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Social Education and Inclusion in Primary Classrooms

In Denmark social education and inclusion is increasingly emphasized in the national curriculum of the primary school. The curriculum emphasizes that social education is developed through pedagogies, where the pupils are to be more active participants and take a greater responsibility for their own learning processes, and where the classification of knowledge becomes weaker. – I.e. from being demarcated strictly according to school subjects, knowledge is meant to be integrated in interdisciplinary topics and issues. But does the weaker classification of knowledge increase social education and inclusion in the school? On the basis of empirical research of pedagogic practice in the primary classroom (in Denmark), I am going to illustrate how progressive education conditioned by different social environments can be practiced in different ways and, on this background, discuss the above question. Thus, the main issue of this paper is to discuss the practice of the progressive pupil-centered methods and social education in relation to the social composition of the pupil group and social inclusion in the school.

Introduction

This paper will contain a preliminary analysis of findings from an ongoing PhD study, in which I am researching the relations between social education and inclusion of children in primary school life and their social background. The methodology applied takes its point of departure in social education being described and analysed through the concept of the hidden curriculum (Jackson 1968, Bauer & Borg 1979, and Broady 1981) and reproduction (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, and Bernstein, 1996 esp.) and follows a tradition of classroom research introduced in Scandinavia by Callewaert & Nilsson (1980). In the paper, excerpts from the whole study, including questionnaires, interviews, and observations, will be analysed. Thus, rather than focusing and elaborating on a particular methodical aspect of the study, I am trying to give an overview of its research problem and by excerpts of analysis show how the social composition of the pupil group matters, when considering the relations between social education and inclusion in school life.

Implicit in the hidden curriculum and theories of reproduction lies that any schooling is aimed at both education and socialisation processes, and that schooling will inevitably create both formal school knowledge and informal knowledge of norms, senses of belonging, and actual belonging or not belonging – of inclusion or exclusion in relation to school. The hidden curriculum recognizes the relationship between schooling and the larger society and questions the relationship between

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1 As the idea was to comprehend the double contextualisation of school culture and social background of the pupils, I combined a range of intensive data-gathering techniques. Thus the socio-cultural backgrounds of the pupils were examined through questionnaires (answered by the parents) and interviews with the pupils. The pedagogic interaction was studied by classroom observations (approximately 10 school days in each of the classes), mainly reported by handwritten notes by me and supported by some tape recordings (also transcribed by me). Focusing on the social educational aspect and on inclusion, I interviewed the teachers (three teachers at the A-school and two teachers at the B-school) of the respective classes about their experiences of teaching these classes, and interviewed the pupils of the two classes about their relationships to each other and to school life. The study was carried out by me from August 2002 to August 2003 - with approx. 3-4 months at each school.
school knowledge and social control. Thus perceived more or less synonymous to socialisation, the concept primarily focuses on the hidden, and, sometimes unintended, informal effects of schooling, whereas social education appears as that part of the formal curriculum that focuses on the intended effects of schooling, and concerns what is also considered in terms of good discipline, manners, moral education, citizen values, and democratisation.

Donald Broady (1981:128) has pointed out that the hidden curriculum was “hidden” with the introduction of progressive methods in schooling. With progressivism the open punishment system of the school was replaced by more hidden disciplining mechanisms that were aimed at reproducing the power relations in the classroom. Such power relations become visible through various rituals in the classroom and school life that remain incomprehensible if we see them as rational intentions of teachers and others, but become comprehensible, if understand them as practical devices for the maintenance of power (Broady, 1981:144). Thus the concept of the hidden curriculum marks a distinction between intention and practice. The power relations can be studied by the theoretical device offered by Pierre Bourdieu (1997), by which the classroom has a certain field character. I will regard it as a subfield to education, which is subject to struggles between agents equipped with different dispositions of habitus and capital. These struggles are about the increase of cultural capital – educational knowledge - as well as the definition of the symbolic capital in the field, in other words what counts as educational knowledge in school.

My basic assumption is that the social composition of the pupil group and the pedagogic practice of social education are interrelated and influence on the social inclusion and exclusion mechanisms of schooling more than the formal intentions. So, the paper addresses both the formal intentions of social education, appearing discursively as school objectives, and social education as the hidden curriculum, carried out in the pedagogic practice and leading to the inclusion of some children and the exclusion of others. Its focal question is: What does the social composition of the children group mean to the pedagogic practice, and what do the conditions offered by this practice mean to the inclusion of children in the primary school? The first part of the paper will focus on the formal and hidden curriculum as discourses of social education and inclusion in the Danish Primary School generally, and in selected primary schools and classes specifically. The second part will focus on the consequences of the power struggles in school and so, on analyzing examples of inclusion and exclusion of children in school life.

I. Curricular Discourses of Social Education and Inclusion

This part of the paper will trace discourses of social education and inclusion both in the national curriculum of the Danish Folkeskole and their local variations at selected primary schools and in the pedagogic practice of selected primary school classes. The particular analysis of the school

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2 By progressivism is referred to an education emphasizing cooperation, project organisation, and creativity (Broady 1981, p. 174) which in some ways is also what social education translates into, as will later appear.

3 This is the name of the Danish Primary and Lower Secondary School – merged in the comprehensive school, which comprises 10 years of schooling, from the age of 6 to the age of 16. For short, this comprehensive Folkeskole will subsequently in this paper be referred to as just the primary school.

4 The initial selection was due to personal contacts, with school teachers that showed a particular interest in developing the social competences of their pupils, at two different schools. But it was also considered important that the schools and classes showed great difference in the social composition of their pupil groups.

5 The socio-cultural parameters for the distinction of the children’s social backgrounds comprise their ethnic background, the type of accommodation they live in, the educational and occupational status of their parents (and grandparents), and the leisure time activities of the children.
classes draws on the descriptive language and code theories of Basil Bernstein (1996), which I will unfold in connection to this. His use of the term pedagogic practice is rather wide – as a concept of the fundamental social context through which cultural reproduction-production takes place (Bernstein 1996:17). It includes the saying and doing about schooling – the discourses and interaction, which is also the case in my study. Here the concept more specifically includes the interaction between teacher and pupils in relation to the discourses about teaching and the actual teaching taking place in the primary classroom, where the question of inclusion is interpreted as the participation in school work and social adaptation to school life.

Social Education in the Danish Primary School

The social educational intentions of the Danish primary school are characterised by emphasising democracy. In the last century, especially after the Second World War, democracy became a keyword in many relations, also in the school debate, where democratic education gained a footing. Since 1975, it has been stated explicitly in the objectives clause of the Folkeskole Act⁶ that the school is comprehensive⁷ and has to educate the pupils to democracy. Thus the virtues of freedom and democracy have been continuous and central elements in the school acts for half a century, but the content of these virtues has shifted with the political climate of the country. When dominated by social democrat currents, the element of democracy was emphasised through the core values of equality and equity, while the right-wing and liberal currents tended to emphasize the core value of freedom, understood as market freedom, and to associate with democracy the core value of individual freedom. These differences also relate to and reflect the different importance attached to the social – citizen values – as opposed to more personal values.

Back in the 1960s and 1970s there was a strong emphasis on equality. This was due to the existence of social inheritance increasingly being seen as a problem for educational policy in the welfare society (Rasmussen 2002:630). Social inheritance showed in the fact that recruitment to higher education and to academic secondary education was marked by social inequality. As pointed out by Hansen (1996), there were two separate reasons for seeing this as a problem. Education was to provide a chance for non-privileged groups in society to acquire resources to improve their welfare; and therefore, access to education should not be restricted by social inheritance or other barriers. However, it was also a problem for the optimal use of human resources in society. Economic growth, which was to be the basis of the welfare society, demanded that the ‘reserves of intelligence’, the many children and young people with good cognitive skills, should not be confined to unskilled jobs but rather be educated to higher and more valuable jobs.

Against this background, educational policy focused on the barriers preventing children from lower social strata from moving on in the educational system. One important barrier was the traditional culture of the educational system. The means to change this was to make educational institutions more culturally open and inclusive and to abolish internal divisions⁸ in the school system (like

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⁶ “The Folkeskole shall familiarize the pupils with Danish culture and contribute to their understanding of other cultures and of man’s interaction with nature. The school shall prepare the pupils for active participation, joint responsibility, rights and duties in a society based on freedom and democracy. The teaching of the school and its daily life must therefore build on intellectual freedom, equality and democracy”. (Chapter 1, § 1 (3) in the Act of 1993)

⁷ The aim of the comprehensive school was to make education accessible to all children regardless of ethnic, religious, social, and economic background, to provide general education and not prepare for any particular class, education, or occupation (Henriksen 2000:9).

⁸ With the Primary Education Act of 1975 the school had almost abolished streaming (apart from the division of a few subjects into basic and high level), and the children could remain in the same pupil group with the same classmates.
differences between ‘academic’ and ‘general’ streams). While the complete abolishing of the internal streaming was seen as one means for increasing the social inclusion, another means was the implementation of more progressive pedagogies. Both of these means were provided for in the law of 1993.

The Act of 1993 generally maintained the principles of the 1975 version – that is of a comprehensive school. But it also implied changes in certain ways, such as an alteration in the objectives clause, the introduction of compulsory project work on the upper form levels, and the final abolition of the subject divisions into different levels. It further stipulated the principles of teaching taking its departure in the needs and abilities of the individual pupil (differentiated teaching), interdisciplinary teaching, and more consideration of the weaker pupils. The objectives clause not only included the term ‘culture’ for the first time but also the words ‘Danish culture’, which was now on the agenda of politicians and government. This was due to ‘new’ Danes (immigrants) being increasingly seen as a threat to the social and national unity of the country, which the government tried to comply with, by supporting a strengthening of Danish culture in education. The other changes are seen by some (Winther-Jensen 2001) as reflecting a culmination of the child-centred pedagogies which were introduced back in the 1960s. Other have pointed out, that alongside this trend, in the past twenty years the political climate has increasingly favoured individuality and personal development through education (Mathiesen 2000:590).

It remains to some extent an open question, whether the social educational intentions of the comprehensive school of democratisation and social inclusion have been. On the one hand, research is showing that social and cultural reproduction has not been eliminated but still seems to function throughout the educational system. On the other hand, the same research refers to comparative studies that give reason to believe that certain types of policies actually reduce the social selection of education (Munk 2001:260). The difficulty of the above question is that intention is often paralleled to practice, which however is a parallel that cannot be taken for granted.

The Progressive Primary Schools

The ensuing description of the two school contexts is based on the interview with the head of school and written materials obtained from the school. It focuses on such parameters as the socio-economic basis of the school district, the organisational structure\(^9\), the school objectives and the values as regards social education. The interviews with the head teachers were conducted before collecting any other data from the schools, and each interview lasted approximately one hour. Quotations from the interviews are translated from Danish to English by me, and so are all text references.

The first school, which I call the A-school, is situated in a suburban area of one of the bigger provincial cities in Denmark (250.000 citizens). The area mainly consists of detached and semi-detached houses, and to a lesser extent public house buildings. The head of school emphasises that the school has only few social problems to deal with, as “the house prices decide what type of people live in an area” and concludes: “This is a very privileged school with many resources” throughout their entire school life - from the 1st to the 9th form (Olsen 1986:93). Furthermore, general education had become compulsory for nine years from the age of 7 to the age of 16, with an optional pre-school class, which the children could attend from the age of 5 or 6 (is now attended by approx. 97 per cent of all children).

\(^9\) Just as the organisation of the teaching is assumed to influence of the participation possibilities of the pupils, the organisation and management structure of the school is assumed to influence on the possibilities of progressive teaching.
(interview). As the house prices are relatively high in the area, it means that the pupils generally come from families with economic capital.

The school includes about 800 pupils, of mainly Danish origin, divided into 3-4 classes in every forms from 0 (preparatory school classes) to 9th school year, and 63 teachers. It was built in 1976 and consists of five houses, which organisationally function as autonomous units. The management structure of the school is described as traditional, i.e. main decisions are taken by the top management and implemented downwards. But organisationally the large school is divided into five smaller units, each of which contains 6-8 classes from potentially all form levels and 10-14 teachers. These units (houses) are described as autonomous regarding economy and in many ways regarding culture.

The school as such is characterised by “having a progressive and dynamic school environment, where there is a persistent critical debate, a continuous commitment, an extensive cooperation, and a tradition of participating in development projects” (cf. School Programme 2002/2004). From the School Programme it further appears that “the school aims at being more inclusive and showing consideration for the diversity of the pupils, as well as providing the possibility for strengthening such areas” and that “particularly exposed children should have the opportunity to receive help to handling problems, conflict situations and to cooperate” (ibid).

According to the head of school, the school is directed towards the transmission of “values”, and teaching is usually considered “in general themes, and there have been many alternative days at the school, where the timetable was not split up – thematic weeks and project weeks – and a great many development projects” (interview). He describes it as an intention of the school that the teachers will be cooperating in teams, working across form lines, and will be doing more of the administrative work as they will plan the ‘timetables’ themselves. When asked about the definition of good manners at the school, the head teacher emphasizes that he prefers to talk about social education and added “the school has no regulations in the old-fashioned way. That is, there are no regulations pinned up on a wall, but instead we prefer to talk about social rules of the classroom” and that “this school is not particularly orthodox – not that there is a resistance to changes (among the teachers), but they have a critical opinions in a healthy way” (interview). He refers to the fact that the teachers do not always share his visions of an alternative structuring of the school day, but according to his democratic understanding it is healthy to be critical and leave room for criticism.

The second school, which I call the B-school, is situated in a provincial town of about 40.000 citizens. The pupils here are from farms, detached houses, and public house buildings in the nearby area. It contains about 600 pupils, of whom 90 are immigrants (15 per cent), and about 50 teachers. The school is known for having a relatively high share of the immigrants in the local area, which according to the head of school leads to a certain amount of press coverage. According to the head teacher “the school is known as an ‘either-or’ school, that is to say that to some people we have the reputation that we have social problems and immigrants etc. etc. And we also have the reputation that we work a lot, because we have built up a lot of idealism throughout the years, you know, more than normally seen” (interview).

The building of the school was initiated in 1978 and gradually reached the present structure of five units (clusters). A cluster is a decentralised structure – in building as well as in organisational

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10 The media in Denmark are preoccupied with topics of immigrants and their integration into the Danish society, which has also become an important topic on the political agenda.
structure. Every cluster house contains two or three form levels (typically five or six classes\(^{11}\) and about 10 teachers). The teachers here have a monthly meeting, where they discuss matters of economy and in many ways are self-governing. The head teacher comments on this structure: “The clusters are self-governing in the way that once a year they have democratic elections where they elect a head of the cluster. And then the five heads of clusters form an executive committee that meets with us at the head office once a month, where we try to coordinate everything. So, in this way, the teachers are quite used to having a voice in the management, having influence, and also having direct authority in some areas” (interview).

The values of the school are expressed in the keywords: Responsibility, cooperation, respect, self-esteem, and subject knowledge. In addition to these values the head teacher attaches importance to such values as “tolerance, social understanding, creativity, emphasis on traditions (such as the daily morning prayers), and confident children as a prerequisite for learning”. Besides that he finds it worth mentioning the good cooperation among the teachers, which he has heard visitors to the school comment on. They notice that “one is welcomed and feels the good spirit” (interview). But the school is characterized by disapproving too much concern with image. The head of school expresses the attitude that things have to be tried out before they are advertised in the public. There is an active intervention (temporary exclusion of pupils) in cases of bad behaviour, which is defined as pupils that are disturbing the other pupils’ learning in the classroom. In the local area, according to the head of school, the school has a reputation of a dynamic school, which has some social problems to work with and which fosters a lot of idealism and hard work among the teachers. He is negative towards written principles, as he says: “It is our principle not to have any principles!” (Interview)

The schools are similar in their origin and building structure, which provides an opportunity for small communities (departments) within the otherwise fairly big schools. In both cases, the head of school is very proud of a tradition of cooperation among and between the teachers. Cooperation is generally understood in positive terms. There is a remarkable likeness in the way the schools regard and act towards regulation and authority. At the A-School, words like good manners and regulation in the old-fashioned way are abandoned, as they are seen to express a kind of orthodoxy. At the B-School, the renunciation of formulating general principles is another way of expressing an anti-authoritarian spirit. In this way, both schools distance themselves from the rhetoric of management, regulation and control, which is considered to belong to an old-fashioned, anti-democratic tradition. Rather than that, they adhere to the discourse of progressive pedagogy. This discourse is also rooted in tradition, but not the one of strong discipline as implicitly referred to by the head teachers. Instead this ‘tradition’ is silent about discipline and control and has an implicit understanding of power relations, which are formulated in terms of democracy and pedagogy.

Differences between the schools include the socioeconomic character of the areas from which they recruit pupils. The A-School is located in a suburban area of a city inhabited by people mainly from the intermediate layers and mainly of Danish origin. So, most children attending this school are from homes that are well-off with economic capital and many have cultural capital as well, although the latter is not always the case. The B-school has a different location, in a smaller (but still fairly big according to Danish scale) provincial town. With this location, it has a far more mixed enrolment of children, who represent both the lower and the higher level of the social spectrum. It includes many children with ‘social problems’, understood as language problems and low capitals.

\(^{11}\) It is legally decided that the number of children in a class must not exceed 28, and the average is 19.
in general, but also children from well-off families. In the local area (press coverage) however, the school is mainly associated with social problems, which to some degree stigmatize the school. The schools also differ in the way they are introduced in the public, which is probably, to some extent, connected to the above-mentioned locality and socioeconomic differences. The A-School is represented assertively as a dynamic and progressive school, which is updated on the most recent development. The B-School is implementing changes and visions as well but is less assertive in the public.

Summing up, the organisation and ethos\(^\text{12}\) (Denscombe 1985:61-63) of the schools are characterized by an origin in the early 1970s, when a lot of new schools were built in Denmark. The building and organisational structure invites to implementing the progressive pedagogies of the open classroom, group work, and cooperation among teachers, classes and pupils. But the schools position themselves differently in the social space (they market themselves as progressive in different ways), as their total amount of cultural capital differs according to the amount of cultural capital possessed by the pupils.

**The Pedagogic Practice in the Primary Classrooms**

The analysis of the pedagogic practice takes its point of departure in classroom observations of two primary school classes\(^\text{13}\). The classes will be analysed in turns and named according to their respective school contexts – the A-class and the B-class. The distinction between the collection code and the integration code, advanced in Bernstein’s code theory, is applied as an analytical tool to the understanding and distinguishing of the progressive practice. The collection code is based on a strong classification of knowledge, which means that knowledge is classified and taught according to school subjects, while the integration code is based on a weak classification of knowledge, such as thematic work and projects that integrate different knowledge areas. Thus classification refers to the degree of insulation between categories of knowledge, which is here understood in terms of school subjects. The more the integration code predominates, the more invisible (and progressive) the pedagogy. In the analysis of which code applies with what consequences, it is also important to look at the framing that, like classification, can be distinguished in terms of weak or strong. The degree of framing refers to what is being controlled by the teacher and the pupils respectively, and together with the question of classification refers to the question of organisation. The strong framing refers to a situation, where control is centralised with the teacher as in the case of plenary sessions, whereas weak framing refers to the pupils having more apparent\(^\text{14}\) control in the teaching situation.

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\(^{12}\) Martyn Denscombe (1985) points out that it is difficult to distinguish the impact of the school ethos from the impact of social class and social environment.

\(^{13}\) The school classes represent the school culture and the socio-cultural composition of the pupils at the respective schools. That is, the form teachers of the classes both emphasised the importance of developing the social competencies of the pupils, which from the outset was considered a progressive feature of their pedagogic approaches. In both cases, the teacher had been the form teacher of the class for the past four years and thus had a good knowledge of the children and how they were doing at school. Besides that, the classes were examples of classes considered to be well-functioning, meaning easy to get on with as a teacher. The pupil group had been fairly stable, all the children having been in the classes from the beginning of their school life. At the time of the research they were in the middle form level, year 5 and 4 respectively, where the pupils range from 10 to 12 years of age.

\(^{14}\) The word apparent indicates that the tasks might well be designed and decided by the teacher, but leaving certain aspects of decision or influence to the pupils, or simply giving them a feeling of control, hides the exercise of control by the teacher. This is a very central aspect of the hidden curriculum.
The A-class

The lessons given in the A-class are structured according to a timetable, which varies from week to week. But the weekly variations are mainly according to the content of subjects and only to a minor degree to the demarcations of subjects in relation to each other. The idea of the weekly timetable is to provide detailed information for the parents about the activities within and between the subjects. During the time of observation, the principal rule was that the boundaries between the subjects were clear. The subject boundaries appeared from the timetable, which was divided in time units of 20 minutes. But the subject and time unit was not one to one. Rather, a subject unit would cover two, three or four time units (times 20 minutes). The class normally worked within the boundaries of only one subject at a time. The only exceptions to this rule were observed in subjects of the humanities (Danish, history, and Christianity), which would sometimes appear as thematic work rather than as school subjects as such and would in some cases transverse the subject boundaries.

The generally strong classification of subjects appears from other circumstances within the actual teaching. The demarcations of subjects according to the timetable are intensified by different teachers taking care of different subjects - sometimes even situated in different locations. For instance such subjects like music, creative art, and P.E. are located to different places than the usual classroom. The boundary between lessons and breaks is significantly marked by the sound of the bell. But again there are exceptions to the rule, as the lessons sometimes include the possibility of games and play. When deviations are made from the usual timetable however, these happen within the boundaries of the subjects. It could be that the planned subject were replaced by another subject or by a topic that needed to be discussed, which would then happen in one particular subject lesson (subject unit).

Thematic courses usually take their starting point in the subject of Danish. With this basis, topic work was seen to include other subjects such as Christianity, history, and English. The English and Danish teachers cooperated on a “Self-biography” topic work, which took place in their lessons. And other such thematic courses or topic works were planned for later (according to the annual plan of Danish, history, and Christianity). The thematic courses are characterized by an interdisciplinary approach, which means that the boundaries between the subjects in these cases are blurred, and knowledge is more loosely defined than in the subject courses.

To sum up, the classification of knowledge in this class is not distinctly weak. On the contrary, according to the timetable’s distinction between subjects, different teachers taking care of different subjects, and different targets being planned for each subject, the classification is clear and thus strong. But there are elements of a weaker classification too – these appear from the not always clear distinction in practice between teaching and leisure time and from the interdisciplinary topic works in some subjects - especially the subject of Danish – that blur the boundaries between the subject and time units.

As the weak classification is only pronounced in the topic works of the humanities (mainly taken care of by the form teacher), the question of framing here will be exemplified by topic work. In the actual case, the definition of the content is fairly wide and very much up to the pupils to define. The topic work is initiated by a plenary session on class, in which the children decide on which themes are brought up and thus provide their own inspiration to the topic work. This plenary session is carried out like most plenary sessions in this class (and elsewhere), by the teacher asking questions, some children raising their hands, and the teacher deciding on whom to ask in what succession and
for how long. The teacher also decides as to which keywords are written on the blackboard and in this way attaches different importance to the utterances of the children. After the plenary introduction of about one quarter of an hour, the children have to work on their own for twenty minutes. During that time it is up to them to decide whether they want to work alone or with partners and if so, with whom, and where they want to sit while they are working (in- or outside the classroom). Generally, apart from the plenary teacher control, the frames are weak, as many decisions are apparently left open to the pupils.

In an observation, two days later, the two teachers that have planned and cooperate on the above course make a joint presentation of the framework for the topic work. Here they try to specify what they want the biographies of the children to contain. They exemplify on the blackboard, how the content can be organized, while emphasizing that it could be organized in other ways. Again, the children, whom are asked and when they are, bring up proposals that the teachers repeat in writing as keywords on the blackboard. The two teachers have a dialogue on the framework, while presenting it, and in this way demonstrate that the framework is negotiable. Thus, it is emphasized in the presentation that the content is not strictly defined in a certain way, that there are more ways of doing it, and that it does not have to be done in a specific order. In this situation, where the plenary session is carried out as a dialogue between teachers, the control on the teacher side is weakened, as they themselves are asked questions by the pupils that they (the teachers) have to negotiate between them before answering and in this way happen to strengthen the dialogic interplay with the pupils. But otherwise, in plenary sessions with only one teacher, the framing is strong, as this type of organisation depends on the teacher controlling the content (by asking the questions), the order of asking whom, the speed of progression, and the criteria of evaluating the answers (e.g. which keywords to select).

From the observations of all types of class hours in the A-class and partly inspired by Lindblad & Sahlström (1999)\(^\text{15}\) I distinguished between three organisational forms and estimated their relative importance in time. The tree organisational forms applied were: plenary sessions, individual pupil work, and group work between two or more pupils. My estimation showed that class hours were organised in plenary sessions 39 % of the time, as individual pupil work 29 % of the time, and as group work 32 % of the time. Considering the three organisational forms separately, the plenary form dominates quantitatively compared to the two forms of pupil work. But considering the distinctive forms of pupil work, as one category, this is taking place 61 % of the time. This is interesting in relation to framing, because the pupil work, whether individual or in groups, generally leaves the pupils more apparent room for decisions. Thus, the individual pupil work practiced in the A-class is often weakly framed. Many decisions, such as content, organisation and method (where they want to sit and whether to discuss the matter with someone else and so cooperate), how much time they spend on the activity (including homework), and the evaluation criteria have to be taken by the pupils themselves. The organisational form of individual work makes it difficult for the teacher to exert control and make sure that the individual pupils are actually doing what the teacher intends them to do. Unless they disturb the normal order of the classroom, the teacher is unlikely to interfere directly with what they are doing. By setting explicit evaluation criteria, the frames could have been strengthened, but these criteria in the above case are implicit too. The group work in the A-class is also weakly framed in a number of ways. Often the compositions of groups happen by chance – sometimes by lot – or are left to pupils to decide themselves. The most typical partner is the pupil sitting next to you, and often the group is constituted by only the two pupils sitting next to

\(^{15}\) Lindblad & Sahlström (1999) distinguish between plenary sessions and desk work, where for the latter I made the further distinction between individual and group work.
one another. Where to sit is partly decided by the pupils themselves, partly by the teacher. That is, the form teacher usually decides on the distribution of places in accordance with the preferences of the pupils. During most of the observation period the pupils of the A-class were sitting in pairs of same gender at each desk, and therefore also worked in groups/pairs as such.

All organisational forms considered, the A-class is primarily exposed to a weak framing. This is estimated on behalf of the observations, where the organisational form of pupil work with its implications of weak framing predominates. Also in some cases of plenary sessions, although usually characterized by a stronger framing, elements of a weaker framing appear.

**The B-class**

According to the timetable the school hours at the B-school are divided into lessons of 45 minutes and follow the traditional demarcations of school subjects - Danish, mathematics, music, etc. Only the creative subjects (needlework, creative art, and woodwork) are not taught according to such demarcations but are integrated as one unit (3½ hours on a weekly day). But according to the annual plans of each subject, thematic courses are planned and draw on interdisciplinary teaching and cooperation between teachers and several subjects, typically Danish and one or more other subjects. And in practice, topic work often spreads over more than one lesson and leads to the interchange of subjects or the blurring of subject demarcations, as the teachers let the class continue its work on an ongoing topic – sometimes responding to a spontaneous need of continuity. This spontaneous interchange or replacement of subjects is possible, because two teachers cover most of the lessons – and thus more subjects and more time - in this class.

In the B-class, the classification of knowledge is strong according to the timetable stating clear boundaries of the subjects in units and time. According to the annual plans of subjects and to the practice however, the classification is somewhat weaker. In practice the classification is stronger in the lessons taught by teachers covering only one subject. Against this, the two main teachers, one covering Danish and English and the other covering mathematics, history and Christianity, have the opportunity of more flexibility in handling their subjects. The timetable stands as a guideline to the teachers but is subject to alterations, and as a consequence the boundaries between subjects appear less clear. Thus the classification is weaker than its immediate timetable appearance.

From the observations in the B-class, in cases of a weaker classification, it appears that sometimes the framing is then stronger. Thus three cases illustrate how the teacher decides to relax the boundaries between subjects otherwise clearly classified according to the timetable. In the first two cases the teacher decides on and controls tightly, what the pupils are allowed and not allowed to do:  
- In the first case by reading aloud, which is an activity strongly framing and limiting the interaction between the pupils that have to be quiet and listen. Otherwise they will not be able to participate in the following conversation, which is determined by the reading and by the teacher.
- In the second case by deciding to go through the lesson on the blackboard (talk and chalk). This also leads to the teacher demand that the pupils have to keep quiet (which they have to be reminded several times) and accept the order of things – such as putting up their hands, if they want to say something, although this is no guaranty that they will be asked.

At the end of the lesson the pupils have to read and work on their own, which gives them more apparent freedom to act, as they can move around in the classroom and have quiet interaction with

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16 This is a weekly timetable, which is more or less fixed for the whole school year.
each other and with the teacher. So, in this third case the pupils have the greatest scope of action, as the learning activity is organised as group work. This impedes on the direct teacher control of content and what is otherwise going on, as the children to a higher extent are setting the agenda for what to do, how to do it and for how long, meaning that the framing in this case is weak. From these cases, it appears that the framing is tightly connected to the organisation of school work. Generally, the plenary forms are equivalent to strong framing. This framing however, depends on other things as well. For instance, the beginning of a school day is usually characterized by a weaker framing, although carried out as a plenary session. At this time the pupils are allowed to tell about events and experiences from their personal lives, and as these are individually framed, it is harder for the teacher to exert a direct control. Still, the pace is set by the teacher, who is controlling how much time is allowed for each individual.

The lessons in the B-class are organised as plenary sessions 57% of the time. That the plenary sessions account for this relatively great amount of time is a feature pointing to a strong framing of the pedagogic practice in the B-class. Individual pupil work and group work accounted for respectively 23% of the time and 20% of the time. But these organisational forms contain features that are also indicating an emphasis given to strong framing.

When the pupils work individually, the framing is weaker as such, but to each individual pupil the framing might vary. Thus it varies according to whom the teacher’s attention is directed towards. Some pupils have more scope of action, because the teacher’s attention is not directed towards them. Conversely, some pupils are more closely observed by the teacher, are receiving more help, and are, in some cases themselves, reaching out and asking for more help. This is particularly due in this class, as the form teacher has facilitated a closer attention to certain pupils by seating them in one particular grouping, where she can spend more time. In this way she differentiates her teaching in class according to the needs of the pupils (as they are perceived by her).

The group work is performed in groups that are set up by the teacher. Thus the pupils are sitting in groups that the teacher has decided for them, and usually group work implies that they have to cooperate in these groups. Only on rare occasions is it up to the pupils whom they want to work with. Otherwise, group work is usually well-defined in all aspects. Due to the fixed groupings and defined tasks (by the teacher), group work in the B-class is subject to a fairly strong framing. While formal group work, where the pupils have to cooperate on a joint task, takes place 20% of the time, informal group work is often taking place as well. This is the case, when the pupils are informally cooperating, helping each other, with tasks that they are asked to do individually. It seems to be encouraged by the particular organisation of the classroom, where the pupils are sitting in groups of four, facing each other, and eventually getting to know each other very well.

II. Social Inclusion in School Life
The question of inclusion or exclusion is dealt with in the perspective of cultural capital as applied by Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1984, and 1990 especially). The cultural capital in its formal version is defined as the possession of titles and exam papers, while it informally includes the sayings and doings of the dominating culture, the knowing of the right implicit culture, and the distinguishing between what is implicitly considered right and wrong in this culture. According to the theories of Bourdieu the educational system presupposes cultural capital, which it does not explicitly give to the pupils itself. Although the level of education is not in itself an adequate indicator of cultural capital, the analyses of Bourdieu show that the possession of cultural capital is tightly connected to
being educated and accordingly accommodates for a better adaptation to school life. Thus, the efficiency of the cultural transmission by the school depends on the pupils’ amount of cultural capital directly inherited from the family (1984:23).

Each analysis will be opened by an introduction to the class, where I will briefly characterize the pupil group and the “classroom culture”, based on my interviews with teachers and pupils, before I move on to the question of social inclusion and exclusion. This analysis will be approached in two steps: First, by outlining the form teachers’ accounts of what they emphasize in their pedagogies and how they perceive different pupils’ reception of it. – Secondly by regarding different pupils’ participation and positioning in class in relation to the pedagogic practice, as it appears by observations and pupil accounts.

The Homogenous School Class

The school district of the A-school in the former analysis appears as a semi-affluent suburban area. The A-class consists of 10 boys and 10 girls. There are no immigrant children in the class, where all the children are ethnic Danes. Thus the children have a fairly homogenous – middle class background with only minor variations. The variations include length of parents’ education, occupational and economic status and family size. There is a majority of semi-professionals among the parents, some academics and some non-skilled or manual workers. But all parents have some kind of education, which is only in a few cases a very short one. In all families at least one person is in work. Most families are small, and some are very small, because there is only one child or because the parents are divorced.

The teachers of the A-class say that they find this class easy to work with, as the pupils are not noisy and generally know what is expected from them. They consider the girls to have a positive influence on the social atmosphere and positive working spirit of the class, because a large group of girls in particular fulfil the teachers’ criteria for good school behaviour (teacher interviews). The distinction between boys and girls appears to be a prominent feature of the pupil group, which further seems divided along different lines of interests and in two major groups of the “well adapted to school girls” and the “less well adapted skater boys” (analytical categories).

The expressions of interests in the pupil group (pupil interviews) generally follow the above gender distinction. Most of the girls say they like going to school because of the normal attributions to school life such as subjects, teachers, and education; whereas most of the boys say they like school because of the breaks between the lessons. The favourite subjects of the boys are typically non-academic subjects such as P.E., where they are supposed to be physically active outside of the classroom. This line of distinction in the boys’ group is followed by all, except by two boys that are characterised by being seen and somewhat seeing themselves as outsiders in class.

The form teacher of the A-class describes that she prefers a diversified programme of teaching, which implies that the pupils get to cooperate and learn from each other:

“I think that careful change is good..., because different pupils are learning in different ways. There are, for instance, pupils in the class that are not able to learn from each other. There are pupils that are very good at learning from each other – to tell each other how and to explain and... That is what I find important – and then cooperation. In these situations, I find it important that we do not interfere – that we leave things to slide or not slide. That is probably what we find so difficult, because we always interfere at some point as we think that we cannot just let
this product fail. We have had some weeks where we had this kind of topic work, where we did not interfere. Where we said to the pupils, this is your project – we are here and you can ask us for help, and we would very much like to help you. But you have to ask us before we help you. Where it simply ended up with some groups of pupils not having made anything at all” (interview).

The teacher finds herself in a dilemma. On the one hand, she believes in a professional ideology of not interfering in the learning process of the pupils. On the other hand, she has the experience that when she does not interfere, some pupils are lost. But even if some pupils did not at this occasion live up to the expectations of the teacher, she still finds it important to engage the pupils actively in the classroom:

“I really think that it is valuable that they (the pupils) are actively involved in the process and that I am not just giving lessons and telling them, this is how you have to write it and so. – I mean I do that as well, but there also has to be something else” (interview).

From the above quotations some “hidden” expectations to the pupils appear. These include such elements as cooperating and ‘learning from each other’ by explicating what you know (explaining to others) and what you do not know (asking). This involves having a certain vocabulary and being assertive about your own needs and preferences, which in other words implies cultural capital.

The failure of the pupils not achieving anything in the above-mentioned topic work was followed up by the teachers having a talk with these pupils:

“(…) we had a talk with them about the importance of stating one’s opinion in the group and of knowing what you find interesting to investigate. You should not just… Well, it has to make sense – you cannot just light a fire for the fun of it. Well, this is a school, and we somehow need to do schoolwork – we need to investigate something, to study something. But whether it has helped them, I do not know. I know that other pupils in there have learned it. But these particular boys…”

The hidden curriculum appears, when the intention (the open curriculum) is that the pupils have to decide themselves what they find interesting. But in practice (the hidden curriculum) not all the interests of the pupils count as valid school knowledge. Schoolwork involves studying something that you find interesting, which again builds on the premises that you have a sense of what can be studied in school, that you know (have a certain knowledge about) what you want to do, and finally that you are able to articulate and state your own opinion (about the relevant matter).

The characteristics of the children that succeeded their school work under the weakly framed circumstances are described by the teacher as:

“(…) they have learned what going to school could also mean. And many of them think that they are studying! And if, for instance, I allow them a free choice, then they do not waste time. They set out to work, they will be doing something, and they know (interview).

While some pupils were considered to have failed understanding and working within the loosely defined frames, other pupils were considered to have learned it. To them the open framework was considered to be motivating, as they did not waste time, but set out to work, and they know. In contrast to them, the boys, who have not learned it, according to the teacher, need a firmer framework. One of these boys is called Johnny, about whom the teacher states:

“Johnny needs the kind of teacher, who is standing in front of him and telling him that now he needs to do this, and for that day he needs to do that. Then, he will always be sorting out his
things. But if you ask him to find out what he wants to do, or investigate something by own choice that he finds interesting to work with, then he is stuck” (interview).

And, Johnny is not the only one, whom the teacher finds, in need for a fixed framework to work within:

“More children in the class need to be taught in that way. So does Jan. He finds it difficult too, to keep himself going, to be self-determining, and to find an interest in a subject. (...) Well, anyway, they prefer to cooperate with somebody, where they have to do as little as possible. But then, this is probably caused by their feelings of inferiority in certain school subjects. They both had reading difficulties and were among the last ones that learned to read in the class. And Johnny, he has attended specialist teaching, so there is... - Well, I think, they feel unconfident that they can contribute acceptably in a cooperation with others” (interview).

According to the teacher, these children have difficulties in meeting the responsibility demanded by the open framework of the weakly framed teaching. As the main reason for such difficulties, she states their feeling of inferiority in the school subjects. Implied in this is that you need a certain basis of school knowledge in order to cooperate with other children and to take a share in the responsibility of lessons. The above children have not been ascertained in having the skills and knowledge required.

The pupils not succeeding the demands of the weakly framed topic work in the A-class are boys, whereas the pupils succeeding the best are girls. Other characteristics of the particular boys mentioned include that they are the only children from low income families living in small apartments, and none of their parents have an academic background. The girls doing particularly well have in common that they are coming from families with fairly big owner houses, having brothers or sisters, and that one or both of their parents have a university background.

In plenary sessions this pattern of participation is repeated. Generally, more girls put up their hands and answer questions raised by the teachers than do the boys. Those few boys who are actively participating are characterized by being the most dominating in social relations too, meaning that they play a central and dominant role in the breaks and have a certain prestige in the eyes of the other children (interviews). The character of participation also differs between girls and boys. The girls that put up their hands and get to say something will typically answer strictly to the questions asked by the teachers. When boys are participating, they are seen to raise questions to be answered by the teacher and to contribute with entertainment, cracking jokes or at least trying to amuse the other children.

In group work the great majority of the girls seem concentrated on the task, while the boys seem pre-occupied with other things. When doing group work outside the classroom which most of the pupils prefer to do, the boys’ groups are easily distracted by other things occurring, such as having a chat with people – other teachers or pupils from other classes – walking by (observations). When selecting partners for group work, the pupils in the class choose to be with somebody of the same gender and they prefer to be together with their best friend(s). They object when they are asked to work together boys and girls – sometimes so much that it has to be given up by the teacher (observations).

In individual pupil work the level of activity among the children varies greatly, and for the children individually, according to what kind of activity is dealt with. When they have written assignments
in mathematics for instance, they all seem to work diligently on the task. They alternately ask the teacher or other pupils (of the same gender). But when they have more practical work to do, such as experiments and creative tasks, the girls assume a more active position. They seem willing to offer their help to others, including the boys in these situations. Often the boys are the ones that ask for help, which the girls will provide. Within the boys’ group, there are exceptions however, to the above pattern. One such exception is Peter (middle class background), who is usually hard-working when working on his own, but who is not particularly well-liked in the boys’ group. He is socially excluded, because he is taking school too seriously. Among the girls, Janni experiences exclusion for the opposite reason.

The girls’ group is generally characterized by performing well at school and by taking a general interest in football. The only exception to this is Janni, who is not a football player. Nor does she display the same self-confidence about school as most other girls in the class do. Instead she tries to position herself by wearing fashionable clothes and by underlining her more advanced puberty. For the same reasons, many girls in the school class distance themselves from her.

The boys in the A-class generally try not to take school too seriously. They are split up into more groups, of which the dominating one can be ascribed an image of “skater boys”, because they attach importance to wearing skater clothes and being cool (e.g. towards school). Most boys however gather around the activity of playing football in the breaks at school, which means that football in a way is a ticket to their school class community. But some boys from the class are not socially included in this community. This goes for Peter, who is characterized by working diligently with school work on his own but not taking part in group works or plenary sessions. It also goes for John, who in spite of having some learning difficulties and attending special teaching activities takes school work very seriously.

**The Heterogeneous School Class**

The school district of the B-school can be characterized as a socio-economically mixed area on the outskirts of a provincial city. The B-class consists of children that are mixed culturally as well as socially. There are 12 boys and 8 girls in the class – of which three boys are immigrants and have a refugee background. Besides the immigrant children two other boys attend to additional special teaching. Socially the backgrounds of the children vary from the lowest classes to the upper middle class. Most children are from average sized or big families, with two parents and two or more children. Concerning education and qualification the span between the parents is wide. Six children have parents with higher education, 11 children have parents whose education is brief (skilled workers etc.), and four children have either unskilled or unemployed parents. The same span is reflected in the economic background, which appears from the housing conditions of the children that vary from fairly big owner-houses to public housing apartments.

The teachers talk about the B-class as socially well-functioning. They emphasise that the children are tolerant and display solidarity, openness and hospitality. One of the teachers ascribes this to the many activities between the children – across sexes and other differences – at school, while the other ascribes it to a group of children doing well at school exerting a positive influence in class. But still, a small group of children, among whom some of the immigrants, seem to participate less in the other children’s activities.
The B-class pupils’ expressions of school life (pupil interview) do not indicate any particular patterns of similar or different preferences. Their favourite subjects include academic as well as non-academic subjects, which goes for both boys and girls. Thus the particular preferences do not seem to follow gender or indicate any other groupings among the pupils, which differ from the A-class patterns, in which distinctions widely followed gender.

The form teacher of the B-class gives an account of her preferred way of teaching, in which group organisation plays a major role:

“I have the children seated in groups, so that in the groups they have a responsibility for each other. In that organisation, in the lessons we have had workshops, where it was possible to ask your group for advice, but you were not to disturb the group in which the teacher was working. And maybe I should add a few comments on the work in workshops. (...) By workshop is not meant to do something manual, but it is about practicing different exercises. It has been organised in the way that when we had double lessons, we had four different groups of activities of about 20 minutes’ duration. And then we had the clock ringing for shifts. Three of the groups were self-governing, and typically this would mean, in 1st form, one group would practice spelling words, one group would write in ‘My Own Book’, or would be drawing, and one group would be reading. And then, perhaps, one group would be doing something for fun, which might be outside the classroom. But different activities and a lot of practicing of meta learning, because in the 1st form this is what it is very much about – the meta learning of for instance spelling words.

And if you cannot work it out with the person you are sitting next to, you can ask the others in your group. But you should always remember that it is not only the teacher, who can be instructive. The talk that is taking place among the children is very instructive indeed. In the pupil cooperation, what happens is that, you have to formulate your thoughts about the problem you have, you ask your question, and you have a response on whether you are right or wrong. So a lot of things happen during that learning process. That is why cooperation in pairs is an important feature of education” (interview).

The teacher emphasises her intention of a diversified teaching - between ordinary class teaching and workshops (her name for group work). In the latter, the children could cooperate on tasks or do them individually. But they were encouraged to help each other in the group where they were seated, as they were not allowed to ask the teacher before other possibilities had been tried. In that way, the teacher is convinced; the children will learn to learn from each other, and so simultaneously, while learning to learn by cooperating, learning something else, such like reading etc. Workshops in the primary forms are characterised by small, well-defined, and –arranged tasks. It was the teacher who defined the content of these tasks, which would typically be to practice some kind of skills. The idea of appreciating each others’ skills was to be enhanced by encouraging the children to cooperate, which the teacher finds them really good at:

“(...) they have been really good at helping each other. The tight structure helps a lot of the children. (...) But then, we have some prearranged rules, before we start off. We have had some rules for how to behave socially. And if you cannot observe the rules, then the children knew that they would be sent out of the room and had to wait until they could. It is not like I, the teacher, should have to interrupt my teaching and get angry” (interview).

Although the activity of the children is important in this organisational structure, it is still a very tight structure. The tasks are strictly defined by the teacher, as they have to be adjusted by her to the actual schedule and the abilities of the children at the actual form level. Not only the task, but the children’s social behaviour is clearly defined and regulated by this structural framework. The
teacher also finds it important to be very consistent that the rules should be observed by the children. If they are not observed, the sanction is that the children have to leave the room. Thus she also tries to assure that the imperative for observing the rules is predefined by structure and not directly related to her personally as a teacher.

This teacher does not recall any problems related to her application of this professional ideology. In the ideology the structuring of pupil activities is strongly emphasized, meaning that the children’s scope of freedom (free choice) is smaller, as it is placed within preset structures. Accordingly, the teacher plays an important part in encouraging the children’s motivation and moral of learning. In the same way, she views it as her responsibility to teach the children to cooperate; she also takes the responsibility of matching the groups they have to work in:

(...) From the very beginning, I have...; there have been boys and girls in the groups. And then I have applied various other criteria. We have had groups, where they were really weak, which was the reason why I could spend more time with these. And they were... I might have asked the children in the class, if somebody wanted to be near, where I was. This was what; Ronnie often sought to be - probably so that I could help him getting started. He finds it difficult to find out his way. (...) For him, it is also a matter of knowledge, I think. Yes, because otherwise he would not get started. And then I have had a group of children doing well. And right now, they are somewhat mixed. No, I might have a group that is somewhat weak, because there is a group of only boys. They need some extra help from me, and then they also have a helpful classmate among them” (interview).

When deciding on the constellation and placement of groups, she considers such factors as gender and knowledge. She is aiming at mixed groups of both boys and girls and at having the opportunity of reaching the weak (concerning school knowledge) children. She refrains from having a fixed formula for mixing the weak ones and the ones doing well, but it appears that they are mixed and also have a regular change of seats. But her intention of mixing boys and girls is not accomplished for all, as there is a table of only boys. At this table, two of the immigrant boys are sitting, together with Ronnie and a boy, who is doing well at school and is described by the teacher as a helpful classmate. She considers that Ronnie’s need of getting started by her is also a matter of knowledge but is primarily due to him not finding out his way – i.e. not adapting to the school expectations that go beyond “knowledge”.

Generally, structure is very important to this teacher. She sets up clear frameworks for the children’s work, but within these the children are encouraged to cooperate with each other. The teacher tries to concentrate on the weaker children, and to let the well-doing children work on their own or in cooperation with each other. In this way, she differentiates her teaching. But she is also trying to be very consistent in her execution of the rules. And to exhibit this consistence, she has also got to be omnipresent in the classroom – to have eyes at the back of her head. She is very observant of differences among the children – differences of gender, of school knowledge, and of culture, which are used as criteria for matching the children in different groups. But although being very aware of it, she is not altogether consistent about that particular matter.

When some children, like Ronnie, to the teacher seem to experience difficulties with school work, she responds to this by attending more to them during lessons of pupil work. In that way these pupils are subject to stronger framing than other pupils in class. But then weak performances of school knowledge do not appear to exclude these pupils from participating in individual pupil work or group work. They participate at different levels or with different kinds of contributions. They are
seen to ask their classmates for help, and frequently the teacher too, and to contribute, sometimes with more practical matters, in group work. So in topic work that usually implies a wider definition of school knowledge, they have a more prominent position or at least appear as more equal participants to the others than in lessons abiding to strongly classified school subjects.

The pupils that need extra help, in and outside the classroom, include the three immigrant boys and further two boys of lower, working class background. These children are taken out of class regularly to attend special teaching and thus have a regular absence from the remaining pupil group. This physical absence from their regular classroom and the pupil group, which they are supposed to belong to, could weaken the children’s sense of belonging and impede on their adopting to the rules of this group. Most of the other boys are doing relatively well in school subjects, and so are most of the girls.

In plenary lessons about half the children (both boys and girls) of the class stand out as a more active group. Two children, the boy Ronnie and a girl named Lise, make themselves conspicuous by their, sometimes somewhat misunderstood, way of participating. When Ronnie says something in class, which he frequently does, he also fairly often forgets to put up his hand beforehand. Then he is commented on, for this omission rather than for what he has to say. Lise, on the other hand, is noticed for nearly always putting up her hand, but frequently says something which is out of context – and defined as out of context by the teacher. Now and then, Lise makes the conclusion herself, when asked by the teacher, that what she wants to say regards something else. Then she refrains from being called upon, but only to put up her hand and try again shortly after. She does not know how to distinguish clearly between right and wrong in the context. The girl generally seems to have an enormous need of getting into touch with the teachers. This has to be seen in the light of her recently having lost her father due to drug addiction and her mother seemingly not offering her much school support either. But in the plenary sessions especially, Lise’s behaviour seems to annoy the teachers, who respond by not asking her when she puts up her hand. The form teacher is well aware of this problem and tries to deal with it by bringing it up as a discussion topic for the whole class, when practicing one of the regular circle discussions. Here the pupils are asked to discuss various problems like this, in pairs of mixed gender, and afterwards each pair is to contribute with their solution in the circle. At this occasion, some pupils display a sense of solidarity towards their classmates involved by aiming their solutions at each other as well as the teacher.

In group work the mixed ability groupings seem to enhance the participation of the pupils with reading difficulties and other difficulties concerning the school subjects. In some ways this mixture also enhances the participation of the stronger pupils that are seen to take a special responsibility for the product of the group and a social responsibility for its members, when they have their oral presentations in plenum. At these occasions the stronger pupils tend to take over. The mixed gender and school ability grouping is not completely consistent though, as one group consists of only boys and has a majority of weak pupils. This allows and necessitates the teachers to spend most of their time at this group, which they clearly do.

When working individually the pupils, due to them always sitting in groups, tend to cooperate on many matters too. The group seating seems to enhance pupil cooperation, which perhaps goes for the general associating with each other too. Thus it seems that the distinction between boys and girls is not pronounced in the school work of the B-class. Both boys and girls participate actively, no matter how it is organised. They cooperate across gender and other distinctions, e.g. as to abilities or background, which work across gender.
A small group of pupils, consisting of two girls and three boys, seem to have a fairly dominant position in class. The dominating pupils of the B-class are conscientious about their school works and the responsibility that follows from their dominant position, which they seem to be fairly aware of. That the dominant group consists of both boys and girls might have an integrating effect on the communication across gender among the pupils in class. Thus in the breaks and outside school, boys and girls together seem to do a lot of things, in which most of them participate. But, against this picture of successful integration and inclusion, five boys, the ones attending extra teaching, are generally less active in this class community. They participate on occasions but stick together on these occasions and in general, because they define themselves as different and are defined by the others as having different interests. It is not that these interests are not accepted by the others – they just seem to follow different paths and, in this way, exclude themselves.

Concluding Comments

This study on the progressive, primary schooling in Denmark suggests that the progressive child-centred education, though originating in the same Danish tradition, differs according to socio-cultural contexts. The case schools in the study both understand themselves as progressive and non-authoritarian. Their pedagogical understanding seems deeply rooted in an egalitarian thinking and critical tradition, whose main task is to further the democratic dialogue. It further builds on the premises that we are all equal and have some communitarian interests that can be agreed upon through discussion. Democracy in this tradition is linked to a harmonious – non-conflict - understanding of society. It is primarily seen as a lifestyle - culture, for which reason the rules of it are implicit. This implicitness however is seen to complicate the social inclusion in classrooms. Some children are implicitly ignorant of the “right”, implicit, cultural knowledge, and, at the same time, it is impossible to initiate these children in that knowledge without explicitly saying 'what goes without saying'. An explicit statement would cause a difficult situation for the teacher regarding her democratic identity and the ideal of the school as a community ruled by dialogue instead of detailed regulation.

This discursive adherence to democracy and progressive pedagogy is noticed in the pedagogic approaches described and practiced by the teachers. They favour cooperation among the pupils, but in various ways they also emphasize strong pedagogic structuring. In so doing, they differ in their way of viewing and practising structure as follows.

In the school class (A) where the pupil group is socially, relatively homogenous and the children generally well equipped with cultural capital, the teacher displays a certain ambiguity about structuring. She regards it somewhat as a necessary evil that she has to apply to make the weak ones work. But, it is her general opinion that, the personal freedom and individual choice of the pupils in general should not be restricted too much. Rather, she finds it important to encourage them in studying on their own. The pedagogic practice in the class is characterised by a generally strong classification with only few elements of weak classification in the cases of topic work. As opposed to the strong classification, the framing is generally weak. This appears from 61% of the school hours being devoted to pupil work, while plenary lessons account for 39% of school hours. The pupil work, whether organised individually or in-groups, leaves many decisions open to the pupils and therefore is subject to weak framing.
The teacher of the other school class (B), which is characterised by its socially mixed pupil group – with more children having a disadvantaged social background, generally finds structure important. She is very explicit about her ideas of structuring – describes her ideas of a specific organisational structure - and sees it as a way of facilitating the learning of all ‘her children’ in class. The pedagogic practice is also generally subject to a strong classification of knowledge. However, elements of weak classification frequently occur, and more so than in the above case. Compared to the A-class, the classification in this practice is weaker, while the framing is generally strong. The strong framing appears partly from plenary lessons accounting for 57% of the time, partly from group work and individual pupil work generally being fairly tightly structured by the teacher. The structuring includes pacing and framing the tasks and, quite often, deciding for the children whom they are to co-operate with. In this way the teacher paves for a more explicit pedagogy. In other words, the rules of the game are more pronounced in the B-class than in the A-class, where the rules, with reference to personal responsibility and freedom, become very implicit.

But none of the pedagogic practices are progressive in a radical way, as they maintain an overall adherence to the traditional classification pattern in school and its understanding of, what goes as valid school knowledge. Thus in both cases the collection code is predominant – knowledge is clearly divided into school subjects and fixed according to a timetable. Only in some school subjects, which notably do not include math but in both classes include the subject of Danish, elements of an integration code occur. The integration code appears more significant in the socially mixed practice, where it is facilitated by certain features such as fewer teachers covering more subjects and creative elements being integrated in otherwise academic subjects. When the integration code predominates, both classification and framing is supposed to be weak. But in the socially mixed class the framing is not uniquely weak, whereas in the school class that appears more homogenous as to the pupils’ generally higher amount of cultural capital, the framing is generally weak – both in cases of weak and strong classification. Here many decisions are seemingly left open to the pupils, including the definition of relevance, which is a matter of cultural capital, that the school does not explicitly provide the pupils with.

Thus, the practice of leaving the pupils to decide on many matters themselves builds on some hidden premises such that going to school implies studying and investigating – gaining knowledge. But the knowledge implied regards a particular knowledge because, as the teacher said, “you cannot just light a fire for the fun of it”. The practical knowledge of lighting a fire does not count as valid knowledge in school, although the terminology applied in topic work is usually very strongly related to the practical world. In school, valid knowledge is abstract and related to the world of symbols, which however is not obvious to all children. This goes especially for some of the boys that are only children, from low-income families, living in small apartments, and whose parents do not have an academic background. In contrast, the children knowing what going to school implies are mostly girls coming from families with fairly big owner houses, who have brothers or sisters, and whose parents have a university background.

In this class a cultural divide has developed between boys and girls, whose degree of inclusion in schoolwork consequently differ. The possession of cultural capital has become a matter of gender, because the gender divide between girls and boys – the cultural divide between the “doing-well-at-school girls” and the “skater boys”(anti-school sub-culture) is just as much a social divide. The teacher’s practice - of separating girls and boys in group work etc. - reinforces the cultural divide according to gender and the accompanying school stratification. The gender division in two cultures means that some pupils are socially excluded from the cultural group they ‘naturally’ (due to
gender) belong to. The kind of social exclusion experienced by these children does not directly translate to exclusion in relation to school life. But the generally strong gender divide that is not discouraged by the pedagogic practice might render the cultural inclusion of the ‘weak’ – concerning cultural capital – boys more difficult.

Conversely, the social consequence of the strongly framed schoolwork (combined with the weak classification) is that all pupils somehow fit in somewhere – can somehow match the expectations of school knowledge. This pedagogic practice, which also finds a strong personal exposure by the teacher, is contextualised by the social diversity of the pupil group, by some of the pupils clearly having less cultural capital, and adapts to this diversified composition by differentiating and mixing (e.g. mixed ability groupings). The practice seems to entail increased and widespread participation in group work, where it directs different tasks to different pupils. Moreover individual problems are treated as a matter concerning the whole class, discussed in a combination of teamwork and plenary sessions, and not distinguished according to gender or else. Consequently perhaps, the willingness to help each other and the tolerance of differences (few conflicts in class) seems to persist despite social and cultural differences of the children. But when this is said, social exclusion takes place in this practice as well and happens despite all good intentions. In plenary sessions especially, when the framing is also strong, some children cannot distinguish and fall through. And the group around the immigrant boys seems to exclude themselves from the joint pupil activities that take place in breaks and as outside school activities. This self-inflicted exclusion is however reinforced by the school – by the special teaching and seating arrangements, which has the consequence that they stand out as special.
References


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