to exercise control and dominance, and as an indicator of the right to define the rules (Potter & Wetherell, 1996). When asked why they thought the situation existed, a girl in this group who had a Turkish background, answered: 'Yes, they stick to their culture. They do not look at us as Norwegian people.' The most popular girls could depart from the rules, but this was not possible for the less popular girls. Thus, the popular girls had the power to decide and control the discourse. The members of the discussion group demonstrated clearly that their sense of belonging was closely connected to inclusion and exclusions, and that belonging is about emotional attachment and the feeling of being safe and 'at home' (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Although the girls in this group supported each other, we took time to process their feelings after having turned off the camera. We asked whether they needed any help from us, but they assured us that they did not. In order to ensure that no harm had been done to the girls as a result of their participation in the discussion, we noticed their contact teacher. She told us that she knew about the 'we' and 'them' conflict in the class, and that she paid a lot of attention to the situation. She ensured us that she would keep an eye on the girls after we had left the school.

Social and cultural practices – immigrant parents are 'used to something else'

In the above-mentioned focus group with pupils who had a Kosovar background, some said that their parents did not understand Norwegian culture or that they did not understand words describing some ‘Norwegian’ activities. For example, when the pupils told their parents that ethnic Norwegian peers were going to a party, their parents would ask: ‘Party? What is that?’ (Boy 1, Kosovo). Girl 2 from Kosovo stated:

I would like to have more close friends who are not foreigners. They could learn from me, and I could learn from them. But I do not believe that it would be easy to have a best friend who is Norwegian, because I believe they would expect a little bit more [from me] than I would be able to do with them. Many Norwegian girls attend parties and such things, and I am not allowed to do that. And then they might take offence because I cannot do things like that.

The pupils in this discussion group said that they had often noticed that there was something about Norwegian culture that their parents did not like. The pupils mentioned leisure activities, ‘challenging clothing’⁶, or girls interacting with boys, either as friends or sweethearts. Several of them understood their parents’ reactions, because ‘they are used to something else’ (Girl 2 from Kosovo). Cultural differences are central themes in young people’s everyday life and therefore it is important to discuss them. Cultural distance can make it difficult for children to talk about themes that their parents do not understand (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Young people would rather talk to someone who understands them, and some of the participants in the focus group discussions said that they had talked to their teachers about matters that were important to young people. It was interesting to learn how the young girls contextualised some activities as ‘Norwegian’, such as choosing their own friends, mingling with boys, and talking openly of love. The girls informed that they had talked to female teachers about such matters. Girl 2 from Kosovo, who had lived in Norway for 6 years, said:

Sometimes we chatter with the teacher, and talk about boys and things like that. This I cannot do with my mother, because I am not allowed to be out with boys that are friends or sweethearts.

The pupils said that siblings and friends with an immigrant background were important conversation partners because they had similar experiences and were aware of the challenges

⁶ The girls said their parents found that some Norwegian adolescents’ clothing styles were not acceptable in their culture.

they faced. There was solidarity between the young people with an immigrant background and I noted that they connected well even if they were from different cultures. A boy aged 15 years, who was originally from Afghanistan and had lived in Norway for 2 years, said:

We have a close culture ... so therefore we hang out mostly with foreigners who we have more in common with. I can chatter more with them than with the Norwegians (Boy 1, Afghanistan).

The utterance was directed towards peers from Kosovo in the group, and although the boy had been living in Norway for a relatively short time, his point was representative of many of the pupils in the study who spent time mainly with peers of an immigrant background. The experience of being in the same situation seemed to play a role in this respect (Beach et al., in this issue; Schwartz & Öhrn, 2012). Girl 1 from Kosovo, who was aged 16 years and had lived in Norway for 13 years, pointed to the girl next to her and said:

We have the same background, we are both from Kosovo and we know how it is there. We also know how our parents are and that they do not always understand us, but you cannot say such things to Norwegian adolescents. They just say: 'Hi, come and join us and go to the cinema', and they are allowed to go. Their parents drive them and they always get money for the [cinema] ticket. But I do not get money all the time, mum and dad often say 'no' because they want me to stay at home. This is how it is.

The girl interacted most closely with her friends who shared her Kosovar culture because there was a common understanding (Anthias, 2006; John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Yuval-Davis, 2006). She did not regard it as a matter of course to participate in activities with her ethnic Norwegian peers and she did not expect her parents to approve of such participation. She understood her situation, but found it sad that she was unable to talk to her Norwegian ethnic peers and to her parents about their cultural differences.

In some of the suburbs, few of the mothers spoke Norwegian and consequently had little or no contact with ethnic Norwegians. The pupils acted as interpreters when needed. This was especially the case when many families from the same country lived in the same neighbourhood. Some of the parents attended individual parent-teacher meetings at the pupils' schools, but few attended meetings where all parents were gathered. The pupils believed that

problems with learning and understanding Norwegian were the main reason for their parents' non-attendance. Many of the parents were poorly informed about their children's daily activities at school. Girl 2 from Kosovo, who was aged 15 years and had lived in Norway for 6 years, informed that her father knew that she spent time with her female friend from the same country. Her friend, Girl 1 from Kosovo, who was aged 16 years and had lived in Norway for 13 years, added, 'But it is not so that they always know what I am doing at the school, or what we are learning, and things like that. It is not like that.' Further, she said that they did not tell their parents much about what was happening at school, unless something special had happened. She believed that the situation was different for young ethnic Norwegians, and she was curious to know what happened in Norwegian homes:

I do not speak with my parents about the school and what happens there, except when we are going on an excursion or things like that, because then I have to tell them about that. But the way the Norwegians in my class do it, such as 'We did this today' and so on, no, I do not speak to my parents like that. How do you Norwegians do it? Is true that when you gather for dinner you talk about the school day and things like that? Is that normal?

We responded that what had happened during the day is often a topic of conversation during the evening meal, when family members gather. The girls listened attentively while smiling and looking at each other, whispering to each other behind their hands. When we asked why they were whispering, Girl 1 from Kosovo continued:

Dad sits by himself when he eats and I cannot be bothered to tell mum about what is happening at school because she is not interested in hearing about it.

In the discussion group mentioned above, the adolescents said that their parents did not understand what it was like to be a pupil in a Norwegian school due to the differences between the schools in their home countries and Norway. They also mentioned that since their parents seldom attended arrangements at their school, they missed opportunities to find out what was happening there.

Concluding remarks

The main focus of this article has been to shed light on different aspects of social and cultural practices with relevance to a sense of cultural belonging and inclusion in the case of young

people with an immigrant background, who live in an area where the majority are ethnic Norwegians. The main findings show that young people's experiences of belonging are mainly connected to their parents' culture, and that they lack membership of a social network among their ethnic Norwegian peers. Furthermore, findings show that the interviewed pupils seldom participated in leisure activities together with their ethnic Norwegian peers, and that they seldom participated in typical 'Norwegian' activities. The pupils experienced contradictory expectations between their home culture and their peer culture. Their lack of common frames of references in a new and partly unknown culture made it difficult for them and parents to communicate such experiences (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996).

The pupils came from cultures where family solidarity and traditions are important (McCarthy, 2005). According to the pupils, many of their parents were sceptical of Norwegian youth culture values, but the findings also indicate that the lack of a frame of references related to Norwegian culture might have restricted the parental understanding. Semiotic tools and conventions are developed in social and cultural contexts, and a person's understanding of what is happening either opens up or restricts their possibilities for participating in different cultural activities (Wertsch, 1998). The young people in my study expressed that they understood and respected their parents' cultural categories, and thus they were taking part in their parents' chain of utterances; ancestors' voices were living on in the children (Bakhtin, 1986; Wertsch & Stone, 1985). By expressing that their parents were 'used to something else', the pupils indicated that they themselves had developed a meta-perspective on their culture.

Many parents lacked a repertoire of interpretations in order to understand activities that ethnic Norwegian young people participated in (Potter & Wetherell, 1996; Wertsch, 1998). Since the construction of meaning is done on the basis of what one already knows, implicit patterns of meaning or inadequate tools may give room for misunderstanding in meetings with people of another cultural background (Rommetveit, 1985; Wertsch, 1998). Thus, it was problematic for the pupils to explain and obtain their parents' permission to participate in 'Norwegian' activities that their parents did not understand. Another interpretation may be that the parents *did* understand, but pretended not to, because they did not want their children to take part in those activities. Fundamental principles and categories may be relevant when valuing other people's social and cultural practices (McCarthy, 2005; Wertsch, 1991). According to Yuval-

Davis (2006), belonging is not just about attachments and constructions of individual and collective identities, but also about the ways these positions are valued and judged in society.

Normative conventions regulate the categorisation of what is considered right and wrong (Burr, 1995; Wertsch, 1991; Wertsch & Stone, 1985). As an example, I noted that the pupils reacted strongly when hearing Norwegian youth speaking disparagingly about their parents, such as saying that they ‘hated’ their mother, because in their culture it was unthinkable to behave in such ways.⁷ They therefore concluded that young Norwegians had little respect for their parents.

The pupils focused on issues of control, power relations, and ‘rules’ regarding inclusion and exclusion (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1996; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Given the fact that very few of them were invited to visit their ethnic Norwegian peers’ homes and that very few had ethnic Norwegian friends, the pupils’ general experiences of inclusion in ethnic Norwegian peer groups can be described as relatively weak. These division lines were also operational at school, where the pupils’ strategy was to create a sense of togetherness and belonging with other young people with an immigrant background (Beach et al., in this issue). They preferred the company of peers who understood them, but were sad that ethnic Norwegian peers put very little effort into understanding cultural differences.

I have shown that the sense of belonging common to young people with an immigrant background can take many forms. The pupils themselves suggested the importance of shared experiences, values, practices, but also social and symbolic ties that involved emotional attachment and the feeling of being safe and ‘at home’ (Anthias, 2006; Yuval-Davis, 1997; 2006). Their identities were composed of several chains of utterances and of polyphonic voices mixed with their own voices (Bakhtin, 1986). If the world around such young people is in balance and based on mutual respect for cultural differences, it might contribute to a sense of belonging that transcends cultural differences.

⁷ Even though the word ‘hate’ has negative connotations, it is often used as a rather harmless slang expression among Norwegian adolescents. The strong reactions to the usage indicate that it takes time to understand fully the meaning of expressions in a new language (Bakhtin, 1986; Rommetveit, 1985).

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