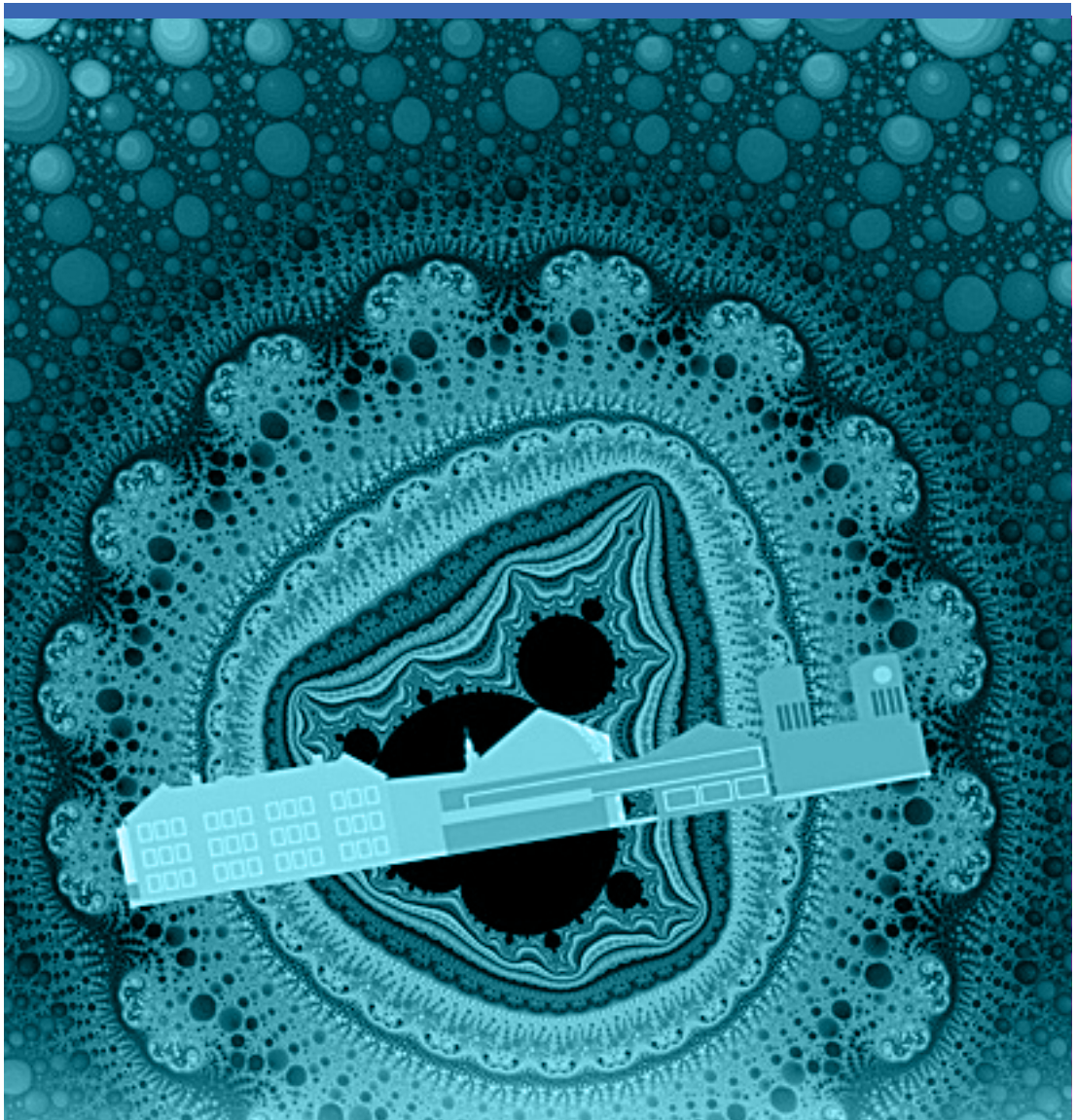


Kristian Garthus-Niegel

# The Unity School Diversified -Ideological and Social Transformations





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## **The Unity School Diversified**

-Ideological and Social Transformations

A PhD dissertation in  
**Culture Studies**

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Faculty of Humanities, Sports and Educational Sciences

**University of South-Eastern Norway**

Bø, 2019

**Doctoral dissertations at the University of South-Eastern Norway no. 27**

ISSN: 2535-5244 (print)

ISSN: 2535-5252 (online)

ISBN: 978-82-7206-512-5 (print)

ISBN: 978-82-7206-513-2 (online)



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Print: University of South-Eastern Norway

## Forord

To patience and supportive beliefs

as manifest through

Halvard

Brit

Susi

Leo

Smilla

*timelessness always implies*

*a certain amount of potential youthfulness*

- Thomas Mann



## Sammendrag

Siden midten av 1900-tallet har globale migrasjonsstrømmer tiltatt. I takt med dette har spørsmål om hvordan den norske enhetsskolen skal forholde seg til elever fra familier med innvandrerbakgrunn i økende grad preget utdanningspolitiske diskurser. Avhandlingen presenterer en systematisk gjennomgang av de ulike rådende forestillingene gjennom perioden om hvordan enhetsskolen bør innrettes for å balansere, på den ene siden den pedagogisk ivaretagelsen av disse elevene, på den andre sin institusjonelle selvforståelse som bærebjelke i allmenne nasjonale samfunnsintegrasjonsprosesser. Det er allerede godt dokumentert hvordan denne elevgruppens økende størrelse og mangfold over tid har tvunget klassiske, gruppesentrerte flerspråklige/-kulturelle opplæringsmodeller ut over sidelinjen. Disse er i dag langt på vei blitt erstattet av en universell opplæringsmodell hvor formidling av ferdigheter med instrumentell nytteverdi for senere samfunnsøkonomisk deltakelse står i sentrum. Mindre kjent er det paradokset at dette *skoleeffektivitets*-paradigmet, som i kraft av å tilskrives universell pedagogisk gyldighet dominerer opplæringshverdagen til de fleste lærere og elever i dagens enhetsskole, faktisk er historisk forankret i en liten gren av anvendt kvantitativ utdanningsforskning rettet mot å utvikle forsterkede opplæringsmodeller nettopp for minoritets elever med dårlige skoleprestasjoner.

Skoleeffektivitets-paradigmet har blitt institusjonalisert i enhetsskolen i kraft av det nyliberale styringsregimet som fulgte med reformen Kunnskapsløftet av 2006. Herved vokste og styrket det administrative nivået seg betydelig i forhold til de andre nivåene i utdanningssektoren. En konsekvens er at administrasjonsnivået langt på vei frarev definisjonsmakten over opplæringsens kvalitet fra den pedagogiske profesjonen. Derav ble det også gjengs å sette likhetstegn mellom pedagogisk kvalitet og kjapt kvantitativt målbare læringsresultater. Selv om verdien av lokal pedagogisk autonomi ofte snakkes opp i utdanningspolitiske diskurser, er legitimiteten til aktivitetene i dagens skoler oppover og utad i praksis først og fremst betinget av resultatkonjunktorene de klarer å levere. På bakgrunn av til sammen ett års etnografisk feltarbeid i grunnskoler i Oslo med til dels svært mangfoldig elev-tilfang avdekkes sammenhengen mellom dette styringsregimet og

en forsterket kollektiv opplevelse av at selve klasseroms-tiden er en tiltakende knapp ressurs. Videre beskrives andre utilsiktede ringvirkninger denne opplevelsen igjen genererer i det hverdagslige samspillet mellom lærere og elever i klasserommet.

De empiriske analysene av henholdsvis skiftende migrasjonspedagogiske diskurser og av klasseromstid som eksternt strukturerende sosiale størrelser berører begge bredere og mer komplekse teoretiske diskusjoner om maktens sosiale ontologi. Særlig interessant her er spørsmålet om hva som understøtter den sosiale reproduksjonen av dominante forestillinger innenfor formelle institusjonelle kontekster, i dette tilfellet opprettholdelsen av skoleeffektivitets-ideologien i enhetsskolen, når de etnografiske undersøkelsene avslører at de enkelte aktørene som bidrar til reproduksjonen, i dette tilfellet lærere og elever, viser seg å ha begrenset kunnskap om og/eller personlige betenkeligheter til den. Med henvisning til innsikter fra nyere kognitiv vitenskap problematiserer avhandlingen validiteten til overleverte samfunnsteoretiske, psykologisk inspirerte maktbegreper, slik som internalisering, subjektivering, hegemoni og falsk/kolonisert bevissthet. Forklaringer av dominans som antar at ideologier på varig og konstant vis kan feste seg i individers indre for så å legge direkte føringer for deres sosiale handlinger tilbakevises. Isteden fremmes en forklaringsmodell hvor dominans forstås gjennom individers evne til å forutse og forholde seg sosialt fleksibelt til konkrete, institusjonaliserte sanksjonssystemer som understøtter den rådende ideologiske diskursen. Gjennom sin daglige deltakelse i skolen lærte elever og lærere i fellesskap de mange små og store sanksjonsmekanismene som finnes i skolen å kjenne og utviklet en finkornet sosial intuisjon for når det var tryggest å gå i takt med skoleeffektivitets-ideologien og når det fantes rom for å la mer nonkonforme handlinger og meninger komme til uttrykk.

Emneord: Diskurs, internalisering, makt, sosial interaksjon, statseffekter, temporalitet, utdanning







## Abstract

Since the midst of the 20th century, global migration currents have increased significantly. Correspondingly, questions of how the Norwegian Unity School should deal with pupils from families with immigrant origins have come to the fore of education policy discourses. The dissertation presents a systematic analysis of different dominant ideas throughout the period about how the Unity School is best organized to balance, on the one hand the pedagogic accommodation of these pupils, on the other its institutionalized role as a pillar in greater processes of national societal integration. It is already well documented how the increasing size and diversity of this pupil segment over time has led to a marginalization of classic, group-centered multilingual/-cultural educational models. These have today been replaced by a universal education model in which the transmission of skills thought to be of instrumental utility to later socioeconomic participation in society are crux. Less known, however, is the paradox that this *school effectiveness*-paradigm, which by force of its self-ascribed universal pedagogic validity now dominates the everyday school life in Oslo, evolved historically from a small branch of applied quantitative educational research aimed at the development of reinforced educational programs targeting minority pupils with low school achievement.

The school effectiveness-paradigm bore down on the Unity School by way of a neoliberal regime of state educational governance culminating in the reform the Knowledge Promotion in 2006. Thereby the administrative level of educational governance grew in size and strength relative to the other levels and appropriated the power to define educational quality from the pedagogical profession. Hence, it has become custom to rate educational quality by quick, successive quantitative measurements of school achievement. Though the value of local pedagogic autonomy is often politically celebrated, the de facto external legitimacy of particular pedagogic practices is primarily constituted by their achievement conjunctures. Relying on one year of ethnographic fieldwork in high-diversity primary schools in Oslo, the dissertation exposes associations between this new regime of state educational governance and an exasperated collective experience of classroom-time as a perpetually scarce resource. It then goes on to explore

further unintended social consequences of this experience in everyday classroom interactions between teachers and pupils.

Both empirical analyses of respectively shifting migration-pedagogical discourses and classroom time as externally structuring social entities touch on broader and more complex theoretical discussions about the social ontology of power. A particularly interesting question is: What exactly underwrites the social reproduction of dominant cultural models inside formal institutional contexts, here the sustenance of school effectiveness-ideology in the Unity School, when the ethnography reveals that the individual actors contributing to this reproduction, here teachers and pupils, possess only fragmentary knowledge of and/or personally dislike it. Lending insights from recent cognitive science, the dissertation critically questions the longevity of received social scientific concepts of power that are inspired by 20<sup>th</sup> Century psychology, such as internalization, subjectification, hegemony, and false/colonized consciousness. Explanations of dominance that presume that ideologies can stick to individual interiorities in a lasting and stable manner so as to go on to directly guide their social actions are refuted. An alternative explanatory framework is outlined where dominance is understood by way of the ability of individual social actors to predict and relate with socially cognizant flexibility to concrete, institutionalized systems of social sanctions that promote the ruling ideological discourse. Through their daily social participation in school life, pupils and teachers collectively learned the many lesser and graver sanction mechanisms institutionally vested into it and thus developed a fine-grained social intuition as to when it was safest to pace in with school effectiveness-ideology and when there was leeway for less conform actions and attitudes.

Keywords: Discourse, education, internalization, power, social interaction, state effects, temporality





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## Chapter one

### 1.1 A framework for the thesis at large

Originally, this study was meant to be about the education of children of ethnic minority origins in Norway. More so, it has turned out as a study of the institutional and ideological nature of contemporary Norwegian public education itself.

In the first decade of the 2000s, an anxious public discourse about the growth of ethnic minority children in Norwegian schools caught sway. The trend was particularly evident in the eastern, more working-class neighborhoods of the capital of Oslo. It derived mainly from the increased settlement of immigrant origin populations here since the late 1970s and a concurrent exodus of white middle-class families. Typically, fears were expressed in terms of national cultural identity:

*“It was simply out of question that our daughter should end up as the only Norwegian in class. What kind of Norwegian tuition would that give her? And who should she identify with?”*

Father, Aftenposten, 22<sup>th</sup> August 2009

*“We should make sure that at least a quarter of the pupils in each school are ethnic Norwegians. It should not be much lower if we want Norwegian language and culture to remain the common denominator”*

Labor party politician, Dagbladet 22<sup>th</sup> August 2009

Education research as of yet has had little to say about these cultural fears. What there is mainly focuses on school achievement and tends to find that high-minority schools on average yield slightly lower results. These differences evaporate however when controlled for socio-economic background factors.

The existence of micro-contextual, experience-near accounts of life in these schools is bleak; the low voices from the teachers or pupils involved are mostly left unheard. This was the knowledge gap that I initially wanted to fill with my research. In my ethnographic



explorations of one high- and one low-minority school in the area, I soon realized that the pupils' cultural backgrounds were much more peripheral to life as it unfolded on a day-to-day basis than one could expect. Sure, themes such as religious holidays, food and clothing were somewhat more pronounced in the high-minority setting, but to the vast amount of educational interactions observed inside the classrooms, they were little but cultural paraphernalia. More so, the elephant in the classrooms turned out to be a minute formal schematization of everyday life that in both settings for most purposes bested the significance of the children's home backgrounds.

As a result, my focus shifted from the individual informants to the very institutional fabric of this educational regime. More specifically, the study has come to constitute a three-pronged attempt to grasp its central historical, social and cognitive underpinnings. By way of the individual research papers included in it, the following dimensions are investigated in more depth:

1. Genealogy
2. Social reality
3. Cogency

Underlying all the papers and the thesis as a whole is a fundamental concern with wider theoretical debates about social power and ideology.

Given the limited empirical scope, the papers may in isolation appear only loosely associated. This summary is intended as a contextual guide for how the papers may be read as different explorations into larger questions about how social power and ideology operate within contemporary institutional fields. Taken together, they claim to contribute some useful and perhaps provocative novelties to questions such as:

- How do specific educational ideologies catch sway?
- How does the institutionalization of particular educational ideologies shape social life in school?

- What make subjects of the contemporary Unity School regime to tilt on large towards *sustaining* rather than upending its ideological ramifications?

Tying all these questions together is an epistemological concern with how power constitutes social life.

A basic claim running through the presented research is that contemporary debates about power within the area of culture studies are fraught with certain conventional truths that, in the light of recent developments in other fields, are long overdue for critical scrutiny. The scope of the listed questions is obviously too large for a thesis of this caliber to offer exhaustive answers. As such, the more modest ambition is to invite the reader to widen her imagination for a moment about the theoretical questions in concern. A bid is made for recent cognitive anthropology as a source of particularly fruitful insights for moving understandings of social power forward.

## **1.2 The school effectiveness-regime – An unexpected return of minority pedagogy**

My ethnographic experience soon blew the wind out of my interest for children of ethnic minority origins as privileged research subjects. The irony remains though, that the dominant educational regime of the day, which through the dissertation is summarized in terms of effective schools or school-effectiveness, stems from a pedagogic ideology that originally was coined specifically on ethnic minority children of lesser means and educational performance.

The school effectiveness movement began in the US around 1970 as an activist reaction to the infamous Coleman-report, the prototype for all later large-scale quantitative educational surveys. Some commentators took the findings of the Coleman-report to claim that school-based interventions for disadvantaged black children were pointless, since school achievement is mostly an extension of factors external to school, such as social, economic and/or cultural background (Creemers 1994). Adopting the methods and rhetoric of evidence-based research, the early proponents of the school

effectiveness movement, many of them pedagogic professionals from black neighborhood schools, set out to identify a set of core school characteristics that objectively improve black, poor children's academic achievement. In 1979, based upon a series of school interventions in Lansing, Michigan, one of the school effectiveness movement's most famous pioneers Ron Edmonds published his seminal publication *Effective Schools for the Urban Poor*. Here he claimed that such schools

- a) *Have strong administrative leadership...*
- b) *Have a climate of expectation in which no children are permitted to fall below minimum but efficacious levels of achievement...*
- c) *[Have an atmosphere that] is orderly without being rigid, quiet without being oppressive, and generally conducive to instructional business at hand*
- d) *[Make] it clear that pupil acquisition of the basic school skills takes precedence over all other school activities*
- e) *[Can divert] school energy and resources...from other business in furtherance of the fundamental objectives*
- f) *[Hold] means by which pupil progress can be frequently monitored... by which the principal and the teachers remain constantly aware of pupil progress in relationship to instructional objectives*

Ron Edmonds, *Effective Schools for the Urban Poor*, Educational Leadership 1979, p.22

This is the earliest example of the school effectiveness movement's recurrent claim that there exists a universal set of objective internal traits characteristic to schools that are particularly effective in raising their pupils' academic achievement. Invariably, these are spelled out as *strong leadership, high expectations, disciplined learning environment, priority of basic literacy skills, target orientation, and systematic testing*.

The Tidlig Innsats – Early Years (TIEY) program, the staple pedagogic regime in the schools featured in this study alongside more than half of Oslo's primary schools, espouses much the same tropes. And similarly, its own early development is intimately tied to concerns for under-achievement among pupils misaligned to (white) ethno-national child prototypes. Its predecessor, the Early Literacy Research Project (ELRP), was a pilot program funded by the Victorian Department of Education in Australia from 1996-98 to

maximize the achievements of so called 'at risk students' in their early school years. ELRP-literature is replete with references to earlier US based school effectiveness-research. The marker of educational disadvantage here was "a composite measure of poverty, non-English-speaking background (NESB), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status, and transience" (Crevola & Hill 1998). Again, we are clearly dealing with an educational program whose means of intervention were at the outset intrinsically linked to low-achieving ethnic minority children. Similarly, in Norway it was first adopted in 2002 in a school in the west coast city of Stavanger that had comparably high proportions of minority children (Paust-Andersen 2010). When it was picked up in Oslo 6 years later as a part of a broader urban renewal project in the city's more socially and economically disadvantaged northeastern district of Groruddalen, the program was exclusively implemented in schools with exceedingly high minority-proportions.

Whilst school effectiveness-programs thus at their historical outset have repeatedly caught wind by arguments about the need for special educational measures for low-achieving ethnic minority children, their histories also recurrently show that policy-makers are quick to attribute them with universal capacities. Likely, the political appeal of school effectiveness-thought has much to do with its objectivist appearance and recipe-style recommendations, by which it easily lends itself to the legitimation of large-scale policies. School effectiveness-research rise to the center of general Anglo-Saxon education policymaking in the 1980s- and 90s is well-documented (Goldstein & Woodhouse 2000; Hallinger & Murphy 1986; Lauder & Kahn 1988). Despite mounting criticism (see for instance Elliott 1996; Gorard 2010; Slee et. al, 1998; Thrupp 2001), intensified competition in global markets of knowledge and human capital and its disruptions of national sovereignty since the millennial turn ushered on a large-scale capture by school effectiveness-thought of the educational imaginations of supranational policy agencies across the OECD-zone (Morley & Rassool 1999; Normand 2008). Fair to say, school effectiveness-ideology now exerts momentous global resonance (Townsend 2007).

In Norway, school effectiveness-ideas waxed in education policy discourses in the wake of the country's mediocre results in the PISA-surveys of 2000, as evident in the policy papers corresponding to the most recent national education reform in 2006:

*It is significant that basic skills in reading, writing and arithmetic/numeracy gets sufficient attention and time in the early years of the primary education*

*To ascertain quality in education it is important to assess results, processes and structures at individual, school, regional and national levels*

Governmental interim committee report *In first line*, 2003, pp.18 and 219

*Teachers in high-achieving schools exert a clear and active pedagogic leadership with focus on the school's academic targets*

Governmental white paper "*...and no one stood behind*"; *Early effort for lifelong learning*, 2007, p. 33

*Good academic results depend on time in school be as far as possible spent on learning and that there is peace and order in the classroom (...) clear and explicit educational targets lead to more learning for the pupils (...) the teachers' expectations about the pupils' learning potential influence the pupils' results (...) teachers who direct the pupils' attention towards the most central parts of the curriculum and repeat the most important principles achieve the best results*

Governmental white paper *Quality in School*, 2008, pp. 27-28

Concurrently in Oslo, whilst at first explicitly targeting high-minority schools, the TIEY-program soon gained a reputation for improving academic achievement across the board, by which it rapidly spread to schools everywhere in the capital. As of 2011, it had been implemented in 53 of its then 110 elementary schools, enrolling more than 15 000 pupils and 800 teachers (Utdanningsetaten i Oslo 2011).

Some 20 years ago now, all the minority-specific educational methods associated with the bilingual-/multicultural education movement, such as mother tongue education, bi-cultural classes, separate culture-sensitive curricula, and even separate host-language instruction had been rendered more or less politically illegitimate. The deeper irony at

display in this study, therefore, is that now reigns a universalized pedagogic regime that itself was designed as a method of schooling exclusively for socio-economically disadvantaged ethnic minority children. In other words, whilst my ethnographic encounter made me abandon my focus on ethnic minority-markers because they proved peripheral to the social life passing before my eyes, coming full-circle I ultimately discovered at the core of that ideological web holding my field in equilibrium the image of that very same pupil segment!

### **1.3 Synopsis of the research papers**

#### **1.3.1 Semantic Models of Host-Immigrant Relations in Norwegian Education Policies**

The paper presents a genealogy of the various prescriptive semantic models that have surrounded children of immigrant origins in Norwegian education policies since this pupil segment became one of political concern. I apply cognitive and linguistic anthropological theories to track paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations within the relevant policy discourses so as to expose their core semantic structures. Four distinct semantic models are identified throughout the historical period. Each model is shown to comprise specific overall policy programs, education system characters, teaching methods, and parameters for equality output evaluations. Attention is given to how the core semantic structures of each model, and the changes between them, derive from three interacting factor domains: (1) semantic inclusion and contrast relations, (2) pragmatic characteristics of practice fields, and (3) broader welfare state policy histories. As such, the paper demonstrates how ideological transformations within the broader education field are intimately intertwined with events and developments occurring outside of the ideological discourse, most significantly here an exponentially increasing number of pupils marked with immigrant origins. In particular, it underlines how the direct experience of this influx at the pedagogic frontline produced a unique upstream influence on national education policy-making until the end of the Cold War, much due to the exceptionally strong position of the education profession in the historical formation of the Norwegian nation-

state. It also traces the circumstances by which the most recent neoliberal reform of the national education system severed this close traditional link between the fields of practice and policy, paving way for the institutional dominance of that narrow, instrumentalist, one-size-fits-all pedagogic ontology sitting at the core of school effectiveness-thought, all under the enduring mantle of the Nordic universalist welfare-state ethos.

### **1.3.2 (No) Time to Learn: Learning Effectiveness Temporalities in Norwegian First-Grade Classrooms**

This paper, which is based on two prolonged participant observant fieldworks at the first-grade level in two schools in Oslo, makes a close descriptive and analytic scrutiny of the social reality of Tidlig Innsats—Early Years (TIEY), a literacy instruction program built on the principles of school effectiveness-model. As such, it bears ethnographic testament to the flavor of everyday social life within a school effectiveness-regime. In particular, it focuses on how the program’s rigid and meticulous pedagogic standards shaped the social fabric of quotidian time. It is argued that TIEY’s obligatory pedagogic routines mould classroom interaction dynamics into patterns abbreviated as ‘learning effectiveness temporalities’. These are characterized by intensified levels of academically oriented business and competition. The paper also points to further social effects that go well beyond the bounds of those officially intended. Among these, the most notable is an exasperated emphasis on an orderly and disciplined sociality that proves indispensable to the realization of the program’s ambitious time schedule. The impetus to implement TIEY came from the municipal administration, bent on improving the academic output of schools scoring below the test benchmarks set by the municipal school administration. The teachers, whilst generally compliant, held many personal professional qualms about the program. Given its highly politicized thrust, the social realities it generated are analyzed as a type of state effects by which the state sculpts the temporal constitution of life in schools. The intensity of such state-driven temporalization-effects are shown to fluctuate with the annual administrative achievement-monitoring cycle, in particular through changing seasons of testing and assessment.

### 1.3.3 Social Power and Schooled Minds

The third and final research paper presents a critical view on conventional sociological notions about how ideologies are socially sustained. The starting point is the rich amount of ethnographic evidence to say that individuals that socially realize dominant ideologies are in many cases only sparsely acquaint or even in outright personal disagreement with them. It provides empirical examples and discussions about exactly how school effectiveness norms- and practices were socially realized in everyday classroom life. The main disagreement lies with theories of hegemony that posit the individual psychological internalization of ruling ideologies as the driving force in the social reproduction of existing power structures. The core criticism is that such perspectives fail to account for evident cognitive flexibilities in how individuals vacillate the diverse cultural information they possess as they traverse everyday social life. Drawing on recent insights from cognitive anthropology, an alternate explanatory framework is outlined in which ideological reproduction derives from the institutionalization of distributed systems of social sanctions that are discriminately marked by one overall ideology. The conformity tendency that social agents display derives from social learning processes by which the quotidian experience of micro-sanction-contexts fosters specific cultural navigation skills that increase social benefits and diminish situational social disadvantages. In the paper, I chart empirically two salient sanction forms specific to school effectiveness-classrooms: (1) Pedagogical demand-evaluation exchanges and (2) pedagogical rewards and punishments. I argue that it was the routine repetition of, and familiarization to these localized sanction forms (as opposed to individual ideological internalization) that underwrote the pupil's tendency at large towards reproducing school effectiveness-oriented behaviours. To broaden the claim about the distributed nature of such sanction systems, I outline further sanction systems buttressing the teachers' school effectiveness-conformity in spaces of school life beyond the classroom, such as (1) regular test score presentations, (2) the moral devaluation of criticism, (3) targeted professional interventions and (4) the risk of dismissal.



## **Chapter two**

### **2.1 The anthropology of mass education at home**

Like most other anthropological studies in western modern education settings, so is this one above all an exploration of unintended effects of institutionalized education. Whilst theoretically kindred to the discipline's socialization classics (Firth 1936, Fortes 1938, Malinowski 1929, Mead 1928, Van Gennep 1960, Whiting 1941), the following account is specifically concerned with anthropological studies that have focused on mass education, or what Durkheim called the "systematic socialization by the young generation of adults" (1956: 124). The account will serve to position the current study vis-à-vis this research field.

There exists a long-standing debate as to whether educational anthropology may at all be distinguished as a separate sub-discipline within the broader education science proper (Van Zanten 2012). As the following historical survey will show, there are good reasons to say that it cannot. The total corpus of studies of Western mass education is thoroughly interdisciplinary, though pedagogy and psychology dominate. On the other hand, educational anthropology is perhaps best described as educational sociology's little sister. Furthermore, the study of mass education is intersected, not only by the interest of various academic disciplines, but also by a wide range of social, public and policy stakeholders that are concerned with questions that go far beyond those of the academies. Thus, it is questionable whether educational studies is at all in its own right a distinct research discipline (Delamont 2012).

### **2.2 The culture-personality cradle: Schools as loci of dominant cultural illusions**

George Dearborn Spindler, who, next to his anthropological training, also held a degree in psychology, was the first to apply an anthropological approach to western education. Whilst working on a PhD in cultural anthropology on acculturation processes among Menominee Indians in a Wisconsin reservation in the early 1950s, Spindler was recruited

into an interdisciplinary research project at Stanford University's education research department. Pioneering the use of participant observation in a modern classroom setting, Spindler's attention was caught by how the teacher unwittingly taught and managed his class in ways that subtly favored white middle- and upper-class children. From this observation, he went on to elicit a range of features from everyday schooling that he saw as cultural biases favoring white Anglo-Saxon children (Spindler & Spindler 1982). He then transferred the findings back to the teachers to foster increased culturally sensitivity in their instructional practices.

Spindler's second classroom study, which became canonical to educational anthropology, focused on the classroom adjustment of a white, middle-class girl who was viewed by the school staff as an especially well-adjusted pupil. Through the lens of close classroom observations, psychological tests and interviews with her parents however, Spindler found out that she was actually rather socially introvert, having few classmates, being tensed, aloof and anxious about living up to the school's expectations, edging the threshold of developing a nervous abdominal tic. This range of negative symptoms, Spindler claimed, derived from the American mass educational culture of competition and social subordination, which intruded on and harmed her personality development (Spindler 1974).

Throughout his career, Spindler continued to explore mass education from a point of view in which school institutions are seen to revolve around culturally constituted illusions about the nature of their own purpose, which in turn are reflected in most everything that goes on in school life (Spindler 2000). He remained particularly interested in how to reshape pedagogic practices so as to alleviate the negative effects of such cultural illusions on pupils' and teachers' personality development. During his tenure at Stanford from 1951 to 1978, Spindler and his wife, another passionate educational anthropologist, taught thousands of anthropology students the works of Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict and Melford Spiro's on socialization, sustaining the culture and personality-school in educational anthropology considerably longer than elsewhere in the discipline. Much thanks to a series of meetings that Spindler initiated during the 1950s and -60s with the

support of Margaret Mead herself, a network for educational anthropology cropped and eventually culminated in the foundation of The Council on Anthropology and Education (CAE) and the journal *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*. In the later parts of their careers, the Spindlers designed a method called 'cultural therapy', a tool meant to enable educators to become aware of and deal with the many cultural biases besetting their daily school practices. This applied thrust to teach educators how to use ethnography to inform classroom pedagogy has since run strong in the US vein of educational anthropology (Demerath & Mattheis 2012) and is also evident in European anthropology (Gobbo 2012).

The boldest example of culture and personality-type anthropology of American mass education is Jules Henry's *Culture against Man* (1963). In the 1930s, Henry had done fieldwork among the Brazilian Kaingáng, whom he claimed had been driven into a downward spiral of internal feudal violence due to a lack of social institutions to regulate external modernization pressures. Returning to the US during the Second World War, Henry developed a particular affinity for facets of modern society that he thought released humanity's inherent potential to degrade human life. Henry's critique was particularly concerned with the culture of competition. This he saw for instance in teaching practices related to intelligence testing in grade schools, which he claimed caused a range of negative psychological effects on the pupils such as fear, acquiescence and alienation.

Apart from the Spindlers, Henry and a few other anthropologists, until the 1970s most homely US educational anthropologists focused on the peoples of the first nations. Characteristic of this work was that it juxtaposed indigenous vs. white middle class culture, often with an explicit romantically colored sympathy for the former. One of Spindler's most prominent students Harry F. Wolcott, who spent a year as an elementary school teacher among the Kwakiutl, ascribed the constant tensions and frictions he encountered in his daily classrooms to a cultural wiring of the pupils that was contraire to the progressive pedagogic approaches he had been trained to apply (Wolcott 1974).

## **2.3 Enter critical education sociology: Schools as loci of structural discrimination writ small**

With the exception of the work of a few anthropologists employed at the Chicago school of sociology (Fuchs 1969, Leacock 1969, Moore 1967), US educational anthropology had until ca. 1970 remained firmly grounded in the Boasian tradition, focusing on issues of racial oppression and forced acculturation. The US Supreme Court's by now infamous 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education*-ruling of the century-old system of racial segregation in schools as unconstitutional marked a watershed in the public legitimacy of Boasian arguments. Psychological data showing that racially segregated schooling deprived black children's cognitive-emotional growth became widely acknowledged. Subsequently, American educational anthropology enrolled as an academic champion of the civil rights movement's struggle to improve the schooling of black children. The scientific battle lines of the 1960s were constituted by the question of whether the main cause for black children's persisting academic under-achievement lay within the education system itself or rather in their own sociocultural home-environments. The Coleman-survey, a quantitative sociological survey of monumental scope by the standards of its time, mainly pointed to the home environment. The survey was supported in anthropology by Oscar Lewis 'Culture of Poverty'-theory, which was based on ethnographic accounts of how Latino culture was marked by feelings of marginality, helplessness, dependency and inferiority, in turn impairing their children's learning motivation. To most anthropologists though, such propositions were preposterous, coming across as a new culturalized variant of racism. In turn, the quest to document school-based racial/ethnic discrimination became a defining trait of the sub-discipline's identity.

In the same decade, dissatisfaction with the potential of positivist research paradigms to explore the local impact of large-scale societal change was growing within educational sociology. This increased their interest for anthropology's methods of naturalist inquiry, in-depth fieldwork, observation and interviews. Thanks to their methodological training many educational anthropologists thus found their way into sociology departments and teacher colleges, which had them partially divorced them from the anthropological

proper (Van Zanten 2012). From around 1970, the qualitative social sciences became heavily influenced by what later came to be known as ‘the New European Sociology’, a critically spirited amalgamate of symbolic interactionist- and neo-Marxist theories suffused in an ethnomethodological research program (Foley 2011). The key figures of this school were based in the UK<sup>1</sup>. With it, the interest in psychology waned at the expense of a sharpened interest in structural power writ small. As parts of this movement, educational anthropologists produced fine-grained, interpretative accounts of the organization and experience of everyday classroom interaction bent on showing how it served to reproduce the socio-political constitution of society as a whole.

Their focus was primarily on structural biases in classroom discourses and norms, on how deficit categories such as ‘English language learners’ and ‘learning disability students’ were enacted and lived, and on how teachers and children coped with the formal systems that measured and ranked pupils according to IQ. The collection *Functions of language in the classroom* (Cazden, C. B. et. al. 1972), for instance, presented a series of empirical excursions into how natural classroom communication is structured by middle class linguistic conventions that keep deaf, black, Native American and Spanish-English children at a disadvantage. One of its editors, linguistic anthropologist Dell Hymes, subsequently launched a general framework for the cross-cultural study of pragmatic language use centered on analytic units such as ‘speech communities’ and ‘speech events’, and on tracking the socio-contextual premises for various culturally constituted ‘communicative competences’ to come to play within them. Another highly acclaimed educational sociologist, Hugh Mehan, did ethnographic investigations of one-on-one tests, classroom turn-taking processes and special education school hearings, concluding that these were all organized social moments for sorting and arranging learners into pre-defined hierarchies of smart and successful vs. dumb and failing people that had been constructed by remote politicians and bureaucrats. He also demonstrated the ingenuities with which teachers and children coped with all the situational arbitraries generated by

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Ball, Michael Young, David Hargreaves, Basil Bernstein, Phillip Jackson, Paul Willis

the many mismatches between official education categories and classroom realities to make the categories seem to fit. This and related ethnographic research fueled the development of bilingual / bicultural / multicultural / integrative educational ideas and programs.

Whereas early ethnographic work in schools was usually bent on uncovering how broader discriminatory political structures were reproduced in classroom social processes, an interest grew in the 1980s for how local school actors were not only conforming to, but also challenging and resisting such structural pressures. Studies appeared describing students engaged in subcultural identity politics and covert disobedience to negotiate and contest dominant cultural categories (Everhart 1983). Racial issues remained the hottest topic, most notably represented by the work of Berkley professor John Ogbu. His claim was that success in US schools was premised on acting in accord with white majority cultural conventions, which for many, particularly for black youth, came at the price of social exclusion from their own ethnic communities. Thus, in school black students faced a 'burden of acting white', as it forced them to choose between loyalty to their own cultural heritage and suffer school failure or assimilation to the dominant white majority (Fordham & Ogbu 1986; Ogbu 1978).

Through the 1980s and 90s, class and gender rose alongside race as the central analytic foci of educational anthropology. In *Learning Capitalist Culture* (1990) for instance, Foley examined how students in a mixed white/Mexican small town high-school became enculturated to the materialistic, competitive, individualistic and non-egalitarian attitudes of capitalism through their everyday informal school activities, which over time aggregated as a process of cementing pre-existing class divisions in the local community. *Jock's and Burnouts* (Eckhart 1989) describes middle- and working class students in a Detroit High School caught in schismogenetic processes of linguistic and symbolic polarization. Holland & Eisenhart's *Educated in Romance* (1990) showed how the career ambitions of bright female college students were hampered by social pressures on campus that made their identity development converge with a dominant culture of romance anchored in traditional gender norms.

In an introduction to collection of essays in what the authors called ‘critical educational anthropology’ that was published in 1996, Levinson & Holland nicely summarized the currently prevailing anthropological understanding about the role and functions of mass education:

“...modern schooling...may, while offering certain freedoms and opportunities, at the same time further draw students into dominant projects of nationalism and capitalist labor formation, or bind them even more tightly to systems of class, gender, and race inequality...can yield a sense of self as knowledgeable, as “somebody”, but it may also encourage a sense of self as a failure [and] a feeling of responsibility for one’s lowly social standing....provide a contradictory resource for those who would fit the young to a particular vision of society...become sites of intense cultural politics” (1996: 1)

There is little to say that this analytic fundament has changed much over the last 20 years. Among recent educational anthropologies from the US, it is worth mentioning Lipman’s *High Stakes Education* (2004), which is a critique of how recent neoliberal accountability-policies, high stakes testing, and trends of centralized regulation and militarization in schools in impoverished districts of Chicago serve to educate the students as second-class citizenry. Another important monograph is *Colormute* (Pollock 2004), which identifies the dominance of a communicative discourse in a Californian high school that rendered race-talk taboo, yet leading the educators to reproduce implicitly the very same racial prejudices that they tried so hard to avoid.

## **2.4 Continental imaginations: Mass education as a civilizing project**

The history of European educational anthropology is considerably shorter and more tenuous than that from the US. Although a pessimistic outlook on the intentions of mass education policies- and practices is widespread also here, one distinctly regional concern can be identified: An interest in how education is associated to processes of nation state- and citizenship formation.

The multi-country study *Civil enculturation: Nation-State, School and Ethnic difference in the Netherlands, Britain, Germany and France* (Schiffauer et. al. 2004) is one pertinent example. Contrary to much research in the US, it focuses neither on specific traits of minority children, nor on majority-minority discontinuities, but instead on variations in notions of civilness, citizenship participation and national identity in schools in four major West European countries. The study shows the distinctiveness in how national character is spelled out in education, reflecting how it is nested in each country's particular nation-state history. These nation-specific notions of civilness, citizenship participation and national identity are shown to be transmitted through everyday schooling in various forms; as skills (how to navigate national public civic services), norms (what constitutes civil behavior), and self-concepts (how to identify with the nation). Similar to the current study, the authors go on to claim that the recent diversification of West European schools following increased international migration has made nationalistic education imageries less overt and offensive, more inclusivist in style.

I will now finally give some more attention to the most important educational anthropologies from the Scandinavian region. Central to mass education in Scandinavia is the remarkably expanded character of the welfare state. Here is a political economy where the state has taken on extensive socialization responsibilities, giving rise to highly centralized public education systems. Somewhat paradoxically, Scandinavian anthropologists typically share the very same egalitarian idealism that mark broader Scandinavian welfare discourses, yet their studies tend to conclude in good critical fashion that these ideals are in practice far from fulfilled (Anderson, Gulløv & Valentin 2012).

The most vibrant, and in reality the only consolidated community of educational anthropology in Europe is situated in the Department of Education at the University of Aarhus in Denmark. Its handful of trained educational anthropologists have in recent years published a series of studies into civil enculturation processes in more and less formalized education settings inside Denmark, all analytically framed by Norbert Elias' figurational sociology (Anderson 2011). The one who has focused the most exclusively on primary



school classroom settings, Laura Gilliam, claims that “The socialization of children in school unmask dominant cultural ideas about civilized behavior and civilizing communities in (...) society” (2012: 158). Thus, she conceptualizes the everyday classroom as a prism through which broader societal discourses of civility may be scrutinized. The micro-communities generated through institutional classroom life, she argues, function in parallel as Geertzian models *for*, as well as models *of* Danish civil society. As models *for*, they are local training grounds for broader societal conceptions about appropriate civil behavior. As models *of*, they are slates onto which teachers and parents can project their dreams about civilized society.

Through extensive observations of daily life and teacher-parent talks across the grade-spectrum in primary schools in Copenhagen and Aarhus, Gilliam reconstructs the dominant Danish ideal of the civilized pupil, as represented through a series of behavioral traits signifying appropriate social behavior. ‘The civilized pupil’ embodies bodily discipline, non-aggressiveness, non-competitiveness, peacefulness, friendliness, mellowness, empathy, inclusiveness, cooperativeness, ability to verbalize emotions and disagreements, work diligence, complacency, teacher obedience, conformity motivation, ability to appropriately self-regulate assertiveness and compromise, ability to take turns, and ability to ‘play well’. By extension, all these character traits are connoted to ideal modes of being together, i.e. the ideal community. Conversely, competition, factionalism and bullying is represented as antithetical to school’s basic civility norms, connoting a regression towards barbarism. The teachers make myriad pedagogic efforts to instill the appropriate norms of civility in the children; corrections, impelling, reprimands, structured role-playing activities, free-play lessons under teacher monitoring, and the organization of out-of-school playgroups. All these efforts are legitimized through a pedagogic-psychological discourse that mix images of the child as fragile and vulnerable, prohibitions against authoritarian child-rearing styles, and a behaviorist logic of consistently and systematically rewarding wanted behaviors. The teachers thus operate as active choreographers in the generation of civilized classroom communities, constantly working to coordinate social harmony, encouraging ‘the silent ones’ to step forward and ‘the uppity ones’ to step back. Although expressing concerns both for

individual and communal well-being, communal harmony is in sum the highest value, providing the fundamental scale for ranking of the pupils according to how well they adjusted to the appropriate civil behaviors. The actualization of these notions of what counts as more and less appropriate civilized behavior turn the classrooms into sites in which the symbolic boundaries between civil normality and abnormality are instituted and maintained. Consequentially, they are also purgatory spaces where nonconforming children are sorted out for more specialized civilizing measures (i.e. psychological assessments, special education, personal pedagogic assistance, motoric / speech therapy, medication). Gilliam suggests that these particular specialized civilizing measures are byproducts of a dominant pedagogic discourse that prohibits the use of more authoritarian measures.

Gilliam also takes school's dominant civility norms to explain why Muslim boys more often fall out with teachers and classmates than others do. She describes how such boys are stereotyped as externalizing, violent, aggressive, having big egos, lacking social competences, inner control, and awareness of how their behaviors affects others. Such behavioral traits are associated to an upbringing in environments short on particular social and cultural resources, hinting to the existence of underlying deficit discourses based on ethnicity and class. Implicitly, these culture of poverty-stereotypes came out as binary oppositions to dominant Danish middle-class child-rearing norms that emphasize a harmonious balancing of warmth, active involvement, intellectual and physical stimulation, close supervision and giving freedom under supervision and responsibility. Resonating Paul Willis and John Ogbu, Gilliam claims that by the vesting of all these stereotypes within the school system, Muslim boys are predisposed by their cultural, ethnic, religious and gendered backgrounds to be more likely to fail living up to the school's dominant civility norms, thus driving them towards oppositional behaviors, norms and identities.

## **2.5 Norway: Welfare education childhoods**

In Norway, anthropological classroom studies are also primarily occupied with how welfare state discourses of equality are actualized in everyday classroom life. Much owing

to the writings of anthropologist Marianne Gullestad, they exhibit a particular affinity for the cultural construction of childhood and for grasping children's native point of view. Pivotal is Hilde Lidén's study of processes of cultural continuity and change in multicultural primary school settings (2005). Lidén provides a rich account of the heterogeneity of social and cultural experiences brought into school by children of various ethnic backgrounds. She shows how immigrant diasporas and interests are constitutive of the children's own interpretative frameworks and friendship pathways. Similar to Gilliam, Lidén portrays organized classroom teaching as a homogenizing force that transmits a naturalized sense of community that mutes ethnic and social differences. She also eloquently describes how school's dominant knowledge hierarchies are reproduced through classroom interaction norms that discretely invalidate knowledges and experiences that do not fit in. In other words, the classroom's social scripts favor knowledge pertaining to an ethnic Norwegian middle-class experience. Lidén's work lacks the critical gist of most educational anthropology. To her, Norwegian schools are places where children are offered, not only the knowledge, codes and interpretative frameworks needed for participation in the majority society, but also a sense of belonging in a time when private cultural and social experiences are increasingly rendered divergent by globalization pressures.

Marie Louise Seeberg (2003) compares Norwegian and Dutch 6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grade classes, similar to Bauman and his colleagues finding specific classroom practices that nurture nation-specific forms of selfhood. In the Dutch school, the children are taught to understand ethnic diversity mainly through values of 'tolerance' and 'difference'. This moral celebration of diversity allowed the teachers to intervene actively on racialized interactions among the children. In the Norwegian school conversely, ethnic diversity was understood through values of 'equality as sameness'. This in turn engendered classroom practices by which ethnic differences were muted, making it more difficult for the teachers to grasp how these played into everyday life. Seeberg claims that the discourse of 'tolerance' and 'difference' in the Dutch school led to the emergence of more multi-referential identities and a sense of belonging in the children. The discourse of 'equality' in contrast engendered more unilocal senses of belonging and identity. Seeberg

associates the enculturation of multi-referential forms of Self in the Dutch setting to the country's tradition of integration policies that explicitly acknowledge people of immigrant origins as Other. The unilocal forms of selfhood she finds in Norway is traced to the more assimilationist policy-tradition of the social democratic welfare state, where individual-level integration is closely associated to personal identification with the nation.

More recently, Rysst (2012) examined the role of equality-discourses in a 6<sup>th</sup> grade class in Oslo that had a majority of immigrant origin children and found that two contrasting discourses of ethnicity existed in parallel to each other. One was an official discourse of color-blindness, most strongly upheld by the teachers, denying that racial talk at all existed in their school. Beyond this official discourse however, Rysst found what she called 'the sound of color': Sociolects incorporating Arabic and Punjabi words and concepts, and racialized gossip around bodily markers such as lip-size, skin-tone and clothes. From this, she suggested that the children had internalized a racial hierarchy of whites on the top, followed by yellows, then browns, and finally, blacks, which she thought derived from informal social environments outside school. In school, where color-muteness dominated, the children hid this racial discourse from most of their interaction, only to surface in more heated instances.

Finally, Stian Overå's study of masculinity in a private primary school in Oslo's west-end should be noted (2013). Building on the lengthy classroom studies of Harriet Bjerrum Nielsen (2009, 2014), he found that his informant boys showed remarkably many traits that are typically thought of as feminine. The youngest ones frequently assisted each other with school-tasks, fondled and cozied each other and would comfort those who cried. The adolescents were inclusive and emotionally articulate, interested in clothes and style, and teased those not taking schoolwork seriously. Overå plays with various explanations as to where this softer, 'new' masculinity might come from. One suggestion is that such masculinities were promoted by individual figures seen as popular. Another is that the school applied a particular pedagogic organization with mixed age group in which older children received explicit caring responsibilities for the younger children. A third and broader suggestion is a broader societal change deriving from the rise of gender

equality discourses in the Nordic region by which masculinities have come to include traits such as emotional reflexivity, intimate confidentiality, increased family involvement, and more child-centered fathering.

## 2.6 Dodging the choice of sour grapes

“Cohorts after cohort of students are learning – and many of them subsequently hired to apply or teach – useless theories”

Jon Elster, 2009

Briefly summarized, anthropologies of mass education tend to conclude that one or a combination of the following processes underwrites schooling: (1) A contentious dialectic between dominant vs. marginal cultural forms, (2) a socio-cognitive inculcation of exclusionary class, gender and/or ethnic representations; (3) a propagating of ideologies that serve the power of societal elites. The recurrence of conclusions of this ink within the field hints to a default antipathy towards projects of mass education as such. Delamont (2012) has pointed out that education anthropology is parochially focused on Native American, African American and Hispanic American children, shifting target according to whichever group is regarded as ‘underachieving’, ‘failing’, ‘drop outs’ or ‘at risk’ at a given time and place. Distinctly applied and activist in spirit, educational anthropology however seems to have lost touch with the more general theoretical concerns of the anthropology proper.

So where to place the current study? I do have some reservations to the field’s customary default activism. Given the variety of opinions and behaviors observed among my informants during fieldwork, the trope of Norway’s unitary school system as a vehicle of nationalist indoctrination seemed a bit to crude. More so I was wondering how my empirical materials could be interpreted so as to allow it to speak to wider anthropological debates about the human condition. Dissatisfied with the blank slate-like trope of social agents that dominates post-modern qualitative institutional studies, I eventually turned to educational anthropology’s theoretical progeny: the mind sciences.

A key reason for this choice was that to understand the actualization of school effectiveness-ideology within formalized educative interactions, a firm theoretical framework for framing as precisely as possible how processes of learning, socialization and enculturation operate in social real-time felt pertinent. As will be described in detail in the theory chapter, anthropologies of the mind has travelled far since the time of the culture and personality-school. From its diverse recent history, I was able to draw various conceptual tools by which I could produce fruitful analytic responses to my stated research concerns. For the genealogical analysis of education policies for instance, semantic extensionism facilitated means to produce both a high-resolution image of the semantic dialectics internal to the policy discourse as well as an account of the interrelations between the discourse itself and relevant external historical and material environments. For the ethnography of classroom time, the concepts of cultural models and schemas provided an epistemology of culture by which the temporal effects of school effectiveness-ideology could be studied exclusively as a relational entity, that is, as a social phenomenon extraneous to individual experience and motivation. For the paper on social power, cognitive anthropology offered refined insights based on experimental research into how individuals in natural social environments learn, store and enact cultural information. These insights in turn allowed for an explanation of why ideological conformity was the rule among my informants that took account also for their less outspoken yet clearly evident facility to disregard or oppose the school effectiveness-regime. Although both Lidén and Rysst made passing references to cognitive anthropological theories, none applied them actively in their analyses their materials. As such, the current application of cognitive anthropological perspectives to understand mass education is completely new within educational anthropology.

Like most educational anthropologies, so is this one concerned with how larger political processes are linked to more and local social ones. Whilst it supports the basic assumption that happenings at macro-level have concrete implications at micro-level, it also explores the extent to which cumulative effects of unforeseen events at the micro-level may eventually produce macro-level change. Such upstream effects are well demonstrated in paper on the genealogy of minority education pedagogies, particularly

in the various examples of how the changing composition of the Norwegian immigrant pupil population changed national policy-making by way of the special political influence of the teaching profession ensuing from Norway's indigenous welfare state history. The paper on classroom time on the other hand primarily explores happenstantial downstream influences, that is, unintended social effects that arise from the blind spots of an idealized pedagogical program at implementation. In the paper on social power, I take a purely naturalist view on the field of education in which its appearance as a large-scale coherent institution is seen as the net aggregate of its ongoing myriad micro-level social moments. As such, ideology as a macro-level phenomenon is more of an analytic shorthand description than something system-immanent. The crucial question of power within such an emergent view of social life is where, how and by whom social emergence is contained. Macro-constraints primarily take overtly disciplinary forms that are set up to roughly keep social life in ideological place.

There is all to say that mass education will continue consolidating its Leviathan form across the globe in all predictable future. Recognizing this fact, I feel it is due for educational anthropology to temper its activism a notch and return to questions about what actual socialization in an era of mass education can reveal about more basic human conditions. As such, this study hopes to be an example of a less politicized educational anthropology that can contribute to the development of theories about how cultural knowledge is socially constructed and transmitted within and outside of modern mass education settings.

## Chapter three

### 3.1 The ethnographic field and its Self

“[fieldwork] has been a messy, qualitative experience in contrast to the positivist social-science vision of method”

Marcus & Fischer, 1986

The main purpose of any methods chapter is to discuss the scientific value of the presented study. In question are concepts such as ‘reliability’, ‘validity’, ‘rigorousness’ etc. In an abstract for a paper presentation at the 21<sup>th</sup> international congress of the International Association of Cross-Cultural Psychology (IACCP) in South Africa in 2012, I reported:

*“[My study] compares 1<sup>st</sup> grade multicultural classrooms... the two investigated schools had 90% / 35% registered ‘minority language pupils’. Each had three 1<sup>st</sup> grade classes with an average of 25 pupils / 1,5 teachers per class, thus a total of six classes, ca. ten teachers and 150 pupils were included. The main method was prolonged participant observation. A total of one year of ethnographic fieldwork was carried out in the two schools. Teacher data include group differentiations, definition and evaluation of aims, and class supervision. Pupil data include peer socialization dynamics relative to contextual adaption and academic performance.”*

This account effectively summarizes the methodological design of my study, providing key statistical properties of the field setting, the types of data it contains as well as procedures applied to gather them. Similar minimalist, matter-of-factly scripts pervade the genre of methods writing in so-called evidence-based social science. Contraire to this trend, in anthropology reflexive fieldwork description of a more personal, subjectivist kind has ascended as the state of the art in methods writing (see for instance Berger 1993; Clifford & Marcus 1986; Gupta & Ferguson 1997; Strathern 1987a). Key questions here are: Who is the fieldworker? Who is her Alter? How did she come by her field, and



how did it look? What spoils did she bring back from her field journeys? How did she go about literarily mediating her ethnographic bounties? The following report is my attempt at tackling these questions, including some further reflections bred by this effort.

### 3.2 An Auto-Ethnographic Self

“self-knowledge is bottomless”

“At the least, there is refuge in the postulate that self-knowledge is possible”

Marilyn Strathern, 1987b

Doing anthropology at home tends to get a skeptic reception in the anthropological mainstream. One important reason is that it is thought to miss the ‘culture shock’-effect of classic, foreign-bound fieldwork. Grappling with this epistemological problematic of the near vs. the far, Strathern launched the concept of *Auto-anthropology*, or “anthropology carried out in the context which produced it”. The term encompasses her views of how to best do anthropology in a way that is thoroughly levelled with the ethnographic field, regardless of the spatial relation between the ethnographer and the field (Strathern 1987b: 17). Central is a mode of writing that incorporates at all levels, be it methods discussions, empirical reporting or analysis, a fundamental reflexivity about the intricacies both of Self and Other. In the following, my aim is to produce a reflexive account of my own research experience along these lines.

Two years prior to fieldwork, various circumstances had led me to getting a position as a doctoral student in the EU-funded SIMCUR<sup>2</sup>-project. It was designed by an inter-European team of developmental psychologists who shared an interest in issues of migration, acculturation and multiculturalism and a flair for Urie Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (1979). Prior to fieldwork, in keeping with the broader project design I formulated a letter of intent to the teachers and the children’s parents stating that my aim was to “uncover factors promoting resilience and social integration among

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<sup>2</sup> Social Integration of Migrant Children – Uncovering Family and School Factors Promoting Resilience

immigrant children in school". Operationalizing this aim in ethnographic terms soon proved a bewildering task as I discovered that how to even get MYSELF integrated in the field was far from self-evident. At the time I had placed my confidence in the 'culture's apprenticeship'-approach as described by Marcus & Fischer (misquoting Geertz): "the anthropologist focuses on whatever in a culture that strikes the eye and then fills in detail and descriptive elaborations" (Marcus & Fischer 1986: 29). Bred and fed by the Norwegian Unity School through the 1980s- and 90s, and having worked part-time in various schools through the 2000s, I found little that struck my eye in the everyday 1<sup>st</sup> grade teaching of the alphabet and the numbers 1-20. No clear ethnographic Other springing to view, I receded, to borrow Rosaldo's words, to "transcribing in uncomprehending boredom" (1980: 16), shadowed by a subliminal fear that my jottings were nothing but mere banalities.

This experience, I think, highlights a serious problem with the post-modern turn in anthropological methods thought, namely a myopic faith in the concept of reflexivity. Growing out of a critical reexamination of the modernist genre of ethnographic writing, increased reflexivity was no doubt a pertinent antidote to the many colonial conceptual specters that have ridden the discipline. Unfortunately, though, the 'writing culture'-turn failed to define distinct forms of reflexivity adapted to the different stages of the anthropological research process. Thus, methodologically relevant nuances between actual fieldwork and its pre- and post-phases are lost. Following the common argument against homely anthropology, one might claim that the reason why the 'culture's apprentice'-approach did not work for me was that I knew my field too well to at all be able to establish a naïve ethnographic gaze. My counter-claim though, is that the critical problem was not primarily my subjective proximity to the field; had I taken time to reflect systematically on all my pre-knowledge of the field, I would neither have gone for this approach, nor been surprised by its inefficacy. More so, I think it was my postmodernist ethnomethodological training itself, particularly its radical idealization of an ethnographic gaze free of preconceptions, which sent me tumbling down the wrong track. In effect, I had to learn-by-failure that my field would bestow me neither with cultural shock therapy, nor any great epiphanies about what to look for as fieldwork rolled on. In

consequence I fell into something akin to a naturalist fieldwork strategy, mostly sticking to, as Frederik Barth would have it, 'watch and wonder' (in Kuper 1981), trying to simply take note of as much as I could of everything and anything.

### **3.2 A missing ethnographic Other**

A bitter fruit of serious auto-anthropology seems to be that one has to abandon the pursuit of a clearly defined ethnographic Other. To catch speed however, any ethnographic endeavor is dependent, at least temporarily, on a fantasy of one. As noted in the introduction, a key motivation for this study was to investigate the ominously culturalized public discourse about increasing portions of children with immigrant origins in schools in eastern Oslo. I felt it as my responsibility to offer a more down-to-earth, behind-the-statistics comparison of everyday life in high- and low minority-school settings. In my fieldwork, I did indeed find linguistic and cultural variations between the studied schools that resounded with, and could have been taken to confirm some of the discursively established differentials. For instance, Norwegian-spoken, subject-centered teacher-pupil dialogues were more fluent and elaborate in the low-minority school than in the high-minority school. And religious categories (particularly Muslim/Christian) were more outspoken in the children's various identity talk in the latter setting. Thus, I did find empirical materials to spawn thick descriptions of, say, the more mediocre Norwegian fluencies, or their greater enthusiasm for Eid than Christmas, or of their teachers' fleeting frustrations with the school-home cooperation in the high-minority school. Such work might have merited both academic publication and public interest, though I fear it would also have fueled more than cooled popular majority-minority frictions. The fact is that these differences were not representative to the life as I actually witnessed it to unfold. More so, what I found was that the vast majority of the daily life that passed in the two settings was very similar. They were predominantly cued on the same kinds of tasks, the teachers mostly enforced same kinds of norms, life was just as hectic and erratic, the children just as liable to work or drift off into play.

To illustrate the point of reflexivity that I am trying to make, consider for a moment the following statistical representations of the majority-minority achievement-gap:

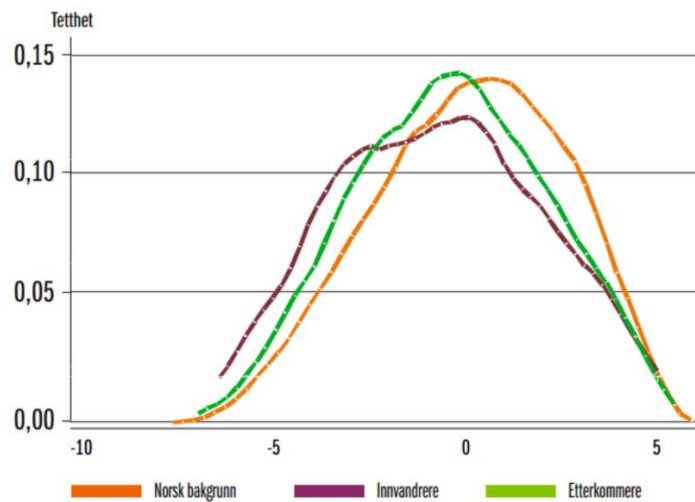
2004

**Tabell 3.16. Resultater på nasjonale prøver elever etter kjønn, innvandringsbakgrunn og foreldrenes utdanningsnivå. 2004**

	4. trinn		10. trinn		
	Matematikk	Lesing	Matematikk	Lesing	Engelsk lesing
Alle elever	50,18	50,92	49,28	50,05	50,17
Jenter	51,02	53,31	49,21	52,23	52,86
Gutter	49,39	48,65	49,35	47,97	47,60
Førstegenerasjons innvandrere	39,47	41,67	41,90	37,91	43,14
Født i Norge av to utenlandske	44,57	48,28	46,39	43,79	47,92
Far har høgskole/universitets utdanning	55,99	56,16	56,88	56,34	56,69
Mor har høgskole/universitets utdanning	55,53	56,16	56,31	55,91	56,12

Kilde: Bonesrønning mfl. (2005).

2007



2011

**FIGUR 3.16** Gjennomsnittsskåre for alle nasjonale prøver på 5. og 8. trinn etter innvandringsstatus. 2010. Standardiserte skåre, med gjennomsnitt 0.



These tables all represent the aggregate scores of children belonging to non-immigrant vs. immigrant categories on annual national education tests. They are drawn respectively from the 2004-, 2007- and 2011 editions of 'The Education Mirror' (*Utdanningsspeilet*), an annual report published by the Norwegian Education Directorate

(*Utdanningsdirektoratet*), Norway's national bureau of educational administration. In the first of the above tables, which lists 4<sup>th</sup> (left) and 10<sup>th</sup> (right) grade math- (col. 1) and reading- (col. 2) scores from 2004, the initial line comprises all pupils regardless of background, the fourth children born to immigrant parents in Norway (i.e. 2<sup>nd</sup> generation). The second table, which lists the total 2007-scores of all 5<sup>th</sup> graders, divides into three categories: Pupils with Norwegian backgrounds (orange), immigrant pupils (purple), and immigrant descendant pupils (green). In the third table from 2011, which lists total 5<sup>th</sup> grade scores in orange and 8<sup>th</sup> grade scores in green, the leftmost category are majority pupils, the rightmost non-western descendants (i.e. 2<sup>nd</sup> gen.).

I spent much energy thinking about how to relate these statistics to my study. I explored their causal underpinnings<sup>3</sup>, their diachronic stability<sup>4</sup>, and comparative value<sup>5</sup>, without finding much that felt fit for ethnographic exploration. There is indeed something intrinsic to the ethnographic way of going about the world to resist reducing social phenomena to statistical facts (Leach 1967). Whatever each of my informant children, immigrant origins or not, could flit down on a sleekly designed reading test on some day near the end of the school year appeared starkly peripheral to how they participated socially in the everyday classroom. Not only were the statistics rather uninformative for my purposes, they also represented a real danger to how I tuned my ethnographic gaze. An eye trained for statistical interpretation (i.e. one familiar with the particular data set, construction of standard means and deviations, evaluation of effect sizes etc.) can see for instance that though the 2011-table portrays the gap as particularly sizeable, giving the impression of an increase in time, it remains just about as big (or small) in all three tables. Furthermore, though the differences are 'significant at population level' as a

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<sup>3</sup> Education statisticians primarily ascribe them to differences in socio-economic background and parental education level. Some recent research indicates that genetic components may also be significant.

<sup>4</sup> A slight narrowing has been observed in recent years, which some researchers suggest attributes to the national education reform of 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Comparing to other industrialized liberal democracies, the Norwegian achievement gap comes out as average-sized.

statistician would have it, they are way too small to be divided into the kinds of sub-factors necessary for the design of targeted interventions. In the ethnographic sampling mode, the presented differences are in fact little more than surface ripples. Eventually, the most interesting lesson grappling with these statistics taught me was how they nurtured an observation bias that over-emphasized the significance of majority-minority categories in everyday school life.

Why do such statistical differences, which from an everyday point of view are rather peripheral, evolve into such major concerns in host public imaginaries? The reasons are surely manifold. Leaning on the Freudian notion of a *narcissism of minor differences* and Barth's theory of ethnic boundaries, historian Michael Ignatieff, suggests that ethnic tensions are typically triggered by popular recognitions of how privileges based on ethnic belonging are categorically inauthentic. That is, ethnic groups usually subsume internal diversities that are easily apparent and thus exposes the phantasmagorical nature of such categories (Ignatieff 1998). This point seems important in explaining why minority children as an exclusive pedagogical category gradually dissolved. Parallel to this dissolution however, public anxieties around majority-minority distinctions within the education field have exasperated in pace with the increasingly quantified mode of marking this distinction. In other words, as numbers come to dominate discursive gravity centers, anxieties about differences that actually make little difference in real life flourish.

In *The fear of small numbers* (2006), Appadurai claims that this phenomenon, which is now globally evident, is driven by challenges to the internal homogeneity of nation states caused by globalization processes. Liberal, democratic nation states, he claims, are founded on a representation of the people as a singular mass of rational agents. Within this representation, there is only room for procedural minorities, that is, minorities defined by differences in opinion that may ultimately be resolved within a democratic framework. Minority categories only become problematic when they exhibit seemingly irresolvable differences, such as is the case when (in this case relatively unimportant differences) are solidified longitudinally by census data. Appadurai claims that in liberal democracies, such seemingly primordial differences evoke associations of nepotism,

collusion, subversion, and deception, which might explain the generally anxious tone such discourses take. Vindicating Appadurai's analysis is the fact that all the historical policy interventions described in this study have aimed in one way or another at defining minority children a in procedural terms, that is at levelling their difference from the majority in terms of societal participation.

Another perspective that might contribute to explain public fears of small statistical minority-majority differences, which is also the one most theoretically akin to the larger framework of this study, is Tversky & Kahneman's insights about 'small numbers'-heuristics (1971). They demonstrated that humans are cognitively disposed to impute descriptors of large samples directly onto their expectation about how smaller sub-samples operate. In other words, simply because it is cognitively convenient, we allow large-scale statistical facts frame our processing of everyday experience. A key trait of contemporary population statistics is that minor differences are vastly foregrounded relative to the substantial amount of similarities that exist between the sub-samples in question. As small numbers in large educational test-samples readily transform into large matters in local schools, an uneasy obsession with minority categories persists, legitimating ever-new pedagogical attempts at levelling the difference. Of late, the most pertinent example is the wildfire spread of the TIEY-program in high-minority-proportion schools bent at bringing their overall test scores on par with those with majority-dominated schools.

The low- and the high-minority schools thus differed less in terms of actual linguistic or ethno-cultural traits than in their relative emic concern with such differences. From an anthropological point of view, this observation is rather unsurprising. More than 50 years ago, Fredrik Barth (1969) argued convincingly that the roots of the production of cultural differences are to be found along ethnic boundaries inside local social processes. I have previously accounted for the concern in Norwegian educational anthropology with the institutional muting of ethnic categories in Norwegian schools. A danger to these studies is that they may be read to conclude that teachers in Norway are actually free from ethnic and/or cultural prejudices. Whilst the teachers I studied frequently muted ethnic

categories and rejected all ethnically based differential treatment on moral grounds (“Brown skin color makes no less of a Norwegian” as one put it), they were also clearly mindful that ethnic minority children represented a particular potential risk. Such risks were not only perceived in terms of weaker literacy performance but also in terms of a shortage of majority cultural competences. Thus, a sense that special corresponding pedagogic measures could be necessary was never far away. To counter the expectation of Norwegian literacy deficits for instance, the drilling of basic vocabulary was intensified. With regard to the expected lack of familiarity with national religious and cultural traditions, they took steps to ensure that the pupils were actively engaged with knowledge and activities pertaining to the majority holidays (most prominently Christmas, Easter and the national day). Against the expectation that their parents would at best be only sparsely involved with their children’s schoolwork, they obliged them to sign a list every day for having worked through reading-homework with their children. Given their public denial of thinking in such terms however, it seems unfair to attribute the existence of such minority-minority- distinctions at the practice level to some sort of hidden racialized ideology. A more reasonable view would be that the difference-making is spun out of the pragmatic nature of social encounters systematically framed by an excessive impatience to increase school-level academic performance and statistical pre-representations of the immigrant origin pupil segment as an intrinsic threat to this project.

To sum up the methodological lesson of this exploration: In the end, neither children, teachers, the school system nor public discourses could in and by themselves fulfil the role as a clearly identified ethnographic Other for me to re-represent. As a result, the study lacks the premise of such an Alter. This explains the rather unorthodox absence of an emic voice in its ethnographic accounts. As I am about to elaborate, my choice to avoid the deeper kind of experimental engagement with my informants typical to much ethnography was quite deliberate. After all, this study was never really about giving anyone a voice. More so, it has been about re-representing the particular patterns emerging in that intangible social space between my informants called interaction.



### 3.3 The experience of homely 1<sup>st</sup> grade ethnography

The reader might recall that my fieldwork started with a reverse culture shock. Disappointed to find that life in the classrooms exhibited few striking features, what shook me instead was less the field itself than my own academic prejudices about how a fieldwork process is supposed to work. As my culture's apprentice strategy faded to black, participation, observation and field noting evolved into something that felt like a rather aimless journey. My response was simply to jar my empirical gaze wide-open. In an interview, Malinowski once stated that "the keeping of notes begins as a necessity and expanding them often becomes a habit, and then somewhere along the line...it becomes a compulsion" (Malinowski, in Mydans 1998). The following excerpt from my field log, which comprises roughly one fifth of the entry from my first fieldwork day, exemplifies this compulsion in my fieldwork:

*Monday 6<sup>th</sup> December 2010*

*I enter the school building ca. 0810. A handful of pupils are undressing outside the classroom, hanging their clothes on rows of hooks lining the corridor walls. (...) The pupils enter the classroom as they get finished, put their red 'post files' in a plastic box by the blackboard that carries a sign reading [teacher's first name], lift their chairs off their desk and sit down. (...) [The teacher] (Norwegian, female) walks around the classroom, turning on lights, pulling aside curtains, checking materials, and greeting pupils. (...) At one table, the boy [W] (Moroccan 2<sup>nd</sup> gen., plaster on arm) pushes his desk out of line. His neighbor boy [B] (Polish, recently immigrated, hardly speaks any Norwegian) tries to realign the desks, but [W] hinders him. [B] becomes visibly sad; with teary eyes pushes harder until he manages to get [W]'s desk back in line. The girl [E] (Norwegian), who has been away a week with chickenpox, shows her earrings to her girlfriend [R] (Norwegian). [R] expresses to like them, [E] says she's afraid that no one will play with her when she wears them (...)*

*[The teacher] explains that the class will now start the letter A. Checking the attendance, every pupil is told to respond with an 'A'-word. If they cannot figure a word, they are to merely say 'A'. Few pupils manage to figure 'A'-words, and*

many repeat ones already said. (...) [The teacher] randomly selects one of the pupils to fit a heart into one of the squares of the Christmas calendar on the classroom window. The hearts, red in color with glued-on glittery powder, were made by the pupils before Advent. [The teacher] merrily tells the pupils that after that workshop she found glitter powder everywhere at home. (...) [The teacher] sets up a simple Advent wreath on a chair in front of the blackboard and turns of the light. She lights two candles whilst the class sing a Christian advent song with meek voices. (...) [The teacher] quickly extinguishes the candles and turns on the lights, telling the pupils to be careful with fire, especially now during Christmas-time when candles are lit so often, because clothes and hair may catch fire. (...)

The rest of the lesson (until 0945) is spent doing plenary exercises on the letter A. [The teacher] make the pupils state A-words in turn and writes their suggestions on the blackboard. (...) The following words are listed: Ape (ape), apekatt (monkey), akebrett (sledge), ake (slide), and (duck), appelsin (orange), ananas (pineapple), andre (others), agurk (cucumber), Audi (car brand), alle (everyone), alltid (always), aldri (never), at (that), Askepott (Cinderella), Ariel (the little mermaid), au (ouch), ansikt (face), arm (arm), ambulance (ambulance), alarm (alarm), aha (eureka). (...) They practice differentiating the listed words according to the number of A's within each word. (...) [The teacher] constructs sentences from the words. In a humorous tone she tries to illustrate the meanings of the words 'always' vs. 'never' by writing: "I always have to ask you to be quiet, but you never listen". Noticing that I had said 'dobra' (means Good in polish) to [B], some children ask me if I speak polish, which I say I do not (...) several wonder if I speak other languages. The boy [M] (Turkish 2<sup>nd</sup> gen.) asks if I speak Turkish. I say I know the words 'Merhaba' (hello) and 'Teshekuler' (thank you). He says another word and asks if I know what it means. I do not, so he tells me. (...)

After recess, [the teacher] demonstrates how to write big 'A's (i.e. to start in the left side on 'the floor of the living room', then proceed diagonally up into 'the attic' of their didactic representation of a letter-house etc.). She then distributes sheets with writing exercises (repetitive scripting of 'A', 'a' and 'short A-words'). The pupils fetch shared cups/boxes with pencils and rubbers from shelves lining the walls. Some of the girls declare that they want the red pencils. [The teacher] calls

*them to be quiet, then starts moving about giving individual assistance. Some compete about being finished first; some of the girls seem especially concerned with scripting as neatly as possible. When finished, they are set to glue the sheets into their writing books and draw pictures of things that start with 'A' on the corresponding page. A sheet with some sample pictures of 'A'-words hangs at display on the blackboard. (...)*

*[The teacher] moves the boy [M] (Somali 2<sup>nd</sup> gen.) to a separate desk because she thinks he works better when he sits by himself. Shortly after, he vomits on the floor. Nearby, shocked pupils burst out a few disgusted comments, then turn back to their work when corrected by [the teacher]. She then helps [M] clean up. (...) Several pupils have finished the assignment, which leads to the eruption of some disarray, as they do not get new instructions right away. Eventually [the teacher] tells them to form groups on their own and work freely with number- or letter cards whilst she goes to make a phone call to [M]'s mother. The boys [F] (Tamil 2<sup>nd</sup> gen.) and [L] (Alban 2<sup>nd</sup> gen.) calmly sort cards in the classroom's reading corner. Another group of boys starts throwing rubbers to each other, then gets hold of a Yahtzee-game and spends the remaining lesson time writing their names on the score sheets. The girls, who mostly finish the assignment a bit later than the boys because of trying to write more neatly, form separate groups at other tables to play cards or free-draw. Attempts at social exclusion are evident, especially from [E] in her way of keeping control of the card decks, discriminately deciding whom of the other girls gets various cards.*

Now add another ca. 500 pages filled with similarly dry and fragmentary streams of “dada data” (Roth 1989: 559), next to a few audio recorded teacher interviews, and you roughly have the total of empirical materials that I brought home from the field. My strategy to write down anything and everything that I observed in the hope of capturing at last something that would turn out to be relevant to what I studied (whatever that was) turned out as a recipe for a field log that is not only a pretty soporific read, but also one opaque in thematic focus. Where Rosaldo logged mnemonic war traces in every little crook and cranny of his informant Ilongot's natural surroundings, I recorded streams of trivial 1<sup>st</sup> grade classroom conversations and interactions. Hence, my data are

predominantly tales of how to write the letter “A/a”, how to figure the mathematical outcome of eating two out of five apples, why Ibrahim should not talk so loudly when the teacher talks, how to comfort a sad classmate, when to move here and there to do this and that throughout a lesson, next to a mass of other more or less impetuous 6-year-old mumbo jumbo.

It was not that I had not tried to plan for a more analytically attuned ethnographic gaze; in my project description for instance, I boldly stated that I would track “social inclusion/exclusion patterns [that] are produced by the way teachers manage knowledge transmission in particular classrooms”. As the preceding excerpt shows however, neither are “knowledge transmission management” nor “social inclusion/exclusion patterns” readily observable in direct ethnographic terms. When Barth coined *naturalist fieldwork* as one of ‘watching and wondering’, he probably did not quite have my indefinite way of staggering through fieldwork in mind. Reviewing my field notes though, it seems as if I accidentally fell into a somewhat resembling track. ‘Watching’, Barth says, entails a sort of triangulation process between three levels: Theories, observations and reality. More specifically, it is an ongoing dialectic between the latter, the fieldwork reality, and the former, one’s theoretical concerns, as mediated via discrete field observations. The specific function of observation is to try eliciting field data that challenges and falsifies theory, thus generating theoretical refinement (in Kuper 1981: 9). Traces of a similar dynamic is evident in my field notes. With time, here and there between the lengthy face-level transcripts, I developed a habit of inserting analytic comments. On February 18<sup>th</sup> for instance, I summarized:

*“[The teacher] promotes a participative style that entails responding “appropriately much”. Eager pupils who raise their hands too impatiently or burst out their responses without being appointed are met with ignorance and corrections (especially pupils I and M). Pupils who say little, like R, D and N, are regularly appointed even if they do not raise hands. If they do raise hands, they are picked more or less immediately. These latter pupils also receive no corrections for language mistakes or low voice as many others, and are often praised even if giving wrong answers.”*

And on March 15<sup>th</sup>:

*“A culture for ‘meta-learning’”: Explicit display of self-reflexivity on the content and process of learning events is recurrently sanctioned positively. In staging classroom learning events, the teachers appropriate, transform, temper and modify play-schemas.”*

What seems to be evolving here is an ethnographic gaze bent at inferring select patterns from the mass of interactions passing before my eyes. Which exact patterns that came to attract my attention were not coincidental. Underlying the first section is an assumption that classroom interaction is underwritten by a particular behavioral code, which in turn is sanctioned in particular ways. It also assumes variations in how the individual classroom actors traversed this local sociocultural grid. What I was circling in, in other words, was salient behavioral norms and sanction forms, whilst simultaneously trying to account for irregularities in how these played themselves out. In the second section, I had started generalizing about the social operations driving the prevalence of a culture of meta-learning. The corollary of how the teachers fused elements of play into their teaching shows that I had also started groping with ways to align the variability in the patterns I saw with a theoretical conceptualization of culture as flexible cognitive schemas. From empirical reality flowed particular observations flowed inferences flowed generalizations flowed observational testing of the generalizations against empirical reality. And so on.

Thus, in retrospect my fieldwork does exhibit contours of all the key components Barth's naturalist fieldwork. What mainly sets it apart is the lack of a tactical consciousness about what I was doing as fieldwork went along. This flaw is most obvious in the quality of my falsification work. Though I did actively searched for (dis-)affirming evidence to the generalizations I gradually formulated in my field notes, the lack of an overall framework for deliberate deductions in my ongoing observations does place some limits on the extent to which the study is suited for higher-level theory testing. It was only during post-fieldwork, under the helpful supervision of senior colleagues, that I started structuring my way of dealing with the data more systematically vis à vis broader anthropological

discussions. In other words, the presented analyses are prone to be more conscientious to the theories that frame them than what the empirical reality from which they derive might justify. Had I more consciously looked for alternate temporal patterns during fieldwork and not only in my field notes after returning, I could have ended up at a less imposing image of the presence of the learning effectiveness temporalities in the paper on classroom time. Likewise, had I chosen, for instance, to elicit cultural schemas from my informants through Quinn's open-ended interview techniques (2005a), I might have ended at a more modest criticism of theories of internalization in the paper on social power.

A fortunate consequence of my empirical preoccupation with interaction rather than experience was that my ethnographic gaze was effectively deflected from being too strongly locked onto emic realities, instead shifting in a more Barthian direction, namely towards observing their behaviors "at the moment of action" (Barth 2007: 8). A more empathetic pursuit of how my informants themselves reflected on school effectiveness-thought might have turned up a richer picture of the experiential constitution of this cultural model. For future fieldwork I would want to draw more actively on the ample supply of methodological tools that cognitive anthropology has to offer for charting more systematically how cultural models are constituted. Had these been applied, the study could have offered a more solid empirical basis for the posited school effectiveness-model.

Having named the most important subjective biases, contingencies and myopias that contaminated the quality of my fieldwork, a final aspect that strengthens the quality of my data is my feeling of having achieved a fairly intimate access to what went on in the field. I quickly got on good terms with most of the informants, which implied that they readily shared their personal thoughts and feelings with me and allowed me passage into a variety of contexts within the school<sup>6</sup>. Aside from the classrooms, I also spent much

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<sup>6</sup> As a concrete example, they early on entrusted me with keys to the school building so that I could find materials, let children in and out of, or stay in the classrooms when the teachers were not present

time in the play yards, the libraries, the teacher lounges, the after-schools, and was invited to sit in on various planning meetings, staff meetings and team discussions. Though viewed by the school staff as a 'researcher' by denomination, I was one of a rather odd kind. Whilst most education researchers appeared only sporadically, usually to either briefly extract some quantifiable data or to offer a sober PowerPoint presentation on how such data have been computed, I came back day after day, remained complacent and openly curious about their doings, even offering an extra hand in their daily chores. To the children, I mostly seemed to pass as just another teacher assistant, albeit a less authoritative one.

### **3.4 Writing beyond culture**

According to Marcus & Fischer, "good ethnography.... gives a sense of the conditions of the fieldwork, of everyday life, of microscale processes...of translation across cultural and linguistic boundaries...and of holism" (Marcus & Fischer 1986: 25). By these standards, this study is relatively parsimonious. The best-fulfilled criterion is the second/third; to the first, the preceding sections have hopefully made some repairs. It is admittedly rather timid when judged by classic disciplinary standards of translation and holism. This was to expect however. In my work, I have never aspired to be a cultural mediator, nor to make exhaustive account for the social and cultural complexities I observed. Neither did I aim at a juxtaposition of my own culture and that of an ethnographic Other, whether in the modern essentialist-, nor in the postmodern translationist sense. Though remaining thoroughly committed to the participant observation method, the study has little to offer in terms of thick descriptions or deep interpretations of my informant's own life worlds. I shall finally in brief spell out the goods I see in these bads.

Whilst being sympathetic to the poetic turn that it set off in ethnographic writing, to me, the 'crisis of representation' essentially comes across, less as a crisis in how to write about the field than as a crisis in the scientific validity of traditional anthropological data relative to the level of theorizing aspired to. What kicked off the crisis was a realization that Malinowskian style fieldwork did not yield data reliable for grand cultural theorizing. The ensuing critique therefore circumvented what I hold to be the biggest methodological

conundrum of an ethnographic approach, namely how to refine the very practice of fieldwork. What mainly ensued from the Writing Culture-turn was a sharpening of anthropology's literary wits as it became nasally preoccupied with the aesthetics of post-fieldwork writing. In its rearview mirror, fieldwork itself regressed to something of a laissez-faire affair. The idea that one could arrive at deeper understandings of the ethnographic field simply by manipulating one's literary style of representation stands out to me as a straightforward misapprehension. The delimiting of the anthropological methods discourses to ethnographic writing did little to resolve the fundamental problem of the crisis of representation, namely the limited validity of local 'hang out'-data to answer universal questions about human nature. A key point elaborated in this particular study for instance is how anthropology has failed to realize that in theorizing about internal human states (e.g. experience, meaning, subjectivity, self, the mind etc.), participant observation may at its best only produce ad hoc information to nuance generalizations generated through other methods particularly designed to understand internal human processes<sup>7</sup>.

A relevant question following these general critical remarks about ethnographic methods is whether participant observation data at all is of value for more ambitious theory building. Looking at the current study, the clearest effort at more general theorizing is to sort out some connections between some specified micro- and macro level social phenomena. In the paper on education policy discourses, a link is identified between discursive policy semantics and the on-the-ground immigrant demographic factors. The paper on classroom time points out a link between local school effectiveness-temporalities and a government sponsored pedagogic program. In the paper on social power, I argue that the macro-level dominance of a cultural school effectiveness-model across the Norwegian education sector is constituted as a web of disparate micro-contextual sanction systems, all set to enforcing a coherent cosmos of educational ideas.

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<sup>7</sup> The prototype examples here are the infamous dialogues of Mead and Malinowski with Freudian psychoanalysis.



As such, each paper outlines a particular *generative mechanism* that cuts through and contributes to structure the investigated field. Where I deviate from the Barthian sense of this concept is that neither mechanism, nor the sum of them, are taken to give exhaustive account for the total social and cultural complexity contained within the field. They merely model what I suggest are key underlying dynamics in some particular micro-macro-conjunctures. In naming the mechanisms as *generative*, a lot of empirical work remains to expose more thoroughly the exact nature of the causal relations that this suggestion implies. Briefly summarized, what I hope for the study to exemplify is a more modest form of holism, one that aims to account for some delineated social processes within, rather than the total complexity of, a given field setting. As the rather high-level engagements with cognitive-, political-, and time theories in the individual papers hope to illustrate, such more moderated forms of holism do not need to inhibit ambitions for more high-level theorizing.

A second route to solving the question about the theoretical validity of participant observation data is an increased sober-mindedness about its specific analytic virtues. The empirical domain in which no other method can offer it serious competition is that of ongoing real-time social interaction processes. In my case, no experimental design, interview technique or survey, could have bared so clearly the key patterns substantiating the everyday social relations between my informants. This explains why my analyses are mainly focused on the development of *social* as opposed to *cultural* theory. As I see it, the privileged niche of anthropological fieldwork within science-methodological ecosystem is its naturalist social embedding. That does not mean that it should abandon its long-standing interest in culture. As both the papers on classroom time and social power illustrate, without culture, natural human interaction is literally meaningless. The point is that, lest classic participant observation fieldwork is supplemented with research instruments more deliberately designed for eliciting 'cultural entrails', culture is best studied as a marking of, rather than a predicament to their social behavior. On this note, I end this chapter to embark on a presentation of the stream of anthropological theory that I feel strikes the most sober and refined balance between social and cultural phenomena, namely cognitive anthropology.

## Chapter four

### 4.1 Cognitive (Social) Anthropology

“The subject [of culture] is an old one in anthropology, and one which has mostly been dealt with via one or another simple abstraction that claimed everything while saying not much”

David Kronenfeld, 2011

After the crisis of representation, idea of that culture can be studied in conventional scientific terms has become heavily depreciated in anthropology (Abu-Lughod 1991; Kuper 1999). The depreciation has its roots in the critique of structuralist cultural analysis, by which the notion that ‘Culture’ can be modelled systematically as collective patterns of thought has been mostly obsoleted. Nevertheless, ‘Culture’ has stuck on to the discipline as a gatekeeping concept. Thus, it was not the term itself that was obsoleted, but rather the aspiration that it can be pinned down empirically in objective scientific terms.

Despite this ascension of culture theories that are explicitly odds with classic scientific ideals, a review of the ethnographic corpus of cultural analysis from the latter decades makes clear that ‘Culture’ is still passed on as an abstract, high-order concept. Roughly put, ‘Culture’ now represents a murky coalescence of inter-personal knowledge, experience and practice. Thus, in spite of the many intellectually eloquent arguments brought to court for a radical deconstruction of a more scientific concept of culture, empirical reality keeps insisting that social interaction emerges in irreproachably patterned manners. Reasonable grounds therefore remain to support a restoration of anthropology’s aspiration for a more general theory culture. In this, clear-cut definitions of what culture *is*, as in the Kroeber-Kluckhohnian sense, are of lesser stake than working out more exact venues for how analyses of local cultural data may serve broader theoretical synthesis. To date, cognitive anthropology is the disciplinary branch that has come the farthest in formulating how such a scheme might look like. Much thanks to its

legacy as the anathema of anthropological theorizing since the 1970s however, cognitive anthropology remains stuck with a stereotype as over-formalistic. Thus, it stands to the challenge of making more accessible the utilities of a more systematic approach to cultural data to the studies of how culture is lived.

In the following, a brief outline of key developments in cognitive anthropological culture theory since the 1970s is presented. Conclusively, I give some more lengthy considerations of the recent work of David Kronenfeld, who stands out as the cognitive anthropologist having thought most deeply about the implications of a more rigorous cognitive theory of culture to social theory.

## 4.2 Cultural cognition

Axiomatic to cognitive anthropological theory is the classic Tylorian notion that all cultural phenomena are somehow anchored in the human interior; that culture has a *psychological reality* (Blount 2011). This means that patterns observed in talk and behavior conventionally called cultural practices, customs, rituals, symbols, signs and so forth are indexical to the sharing of cultural information such as cultural beliefs, values, ideas, understandings, emotions and the likes.

### 4.2.1 Internal structures after structuralism

The ethnoscientists were heavily influenced by classic structuralism in how they modelled collective mental structures. Their key analytic units were *lexical semantic models*, which were posited as a kind of collective psychological scaffolds that shore up folk classification systems (Blount 2011). These models however proved dismal at accounting for all the observable discrepancies in how individuals act on their own official semantic categories. For instance, whilst most English speakers report that /‘Father’=male biological progeny/, they may also apply indiscriminately that same term for priests, gods and nations. Similarly, just as farmers are more likely to sort whales as ‘Fish’ than fishermen, so parents are less likely to dub children ‘Pupils’ than are teachers. As it turns out, pragmatic social life abounds with inconsistencies in how humans manage the meanings they ascribe to words, actions and things.

In the 1970s, cognitive anthropologists looked to psychology's *prototype theory* to find ways to account more precisely for this socially slippery nature of human classification. In color-classification for instance, Berlin & Kay showed that, in spite of a great observable variety of official taxonomies, humans tend to classify colors by reference to their core-, rather than their intermediary hues (Berlin & Kay 1969). Through the 1970s, this principle of *focality*-perception in classification was rediscovered in various other folk classification domains (e.g. kinship, medicine, zoology, botany). Eleanor Rosch, exploring how undergraduate students at Stanford mentally represented trees and birds, found a tendency to organize semantic domains in the mind, not by componential traits (e.g. /'Bird'=feathered, winged, two-legged, egg-laying animal/), but rather by commonly occurring natural types. Her students' prototype of 'Bird' for instance was the American robin (*Turdus migratorius*), from which their cognitive ordering of other birds followed along trait similarities/differences (Rosch 1978). That is, a penguin is less 'birdy' than an eagle, which is less 'birdy' than a sparrow, which in turn is less 'birdy' than a robin etc. From this, she concluded that semantic information is stored and organized in human minds, not as encyclopedic facts, but as *exemplary concepts*. In its capacity as an information bank then, the mind manifests more like an archetype gallery than as a dictionary. Together, these insights prepared the ground for the current consensus in cognitive anthropology that culture consists internally of interlinked, fuzzily bounded, more and less abstract and complex mental representations that are (at best) only partially verbal (Bloch 2012: 166-67).

Parallel to the emergence of prototype theory, psychologists and computer scientists were also developing new ideas about how semantic information is shared, and of the network effects of such sharing. Canonical here was Schank & Abelson's *Scripts, Plans, Goals and Understandings* (1977), a theoretical treatise on the cognitive underpinnings of common restaurant behavior conventions. By *scripts*, they referred to packs of cognitively shared information specifically prescribing action sequences in well-known situations. Restaurant behavior for instance is framed by internal serial mental structures of prototypes defining what is appropriate behavior and not in this particular social setting (e.g. decent dress; wait to be seated; be polite to the waiter; tip in accord with

service quality etc.). Next to scripts, there are *plans*, another type of cognitively stored sequences for social action that are more fleeting, less shared/more collectively unstable, that crop internally from the pragmatic conjunctions between scripts, personal motivations, and situational unknowns. The perhaps most significant contribution of Schank & Abelson's work to cognitive culture-theory is their emphasis on the *generative nature* of cognitive structures in social life. Providing a sense of what is typical behavior in recognizable social situations, scripts and plans work as reference points for how to recurrently understand and deal accurately with them. Cultural cognitions are thus not merely passive mirages of the external world; more so, they are the psychological stuff that enable individuals to interact purposefully with and within that world. In other words, they substantiate the actual interpretative- and behavioral horizons of individual members in social units.

*Scripts* and *plans* are closely related to another important concept to the early phase of the cognitive revolution, namely *schema*. The schema-term's anthropological antecedent is Bateson's *psychological frames*, which he derived from observing the intuitive ability of monkeys to differentiate between playful and serious fighting (Bateson 1972). Bateson suggested that primates are able to form a kind of meta-maps in their minds by which they perceive and respond to single actions as parts of broader meaningful action-classes. An individual may thus bring different mental frames to bear down on how she behaves towards children, relative to role and context (e.g. as teacher, mother, stranger etc.). The term *cognitive schemas*, as popularized by David Rumelhart, is a synthesis of prototypes, plans, scripts and frames and their related concepts. "We have schemata to represent all levels of our experience, at all levels of abstraction...All of our generic knowledge is embedded in schemata" (Rumelhart 1980: 41) he wrote, implying that all the semantic content as stored in human minds, from ideological to linguistic representations, from general knowledge to practical scripts and plans, is organized as modular network structures. Following Piagetian learning theory, cognitive schemas accumulate through, and thus reflect the structure of personal experience. Since the individual members of social units usually end up sharing substantial amounts of experience as they interact

with each other in common environments, they tend to develop schemas that converge in structure and content. Shared outsides generate shared insides.

Whilst most anthropologists scrapped the idea of cultural structures on whole for more interpretative and hermeneutic approaches, concepts such as prototypes, scripts and schemas lent cognitive anthropologists means to account for the extensive flexibilities involved in pragmatic culture-cognitive operations so as to maintain an epistemological program of framing culture as collective mental architectures.

#### 4.2.2 Collective cognition in social process

Whilst making their culture-theory more flexible, cognitive anthropologists were also looking for new methods to tackle the problem of psychological reality. That is, how can one scientifically validate that cultural structures inferred from ethnographic data do really exist inside the minds of the ethnographic subjects? For this, cognitive anthropologists turned to *decision theory*, which was initially developed in economic and political studies as a formal procedure for analyzing choice. In the 1970s, Tversky & Kahneman's discovery of how choice is biased by a few basic universal cognitive heuristics that to a significant extent can explain regularities in social decision systems revolutionized decision theory (Tversky & Kahneman 1974). They argued for the psychological reality of these heuristics along the same lines as Chomsky's defense of internal linguistic structures: The psychological reality of a given internal structure equals the accuracy with which it predicts its external expression (Chomsky 1980). That is, shared cognitions are evidentially real insofar as they fit the emergent social phenomena that they are thought to predicate. The measure of the psychological reality of a posited cultural structure, then, is its power to account for correlate activity patterns in the external domain to which it is posited to apply. If cultural activities such as, say, Ghanaian fish marketing (Gladwin & Gladwin 1971), Mexican healing (Young 1981), or household labor in LA (Mukhopadhyay 1980) are each underwritten by particular culture-cognitive structures, these structures would constrain the sum of activities in a manner that can be reliably estimated. Conversely, if the posited structure fails to predict what actually comes to pass, the model must be adjusted and re-tested until it fits sufficiently.

Let us take the current study as an example of such an analysis. As previously discussed, rising proportions of minority pupils in a schools is in Norway seen as a threat to school quality. Coupled to this, there is a preference for attending the neighborhood school, and the most highly appreciated quality of a good school is an inclusive social environment (Morken 2012). An explanatory framework for residential choice for parents in Oslo would thus consists of three overall collective cognitive parameters:

- /children should go to their neighborhood school/
- /good school = socially inclusive environment/
- /less ethnic Norwegian pupils = less social inclusiveness/

The evidence for the collective psychological reality of this structure is simply that it appears to account quite well for how actual residential choice in the eastern suburbs of Oslo add up as a cascading outflow of ethnic Norwegian parents (and ethnic minority parents who possess sufficient economic and cultural capital). As long as these collective cognitive parameters prevail, the trend is likely to continue, even though most would principally agree that residential segregation along ethnic and socio-economic lines is bad. Thus, culture has well-meant individual intentions (i.e. 'do the best for your children') cumulate into unintended, even unwanted system effects.

One might note here the parallels to Fredrik Barth's generative process analysis. Especially in his early theorizing, Barth was similarly concerned with moulding anthropology as a discipline set to construct formal explanatory models of observed social processes by way of local cultural systems (Kuper 1981). The parallel is likely a testament to the strong influence of cybernetics in agency theorizing across the social sciences during the 1970s. With the explosive improvements in computer technology from the 1980s and onwards, some cognitive anthropologists have tried to couple decision theory with theories of complex systems by bringing ethnography into the lab, designing virtual simulations of how patterns of organization emerge in decentralized social processes. Kronenfeld & Kaus (1993) for instance showed that the imputation of a few simple social parameters to a crowd of randomly moving digital critters (minimum/maximum distance keeping, spatial food distribution) generated mob-like

social phenomena. Agar (2001) designed a similar experiment with parameters informed by years of ethnographic fieldwork among young heroin users to simulate how individual variations in cultural predilections to drugs could predicate the emergence of different heroin experimentation trends. Whilst the virtual simulation of social processes has produced some rudimentary insights into the constitution and operations of sociocultural systems, a giant's leap remains for the relevant technology to acquire the level of sophistication necessary to represent accurately the vast complexities contained in natural social system.

### 4.2.3 Cultural models

Anthropologist, psychologists and economist concerned with cognitive theories have all come to share a vision of a theory of self-generative systems in which observed patterns are understood as the emergent outcomes of a self-organizing dialectic between cognitive universals, particular personal and collective cognitive structures, and individual motivations/goals, all mediated in and through micro-interaction. In short: A generative theory of socially distributed cognition. The closest societal analogy to such a theory is the anthill; a complex, adaptive, self-creating, system of feedback-loops in which stabilities and regularities are not the product of the efforts of centralized control-hubs, but rather emerging more spontaneously as the aggregate effect of myriad agents interacting out of their own quotidian concerns (Hofstadter 1979). Anthropologists are particularly focused on the part played by culture in such 'anthill'-societies. From the late 1980s, schema-theory and decision-theory fused in lieu of the expanding field of artificial intelligence studies. Particularly influential was the notion of parallel-distributed processing (PDP), which was a radically decentralist approach to the organization of complex computer networks (Rumelhart et. al. 1986). Within cognitive anthropology, these fusions gave rise to *cultural models theory*. The first definition appeared in a 1987-volume edited by Dorothy Holland & Naomi Quinn:

“[Cultural models are]...presupposed, taken-for-granted models of the world that are widely shared (although not necessarily to the exclusion of other, alternative



models) by the members of a society and that play an enormous role in their understanding of the world and their behavior in it" (1987: 4)

Three key moments are apparent: 'taken-for-granted', 'widely shared' and 'play an enormous role in understanding and behavior'. The first resonates the bourdieuan claim that internal culture operates mostly outside of conscious awareness. The second posits cultural learning as a social process by which collective knowledge is internalized and thus distributed across social groups. The third states that when cognition goes cultural it leads to a collective convergence in feelings, judgments and actions, which is what makes social interaction possible. In sum, cultural models, then, are cognitive nodes in loosely knit, unevenly distributed webs of a collective (sub/un-)consciousness whose core function is to synchronize individual experiences and behaviors so that overall social processes may flow more seamlessly.

The book where this notion of culture as far-reaching distributed cognitive systems first came to full expression was Strauss & Quinn's *A Cognitive Theory of Cultural Meaning* (1997). Its main contribution was to harmonize bourdieuan enculturation-theory (i.e. how the cultural marks of social environments are internalized in individuals) with *connectionism*, a PDP-inspired network theory that has been particularly endorsed by neuroscientists. In brief, Strauss & Quinn claimed that culture is internalized through socialization in a process by which individuals infer cultural traits from the environment that then cumulate as shared cognitive schemas. The bits and pieces of cultural information thus stored are subsequently re-activated through ongoing social experience as weighted neurological responses that express as common understandings and behaviors (Strauss & Quinn 1997: chap. 3).

The advantage of the connectionist toolbox is that it allows for thinking about social instances as moments that trigger an internal review of the total stock of relevant cultural information that an individual holds *prior to* the point of social action. Culture thus operates as heterogeneous networks of information modules whose piece and parcel switch flexibly on and off in response to shifting pragmatic circumstances. What is eventually expressed (e.g. the interpretations/actions resulting from such processes)

reflects those information bits that best correspond to the sum of situational constraints (e.g. individual motivations, particular context features). Hence, culture is understood as deeply vested into our psychobiological make-up, yet only modestly deterministic to our quotidian social engagements.

Whilst the connectionist framework gives extensive headroom for heterogeneity, variability, differential distributions and the likes in micro-cultural operations, it does arrive at a fairly conservative portrayal of culture in large-scale social processes. Cultural change, or ‘centrifugality’, they ascribe to “changes in the circumstances under which people grow up” (Ibid. 252), i.e. to extra-cultural (mainly socio-historical) factors. Akin to Foucault and Bourdieu (and many behaviorists before them), they locate the conservational, or ‘centripetal’ forces of culture in processes of social discipline. That is, the continuing emergence of particular cultural models is seen as rooted on how particular social constraints loop the cognitive selection processes in the individual. The further they have been routinized, the less such selective loops rely on the external constraints by which they were installed, thus becoming increasingly self-reinforcing, ‘internalized’ habits. In later work, Quinn posited that universally there are four to external disciplinary constraints that buttress the influence of cultural lessons on cognitive processes: experiential consistency, emotional arousal, evaluation of the self, and priming (Quinn 2005b).

Today, plans, scripts, frames, schemas and models are all conventionalized concepts in cognitive anthropological culture theory, though a clear definitional consensus is still at large (for a full review, see De Munck & Bennardo 2014: chap. 3).

### 4.3 Kronenfeld's culture theory

"Culture... [is what we] rely on others knowing"

David Kronenfeld, 2008

David Kronenfeld (2008, 2011, 2018) has forwarded the most recent attempt at a comprehensive cognitive theory of culture. A self-declared functionalist (Kronenfeld 2008: 51) and psychological reductionist (Ibid. 82), Kronenfeld runs the risk of instant rejection in other anthropological camps. Any anthropologist interested in cultural epistemology however would certainly find his work though provoking at the least.

Raised in the ethnoscientific tradition at its Stanford hotspot in the 1960s under the tutelage of Kim Romney, Roy D'Andrade and Charles Frake alongside, amongst others, Brent Berlin and Naomi Quinn, Kronenfeld initially specialized in kinship studies (Blount 2011) before turning his interests on cognitive linguistics, pragmatic semantics, and simulations. More recently, he has attempted to project key insights from these areas onto classical social theory. His overall agenda is an ambition to reconcile the epistemological conundrums that paralyzed functionalist culture theory. Several major knots are evident. One is the question of whether to regard culture as an individual or a collective representation. Another is that of whether culture is best seen as agency or structure. A third regards cultural stability and change, i.e. its morphology. Finally, there is the question of the broader functions of culture in societal processes.

#### 4.3.1 Culture as representation

Radically, though on par with mainstream social-constructivism, Kronenfeld asserts that from a purely analytical point of view, collective representations<sup>8</sup> do not actually exist (2011: 571). What we call culture are in reality emergent phenomena at the interface between cognitive and social processes. In other words, culture is epiphenomenal to

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<sup>8</sup> By 'representation', Kronenfeld simply means a mental model of something, like languages, cultures, religions, ideologies etc.

social life; continuously made real again and again in and through the interaction of social agents (i.e. it is socially *real-ized*). When social actors appear to share some defining cultural traits, these traits are thus *not* an expression of, as so many culture theorists would have it, an interpersonal sharing of the same information (i.e. shared ideas, values, emotions etc.). Rather, the impression of shared-ness derives from the social expression of the universal human cognitive inclination to imagine the social world as if being constituted by clearly bounded super-organic entities. More simply put, as a cognitive thing, culture is merely personal representations of collective representations (Kronenfeld 2008: 56).

It is by this cognitive inclination to reify the social world as a mural of super-organic cultural units that humans tend to act as if social units have some sort of cultural soul that has an existence of its own, independent to their constituent individuals. Once such representations are established cognitively they start bearing down on individual interpretative processes as a propensity to classify social agents in cultural terms (i.e. stereotype). However, though this propensity to reify culture in social alters is ripe in everyday classification, individuals usually also have little trouble in seeing the inaccuracy of such classifications. That is, we easily see how all individual group members to some extent stand apart from the collective representations we ascribe to their group (Ibid. 56, 59). Paradoxically then, though the ephemerality of established collective representations are plainly visible, most of the time we nevertheless mostly keep acting as if they had their own independent reality. The idea that ‘teachers’ and ‘terrorists’ exist is just as available to us as the recognition that they do not really. In this view, social units are constituted, not as individuals who embody the same cultural stuff, but rather of a diverse range of cultural outsiders continuously engaged with each other in co-imagining shared collective imaginations (Kronenfeld 2011: 577)<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> A lucid parable here is H.C. Andersen’s fairytale “The emperor’s new clothes”.

Several implications for social life follow from this generalized anthropomorphic cognitive disposition. First, it underwrites a sense of the self as being socially connected in terms of its individual distinctiveness (i.e. identity work) (Ibid. 2011: 571). Second, it fits social interlocutors with a joint assumption of shared understandings (i.e. produces communicative contexts). From this, it thirdly augments routinization and specialization of social interaction processes, laying the foundations for complex forms of social organization in which the individuals carry a sense of being parts of wholes (see below).

#### 4.3.2 Cultural structures in social agency

Broadly, Kronenfeld subscribes to the socio-pragmatic view on cultural structures common to cognitive anthropology. One significant departure is to be noted in his descriptions of the psychology of cultural internalization however, where he offers an important contribution to a major unresolved problem in cognitive anthropology, namely that of the role of culture in individual motivations and goals, e.g. whether or not it has *directive force*. After a lengthy discussion, D'Andrade arrived to conclude that to answer exactly how culture motivates action, case-specific empirical investigation is required (D'Andrade 1992). Strauss & Quinn's descriptions of how cultural cognitions mould individual behavior concluded rather crudely, largely reducing cultural information to a self-sufficing subconscious force.

Kronenfeld somewhat radically throws aboard the whole notion of culture as a causal force in individual behavior. Even in the world's most isolated backwaters, people have to navigate and negotiate a plurality of cultural models in their everyday social lives. As a result, an extensive flexibility is observable everywhere in how individuals bring their cultural information at hand to bear on social interaction. This empirical fact flies straight in the face of the very idea that cultural information has the capacity to override individual consciousness and behavior. The fact that day-to-day social life is wrought with cultural complexities and contradictions nurtures ways of cognitive information processing in which accumulated information is flexibly deployed on-the-fly. Culture, then, is first and foremost socially useful to individuals through their cognitive capacity to reproduce it intuitively in selective response to shifting needs, motivations, goals and

external contextual circumstances (Kronenfeld 2008: 59-60). Within our mnemonic limits then, the key social function of cultural cognition is not to schematize our behavior but to facilitate complex code-switching tasks. It is, in short, psychologically embedded sociability.

### 4.3.2 The morphology of cultural flows

A third knot on anthropology's genealogy of 'Culture' is how to conceptualize the spatio-temporal dynamics of macro-cultural flows. Here Kronenfeld holds true to an agent-based view, conceptualizing culture writ large as the aggregate outcome of masses of interacting cognizant agents, each partially vested with bits and pieces of the total net stock of cultural models (i.e. culture as a system of distributed cognition). He departs from Strauss & Quinn in his emphasis on cultural cognition as a primarily pro-, rather than re-active social factor. Analogous to code switching in language-use, culture-users shift and cross-fit their cultural schemas with various degrees of deliberation across the myriad social contexts that constitute their everyday lives (Kronenfeld 2008: 50-52). Such cognitive switching work is particularly characteristic to cultural behavior because cultural information is typically scattered as 'shreds and patches', unevenly parceled between the individuals that inhabit a social landscape (Ibid. 61). The evolutionary outcome of the shredded nature of cultural distribution is a cognitive proclivity to try to reduce the strains that all this mess causes to our interpretative systems. For instance, we are usually quite content with a minimal lest a perfect fit between our internal cultural representations and our actual experience (Ibid.60). Internal-external consistency is thus of lesser stake than the development of generalized abstractions that allow for ad hoc-extensions to a variety of pragmatic contexts and new experiences (Ibid. 5). Such ad hoc-extensions of already accumulated information onto our ongoing social experience also has the virtue freeing up all the mental energy that would go into construing and storing representations accurately matching the myriad specifics of social experience.

Kronenfeld argues that this inclination to 'drag' our cognitive constructions across contexts, of leaping to generalizations and accommodating novel experiences as variants of old ones, is one of two key sources of large-scale cultural stability by way of how it

accumulates as a collective social trailing of cultural models across societal space-time. The second source of large-scale cultural stability is the formal social institutionalization of certain models as more authoritative than others in terms of 'tradition', 'custom', 'norm', 'value', 'office' and so forth. These are engraved into society as social feedback loops that feed a cascade of direct experiences of how certain cultural models prove more socially effective than others do (Ibid. 88). Begetting these two sources, Kronenfeld adds, is the general the lag in information distribution inherent to aggregate fields of communication. That is, the content and structure of cultural models cannot change faster than the actual pace by which innovations can spread among the communicative participants<sup>10</sup>.

Turning to the sources of cultural change, Kronenfeld essentially conforms to the commonplace view that change originates mainly in forces outside culture itself. That is, sudden things happen that shake up the collective experience of harmony between the dominant representations and their external referents. "Cousins", "brothers" and "uncles" shift meaning with changes in kinship law. The meaning of "Jew" transforms with the groups' shifting historical involvement in political processes. Notions of "Education" are reinvented in the wake of politically driven transformations of state bureaucracies. This view coincides with the argument against an intrinsic cultural causality in individual behavior. As such, culture cannot instantiate its own transformations. Such transformations instead rest intrinsically on changing technological, economic, political, material, ecological etc. circumstances that in turn instigate associations of received cultural representations to new objects, relations and actions, thus tweaking experiential regularities and variants so as to send cultural models interpretatively adrift (Ibid. 85).

### 4.3.3 Functions of culture in societal processes

Briefly summed up, Kronenfeld represents society as a vast network process in which social relations make out the hardware circuits; cultural models the software code. The

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<sup>10</sup> The recent explosion of communication technologies has likely done a great deal to diminish this lag.

hardware contours of such networks express as forms and scales of social organization in which the division of labor constitutes the core variable. At the software end, variations express in terms of how the net cultural knowledge stored within the network is socially distributed in vertical vs. horizontal terms. Culture at a macro-scale is the sum of differentially distributed knowledge that at any time reverberates through the total network. At a micro-scale it is the everyday communicative felt that holds it together.

Kronenfeld recurrently highlights the particularly erratic and heterogeneous character of human social processes relative to other flock animals, which in turn explains his keen interest in social emergence in decentralized networks. Underlining that personal motivations and goals bear heavily down on individual cultural behavior, he revokes simple evolutionary models of decentralized human network processes, as for example the anthill-model. He also insists that the power of centralized government to control social emergence is limited by rising scale and complexity, since it reduces the possibility of detail monitoring- and management. Thus, the sustenance of a common pulse in growing, diversifying societies is more and more dependent on non-political integration-mechanisms. What is fundamentally at stake in expanding societies is therefore the maintenance of a common communicative overhead by which a minimal overall experience of relatedness between the individual members and their many subcultural identities is preserved. At the level of individual cognition, the tension between the cohesive and distributive character of culture expresses as hierarchy of special-purpose cultural models pertaining to expert- or subcultural identities that are anchored into more general and widely distributed all-purpose cultural models. Beneath such society-specific all-purpose models, there are in turn certain foundational cultural models found universally that derive from the general experience of the human condition.

Kronenfeld & Bennardo suggest a preliminary typology of such foundational cultural models based on the particular functions such models serve in social processes. *Cultural models of thought* comprise basic propositions about world-ontology, such as the organization of space, time and cosmos. *Cultural conceptual systems* comprise definitions of how conceptual domains are taxonomically related, thereby filling the gaps in



distributed knowledge systems. *Cultural models of action* comprise definitions of how particular activities and practices associate to particular goals, values, resources, contexts (Kronenfeld & Bennardo 2011: 85-86). Seen from the top of society, foundational cultural models hand its members a cognitive aesthetic of how individual, society and world hang together. That is, they muralize its relational regularities by articulating who belongs where and why, and storytell its broader flows by contextualizing the why's and how's of joint activities. Culture writ largest, then, are all the variously distributed individual representations of collective representations that in sum mediate society. Ultimately it is what makes social actors take the leap to relying on others that reside beyond the horizon of their directly committing personal bonds to form felt fellowships with compatriots as well as sovereigns.

## Chapter five

### 5.1 Concluding Remarks

Broadly, this is a study of how Norway's Unity School system has responded to a by now 50 years long process of accelerating ethnic and cultural diversity among the pupils populating it. It traces a series of transformations of Norway's educational 'ideoscapes' (Appadurai 1990) throughout the period, some less, some more radical in kind. Central to many of these transformations is the augmentation of local experiences and concerns with the effects of increased transnational migration within schools into national public- and political discourse. In the introduction, I highlighted the paradox that after classic multicultural/bilingual pedagogies were delegitimized through the 1990s and 2000s by the growing and increasingly diverse minority pupil population and the ascent of national conservative and economistic education policies, the Unity School ended up universalizing a positivistic pedagogic program originally tailored for disadvantaged US minority children.

Following a cognitivist logic of collective representations to its end, the study is also a testament to how the very existence of ideology is a proximal extension of the living activities of myriad people in myriad places. Thus, were one to analyze ideology in isolation from social life, it would be nothing but an ephemeral mirage. The presented materials and analyses therefore abet an insistence on theorizing ideology as epiphenomenal to mundane social interactions, as evident through ethnographic observation. The study thus takes to court commonplace theoretical frames of social conformity and subservience that rest on notions of hegemony. The critique rests on ethnographic analyses of how the ideology currently dominating the Norwegian Unity School, one that is culturally modelled through the ideas of the international school effectiveness movement, is socially sustained. Scrutinizing the institutionalized patterns of everyday school life and the quotidian social prerogatives vested within them in two schools in Oslo, the study aligns with a large and growing corpus of ethnographic studies showing that the causes of individual social conformity may be much more

mundane than familiarity with or faith in large-scale symbolic structures. The fact that ideological aptitudes are typically at best only peripheral in personal social conformity poses serious epistemological challenges to delivered truths about the nature of power and domination in social systems.

## **5.2 School effectiveness-ideology in social action: Genealogy, social reality, cogency**

*The tensely anticipated annual municipal literacy-test<sup>11</sup> is now only two weeks away. The test-booklets have just arrived in the administrative office. Officially, the teachers are not allowed to look at them before test-date. Sue, the informal leader of the 1. Grade team has nevertheless gotten hold of a booklet thanks to good personal ties to the school inspector for a promise of not making photocopies them. The teachers quickly agree to use it as a template for their classroom instruction up until the test date. They start selecting and copying singular tasks by hand. Is not this what they call 'teaching-to-the-test', I ask. Sue explains: "That's how things have become now. They call it 'practicing the form'". Marianne: "Rehearsing the test-format is common all the way up to the college-level nowadays; it should be OK to bend the curves a bit". Marianne's justification resonate recent words spoken by the school principal in a teacher meeting about test preparations: "1<sup>st</sup> graders must be primed to feel at ease during the test so that one may extract what they really know."*

*The test-booklet contains 10 double pages brimming with literacy-tasks. The teachers start copying a selection of tasks by hand that they will use for test preparations in their classes in the coming weeks. The teachers worry about how their 1. Graders will cope with the test's tightly prescribed schedule of 60 minutes, subdivided to exactly 6 minutes for each task set. Sue tells of one girl who during the test two years ago had fainted from stress and had to be picked up by an ambulance. Marianne comments with bitter irony: "Hey-ho, that's how school*

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<sup>11</sup> *Kartleggingsprøve*, a standardized annual screening which since 2011 has been mandatory in all the city's public schools at all grade-levels.

*treats our small kids these days...they have to grow up fast!". Sue reassures that after the test they will substitute structured teaching for free-play for the rest of the day.*

At the outset of this summary, I stated three questions as the crux of my research endeavor:

1. How do specific educational ideologies catch sway?
2. How does the institutionalization of particular educational ideologies shape social life in school?
3. What make subjects of the contemporary Unity School regimes to on large tilt towards sustaining rather than upending its ideological ramifications?

This last ethnographic snippet, seen in conjunction with the various empirical materials presented throughout the thesis, provides clues to answer all three questions in a way that strikes well the general theoretical position being advanced. A key emic representamen is the 'They' that the teachers repeatedly refer to, by which their ongoing, immediate experience of external control over their pedagogic activities is summarized as a tangible social force. 'They' captures their sense of a systemically present, delineate yet impersonal dominant Other, what in traditional theoretical terms is referred to as structural power. Unlike what many theorists of structural power like to claim however, to the teachers themselves, the power of this Other corresponded less to some psychologically vested ideology than to the relative frequency of social instances by which their pedagogic activities were constrained in day-to-day life. In other words, to them ideological domination played out as systemic social suppression of their pedagogic autonomy. Conformity was thus in many instances rendered a remorseful affair.

In emphasizing how ideological conformity is often an ambivalent experience, the study follows in the footsteps of studies of bureaucratic and managerial regimes, exploring how ideological power effectively resides within the formal institutionalization of practice- and interaction-routines that secure that the ideas at stake are shored up over time. The

cumulative experience of such a formally rigged daily school life layers off cognitively in its participants as anticipatory templates for how to navigate successfully the institutional landscape of contemporary Norwegian schooling in the roles of teachers and pupils. What is internalized, then, is less ideological information itself than the very social rules of the everyday roleplaying game required to legitimate it. As such, the sway of ideological dominance within the field of education is best measured by the density of routinized quotidian social sanctions marked to promote ideologically conform action. The research at hand lays bare a web of school effectiveness-tagged incentives working on the teachers and the pupils in their daily school life: Regular standardized academic tests, routine internal and external school inspections, academic development reporting regimes, an obligatory, rigidly standardized pedagogic-methodological program and token-based reward- and punishment systems for academic- and social performance.

The study documents how the net output of the contemporary system of distributed sanctions, all woven together by a series of mutually obliging bureaucratic and administrative relations, is a regimented and hectic field of pedagogic action in which issues of instructional time, quantifiable academic performance and disciplined classroom behavior are experienced as intensely precarious. As such, by way of its institutional implementations, school effectiveness-ideology has social life in school compressed into a range of professionally specialized forms of pedagogic interaction whose characteristic flavors are impatience, achievement, competition and drill.

Ending this somewhat grim conclusion on a more optimistic note, the study also provides ample evidence that in spite of their extensive conformity, neither teachers nor pupils appeared personally proselytized by school effectiveness-ideology itself. As the last example shows, the teachers typically viewed with skepticism the many school effectiveness-procedures that they had to execute, seeing them at direct odds with more classic progressivist pedagogical models still taught in Norwegian teacher colleges. The teachers' active embrace of teaching-to-the-test procedures above should thus not be understood as an expression of faith in the virtues of testing itself, but rather as a pragmatic balancing of conformity to the educational regime deploying them and

emphatic concerns about how to minimize within its bounds any harm the regime might cause to their pupils. If they could not beat the game, they could at least cheat it. In similar ways, in the classroom the pupils soon learned to anticipate the quotidian social rules of classroom life and balance general conformity with an increasing aptitude to spot loopholes where playful, spontaneous, childish behavior would pass without castigation. This observation of how the everyday players in ideologized institutional environments remain capable of shifting and adapting their behavior in flexible response to fluctuating immediate social pressures has far-reaching implications for how we think about the nature of social power. Taking human cognition, not as a swamp where ideas are stuck, but as a fluid information processing interface where cultural information of variable, often contradictory nature is flexibly stored and managed, even the most hegemonic seeming social fields carry in them an inherent potential for change to be released once the social feedback-loops that power them are altered.

## List of research papers

### Article 1

Garthus-Niegel, K., Oppedal, B. & Vike, H. (2015). Semantic Models of Host-Immigrant Relations in Norwegian Education Policies. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 60 (1), 48-71.

### Article 2

Garthus-Niegel, K., & Oppedal, B. (2015). (No) Time to Learn: School Effectiveness Temporalities in Norwegian 1<sup>st</sup> Grade Classrooms. *Social Analysis*, 59 (3), 41-61.

### Article 3

Garthus-Niegel, K. Social power and schooled minds. Submitted to *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale*

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Doctoral dissertation no. 27

2019

**The Unity School Diversified  
-Ideological and Social Transformations**

Dissertation for the degree of Ph.D

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Kristian Garthus-Niegel  
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ISBN: 978-82-7206-512-5 (print)

ISBN: 978-82-7206-513-2 (online)

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