

Thomas, P. & Hennem, Ø.

Absenteeism and the new 10% ruling in Norway: A case study.

Power and Education, 21

Copyright © 2019 The Author(s) DOI:

doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1757743819850854>

This is a PDF file of an unedited manuscript that has been accepted for publication. As a service to our customers we are providing this early version of the manuscript. The manuscript will undergo copyediting, typesetting, and review of the resulting proof before it is published in its final form. Please note that during the production process errors may be discovered which could affect the content, and all legal disclaimers that apply to the journal pertain.

Absenteeism and the New Ten Percent Ruling in Norway: A Case Study

Abstract

This study considers the issue of absenteeism in Norwegian high schools with a particular focus on the new controversial 10% ceiling which began in August 2016. Data was obtained through documentary sources and participant observation in one high school with one of the highest absenteeism rates in the capital Oslo. Employing Foucault's 'panoptic gaze', the study also interrogates schools' growing dependence on technology in self-reporting absence and enacting more effective forms of 'disciplinary power'. The study argues that each school and each individual case warrants careful attention before macro policies on a national level are enacted by politicians who at best have a superficial familiarity with the challenges and uncertainties that constrain these students' academic progress.

Key words: absenteeism; minority students; Foucault; teacher as researcher; technology

Introduction

This study considers the issue of absenteeism and truancy in one Norwegian high school with a particular focus on the new controversial 10% ceiling beginning in August 2016. In 2008, the then 'Minister of Knowledge' (*Kunnskapsminister*), Kristin Halvorsen, of The Norwegian Socialist Left Party, expunged the earlier practice (called the 'Møglestu-modellen') where schools adhered to varying absenteeism limits that ranged between 10-20% (Ruud, 2016). The current Conservative coalition government has decreed that beginning in August 2016, students whose absenteeism rate is more than 10% in any given subject will fail to secure a grade in that subject. However, according to The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (udir.no, 2016), the new rule gives some latitude to school heads to grant grades to students whose absenteeism is in the 10-15% range. According to Kearney (2016, p. 2), absence from school can either be excused or unexcused. Illness, hazardous weather conditions, family emergency or travel, for instance, constitute excused absence, while unexcused absences refer to those that are illegal. Truancy, according to Kearney (2016, p. 3), constitutes 'illegal, unexcused absence from school; the term is sometimes applied to youth absenteeism marked by surreptitiousness, lack of parental knowledge or child anxiety, criminal behaviour and academic problems, intense family conflict or disorganization, or social conditions such as poverty'. Hence, while truancy is one form of absenteeism, we feel it is commensurate with the kind of absence described in this study.

A further distinction needs to be made with respect to absenteeism and students who drop out. As a teacher in upper secondary, the lead author's concern was with 'fravær' (Norwegian), or student absence from classes irrespective of the reasons behind the absence. The objective of reducing absence with the help of several professionals such as psychologists, nurses and even representatives from the employment office (Job Centre equivalent in Norway), was to avoid students dropping out. A student who drops out loses his or her right to study at that particular high school, which is perceived as a drastic, final resort. Such is the concern with students dropping out that the authorities are now permanently stationing more professionals at a growing number of upper secondary schools in the hope that they continue with their studies and not be a burden to society. These representatives, although not in the teaching profession, became an integral part of the school apparatus.

There is no consensus in the literature about the term absenteeism or what percentage of absence should be considered problematic or chronic absenteeism. Researchers consider an absence of more than 15% as chronic absenteeism and argue for early identification and intervention (Askeland et. al 2015, p. 1). Norway's adoption of a 10% cut off benchmark may be subsumed under what some countries (e.g. USA) refer to as Tier 2 problematic absenteeism (Skedgell and Kearney, 2018). In Germany, Pflug and Schneider (2016) used online self-reporting websites to collect data from high school students because of the existing difficulties in consensually defining absenteeism and methodological weaknesses in data collection. They found that, 'Absent students lived less often with both parents, were on average of lower socioeconomic status, and reported more emotional problems, behavioural problems, and less prosocial behaviour than attending students (Pflug and Schneider, 2016, p. 427).

Both in Norway and internationally, absence from school indicates functional impairment in adolescence and raises concerns about future unemployment. Research suggests that lower rates of school absenteeism may reduce disparities in educational achievement (Askeland et. al 2015). In developed countries, chronic absenteeism has been linked to, among others, 'poor grades, lower test scores, grade retention, school disengagement, delinquency, substance abuse, expulsion, and, ultimately, high school dropout' (Cook et. al 2017, p. 262).

In Norway, high school students are awarded two grades – one that reflects academic grades and another with a grade reflecting the student's attendance rate. Prior to the new 10% absenteeism ruling, students with very high absenteeism rates (e.g. 50%) could still expect to receive an academic grade. With the new ruling, however, students with more than 10%

absenteeism fail to receive an academic grade. Several students often work part-time in the evenings, weekends and during the summer holidays. Teachers are expected to warn students that employees often consider their absenteeism rates before employing them. In Norwegian high schools, the term 'expelled' (bortvist) is used to denote expulsion from the classroom and school premises for just one school day, and not 'permanent expulsion' such as in the UK. By 'dropping out' we mean those high school students who opt to discontinue their studies and forfeit their place in either the first, second or final year. There are no consequences as enrolment in high school is not mandatory in Norway, although the Socialist Left Party has argued that high school attendance should be mandatory until the age of 18 given the paucity of skilled jobs in the market (Dagens Næringsliv, 2016).

Of concern, and pertinent to Foucault's analysis of power, is the nature of the discourse disseminated through the new 10 per cent ruling. Discourse was fundamental to Foucault's understanding of the way in which society framed a particular subject (Foucault, 1977). Who are the beneficiaries and the disadvantaged in this new ruling supported and perpetuated by a network of politicians and professionals associated with education? Foucault contends that power works through discourse to shape popular attitudes towards phenomena such as crime, madness or sexuality. If 'expert discourses established by those with power or authority can often be countered only by competing expert discourses' (Giddens, 2001, p. 676), then this study seeks to query the machinations of the way in which power and knowledge are linked to technologies of surveillance, enforcement and discipline.

The school is located in a borough with the second largest prevalence of minorities in Oslo (32.5%) and the highest dropout rate (12.3%). There is a consensus that the current high rates of absenteeism are unacceptable, but political parties and stakeholders in education are divided in arriving at optimal solutions. Several studies have highlighted the pernicious long-term effects that absenteeism can have on school performance (Kearney, 2016; Calderon, et al., 2009; Henry, 2007). Even a 12% absence in a school year impacted negatively on health, self-efficacy, self-perception and developmental competence (Schwartz et. al, 2009). According to the annual OECD report 'Education at a Glance', Norwegian students performed below average in numbers expected to complete upper secondary school in 2014 (OECD, 2016, p. 46). While countries such as Israel, Hungary, Latvia and Chile - who invest less than Norway in education - were above the OECD average of 85%, Norway's was below the average (ca. 82 %). Thus while the government's efforts at grappling with this challenge is

laudable, this study argues that the introduction of a new 10% ceiling may exacerbate the aforementioned OECD statistics for two main reasons:

- Teachers' bureaucratic workload is increased with less time for actual teaching.
- The ruling does not take cognizance of the challenges specific to students from minority backgrounds whose numbers have seen a 52% increase in just 4 years (2009-2013; Thomas & Breidlid, 2015; Thomas et. al, 2016). The citation below puts the changing demographics into perspective:

In 2004, the total number of upper secondary students with an immigrant background in Norway was 13,800 (85% nationally). Last year (2013), this student cohort stood at 22,300 comprising a 52% increase over the course of just 4 years (2009–2013). On a national basis, Statistics Norway predicts, based on the figures for 2010, that 22–28% of the population of Norway will be from immigrant backgrounds in 2060 (Statistics Norway 2010). The majority of the 14.9% of immigrants have roots in Africa and Asia (8.5%) (Thomas & Breidlid, 2015, p. 350).

A report about the living conditions of minorities in Norway, published by Statistics Norway in 2014 states that while 69% completed upper secondary within five years, the number for minorities was 50% for those from non-western countries (Africa, Asia, South America etc.) (Statistics Norway, 2014). In other words, only half of those from minority backgrounds complete upper secondary within five years (Larsen, 2012). According to Markussen and Seland (2012), boys with immigrant backgrounds have the highest numbers that drop out. Some of the reasons they cited were a lack of motivation, repeatedly failing to score a pass grade and dissatisfaction with subject choice among others. These factors accumulate gradually and affect students' attendance rates. Significantly, and relevant to this study, minorities with about 13 years of residence in Norway are on par with ethnic Norwegians in upper secondary completion rates. Ken Reid, one of the foremost authorities on truancy and absenteeism states: 'Further research to explore pupils' views about their own attendance and behaviour is another fruitful avenue for research' (Reid, 2012, p. 219). It is precisely such concerns which underpin this study. The next segment will attempt at a brief literature review of absenteeism with a focus on minorities followed by a consideration of Foucault's 'panoptic gaze' in making sense of the novel ways technology (e.g. students self-reporting absence using smartphones) is being employed in the new architecture of extended school surveillance.

Commenting on an OFSTED report from 1999, Reid (2003, p. 4) states: ‘especially worrying is the disproportionately higher rates of non-attendance amongst pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds’. For Reid (1999, 2003), existing efforts to address absenteeism at the national level must consider home background, existing demographic and cultural changes within society. In addition, he highlights the conundrum of new teachers who receive little or no training in grappling with the enormous challenges posed by truancy and absenteeism in schools. These teachers often find themselves overwhelmed with social and pastoral cares ‘due to the aforementioned changes taking place in an increasingly pluralistic and diverse society’ (Reid, 2003, p. 8).

Carroll’s (2000) study on absenteeism also found certain common denominators that parallel Reid’s (2003): council-rented accommodation; overcrowded home with shared bedrooms; father in manual labour, unemployed or absent; unemployed mother; eligibility for free school meals; more than three children in the household; minimal parental education and interest in child’s education and having fewer friends. In Sweden, Strand and Granlund (2014) found ‘a lack of clear patterns in the school documentation concerning levels of truancy, students’ learning difficulties and support throughout compulsory-school years’. Significantly, they report:

In the fourth to sixth and seventh to ninth grades, 22% of the whole sample had documented difficulties in school and 43% had documented relational problems in the school setting. With early support provided, perhaps high levels of truancy for students with learning problems could be prevented (Strand & Granlund, 2014, p. 566).

In their research on non-attendance in Norway, Havik & Ertesvåg (2015) cite subjective somatic reasons, such as headaches, as the major cause among students in the sixth to tenth grades, an under-researched area that ought to be carefully looked into, according to the authors.

Theoretical framework

Foucault and the regime of discipline

Foucault (1977) employs the British philosopher Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon - a 19th century design for a model prison as a metaphor to explore the manner in which institutional apparatuses exercise power. In the panopticon, the cells of inmates were arranged around a central tower with the architecture conveying the sense that they were perpetually under observation, although this may not have been the case. ‘The human body was entering a

machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it. A “political anatomy”, which was also a “mechanics of power”, was being born... They were at work in secondary education at a very early date, later in primary schools’ (Foucault, 1977, p. 138). To his mind, this ‘political anatomy’ was detailed yet subtle, purportedly innocuous or ‘normal’, but profoundly suspicious. The ingenious power of the panopticon to engender acquiescence is captured in Foucault’s (1977, p. 200) aphorism: ‘Visibility is a trap’.

Furthermore, secondary schools furnished perfect enclosures heterogeneous to all others upon which monastic discipline was exerted. Ultimately, the aim is to reach a state where students internalize the norms, rules and laws of the school without the constant presence and supervision of the teachers. ‘Foucault’s view is that educational practices that may appear more democratic, participatory, or progressive may in fact be more effective forms of disciplinary power’ (Anderson & Grinberg, 1998, p. 331). It would be simplistic to suggest that schools should not expend effort in exploring ways to ameliorate absenteeism. Foucault has been critiqued by, among others, Said (1986, p. 151) who contended that ‘Foucault seemed to have been confused between the power of institutions to subjugate individuals, and the fact that individual behaviour in society is frequently a matter of following rules of conventions’. However, and commensurate with this study’s argument, is Foucault’s concern was with society’s obsession with constantly developing cheap and easy techniques of regulation and supervision – hence Bentham’s Panopticon. The schools, for instance, aim to standardize practices of reporting absence employing smartphones but these gadgets do not take cognizance of students’ differential socio-economic status. While all ‘participate’, there is nothing to commend this as ‘progressive’ (Anderson & Grinberg, 1998, p. 331). While other studies caution that it is still too early to draw conclusions, most agree that the number of students who drop out has risen. Like the panopticon, then, the cooption of technology (e.g. smartphone) in the surveillance and visibility of students becomes a moot point. While not denying the need for some form of regulation and conformity in schools, Foucault’s (1977) concern with the manner in which society’s disciplinary capacity (carceral) may be counterproductive is salient.

It must be kept in mind, however, that Foucault’s disciplinary regime does not entail a totalizing ‘master narrative’. Indeed, this would be antithetical to the spirit of postmodern thought. Rather, Foucault conceives of power as both repressive and productive – there is latitude for ‘acts of transgression’. To Foucault, the nexus of power-knowledge are to be

analysed synchronously as the one entails the other in a matrix-like, shifting scenario.

Jettisoning one regime of truth runs the risk of establishing another. He states:

The role of the intellectual is not to tell others what they have to do... it is through the analyses that he carries out in his own field, to question over and over again what is postulated as self-evident, to disturb people's mental habits, the way they do and think things, to dissipate what is familiar and accepted, to re-examine rules and institutions (Foucault, 1980, p. 265).

It would be quixotic to believe that students will regulate their behaviour in terms of school attendance without some form of supervision. However, in the interests of a pedagogy that aims at social justice and student emancipation, educators ought to query the implications of the encroachment and purpose of more and more technology that takes on a greater role in the supervision (implies that 'some see better than others' (Anderson & Grinberg, 1998, p. 342)) of both teachers and students roles. Hence commensurate with a Foucauldian analysis, this study seeks to unpack 'the actions through which power is produced/exercised, negotiated and sustained, as opposed to the identification of individuals or systems that oppress' (Freie & Eppley, 2014, p. 656).

Methodology

This research was two-fold: the first part involved the analysis of official documents in the public domain. These electronically available websites (e.g. www.minosloskole.no) report statistics on absenteeism rates, entrance scores, dropout rates and a host of other figures for each high school in Oslo. The availability of every high school's data on figures such as entrance scores, drop out and completion rates, among others, is a recent phenomenon in Norway and runs contrary to the cherished spirit of egalitarianism. Affluent families for instance seize upon these figures to avoid underperforming schools resulting in a further exacerbation of the 'east-west' divide. Hence, rather than wielding its considerable power and influence to redress the growing educational divide in Oslo, the authorities, perhaps inadvertently, become the handmaiden of the wealthy. A crucial consideration in this regard is the nexus between governmentality and the manner in which the modern state exercises social power in comparing and ranking schools according to distinct registers of 'domination', 'exploitation' and 'subjectification' (Foucault, 1983, p. 213). Foucault employs the metaphor of the 'police' to give expression to this multi-pronged administration concerned with how the population lives. The meticulous attention to figures and statistics that purport to be 'neutral', and in the interest of the public at large, aligns with Foucault's designation of the modern

state as the ‘pastor’ concerned with the ‘good of the soul’ (Carrette, 1999, p. 139). The maintenance of these statistics – a ‘pastoral technology’ – is made possible through a bureaucracy tasked with a multifarious portfolio that includes absenteeism rates. Data generated in the second part of the research was gained through participant observation (lead author) as a full-time teacher at the high school for a period of one year. Permission was obtained from the head teacher and data anonymized. 21 students were interviewed. Norway’s NSD (Norwegian Centre for Research Data), stipulates in regards to children: ‘Depending on the project, common practice is an age limit of 15 to give consent, and 16-18 when gathering sensitive personal data’ (NSD, 2017). All the interviewees were over 16 and gave verbal consent to be interviewed and data processed. Hence, the need for parental consent is waived, and just as well because the majority of the students interviewed had come alone to Norway. Furthermore, informed consent can be verbal or written, according to NSD. That the students were physically present and willingly gave of their time attests to this verbal consent. Prior to each interview, the students were clearly informed about their right to withdraw and the use which their data would be put to.

Students filled out the standard form which constitutes the basis for a one-on-one conversation with the teacher. Often, many students answer these questions with words like ‘I am happy in this school’; ‘Nothing to discuss, really!’ and ‘Yes’ or ‘No’. Given the brevity of these responses, the follow-up ‘interviews’/conversations are intended to flesh out students’ responses. The oral responses were transcribed verbatim. In the coding process, embryonic phrases were underlined and served as guidelines for constructing individual storylines (narrative report). This was in turn used to distill concepts through a comparative, iterative coding process of in-case and across-case analysis commensurate with a Grounded Theory Approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1999; Corbin and Strauss, 2008).

Another approach employed in generating data was participant observation understood as a form of autoethnography. The lead author was a full-time teacher involved in several aspects of the students’ schooling experience. This privileged access as a practitioner-scholar generated much of the data in this study. In particular, participant observation yielded information about students’ socio-economic challenges through meetings with social workers and schools advisors and observation of students’ patterns of absenteeism and the excuses made as evident through text messages. More importantly, we use the term participant observation to draw attention to the reflexive process involved in developing a ‘double

awareness' of being a full-time teacher and researcher simultaneously through note-taking at the end of the day for instance.

Using self-narrative, practitioner scholars can engage in and document their reflexive processes regarding their involvement in the research endeavor as both researcher and practitioner. Furthermore, examination of these narratives can reveal points of leverage, moments, or conditions in which shifts in their negotiation of the participant observer process might yield more favorable outcomes (Kennedy-Lewis, 2012, p. 112).

Several stated that they hoped the research would highlight their predicament and challenge the new 10 per cent ruling. The above said, any research that involves one's own classroom presents several challenges. Balancing the role of teacher, researcher and mentor requires a certain dexterity and ability to process multiple voices synchronously. The issue of power is also salient (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). In particular, there was some early reticence on the part of a few students to participate as teachers were part and parcel of the system that would enforce the new 10 per cent absenteeism ruling. We have reflected upon this in the 'teacher as researcher' segment below.

Data collection involved, for instance, a bi-annual one-on-one discussion with each student employing a 'student form' with predetermined questions about students' progress (*elevskejma*), which all lead teachers are expected to fill out and archive in students' files. In particular, it was during these discussions that high absenteeism rates were raised with the student and alternatives to ameliorate the absenteeism explored. It is the lead teacher's responsibility to ascertain which code (see findings for the list) students would be assigned at the end of the day. The study, therefore, has relied on the absenteeism record equivalent to one year's data from the digital educational platform *Itslearning*. Furthermore, five meetings (Norwegian *firkant møte*/a meeting involving four stakeholders) were held between the section leader, school advisor, social services representative and the lead teacher where students with high absenteeism and solutions were on the agenda. To complement the above, some background information, albeit limited, was obtained through the bi-annual teacher-parent meetings.

Of particular concern is the faith placed in modern technology as evidenced in the case of students self-reporting on their absence using smartphones, for instance. There is the unquestioned belief that deploying technology in this manner will translate into higher rates of attendance and the corollary of higher rates of completion. Foucault (1980) noted how

institutions reorganized and redefined objects of their investigation (e.g. the child). Power acting upon the action of others is what he called deployment. To his mind, this is often triggered by a crisis or ‘urgent need’, as is the case with the 10 per cent ruling. The new ruling conforms to a vision that links physical presence in the classroom to successful educational reform. The right-wing, neoliberal political ideology from which it emanates is not made explicit nor the impact on the unified subject. The ruling has mobilized various professionals from disparate fields of expertise (e.g. nurses, psychologists, social workers and even staff from the Job Centre) to work in schools and rub shoulders with teachers on a daily basis and are allotted offices on long-term basis, reminiscent of Bernauer’s (1990, p. 145) description of deployment: ‘A heterogeneous ensemble of discourses, institutions architectural arrangements, administrative procedures, and so forth’. This deployment, it is argued, reduces the purposes and quality of education especially for the more vulnerable students who obsess about absenteeism.

Teacher as researcher

The teaching practicum has traditionally valorised content knowledge, skills and teaching practices to the detriment of the social and educational context. In recent years, however, the teacher as researcher methodology has provided a scientific basis for teachers, often in collaboration with researchers, to generate new knowledge by building on their own experiences in the ‘classrooms’ level (Houser, 1990; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hopkins, 2014). The latter is commensurate with John Dewey’s concern with enhancing the judging abilities of practitioners as a catalyst informing intelligent action. The ‘Teacher Research (TR)’ Teacher Research (TR from hence) approach that guided this study is captured in the definition below:

Teacher Research refers to the inquiries [of] K-12 teachers and prospective teachers, often in collaboration with university-based colleagues and other educators. Teacher Researchers work in inquiry communities to examine their own assumptions, develop local knowledge by posing questions and gathering data, and in many versions of Teacher Research work for social justice by using inquiry to assure educational opportunity, access and equity for all students (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, pp. 39-40).

The data gathered during this research was part of a larger sample that looked into diverse aspects of minority students’ lived realities in a high school in the southeast of Oslo where they were the majority, although comprising a minority in national terms (see Author *et al.*, 2016). TR involves an intentional, systematic and rigorous engagement with the classroom as

the natural research site. In such a situation, the students become the workshop along with their families and the social context/community that they are embedded in (Ayers, 2010).

Although a TR methodology is claimed for this study, TR's claim to trump conventional educational research are not without its detractors. Hammersley's (2006) discussion of TR's critique of conventional educational research is apposite in this regard. He counters TR's claim that teachers are better able to approximate their own motives than 'expert' outsiders do by stating that this does not rule out the possibility of self-delusion. Furthermore, in response to the assertion that teachers have long-term experience in the setting, he points out that this pertains to information gathered in a specific role and thus of limited value. Again, Hammersley (2006) points out that a Teacher Researcher's 'advantage' in having access to an established network in the school milieu may be hamstrung by constraints that may be placed on the inquiry in terms of where the gaze should be focused and what can be published. He concludes:

In short, I do not believe that being an established participant in a situation provides access to valid knowledge that is not available to an outside researcher. In general, the chances of the findings being valid can be enhanced by a judicious combination of involvement and estrangement (Hammersley, 2006, pp. 433)

Clearly, the teacher as researcher might produce its own 'regime of pedagogy'. From the perspective of the students, this shift in role – from teacher to researcher – is immaterial; the teacher is still perceived as an integral part of the school system with all the disciplinary power this entails. Foucault did not consider power an evil. While justifying the institution of pedagogy that transmits knowledge and communicates skills, his concern was with 'the effects of domination which will make a child subject to the arbitrary and useless authority of a teacher' (Foucault, 1988, p. 18). Assuming the role of teacher as researcher reinforced the preoccupation with 'normalization' understood in this research as documenting and explaining why so many deviate from the acceptable 'standard' of 10 per cent. Such standards, following Foucault, are obviously arbitrary and contingent upon the political parties in power. Teacher as researcher, then, can be perceived as an extension of the techniques of surveillance. That the method generated data from official documents, interviews, classroom discussions and information provided by social workers etc. is commensurate with Foucault's view that power relations are capillary and tentacle-like: local, unstable, diffuse and emanating from several sources (Foucault, 1977). While it would be duplicitous to deny the above, and the extent to which students embraced our endeavor as

sympathetic to their cause remains ambivalent, it is argued that some of the concerns were ameliorated in adopting a Foucauldian analytics of power. As Gore (1998, p. 249) argues:

Attempting to understand those processes and remove those that are harmful cannot, in my view, be any more dangerous than maintaining what already exists ... The microlevel focus of Foucault's analytics of power, therefore, not only is useful for understanding power's operation in specific sites, as demonstrated here, but also has clear potential in addressing possibilities.

It is in the interstices of such deliberations that this study proceeded and was refined. The dual embeddedness in two worlds – the 'chalkface' and academia – it is hoped goes some way to ameliorate the caveats Hammersley (2006) raises.

Findings

Absenteeism and minority demographics

In regard to high schools in the capital, non-private ones were selected as the majority of students attend such schools and, more importantly, the bulk of students from minority backgrounds attend publicly funded schools in the main. The schools listed as official were taken from the Oslo Municipality website (Oslo Kommune 2015,2016). The percentage of minorities in each school is based on the statistics available for each borough where the school is located (Dzamarija, 2014/2016, p. 49). The average drop-out rate for all upper secondary schools in Oslo is 2.8% (Oslo Kommune Utdanningsetaten, 2015/16). About three schools - Edvard Munch, Blindern and Eikelund - were omitted because no statistics were reported. The remaining schools not included were schools that catered for students with special needs (e.g. Kirkeveien).

Table 1: Types of high schools in Oslo (Source: Udir.no, 2015, 2016).

<i>Key figures</i>	<i>All types</i>	<i>Public</i>	<i>Private</i>
Total students	18 678	15 673	3005
Total schools	38	27	11

Statistics published by the school authorities do not register figures based on ethnicity. The figures in Table 2 were solicited through two sources: minOsloskole.no and Statistics Norway. The former publishes publicly accessible data on several indices among which are absenteeism and drop out rates for each high school in Oslo. The latter gives a breakdown of

the ethnic composition in each borough in Oslo. Juxtaposing the two variables, along with drop out rates, allows for some analysis and conclusions to be drawn, albeit with caveats. One such important caveat is that the category for minorities says nothing about age, gender, length of stay and parental education level of the group. As the quote below indicates, children born in Norway to immigrant parents tend to do better than those born abroad.

There is still a clear disparity between immigrant and Norwegian-born to immigrant pupils. While 39 per cent of the immigrant pupils completed within the nominal study period, the corresponding figure for Norwegian-born to immigrant parents was 57 per cent (Statistics Norway, 2016).

The heading ‘Minority’ does not refer to ‘enrolment’, but the percentage of minorities resident in the borough. Schools are not allowed to divulge statistics according to students’ ethnic backgrounds, but one can roughly surmise from the numbers of minorities in the various boroughs of Oslo roughly what ethnic percentages can be expected. The blue shaded boroughs are anomalies. The blue-shaded schools have lower minority enrolment compared to boroughs with higher minority numbers resident, but the numbers are nevertheless high when one considers that these are upscale areas with some of the highest incomes in Oslo (for an overview of average earnings in various districts see Oslo Kommune Statistikkbanken, 2017). While the average annual earnings for Holtet and Persbråten were 89,000 USD, 105,000 USD that of the district were this study was conducted was less than 39,700 USD. Several educators consulted were of the opinion that although minority uptake is lower in Holtet, Persbråten and Ulsrud, for example, minority background students do aggravate absenteeism rates

Table 2: Absenteeism, minorities & dropout rates in Oslo (percentages)

High school in Oslo	Absenteeism	Minority	Drop out
Bjerke	5.7	29.7	0.30
Bjørnholdt	11.1	32.3	3.4
Elvebakken	5.8	27.6	1.4
Etterstad	12.3	29.1	10.90
Foss	7.4	27.6	0.1
Fyrstikkalleen	6.2	29.1	1.70
Hartvig Nissens	8.3	23.1	1.2
Hellerud	13.4	32.5	12.3
Hersleb	n/a	29.1	4.7
Holtet	13.5	12.7	9.9
Kongshavn	7.2	29.1	0.7

Kuben	9.5	29.7	3.5
Lambertseter	5	12.7	0.9
Nydalen	7.9	14.6	1.7
Oslo			
Handelsgymnasium	6.9	23.1	1
Oslo Katedralskole	5.1	22.8	0.5
Persbråten	10.3	13.7	2.2
Stovner	10.4	32.3	4.6
Ullern	4.9	14.5	0.8
Ulsrud	9.7	16.5	4.9

From a macro exploration of high school absenteeism and minority rates in Oslo, the next section considers one high school class where the author was lead teacher for the academic year August 2015 to June 2016.

Absenteeism in one class: snapshot of a week

‘Johnson High’ (pseudonym; from hence JH) is a high school with one of the highest minority concentrations in Oslo. Whereas the best schools in Oslo required an entrance score of 50, JH operates with less than 31 in 2015 (the average for all high schools is 39.7). High schools in Oslo operate with an average and lower entrance score. The average entrance score refers to the average score of the total number of students who apply to each high school. Generally, the more popular high schools will invariably score a higher average as the competition to enroll is high. Many high schools also operate with a minimum entrance score. This reflects the score of the student with the lowest total score, and is additionally contingent upon the relationship between the total number of applicants and the total number of places available, which means that the minimum entrance score varies annually. For instance, Persbråten high school, although situated in an affluent district, had the lowest entrance score of 30 points for the academic year 2017/18, while Nydalen had 50.40, the highest minimum entrance score in Oslo (Oslo Kommune, Nedre poengrense, 2017). The school operates with the following absenteeism codes from the *Teacher’s Handbook p. 31* (although the handbook may be accessed electronically, the source is not divulged as the school’s name appears on the front page). All translations from the Norwegian are mine.

- U = the absence is not documented; has consequences for behaviour (remark; i.e. negative comment that has consequences.)
- L = the student has informed the teacher (no remark)

D = documented (reasons subsumed under point 8 of the *Teacher's Handbook*; e.g. health; participation in political work; responsibilities as class prefect; volunteer work; court summons; maximum of 2 days leave granted for religious holidays; no remark)
R = religious holiday (no remark)
E = doctor's note. This absence is deducted at the end of the year (no remark)
B = Expulsion. Remark may appear in the school leaving certificate
A = Other agreed teaching/assignment. E.g. work as school prefect or leave for exam study (students in Norway can claim leave to study if selected for exams; no remark)

The *Handbook* makes it clear that students are expected to constantly monitor the codes with a deadline of one week to report back to the lead teacher in case of error. This implies that all students have access to mobile phones with internet connection. All teachers are given state-of-the-art smartphones through which they monitor student messages and update the register accordingly. Some codes overlap with teachers experiencing some ambiguity about the difference between a 'D' and 'E' for instance. According to the *Handbook*, p. 30:

1. In case of absence, the student alerts the lead teacher through SMS, email or telephone. Students must do this at the moment they were expected to be at school...
2. If the total absence is more than 8 days/40 hours [i.e. before the Christmas break] the lead teacher calls the student in for a meeting. Before the autumn break, the student must be called in if absence exceeds 3 days/6 hours. The purpose of the meeting is to explore ways of reducing absence...

U, for instance, constitutes all absence where the student either fails to notify the teacher or is invalid. Let us say, as was often the case, that a student simply failed to show up for a lesson. The teacher enters a U. In a few cases, the author decided to follow up on reasons given for absence and discovered that the students had lied. For instance, a student had reported an appointment with a dentist. In such a situation, the teacher enters an E (a doctor's note). However, upon calling the dentist's office, it was discovered that such an appointment never transpired, and that the note was a forgery. Obviously, given the gravity of the deception, the case was referred to the appropriate staff. The student was informed that a B (expelled) would be entered into his attendance record and he would have to stay away from school the next day. The code L comprised the majority of attendance entrances. L stands for 'legitimate' absence. All a student had to do was send an sms text stating why they should get L and not a U. Students generally put in some effort to avoid or reduce an A code. This is because a certain number of A codes (ca. 8 days total) will affect the student's remark on 'Behaviour'. High school students thus receive two grades/evaluations on their certificates – one for their academic performance and the other for behaviour. A student who sends a text explaining why they are unable to attend (e.g. severe delays because of construction work) will receive

an L code. The L does not affect 'Behaviour' but the total L codes are nevertheless there for a potential employer to consider. 8 out of 21 (38%) students in the author's class (August – December 2015) exceeded the ceiling of 8 days *before* the first semester terminated. Whereas 105 hours came under the category 'U', only 14 were registered as 'L'.

The above encapsulates Foucault's (1977, p. 167) argument that discipline is 'cellular (by the play of spatial distribution)' and '... it arranges 'tactics'. Discipline, according to him, involves the drawing up of tables, coding of activities and prescription of movements among others. The term 'partitioning' is also apposite in this context (Foucault, 1977, p. 143). In seeking to mould what Foucault (1977) calls 'docile bodies', absence is codified and hierarchized. At regular intervals, a number of professionals – teachers, section leaders, social workers, school advisors and representatives from the Job Centre – scrutinize the codes and prescribe action contingent on the severity of the absence. It is worth quoting Foucault at length to appreciate the aspiration of disciplinary space:

One must eliminate the effects of imprecise distributions, the uncontrolled disappearance of individuals, their diffuse circulation, their unusable and dangerous coagulation; it was a tactic of anti-desertion, anti-vagabondage, anti-concentration. Its aim was to establish presences and absences, to know where to locate individuals, to set up useful communications, to interrupt others, to be able to at each moment to supervise the conduct of each individual, to assess it, to judge it, to calculate its qualities or merits (Foucault, 1977, p. 143).

In a manner reminiscent of Skinnerian behaviourism, the focus was not only on proscribing absence, but also rewarding the candidates with the lowest or nil absenteeism. Teachers would often opine that this codification was in place because the authorities hoped to keep students away from loitering and crime. Some nicknamed the school *oppbevaringsboks* (storage locker). These cynical, though not imprecise sentiments highlight Foucault's (1977) contention that disciplinary space sought to eliminate 'anti-vagabondage'. This political anatomy, according to Foucault (1977, p. 137) was 'at work in secondary education at a very early date, later in primary schools'. The absenteeism codes assigned at the end of each semester all the way to the completion of high school had far-reaching consequences. After analysing the codes, intervention could take various forms. If the student's high absence was on account of scholastic inaptitude, the professionals would recommend a vocation such as catering or carpentry, for instance. Much energy was expended from the first day on about the serious consequences of high absenteeism. Significantly, teachers operated with two grades –

one for academic performance and the other for absenteeism. Students were informed that they could neglect the grade for absenteeism at their peril as employers would often take a keen interest in this grade. Hence the dénouement of these not-so-subtle threats was that students' physical presence was constrained not so much by a desire to learn, but a fear of tarnishing their prospects for future employment.

In this great tradition of the eminence of detail, all the minutiae of Christian education, of scholastic or military pedagogy, all forms of 'training' found their place easily enough. For the disciplined man, as for the true believer, no detail is unimportant, but not so much for the meaning that it conceals within it as for the hold it provides for the power that wishes to seize it (Foucault, 1977, 140).

The entire class comes under the population category 'immigrants' (i.e. both children and parents were born abroad) employed by the national statistics agency, *Statistics Norway*. The students were in the second year of high school following the General Studies programme with subjects tailored toward higher education in colleges and universities. They came from the following countries:

Somalia = 7; Pakistan = 3; Eritrea = 2; Morocco = 2; Lithuania = 1; Iraq = 1; Thailand = 1; Congo = 1; Philippines = 1; Chechnya = 1; Afghanistan = 1. None of the students had lived in Norway for more than 5 years. Some were born in Norway and have Norwegian citizenship but were sent to schools in their countries of origin for various reasons (religious studies was most commonly cited).

The next section considers findings related to the high absenteeism rates. The data was collected over the course of two years, first as a subject teacher of English in the first year, and then as lead teacher through several meetings with the students, parents of those under 18 and the support apparatus at the school.

Reasons underpinning high absenteeism rates at JH

Under the heading 'Routine for following up student absence', the *Handbook p. 32 states:*

4. a. Measures that can be initiated to reduce further absence: regular meetings between the student and lead teacher, drawing up a contract, closer monitoring/follow up (*tettere oppfølging*) in collaboration with parents/guardians or detention at the 'Learning Centre' in agreement.

- b. When deemed necessary, the lead teacher consults the school advisor, nurse, minority affairs advisor, section leader etc.
5. If the absence continues despite meetings and follow up, the case is referred to the school advisor.

Before the end of each semester, lead teachers prepare a report with names of students with high absenteeism rates. Those with 15-30 'U's end up with the remark 'NG' which would approximate the English, 'Quite Good' (*Nokså God*), while 'LG' (over 30 'U's) stands for *Lite God* ('Poor'). This can impact negatively on students' future employment prospects. On several occasions, the leadership has warned the students during assembly that even those seeking short-term summer jobs could find their applications jeopardized by a poor attendance record. Students who bring a note from the diverse school-based support staff, or even a medical doctor, have the right to be marked with the code 'L'. Significantly, the total number of 'L's for the entire year appears in the final leaving certificate. Although not perceived as a form of truancy, it could potentially raise several questions in a future job interview. This can, for instance, prompt a potential employer to dig deeper and expose health-related problems for example. In what follows, some of the reasons underpinning the high absenteeism rates are explored. All absenteeism rates are for the academic year (2015-2016). Non-traceability in educational/social research cannot be guaranteed (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 64), but, where possible, information has been suppressed to enhance anonymity. Some of the notes below have been taken verbatim from reports I prepared after conversations with these students.

Typical findings have been thematized followed by a discussion.

Brevity of stay and linguistic challenges

Student 1: 39 days and 249 hours absence. The student has been in the country for less than five years. Although relatively fluent in oral Norwegian, his academic performance was very poor. After several rounds of consultations with support staff, the student agreed to try his hand at a vocational trade. It also emerged that the student's parents were unaware of his struggles at school.

Student 2: 64 days and 195 hours absence. The student has been commended by several teachers for her overall courtesy and all round good behaviour. Unfortunately, her academic progression has been seriously hampered due to linguistic challenges linked no doubt to the brevity of her stay in Norway (3 years). After a few rounds with the advisor and department Head, the student has now enrolled in another high school where she will study catering.

During several meetings with various staff assigned to monitor the progression of students, subject teachers would warn that these students were on the verge of failing the subject due to a poor command of the language. During interviews and the bi-annual discussions with these students, it emerged that some were born in Norway, but that their parents enrolled them in schools in Africa or Asia for reasons related to religion, perceived lack of discipline or simply a desire for better cultural competence. The above challenges amplify the already severe challenges associated with the recent influx of refugees from countries like Syria and Eritrea. A recent documentary aired on national TV drew attention to the plight of students from Somalia who were forcibly enrolled in religious schools in Somaliland provoking a national outrage with the author invited to discuss the issue with the Minister for Immigration and Integration.

At this particular school, teachers voiced concern at what they perceived as a 'dilution' of academic standards generally in several high schools in the east of Oslo. The teaching staff at this school have often rebuked students for speaking in their mother-tongues and bemoaned the poor standard of Norwegian heard in classrooms and the campus. The above resonates with figures from the authorities that show an exponential rise in numbers of high school age students coming from refugee/immigrant backgrounds and attending high school in the last few years. For example:

Preliminary figures in autumn 2012 show an increase of 5 700 pupils in upper secondary education from the previous year. Fifty per cent of the increase is due to higher participant rates of immigrants in upper secondary education (Statistics Norway, 2012).

On the other hand, teachers at this school have often felt conflicted in regards to these students because, although linguistically challenged, there was some consensus that they were courteous and better behaved than students born and brought up in Norway alone.

Refugees who come alone

Student 6: 10 days 84 hours. The student always does well when he sits for tests and exams. However, he often has to attend meetings with diverse representatives of the government – police, nurses and housing among others because of his vulnerable status as a recent refugee.

It was noted earlier that children born in Norway to immigrant parents perform better educationally than those born abroad (Statistics Norway, 2016). Of the 475,340 who are registered as non-European (i.e. from Asia, Africa, South America and Oceania), the bulk, 359,085, are immigrants who were born abroad. In addition, the last few years have seen a steep rise in the number of immigrants who have come to Norway seeking asylum/refugee from war-torn or unstable countries like Syria, Somalia and Eritrea. Statistics Norway (2015) reports that 'The net immigration of non-European citizens increased from 14 700 in 2014 to 17 100 in 2015, increasing their share from 38 per cent in 2014 to more than half (54 per cent) in 2015'. When these figures are seen in conjunction with findings from other contexts, such as the England (Reid, 2003), this would mean that the authorities can expect high absenteeism to correlate strongly to student cohorts from minority backgrounds for some time to come. Clearly, Reid's (1999, 2003) observation that efforts to address absenteeism levels at national level must take cognizance of home background, existing demographic and cultural changes is relevant in the Norwegian context.

Lack of home support

Student 5: 13 days and 86 hours absence. The student came to Norway alone four years ago as a refugee. He is eager to learn and is popular among classmates. The bulk of SMS text messages he has sent revolve around meetings with the police, housing agents and social services. He is working on securing his residence permit. Given the precariousness of his situation, it is understandable that he is unable to give undivided attention to his studies.

Student 7: 20 days and 129 hours. Born and bred in Norway; average academic results. Severe problems on the domestic front. The student has had to sleep rough and rely on the charity of friends. He has now secured shared accommodation and is making every effort to attend classes regularly. Still relies heavily on the school support apparatus.

As lead teacher, it was obvious that pastoral care for such students had to take precedence over their cognitive and academic development, echoing Reid's (2003) observation in the English UK context. Student 5, for example, would often require a teacher's assistance in properly articulating his problems to the police, housing authorities and other official representatives. Seven of the eight students with the highest rates of absenteeism came to Norway either alone or live with a single parent, often the mother. Over the course of the year, the text messages they sent in order to avoid a 'U' code (absent without a legitimate

reason) contained some of the following: ‘appointment with police today’; ‘appointment with NAV (social services)’; ‘appointment with school nurse’; ‘appointment with psychologist’; ‘stomach-ache’; ‘head-ache’ and ‘helping mother/father/sibling’. These findings resonate with Carroll’s (2000) study where the aforementioned challenges have been traced to socio-economic factors that aggravate absenteeism and Havik & Ertesvåg’s (2015) study on subjective somatic reasons, such as headaches.

On one occasion, the lead author, who is familiar with the background of a second year student who had not been heard of for several weeks, contacted the student’s mother and offered to drive her to the school, which was just 8 minutes away. This student was born in Norway and had lived uninterruptedly in the country. Hence the challenge is not limited to those with short stays in the country exclusively.

Foucault, technology and resistance

In regard to self-reporting absenteeism, it is of interest that the smartphone (iPhone, Samsung and the like with internet access), so emblematic of youth culture where the serious and the frivolous coexist, has been effectively coopted as a tool in the service of schooling in high schools in Oslo. Each time students discover that they are unable to attend school, they are expected by law to text their lead teachers documenting their absence. The law takes for granted that all students have access to smartphones and, equally important, will log onto the omnipresent World Wide Web promptly. It is mandatory for students to register their mobile numbers with the reception at the start of the academic year. It is argued that this is a prime example of contemporary advances in technology augmenting the school’s panoptic surveillance regime (Foucault, 1977) – what can be called a ‘pan-mobile-optic gaze’ to update Bentham/Foucault’s uses of the term. In contrast to earlier years, when absenteeism was concretized in an immobile, physical register with the teacher taking attendance with a pen, the subtlety of the new ‘political anatomy’ is evident in the appearance of ‘freedom and flexibility’ it grants the students to text lead teachers. ‘Foucault’s view is that educational practices that may appear more democratic, participatory, or progressive may in fact be more effective forms of disciplinary power’ (Anderson & Grinberg, 1998, p. 331). It is, nevertheless, just as efficient in producing a docile body that internalizes the rules of absenteeism.

Whereas the school enclosure and home domain were clearly demarcated earlier, spaces have now become blurred. Several students have reported over the years that the sight of their

smartphones triggers a sense of foreboding – a record of their absenteeism. The stressful memories of being unable to access phones or the internet distilled such a view: batteries that have run out when trains failed to arrive on time; a mysteriously disconnected internet service when reporting absence; texting illness only to find that the phone is nowhere in sight and so on. The codes (or lack thereof) are checked on a daily basis by students who often dispute a ‘U’ or ‘L’ for which they produce evidence in the form of earlier text messages documenting their version of the story.

Foucault’s (1977, p. 200) aphorism, ‘Visibility is a trap’, takes on new meaning in the manner in which schools have capitalized on adolescents and their seemingly inseparable mobile phones. The school supplants the central tower of Bentham with each smartphone being the cell that ensures behavior does not deviate from the *tableaux vivants* or the ‘fetish of taxonomization’ (Foucault, 1977, p. 148) of absenteeism codes that ‘inspect men, observe their presence and absence’. The very word ‘Fravær’ (absence in Norwegian) becomes the sergeant’s command invoking a bodily response. Teachers were told to constantly remind students that potential employers would take a serious interest in their attendance records – the regime of codification and regimentation required that students memorized the meaning of each code and its consequence.

Teachers, too, discovered to their chagrin that more of their time was consumed ascertaining and allotting the right absenteeism code to students. The first order of the day consisted of perusing through several text messages and making changes to the digital record of the last day/s. Twice a year, lead teachers were called for a meeting with the department head and education welfare personnel where they had to report absenteeism trends. Prior to this, email reminders were sent out to subject teachers who were lax in taking attendance. On one occasion, virtually all teachers’ smartphones and laptops were stolen leaving teachers, especially those prone to procrastination, with the herculean task of consulting and trusting students to report on their attendance in the period in question. Of concern is the debasing effect such dry, mechanical routines have on the professionalism of teachers whose task is further saddled with an avalanche of text messages given the new 10% regime of absenteeism – the apotheosis of Max Weber’s (1978) consternation about the triumph of bureaucracy.

To recap, high school students are now monitored by the school system using the all-pervasive technology of the smartphone. Unwittingly, parents are circumvented in this process, unless the absence reaches threatening levels. It is this novel way of monitoring students’ absence (the schools’ ‘gaze’) which is reminiscent of Foucault’s ‘panopticon’. The

Commented [ØH1]: Lurer på om denne kan mistolkes som om 9 åringer blir gjort ansvarlig for å melde fravær selv på sin smarttelefon?

system coerces teachers to play the role of ‘benign’ monitors who daily check their smartphones for text messages from students who report miscellaneous reasons for their absence. The above analogy is not presented to denounce the status quo, but to draw critical attention to the manner in which technology is coopted in instilling discipline.

Finally, the above by no means entails the passivity and mindless acquiescence of students and teachers in this matrix-like panopticon of absenteeism. Students have always found ways to engage in Foucault’s ‘acts of transgression’, which according to him, ‘incessantly crosses and recrosses a line which closes up behind it in a wave of extremely short duration, and thus it is made to return once more right to the horizon of the uncrossable’ (Foucault, 1980). Four strategies, among a host of others, have been noted in this regard:

1. Creatively inventing pretexts to secure an ‘L’ where there should have been a ‘U’
2. Keeping careful tabs on their absenteeism rates so as to strategically feign an illness for example knowing that they have a quota before the ceiling is reached
3. Several avail themselves of religious holidays to apply for a maximum of two days leave annually (Code ‘R’) even when not intending to observe/celebrate. One student made sure to conceal the ostensibly large Christian Cross he normally wore around his neck before applying for Ramadan leave
4. Students became adept at procuring notes from nurses, advisors and psychologists when late to class or to coincide with tests

Conclusion

This study has critically explored the new 10% absenteeism ceiling for high school students in Norway which came into effect this August 2016. Schools with the highest numbers of students from minority backgrounds also appear to have higher absenteeism rates. This appears to be true even in more affluent boroughs where entrance scores are low and hence the numbers of minority students are high. A case study of one such high school suggests that some of these students struggle with a myriad of challenges that in the main appear to stem from the brevity of their stay in Norway and lack of home support. The upshot is poor academic competence which negatively impacts on attendance. This study argues that each school and each individual case warrants careful attention before macro policies on a national level are enacted by politicians who at best have a superficial familiarity with the challenges and uncertainties that constrain these students’ academic progress.

In addition, attention has been drawn to the manner in which new technology has been employed in monitoring absenteeism. It is argued that the 10% rule will further erode valuable time that could have been better expended on measures that would address the challenges these students face. As of writing, hardly a week goes by without the news media in Norway reporting about the resourceful ways students (and those who seek to exploit them) seek to circumvent the new ceiling. For instance, one new website, *fraværsattest.no* (absence documentation.no), offers students a video consultation with qualified doctors who, for a fee of 199 Norwegian Kroners (roughly 25 USD), can issue a medical certificate (De Rosa & Melgård, 2016). According to the founder, Christopher Smith, the website came into existence as a direct result of the new 10% absenteeism rule. Smith states that general practitioners are overwhelmed by students coming with minor health issues which runs the risk of leaving less time for patients with more serious health issues. Another major national newspaper *Verdens Gang* (8.9.2016) ran the headline ‘Teachers frustrated by absence rule – steals time and creates more work’ (Ertesvåg, 2016). Among others, the paper states, ‘In Oslo the new absence rules came together with a new computer system. The teaching manual for this system is 46 pages’ (Ibid).

In light of the above obfuscation, it is hoped, in the spirit of Foucault that, rather than telling others what to do, our modest analysis will raise questions about that which is ‘postulated as self-evident, to disturb people’s mental habits, the way they do and think things, to dissipate what is familiar and accepted, to re-examine rules and institutions (Foucault, 1980, p. 265).

References

- Anderson, G. L., & Grinberg, J. (1998). Educational administration as a disciplinary practice: Appropriating Foucault's view of power, discourse, and method. *Educational administration quarterly*, 34(3), 329-353.
- Askeland, K. G., Haugland, S., Stormark, K. M., Bøe, T., & Hysing, M. (2015). Adolescent school absenteeism and service use in a population-based study. *BMC public health*, 15(1), 626.
- Ayers, W. (2010). *To Teach: The Journey of a Teacher* (3rd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Bernauer, J. W. (1990). *Michel Foucault's force of flight: Toward an ethics for thought*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International.

- Calderon, J. M., Robles, R. R., Reyes, J. C., Matos, T. D., Negron, J. L., & Cruz, M. A. (2009). Predictors of school dropout among adolescents in Puerto Rico. *Puerto Rico Health Sciences Journal*, pp. 307-312.
- Carrette, J. R. (1999). *Religion and Culture: Michel Foucault*. Manchester Studies in Religion, Culture and Gender. New York: Routledge.
- Carroll, T. (2000). Pupil Absenteeism in the Primary School. In *Combating educational disadvantage: Meeting the needs of vulnerable children*. In T. Cox (Ed.). Falmer Press.
- Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. L. (1999). The Teacher Research movement: A decade later. *Educational Researcher*, 28(7), 15-25.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L. I., & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research methods in education* (6 ed.). London: Routledge.
- Cook, P. J., Dodge, K. A., Gifford, E. J., & Schulting, A. B. (2017). A new program to prevent primary school absenteeism: Results of a pilot study in five schools. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 82, 262-270.
- Corbin, J., Strauss, A., 2008. *Basics of Qualitative Research. Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*, third edition. Sage Publication, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Dagens Næringsliv, 2016. The Socialist Left Party wants to make high school attendance mandatory. <https://www.dn.no/talent/2016/07/03/1105/sv-vil-gire-videregende-skole-obligatorisk>
- De Rosa, M., & Melgård, M. (2016, September 15). *Dagsavisen*. Retrieved from Elever kan kjøpe legeattest på nett: <http://www.dagsavisen.no/innenriks/elever-kan-kjope-legeattest-pa-nett-1.778504>
- Dzamarija, M. (2014/2016). *Statistics Norway Reports*. Retrieved from http://www.ssb.no/en/befolkning/artikler-og-publikasjoner/_attachment/175380?_ts=145cbac2a08
- Ertesvåg, F. (2016, september 8). *VG*. Retrieved from Lærere frustret av fraværsregelen - stjeler tid og skaper merarbeid: <http://www.vg.no/nyheter/innenriks/skole-og-utdanning/laerere-frustrerte-av-fravaersregelen-stjeler-tid-og-skaper-merarbeid/a/23788468/>
- Fleras, A. (2011). *The Media Gaze Representations of diversities in Canada*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and Punish: the birth of the prison*. New York: Penguin.
- Foucault, M. (1980). *Language, counter-memory, practice: Selected essays and interviews*. Cornell University Press.
- Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings by Michel Foucault, 1972-1977*. (C. Gordon, Ed.) New York: Pantheon.
- Foucault, M. (1983). The subject and power. Afterward to H. Dreyfus & P. Rabinow (Eds.) *Michel Foucault: Beyond structuralism and hermeneutics* (pp. 208-264). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Foucault, M. (1988). The ethic of care for the self as a practice of freedom, in Bernauer, J & Rasmussen, D (Eds.) *The final Foucault*, Cambridge: Mass: MIT Press.
- Freie, C., & Eppley, K. (2014). Putting Foucault to Work: Understanding Power in a Rural School. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 89(5), 652-669.
- Giddens, A. (2001). *Sociology*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- Glaser, B.G., Strauss, A.L., 1999. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Aldine Transaction, New Jersey.
- Gore, J.M. (1998). Disciplining bodies: On the continuity of power relations in pedagogy. In Foucault's challenge: Discourse, knowledge, and power in education (pp. 231-251). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Hammersley, M. (2006). On the Teacher as Researcher. *Educational Action Research*, 425-445.
- Havik, T. B., & Ertesvåg, S. K. (2015). Assessing reasons for school non-attendance. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 59(3), 316-336.
- Henry, K. (2007). Who's skipping school: Characteristics of truants in 8th and 10th grade. *Journal of School Health*, pp. 29-35.
- Hopkins, D. (A teacher's guide to classroom research). 2014. UK: McGraw-Hill Education.
- Houser, N. O. (1990). Teacher-researcher: The synthesis of roles for teacher empowerment. *Action in Teacher Education*, 55-60.
- Kearney, C. (2016). *Managing school absenteeism at multiple tiers*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kennedy-Lewis, B. L. (2012). When a teacher becomes a researcher: Using self-narrative to define one's role as participant observer. *Theory Into Practice*, 51(2), 107-113.
- Larsen, S.K. (2012). Annenhver innvandrelev dropper ut av videregående. <https://www.vg.no/nyheter/innenriks/skole-og-utdanning/annenhver-innvandrelev-dropper-ut-av-videregaende/a/10053827/>
- Markussen, E., & Seland, I. (2012). Å redusere bortvalg-bare skolenes ansvar? En undersøkelse av bortvalg ved de videregående skolene i Akershus fylkeskommune skoleåret 2010-2011. <https://brage.bibsys.no/xmlui/handle/11250/280856>
- Norwegian Center for Research Data. (2017). <http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvernombud/en/help/faq.html>
- OECD. (2016). *Education at a glance*. Retrieved from http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/education/education-at-a-glance-2016_eag-2016-en#.V-UD749OLIU#page48

- Oslo Kommune 2015,2016. (n.d.). Skoler i Oslo (Schools in Oslo). Retrieved from https://www.oslo.kommune.no/skole-og-utdanning/skoler-og-skoletilhorighet/skoler-i-oslo/#!cf_schooltype_11_13
- Oslo Kommune, Nedre poenggrense. (2017). <https://www.oslo.kommune.no/getfile.php/13140593/Innhold/Skole%20og%20utdanning/Nedre%20poenggrense%20per%20skole%2C%20Vg1.pdf>
- Oslo Kommune Statistikkbanken (2017). Gjennomsnittsinntekt etter delbydel, alder og kjønn (Average income by district, age and gender). <http://statistikkbanken.oslo.kommune.no/webview/index.jsp?catalog=http%3A%2F%2F192.168.101.44%3A80%2Fobj%2FfCatalog%2FCatalog79&submode=catalog&mode=documentation&top=yes>
- Oslo Kommune Utdanningsetaten. (2015/16). Retrieved from <http://minosloskole.no/CorpoWebserver/?locale=no#LandingPlace:r=3991091596080819249>
- Pflug, V., & Schneider, S. (2016). School absenteeism: an online survey via social networks. *Child Psychiatry & Human Development*, 47(3), 417-429.
- Reid, K. (1999). *Truancy and schools*. London: Routledge.
- Reid, K. (2003). The search for solutions to truancy and other forms of school absenteeism. *Pastoral Care in Education*, 21(1), 3-9.
- Reid, K. (2009). The National Behaviour and Attendance Review (NBAR) in Wales: findings on school behaviour from the professional perspective. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 14(3), pp. 165-183.
- Reid, K. (2012). Reflections of being "A man of truancy": 40 years on. *Educational Studies*, 38(3), 327-340.
- Reid, K. (2012). The strategic management of truancy and school absenteeism: Finding solutions from a national perspective. *Educational Review*, 64(2), pp. 211-222.
- Ruud, M. (2016). *Utdanningsnytt.no*. Retrieved from <https://www.utdanningsnytt.no/magasin/2016/juni/fravarsgrense-til-besvar/>
- Said, Edward W. (1986). Foucault and the imagination of power. In Foucault: *A Critical Reader*, ed. David Couzens Hoy, 149-155. Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell.
- Schwartz, L. A., Radcliffe, J., & Barakat, L. P. (2009). Associates of school absenteeism in adolescents with sickle cell disease. *Pediatric Blood Cancer*, pp. 92-96.
- Skedgell, K., & Kearney, C. A. (2018). Predictors of school absenteeism severity at multiple levels: A classification and regression tree analysis. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 86, 236-245.
- Statistics Norway. (2012). Upper secondary education, 2012, preliminary figures. *More immigrants at upper secondary*. Retrieved from <https://www.ssb.no/en/utdanning/statistikker/vgu/aar-forelopige/2012-12-13>
- Statistics Norway. (2015). Migration, 2015. Retrieved from <https://www.ssb.no/en/befolkning/statistikker/flytting/aar>
- Statistics Norway. (2016). Throughput of pupils in upper secondary education, 2010-2015. Retrieved from <https://www.ssb.no/en/vgogjen>

- Strand, A. S., & Granlund, M. (2014). The School Situation for Students with a High Level of Absenteeism in Compulsory School: Is There a Pattern in Documented Support? *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 58(5), 551-569.
- Author, P. (2016). Exploring Anti-Semitism in the Classroom: A Case Study Among Norwegian Adolescents from Minority Backgrounds. *Journal of Jewish Education*, 3, pp. 182-207. doi:10.1080/15244113.2016.1191255
- Author, P. (2016b). Norwegian-Somali parents who send their children to schools in Somalia . *Cogent Education*, 3(1), 1229520.
- Author, P., & Breidlid, A. (2015). In the shadow of 'Anglobalization': national tests in English in Norway and the making of a new English underclass. *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, 10(3), pp. 349-368.
- Author, P., Changezi, S. H., & Enstad, M. (2016). Third space epistemologies: Ethnicity and belonging in an 'immigrant-dominated' upper secondary school in Norway . *Improving Schools*. doi:1365480216643200.
- Udir.no. (2015,2016). Oversikt - Oslo Fylke (Overview - Oslo Municipality). Retrieved from <https://skoleporten.udir.no/oversikt/oversikt?enhetsid=03&skoletypemenuid=1>
- udir.no. (2016). *Fravær i videregående skole*. Retrieved from <http://www.udir.no/regelverk-og-tilsyn/finn-regelverk/etter-tema/Vitnemal/fravar-i-videregaende-skole/>
- Weber, M. (1978). *Economy and society: An outline of interpretive sociology*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Zhang, M. (2007). School absenteeism and the implementation of truancy-related penalty notices. *Pastoral care in education*, 25(4), 25-34.
- Østby, L. (2014) Befolkningen med innvanderbakgrunn i 13 kommuner. http://www.ssb.no/befolkning/artikler-og-publikasjoner/_attachment/182526?_ts=146910b2448