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FRAMING NARRATIVES: YOUTH AND SCHOOLING, SILENCING AND DISSENT

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Abstract

As completing upper secondary school has become increasingly important for young people to take their place in society, the problem of school dropout has prompted extensive research to identify the decisive underlying individual and school-based risk factors. However, less attention has been paid to interactions between individual students and institutions (Bunting & Moshuus, 2017). Such a shift redirects our attention from seeing dropout as an accumulation of risk factors (Rumberger, 2011) towards a focus on the processes leading some students to drop out (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009). From this perspective, this paper explores how interaction frames and silences those young people that drop out (Fine, 1991). Based on ethnographic narrative interviews, this qualitative longitudinal study explores schooling experiences through young people's own accounts. The interpretation of the data reveals issues of young people having a voice or being silenced, staying, and completing school or being excluded from school as silenced individuals or (less frequently) as outspoken dissidents. The study explores how these young people frame their narratives, as this factor seems to contribute to diametrically opposed outcomes (dropping out or completion). The findings indicate that young people who employ similar negative frames to describe their interactions both at home and at school are the most vulnerable to dropping out.

Keywords

Youth, dropout, school, narratives, silencing

Introduction

"*When I went to primary school, I was beaten up several times a week*." Erik told us this as he explained that he struggled at home as well as at school. Erik is one of the young people our research project will follow for 10 years as he progresses through education to take his place in adult society.[1] We first spoke with Erik because he fit the social category of being at the margins of upper secondary school in Norway. While we cannot be sure of Erik's future trajectory, we fear he will end up in another social category – one that is sometimes labelled 'dropout.'

A recently published special report in *The Economist* on youth (Guest, 2016) illuminates Erik's predicament. The report was global in scope and concluded that while young people do better than their parents in almost all respects, they face one major challenge: an increasing scarcity of jobs. To find a job, they need an education, and youth who struggle at school risk failing to complete upper secondary school and so ending up outside the labor market. We argue here that while some of our informants will eventually find paid work, Erik and others are at risk of a jobless future. Our general question, then, is: What leads young people to such different outcomes? To explore this issue, we look to Michelle Fine's classic study of the processes behind school attendance – and, in particular, dropping out of school among students from poor minority families attending a comprehensive high school in New York (Fine, 1991).

Following Fine, we can conceive of youth attending school within particular cultural contextualizations (Geertz, 1973), or, in Fine's terminology, within particular *frames*, as in the title "Framing Dropouts." In a nutshell, her argument is that while school provides some students with the necessary context—that is, the required frame—for learning, others (usually poor students) experience school as a rigged game, framed to their disadvantage. Adopting this frame/framed distinction for the purposes of the present argument, we first present partial narratives from a number of encounters. We then try to envisage the contextualizations (frames) in which these young people find themselves in order to understand how these sometimes appear rigged (framed) against them. Our contribution emphasizes the importance of also including young peoples' interactions outside of school as crucial in understanding why some end up completely disengaged from school.

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Background and research

Young people's future lives as adults are linked to their school career, which will determine whether they find work, where they can live, and their ability to participate in society (Baker, 2014). For that reason, reducing the high dropout rate in upper secondary school has become a challenge to be addressed in many countries (Woodman & Wyn, 2015, Arnesen & Sørlie, 2010; Frønes, 2010; Falch & Nyhus, 2011).

In Norway, upper secondary schooling is not compulsory, but youths are entitled to attend school from 16 to 21 and compete for a place in the study program of their choice on the basis of their academic achievements in lower secondary school. There are 15 study programs in two streams: three general programs leading to higher education and 12 vocational study programs. The latter stream is known as the "2+2 model," comprising two years in school and two years of apprenticeship (Markussen, Frøseth, & Sandberg, 2011).

According to national statistics, 73% of young people in Norway complete upper secondary school, but this includes only 59% of those in the vocational strand (55% of male students) (*Statistisk Sentralbyrå*, 2016). Of those in the vocational stream who drop out, most are more likely to finish between rather than during school years (Markussen & Seland, 2012, Markussen, Lødding, & Holen, 2012). Dropping out occurs mainly after the second year, prior to the apprenticeship. This can be accounted for by a structural blockage in the system (Markussen, Frøseth, Lødding, & Sandberg, 2008; Markussen, 2014); while the county council owns the two first years, employers own the apprenticeship placements and choose who they wish to employ, leaving a significant number of young people behind.

Young people who are successful at school are more likely to be the children of parents with higher education and a good income (Falch & Nyhus, 2011; Markussen, 2014; Sletten & Hyggen, 2013). A child's socioeconomic background influences their success at school in terms of engagement and grades, which again influences how they cope with upper secondary school (Rumberger, 2011; Markussen, Frøseth, & Sandberg, 2011, Alexander, Entvistle, & Kabbani, 2003). Gender also influences completion; girls are substantially more likely than boys to complete their schooling (Markussen, 2014). To date, researchers have typically adopted one of two perspectives in attempting to understand the causes of dropout (Bunting & Moshuus, 2017). The first of these perspectives views dropping out primarily as a function of individual or structural problems that force young people toward the margins and so this perspective seeks to identify precisely the various factors involved in dropout (Rumberger, 2011). The second perspective focuses on the interaction between individuals, the structures, and processes that precede

dropping out. Here, the general finding is that dropout ensues when a young person is unable to understand the embedded language or dominant culture at their school (Fine, 1991; Brown & Rodriguez, 2009). The first perspective depicts those who drop out as part of a social group of marginalized losers defined by "an array of factors." The second approach more often describes those who drop out as opposing or even rebelling against their situation.

Brown and Rodriguez (2009) have argued for a need to shift the focus of research from risk factors to "the everyday experiences of schooling from which [youth] deduced that going to school was not in their best interest" (p. 221). They argued that it is too easy to end up debating the importance of various risk factors while some of our young people withdraw from school and find themselves outside the labor market. Instead, we need to understand how institutional factors and individual experiences play out in the everyday processes of schooling.

This was indeed the focus of Willis' (1978) seminal study *Learning to labour: How working class kids get working class jobs*. Willis' ethnographic fieldwork showed how informal communities develop among young people ("the lads"), creating a sense of belonging and friendship that leads to a shared resistance to life and activities at an upper secondary school in an industrial town (Hammerstown) in the UK in the 1970s. In Fine's study, more than 80% of students entering Comprehensive High School in New York in the late 1970s had not graduated by 1985 (Fine, 1991, p. 35). However, while Fine (like Willis) also adopted an ethnographic approach, she focused on the system rather than on informal communities of resistance among students. The school was negatively characterized as a system that produced school-leavers by "silencing" students (p. 31) and "exporting dissent" (p. 50). With strict adherence to the principle of equal opportunity, the school's generous admission practices were intended to make higher education more accessible for all. However, in practising this equality, the school culture failed to connect with the home culture of most of its students and so produced unequal outcomes. To illustrate this point, Fine quotes one of the students: "When my Momma comes and they show her no respect" (p. 24). Willis' study has been criticized for paying insufficient attention to students (the so-called ear'oles) who managed through their schooling to break away from their working class backgrounds to find middle class jobs (Griffin, 2011). In contrast, Fine's study can be criticized for its excessive focus on systemic determinism (Page, 1994). Nevertheless, both studies are valuable in highlighting how young people move through education within particular cultural contextualizations (frames) that are advantageous to some but not to others.

Methods

The shift in research on understanding dropout from focusing on identifying risk factors towards the interactions that make up young people's daily lives has had an impact on the methods used. Dorn (1993) argues that in order to study dropout as a socially mediated phenomenon, one must understand how dropout is related to and formed by social norms and regulations. In order to record youths' own stories about dropping out of school, both Jonker (2006) and Tanggaard (2013) interviewed young people. What they found was that young people will tell different stories to different audiences. Jonker contends that interviews are like photos of the conversations we have, at most capturing moments in the interviewees' lives, and labelled them photographic snapshots (Jonker, 2006, p. 123).The present research is a longitudinal qualitative study that follows a number of young people over a 10-year period, based on data from individual ethnographic interviews and field notes. The indirectness of ethnographic interviews (Spradley, 1979; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007) engages informants in conversations in which both questions and answers develop out of the informants' context. Using this indirect approach (Moshuus, 2005, 2012; Moshuus & Eide, 2016), every interview starts with small talk, using the interactions that precede the interview to initiate a dialogue focusing on the unique personal experiences of each informant. To this end, the interviewer makes follow-up responses to enable the informant to tell their own story in the words of their choosing (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

The study is now in its third year; this paper is based on the two previously completed rounds of interviews and field notes. All interviews were transcribed and then coded in Nvivo. In the first round, 71 youths were interviewed who were either at school or in the welfare system. All were aged between 16 and 21 and most were male. They were recruited because they were at risk of dropping out and abandoning education (Markussen, 2014). Some participants were not interviewed in the second year of the study. Of these, only a few wanted to leave the study permanently; others were either unavailable at the time or difficult to contact for such reasons as being in the process of moving or having changed their address.

The interviewees referred to herein were among those interviewed twice. Participants who did not grow up in Norway have been omitted, as they could not talk about relevant primary school experiences. We also omitted those whose childhoods had been exceptionally difficult, involving for instance foster homes or schools or institutions outside the Norwegian educational system. Their stories are important, but here we want to understand the marginal schooling experience of young people with backgrounds shared by the larger community. As the indirect research approach allowed informants

to choose the stories they wanted to tell, some did not include descriptions of their childhood or school, and these have also been omitted, along with those used extensively in other articles.

To ensure equal representation of participants from school and the welfare system, we selected four young men: Erik, Asgeir, Anton, and Trond. Two were still at school and two were on welfare. This yielded eight interviews and eight sets of field notes; some were quite detailed, talking about school and home, while others gave only glimpses of what their experiences were like.

In the following section, we present partial narratives from the interviews, interspersed with summaries of longer sequences in order to reproduce some of the complexities of the dialogues in the interviews. In terms of any measure of interview validity, we have no way of ensuring that the interviews represent the only story of each informant's relationship to their schooling (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). But by presenting the produced narratives in this fashion, we are endeavouring to introduce a level of interpretative complexity that will allow us in the following section to enrich our guesswork of the possible meanings and perceptions of our informants' schooling and, perhaps more importantly, their ways of framing their lack of schooling (Geertz, 1983). We do so in the hope of demonstrating that a relational perspective needs to be complemented with a perspective focused also on their interactions outside of school. Or as Fine (1991) would argue, most young people go through their schooling within certain meaningful frames, but some are also framed by these contextualizations. We will argue that the silencing does not stop at school. The really troublesome framing happens when the silencing at school extends also to other areas. The following narratives shed some light on how that happens.

The Narratives

These four young men, Erik, Asgeir, Anton, and Trond, are all very different. What they have in common is that they have all experienced difficulties at school. We cannot explore all of their stories in depth here, so we will start with presenting more in detail part of Erik's account of his life at school and at home. The other youth's stories will follow, supporting and emphasizing experiences similar to or different from Erik's.

Erik's story

We met Erik for the first time while he was attending a course at his local welfare office. In the interview, Erik moved quite quickly to describe his experiences of school and especially the bullying he had endured.

> *I was bullied at primary school and lower secondary school, for 10 years at school. When I went to primary school, I was beaten up several times a week. So if, for example, I was going to read aloud in class, I struggled a lot with that before starting lower secondary school, reading and things like that, I stuttered a lot and didn't quite manage to read the words. It was all jumbled. So, then I often read incorrectly and slowly, and people often laughed at me. What is worse, the teacher I had for that lesson didn't do much to stop them when they laughed at me.*

Apparently, the bullying started around fifth grade and continued until Eric finished lower secondary school at 16. In addition to being bullied by his peers, he also described being ridiculed in front of the class by his teachers, who made him read aloud in spite of his stammering. The teachers also knew about the bullying, which made it worse for him. Later in the interview, he said that the teachers would interfere only if the bullying became physical; when others in classed yelled at him with disrespectful labels, the teachers ignored it.

> *I think that it is almost the school's fault that I have dyslexia – I think that, to a large extent, the reason I have dyslexia today is because I was bullied. … School should be a safe and good place to be, but perhaps it isn't? You are supposed to learn there, but you face a different challenge in your daily life there, where perhaps you start thinking about other things and become demotivated because you are being bullied. And distracted because of it, and lost sort of—how can I put it—the glow or the energy to actually bother, in a way. If the school or the teachers had been better at forcefully stopping the bullying at primary school, I don't think I would be struggling so much with the dyslexia today.*

Erik described how the bullying affected his school life. Looking back, he could see how this affected his ability to concentrate as well as his motivation. When we asked him if any of his teachers had supported him, he mentioned a female teacher he had had for six months in eighth grade who had tried to help him as much as she could, but who left in the middle of the year on maternity leave.

Throughout the interviews, Erik talked a lot about his family, telling us that he lived with his mother, who is on welfare. He made few references to either his father's or stepfather's profession or work. He said that there was a lot of quarrelling, especially when the family did things together. But he also told us that he loved being with his family:

> *My family is important to me in the way that we have grown up [together] – my sisters and my mother, who are very concerned that we show love, that we care about each other, support each other and things like that.*

Erik excluded from this equation his father and the stepfather he grew up with. His sisters and mother were the ones who supported and cared for each

other. His parents had split up when he was a couple of years old, and his relationship with his father was complicated:

> *My dad—my real dad—he is probably well on his way to becoming an alcoholic. … My stepfather, who has been my stepfather for 16, 17 years, he has probably been more of a father to me than my real dad has been.*

In this way, Erik introduced the men into his narrative, but he made it clear that his biological father was distant and that he should probably call his stepfather "father." However, his relationship with his stepfather was complicated. Erik described him as follows:

> *It's true that he has been very strict, perhaps both physically and psychologically, so I have struggled a bit because of how he has been. But it isn't only negative; there are also some positives – for one thing, I have become a calmer person.*

He went on to defend his stepfather, saying that he was a difficult child: "I wouldn't be surprised if I had ADHD." At another point in the interview, talking about how it was at school, he again described experiences with his stepfather.

> *I: How was it growing up, then?*
> *E: No, it wasn't very easy because I had it quite tough at school, and I was very angry and frustrated when I came home from school, nearly every day. And then, almost as soon as I came home, I was scolded by him [stepfather]. Yes, he looked for things I did wrong, to yell at me and so on. And it wasn't that easy when I had it so hard at school, and then I came home, and then, in a way, I got even more. So it wasn't very easy, it wasn't…*
> *I: Was he like that towards your sisters?*
> *E: No, he was mostly like that towards me. I was a little bit… I was a little bit difficult when I was a child. A little bit naughty, you could say. Not at school – fthen, I was very proper and quiet. But when I came home, because of the bullying, my anger came out because I was with people who… yes, who knew me well and loved me I know, and things like that. So it was a little difficult, a difficult situation, and it is a bit hard to explain, too. But my anger came out when I was at home. And perhaps that is partly why he was so strict.*

The struggles at school clearly influenced his home life. Feeling safe at home, he let it all out there – his anger, frustration, and outrage at being treated in that way. However, he could not let himself go; he had to hold back and felt he was not allowed to show his true colors. Instead, he had to be cautious as he knew his stepfather would challenge him about the smallest incident; as Erik said, "*He looked for things I did wrong.*" As mentioned above, he felt close to his mother, and in the second interview, he also spoke about how important she had been to him in managing being on welfare and trying to escape from that situation. However, she had not always been able to be there for him – *f*something that Erik kept returning to in both interviews:

Quite a few years ago, she was in an accident in which she damaged her back and neck. She tried to work as much as she could but was working less and less because she couldn't manage. In the end, she worked so little that she might just as well be on welfare.

This was a very serious accident that happened when Erik was young – about the time when he said the bullying and dyslexia started. This accident changed his mother's life; although she tried, she was no longer able to work. It also changed his own life, and he struggled both at home and at school.

Anton's story

Bullying is mentioned by quite a few of our informants. When we met Anton, he seemed to be a pale and shy young man. His teacher, who accompanied him to the first interview, privately advised us that she considered him a weak student. Anton lives with his mother and they are close. She is a professional cleaner; his father, now retired, was a trained marine machinist. His parents divorced when he was young, and he has had regular contact with his father. Anton is the youngest of three; his siblings, who are much older, have completed their education. He had returned to school after dropping out before, and he was still at school when we met him for the second time.

Anton experienced bullying when he moved to a new lower secondary school. He said he was different from the others and shy, with no friends. He struggled to talk about it, holding back. But when asked if the teachers helped him, he said they did so when the bullies became physical but not when they were verbally abusive. Anton also struggled to get to school on time, which also became an issue.

A: I had a lot of absences.
I: Yes.
A: But …
I: It had to do with bullying?
A: Yes, that, and the fact that I didn't like … to present things and so on. Those things …
I: Yes, there were a lot of presentations?
A: Yes, a lot.
I: Well then, did you avoid them by being absent?
A: Yes.
I: What happened then?
A: No, I was told to buy myself an alarm clock so I could get up in the mornings.
I: So you explained it by saying that you had problems getting up in the morning?
A: Yes, excuses that I had this and that and blah, blah, blah.
I: Yes, what was that?
A: That I was tired in the morning? No, I am, what do you call it – fa Type-B person, is that what it is when you get up early?

I: No, it's a Type-A person that gets up early.
A: Yes, that's what I am, so then, no, it was more than that. The presentations or that, there was something I was fretting about or the walk to school or yes.
I: Yes, I can understand that. So you were fretting about school?
A: Yes.
I: And then you disappeared?
A: It was easier than going [to school]. …
I: How did your teachers react to your absence?
A: We had quite a few meetings.
I: Did anything come out of the meetings?
A: No, I went to … is it called PP [educational psychology] services? Took some tests and stuff.

According to the school, the reason for Anton's truancy was that he slept in. However, he himself explained that he actually wakes up early; sleeping in was not the problem. He was anxious about walking to school because of being bullied and about standing in front of the class to present something. So, it seemed easier not to go. The school told him to buy an alarm clock, saying that the problem was him. They tested his abilities, but they failed to deal with the bullying.

Trond's story

At the welfare office, we also met Trond, another young man who had dropped out. He came across as eloquent, polite, and forthcoming. His parents were divorced and he had grown up with his mother and stepfather. Both of his parents are shopkeepers, and the first time we met it seemed that this was the direction he also hoped to take. When we first met him, he was looking for an apprenticeship. Trond explained how his parents had wanted the school to check whether he had ADHD, as they found him very active and struggling to concentrate. The school disagreed and told them that the observed problems (both at home and at school) indicated that he was a difficult child. This seems to have ended his parents' pursuit of help. In hindsight, Trond found it curious that when he was tested in upper secondary school, they found he had ADHD. He then went back even further to talk about his early experiences with teachers:

On leaving eighth grade and entering ninth grade, we got a new form teacher [the teacher responsible for supporting students]. And the first day I arrived at school, I was taken out in the hallway where he told me that he knew who I was and that he had read my file and everything else I had said, so I should just settle down.

His new teacher at lower secondary school must either have known or been warned about Trond. He made a point of telling Trond that he knew Trond was trouble, that he had read Trond's file, and that Trond had to calm down.

In his own mind, Trond had not consciously done anything to break school rules, such as playing truant:

> *I have never been one to play truant or anything like that. Never done anything very prohibited in terms of school rules and things like that. But I am easily distracted and can easily get up and walk over to my mate in the classroom and mess about and talk. That is typical of me.*

Because of the diagnosis, Trond seemed to feel that he now had proof that he was not a difficult child out of malice; he was a difficult child because he struggled with concentration and remaining still. Looking back at his years at school and what had happened in his life so far, we sensed some regret about not being understood and being seen as someone who just wanted trouble.

> *For example, I can say that if I had been tested for ADHD a lot earlier, I would have had a greater chance in life. If I had learned to manage it earlier, I could easily have got through lower secondary school, for example … and perhaps even managed to get through upper secondary school.*

Trond realized that his current struggle in completing his schooling resulted from a process outside his and his parents' control. He did not have a chance to tell his story. The teacher's preconceived ideas always won; he lost and his parents lost. The joy of proving himself right could not quite override his sadness about what might have been.

Asgeir's story

Turning to Asgeir, this young man had always managed quite well at school despite his dyslexia. He talked about himself as having been a geek in primary school—unlike most of his peers, he had read *Lord of the rings* and *Harry Potter*. He lives with his parents, who are well educated. He was currently a second-year student in the Restaurant and Food Processing strand, specializing in being a waiter. While quite shy, Asgeir looked like someone who wants to stand out. He confirmed this when he talked, saying that he enjoyed talking one-on-one but struggled in groups. In the second interview, he had reached a point where he no longer enjoyed school, and he felt that the teacher was not doing enough to support students.

> *The only things I can think about are examples of him [the teacher] being very rude … We were supposed to be in the restaurant, and then he was going to show us how to serve and stuff like that. And I had already learnt how to serve… last year, from the last teacher we had. So, as I already knew how I should serve, I stood a little behind the others. So let's say the others were about at the end of the table, and I literally stood as far away as here [showing us]. And they were doing this here, like this, and I was playing with my hat. He stands there, like this, saying, 'Asgeir, could you come closer?' And I just said, 'I know this already.' And he just said, 'But you are not following.'*

> *And then I repeated what he had just said, which I still remembered. … Afterwards, he took me aside and told me I was weird and that I didn't fit in with the class. He also said that he would call my parents at home. And I said that 'I don't think my father will be especially pleased to hear you've called me weird and said that I don't fit in and then called them to complain about me'. And he never called my home. At the parents' meeting, when my parents said that it is rude … to say that a student is weird and such, he talked about it. He said that he was going to do something about it; I haven't heard anything, and …*
>
> *I: Do something about what?*
>
> *A: I understood him to mean that he should say he was sorry or make it right, to make sure there was no misunderstanding…. But he hasn't done anything at all. And just the other day, he said … it was just kidding.*

Later, when Asgeir saw the teacher being rude to a friend, he pointed out that this friend was hurt and suggested the teacher should perhaps apologize. The teacher responded: "*I never apologize to a pupil*" and walked off.

Asgeir's parents exercised their lawful right to a session with his teacher to discuss what had happened. Unlike Trond's case, the teacher admitted that he had been rude, and he said that he would apologize to Asgeir. However, he never did; it was all for show. So, even though Asgeir's parents understood how school works and got involved, they were not heard.

Framing narratives

At the outset, we asked what leads young people to such different outcomes. Why do we think Erik will do badly? And why do we expect Asgeir to do much better? In fact, all of the narratives presented here reflect similar problems, some of which are quite severe. However, we believe that situations which at first sight appear similar are likely to end up very differently. We believe this has to do with the different framings in each story, which leave these young people open to different trajectories. We suspect that Erik and some of the others reveal a narrative framing that could end up making them framed.

As stated in the section on methods, this study collects data differently from most studies on school dropout. Our guesswork at the meaningful frames surrounding the narratives we have reproduced is informed by Clifford Geertz's distinction between *thin* and *thick descriptions* (Geertz, 1973, pp. 6–7). The narratives in these dialogues can be viewed as thin descriptions, and our challenge is to guess at the thick description that makes these narratives

meaningful for the study participants.[2] These thick descriptions correspond to the contextualizations or frames within which these young people view their schooling. At best, these contextualizations correspond roughly to those of their schools (including teaching staff, policies and so on). Sometimes, however, they do not.

The stories presented above are mostly about silencing. For example, Erik told us that he did not feel safe at school and that it took all his energy just to get through the day. The bullying seems to have been the hardest thing for him and affected him severely. Being beaten regularly without anything happening is bad, but experiencing teachers as facilitating even more bullying during lessons is hard. Here, his narrative corresponds with Fine's argument about how students' discordant voices in relation to health are "muted" or unheard (Fine, 1991, p. 44). Erik had no teachers that he could lean on; instead, he felt ridiculed and that staff turned a blind eye to the bullying he suffered. This was so hard that the support for his dyslexia was of no help, as he had to concentrate on surviving and had no energy left for learning. His story tells us that he is on his own – alone, quiet and unnoticed. It is noteworthy that he does not talk about friends at school and he has difficulty identifying any teacher that had tried to help.

Anton's story seems very similar to Erik's in terms of how he is silenced at school. He finds himself alone and bullied by his peers. His narrative tells us how he struggled with presentations in class and how nervous and desperate that made him feel. To avoid being bullied, he stayed at home. That was the young boy's own solution, but it quickly became part of the problem. Here, the silencing relates to how Anton's own perceptions are muted to accommodate the school's perspective. As the story developed, we learn that the school addressed the problem; they present Anton with solutions but fail to ask him what the problem is. They say he has a problem waking up and that he must buy an alarm clock. His anxiety about class presentations is ignored, as is his experience of being bullied; what he needs is an alarm clock. The school sends him to an educational psychologist to test him – to assess whether the problem relates to learning difficulties. But the bullying continues and the anxiety persists. The school has defined the problem, but his own experiences are ignored. Anton had dropped out of upper secondary school once before, and his teacher informs us that they consider him a weak student who is in danger of dropping out again.

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[2] As researchers, we are of course part of the dialogue and contributed to how the interviews unfolded. We have discussed this elsewhere (Moshuus, 2005, 2012; Moshuus & Eide, 2016).

Trond's account seems to differ from those of Erik and Anton. Here is a loud, outspoken young man who seems eager to share his opinions. He has many friends, but like Erik and Anton, he is struggling on the margins of school. Trond admits that he is physically active and distracted in class. However, he questions the school's response; in his narrative, he tells us how all of the staff knew about him – even new teachers knew he was "trouble." Looking back at his schooling, Trond felt cheated of an education. The school silenced him, leaving him to sort out his learning deficiencies on his own.

Only one of the narratives presented here is not overtly about school silencing, but even Asgeir's story seems to be about how the school shuts out those who struggle to keep up. Like Trond, Asgeir is able to stand up for himself. This is apparent in the story he told about his teacher who rebuked him for not paying attention during practice. To that point, this seems like another story about silencing. However, in front of the whole class, Asgeir demonstrated that the teacher was wrong. He had paid attention, he was just keeping a distance. Here, the narrative is no longer about Asgeir being silenced. On the contrary, Asgeir told us about this to show how he was talking back, framing his story as narrating how he was something of a dissident at school, opposing the requirement to be silent. But the story he told us was not the kind of dissent that would end with his exclusion; this was not the kind of rebellion that the school would try to prevent (Fine, 1991, p. 50ff). Nor was it an example of the secret communities that form as a countercultural reaction to what school is about (Willis, 1978). This narrative told us how Asgeir was able to position himself at school despite having second thoughts about the training he was receiving. Asgeir wanted to complete the year in order to begin a different program the following year.

So far, we have identified why three out of these four young people presented us with narratives in which their contextualizations differ from those of most young people's experiences of school. To most of us, these stories are quite shocking, revealing how dyslexia, ADHD, and even outright bullying are silenced by schools. However, while all of these stories are about how youth are silenced, we fear that Erik may face a jobless future – something the others may yet avoid, although both Anton and Trond continue to struggle. Asgeir, on the other hand, suffers but is fighting back and has a plan for how to complete school. This difference seems to reflect how the silencing experienced at school frames them.

Some young people experience their schooling as silencing. As these stories show, this means that they are made individually responsible for whatever makes it difficult for them to progress through education in the same way as their peers. Here, we find dyslexia, unruly behavior (ADHD), and even bullying shorn of their relational and contextual settings and instead characterized as problems of the individual. Yet, in most of these stories, we

also see something else. In Anton's case, we know that although his parents sought to discuss his late arrivals in terms of his age and his own problems, these issues are not part of his narrative. Perhaps they were unsure how to respond, but they did not leave him alone to confront his teachers' demands, and his siblings pushed him into becoming more social. He was never alone. Nor was Trond; like Erik, he was out of school, but when the school depicted him as a troublemaker and the author of his own misfortunes, his parents came to his aid, asking the school to get a medical evaluation. In short, he was never alone in his ordeals either. No parents in any of these narratives were more present than Asgeir's, who, as he told us, contacted the school after the episode in question and demanded an apology.

In short, all of these stories show how silencing at school stopped short of framing these young people by virtue of the interventions and care they all received at home. The only exception was Erik, who struggled more than most at school and also struggled at home. His father was a developing alcoholic, his mother was suffering from a severe injury, and his stepfather harassed him. This is what makes Erik's story so important in explaining why some young people suffer more than others. Some may suffer at school only to find that suffering balanced by events elsewhere in their lives. Erik was barely able to operate within the educational frame, but it was the combination of silencing at school and his home situation that framed him. He put it best himself: "*It wasn't that easy when I had it so hard at school, and then I came home, and then, in a way, I got even more.*" While we fear that he is at much greater risk than the others, we also believe that his story holds a lesson for us all.

Conclusion: The difference between frames and being framed

What can we learn from Erik's story? In terms of risk accumulation, the young men presented here face great challenges. It would be easy to categorize our informants as being at increased risk of dropping out. All had attended vocational strands, which at the time had the highest dropout rates; as males, their risk was further increased (Markussen, 2014; Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2014, 2015). Additionally, like most of those who drop out, Erik, Trond, and Anton had low marks on leaving lower secondary school and come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Falch & Nyhus, 2011; Markussen, 2014; Rumberger, 2011; Sletten & Hyggen, 2013). Yet despite all these similarities, their stories prompt us to speculate that their outcomes may prove to be very different. It is when we complement the perspective of risk accumulation with a focus on the relationships the different young people in our study develop with their world that we see the lesson of Erik's story.

In all of these stories, we heard about conflicts at school. Following Michelle Fine, we saw how their narrative frames reflected that these young men were largely powerless to reverse the contextualization of school. In this sense, their stories of their schooling coincide with Fine's understanding of school as a rigged game framed to their disadvantage. Yet, there is more to these narratives than the framing prescribed by Fine's perspective. In three of the stories (those of Anton, Trond, and Asgeir), we also find the presence of parents, friends, and siblings who act in ways that suggest different or competing contextualizations present in their narratives. Their actions—even the failed ones, as when Trond's parents were unable to persuade his school to seek a medical evaluation—matter for what these actions did to alter their situations at school. But the actions also enabled these young people to tell tales about their experiences that generate contextualizations opposing those they had habitually experienced at school. In short, these experiences allowed them to tell tales that—to some extent at least—undid some of the framing they had experienced at school.

Research on school dropout focusing on risk accumulation has found that young people from middle class families do much better at school because they understand the dominant culture in their school (Markussen et. al., 2008; Rumberger, 2011). This study, focus on young people's own accounts, suggests that we should pay attention to how young people interact at school as well as outside of school in order to improve our understanding of how their family background affects their schooling. For some students who experience silencing at school, this silencing may result in their schooling becoming a rigged game in Fine's sense. But, for others, it does not. In their accounts, we find narratives of how the actions of parents, siblings, and friends help them to frame their schooling differently. This is the tragedy of Erik; he did not have such tales to turn to.

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