

The concept of multiculturalism and implications for school leadership

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Abstract

This study builds on and contributes to work in school leadership in a multicultural society. Although numerous studies (Schierup 1991, Appiha 1994, Barth 1994, Taylor 1994, May 1999, Gullestad 2006,) have examined multiculturalism, identity, citizenship and social justice, little analytic attention has been paid to conceptualize the implication of multiculturalism for leadership in schools. As thus, this study provides additional insight into school leadership and conceptualization of multiculturalism. This study builds on a literature review, and is empirically based on my PhD work in two upper secondary schools in Norway. The analytic focus is on the ideas of multiculturalism, and how these may be of great importance for making inclusive school leadership work. I address this issue by demonstrating how some may argue that a cultural group ought to have the right to adhere to the survival of the continued existence of a culture through indefinite future generations (Taylor 1994). Or, while Taylor (ibid) argues that theory of rights cannot claim to be neutral, Habermas argues that theory is not blind to cultural differences and in this sense is neutral. In the paper I will argue that school leadership ought to pay much attention to the wider social and political issues surrounding the politics of multiculturalism based on questions on how the wider debates might lead to a theory of multicultural/antiracist education which incorporates both a critical and a non-essentialist (May 1999) approach to cultural difference.

Introduction

When the completion rates in upper secondary school between majority and minority students are compared significant differences emerge with respect to this baseline data. The percentage of majority students who completed in 2003 was 67,2 compared to a 48,5 per cent completion rate among minority students of non-Western origin (Markussen, Wigum Frøseth et al. 2008). However, minority students of non-Western origin tend to complete upper secondary school at the same extent than majority students (ibid:72). This may indicate that they have more staying power than majority students. Lauglo (1997) claims that there is a tendency that majority students have more drive despite greater challenges than majority students. Minority students from non-western countries, particularly boys, have much greater problems in finding a study place than majority students, and many encounter difficulties with school subjects (Helland and Støren 2004). Specific challenges in relation to this were noted among the 16-20 year old age group who had a short school history and brief residence in Norway, represent challenges. Because of their migration,

many of them have not completed primary and lower secondary education in their country of origin. This often makes it difficult for them to take advantage of their right to upper secondary education and training.

The reference to minority and majority students is a contested area since the students may be both linguistically and culturally a minority or majority. The students may have one or more languages they refer to as their mother tongue. Furthermore, norms, values and traditions are important, and often provide different reference points in their lives. The minority, although diverse is identified as students who have two immigrant parents. School leadership in this article mainly refers to the school's formal leaders. In this article the formal leaders are referred to as assistant head teachers and deputy head teachers. They have formal positions of authority (Leithwood and Riehl 2003). For the purpose of this paper it is possible to conceptualise school leaders as those persons, occupying various roles in the school, which provide direction and exert influence in order to achieve the school's goals. Spillane and Diamond (Spillane and Diamond 2007) differ between formally designated leaders and informal leaders. The latter assumed to be a defining element of leadership practice.

I had an individual interview with the Head Teacher and the school's Social Adviser¹. A group interview was held with eight Deputy Head Teachers. Additionally I had individual interviews with four students. Three main research questions were raised to the former: what kinds of adjustments are used concerning minority students? Secondly, what kinds of challenges are identified? Thirdly, what are their defence of the efficacy of the strategies, or their view in relation to the efficacy of the strategies for meeting the challenges? Students were also asked to address three main research questions; How do they feel about the school's efforts and adaptations to meet their needs? Secondly, they were also asked about their views related to being a student at Fossen Upper Secondary School. Thirdly, how do their stories fit with the school leaders' perception of particularity and universality?

Results indicate that the school leaders are as confident with minority students as they are with majority students as long as they do not have difficulties understanding Norwegian or English language. The social adviser claims that multicultural perspectives are absent from practice and discussions at school. All four students report that Fossen Upper secondary school is a good school for minority students.

Within some central theoretical frameworks (Appiah 1994; Taylor 1994; May 1999; Kymlicka 2000), I will discuss the following questions:

1. What challenges are reported related to minority students?
2. What kind of adaptations for minority students do the school have?
3. What is the school's perception of adaptation for minority students?

Pihl (2002) has documented that minority students have not been visible in the dominant educational discourse, perhaps as a result of policy and practice focused on the assimilation into mainstream education. Although there have been several studies on school leadership in Norway (Møller 1998; Møller 2004; Fuglestad 2006; Sivesind, Langfeldt et al. 2006), there has been little attention related to leadership and ethnic diversity. One significant exception is Vedøy (2006), who has studied leadership in multiethnic elementary schools in Norway. My work focuses on upper secondary schools, which in many ways differ from elementary schools, both culturally and structurally.

¹ Upper secondary schools in Norway usually have both a Social Adviser and a Career Adviser.

Initially, I will explore multicultural approaches referring to some central scholars. The methodological approach gives an overview of the setting, choice of participants and the data collection process. The results are then presented, and are followed by a discussion. Finally I summarize and give a tentative conclusion of the study.

Multicultural approaches

Taylor (1994) has explored the ways in which the politics of recognition impacts on issue of multicultural education, and believes that much of modern social and political life addresses questions of recognition. He argues that the demand for recognition is given by the supposed links between recognition and identity; the later term designates something like a person's understanding of who he/she is, of the fundamental defining characteristics as a human being.

The development of the modern notion of identity, has given rise to politics of difference, Taylor argues. He claims that we are asked to recognize the unique identity of an individual or group, the distinctiveness from everyone else, in order to avoid the continuation of ignoring, glossing over, assimilating to a dominant or majority identity. Politics of difference denunciate discrimination and refuse the development of second-class citizenship (ibid:39). We must avoid a set of supposedly difference-blind principles, which may be based on subtle, unconscious and hence highly discriminatory arguments (ibid:43). An enlarging and changing of the curriculum is essential, not only to develop a broader culture to everyone, but also to give due recognition to those in danger of being excluded. A student may be considered excluded when he/she is forbidden to speak and learn in his/her own language, or if the content of the curriculum or the activities favour other cultures more than theirs (Ryan 2006). Fanon (2005) argues that dominant groups tend to entrench their hegemony by inculcation an image of inferiority in the subjugated, and the struggle for freedom and equality must therefore pass through a revision of these images. Taylor (1994) warns that our standards are the standards of North Atlantic civilization, and our judgments may implicitly and unconsciously cram the others into our categories. In a comment to Taylor's work, Susan Wolf (ibid:85), claims that we need to take a closer, less selective look at who is sharing the institutions we call our own, such as schools, asking ourselves who we are as a community.

Steven C. Rockefeller (ibid:88) in his comments emphasizes that our universal identity as human beings is our primary identity Hence it is more fundamental than any particular identity, whether it be a matter of citizenship, gender, race, or ethnic origin. From a liberal democratic point of view a person has a right to claim equal recognition first and foremost on the basis of his or her universal human identity and potential, not primarily on the basis of an ethnic identity.

Appiha (1994) argues that in our liberal tradition recognition is seen largely as a matter of acknowledging individuals and their identities. However, people have the right to be acknowledged publicly as what they already are (ibid). It is because someone is already authentically Jewish or lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) that we deny them something in requiring them to hide this fact, to pass as something that they are not, he, continues.?? (don't undersand this Western theorists have failed to grapple satisfactorily with issues of ethnic diversity because they have been blinded by the myth of ethno-cultural neutrality (Kymlicka 2000). This implies that the state treats culture in the same way as religion, claiming that people are free to pursue it in their private life, without having to interfere. Kymlicka (ibid) claims that this neutrality ought to be replaced by a new model of the liberal-democratic state – a “nation-building” model. Emphasizing justice, he points at what he calls a process of rethinking being complicated, since majority nation-building

programmes impact differently on different types of groups, and may fail to reflect all the complexities across different countries. He focuses on three types of ethno-cultural groups found within Western democracies, in which I will concentrate on immigrants². The immigrants have not resisted integration, but they have tried to renegotiate the terms for integration, in order to make them more equitable.

Immigrants are demanding a more tolerant or "multicultural" approach to integration that would allow and indeed encourage immigrants to maintain various aspects of their ethnic heritage even as they integrate into common institutions operating in the majority language (ibid:191).

The institutions of the larger society, such as schools, should be adapted to provide greater recognition and accommodation of ethnic identities, Kymlicka continues. Two basic elements are demanded to ensure that the terms of integration are fair: 1) Recognise that integration does not occur overnight; hence see it as a difficult and long-term process operating inter-generationally. 2) Ensure that the common institutions provide the same degree of respect, recognition and accommodation of the identities and practices of ethno-cultural minorities as they traditionally provide for the majority group³. Kymlicka (1998) argues that immigrants' claims do not abandon integration goal.

Immigrants seek changes within mainstream institutions, so as to make it easier to participate within these mainstream institutions. They want to reform these institutions so as to provide greater recognition of their ethno-cultural identities, and greater accommodation of their ethno-cultural practises, so that they will feel more at home in these institutions (Kymlicka 2000).

Referring to the USA, Shlesinger (1992) warns that "ethnic cheerleading" preserves rather than transform people, rejecting people making their own choices, keeping them in more or less ineradicably in their ethnic character. Shlesinger (ibid) also points at bilingualism, claiming that using some language other than English dooms people to second class citizenship in American society.

May (1999) identifies several inconsistencies in Shlesinger's polemic. Private identity is left out, May argues. Within the concept of a liberal democracy, a person is solely a political being with rights and duties connected to the status as a citizen. Hence, ethnicity is not accounted for as a construction of what individual identity concerns. The question of whose history is being thought is a question which in turn reflects the hegemonic power relations. McLaren (McLaren 1995) argues that a prerequisite of full membership of a society is to become denuded and culturally stripped. May (1999) points at important consequences of failing to recognize ethnic, linguistic and religious rights: Ethnic conflict and fragmentation arise often when these have been avoided, suppressed or ignored. He argues that practices aiming at enforcing ethnic, linguistic and religious homogeneity may lead to disunity rather than the amelioration of the conflict. . Waldron (1993; 1997), on the other hand, objects to the idea that we define identity by our ethnicity. We need cultural meanings of some kind, he claims, but we do not need specific cultural frameworks.

² The other two are national minorities and metic.

³ I have chosen to use majority group over Kymlicka's "dominant group."

...we need to understand our choices in the contexts in which they make sense, but we do not need any single context to structure our choices. To put it crudely, we need culture, but we do not need cultural integrity (ibid:108)

A crucial element is that members of the minority are themselves able to retain a significant degree of control over the process, conceptualized as cultural autonomy (May 1999). The availability of identity choices are structured by class, ethnicity and gender, objective constraints and historical determinations (Hicks 1991; McLaren 1995; McLaren 1997). May introduces ethnicity as habitus as a theory which recognizes this point.

May develops Bourdieu (1990) concept of habitus i.e. as a system of dispositions common to all products of the same conditionings and applies this to ethnicity and ethnic identity formation. Through the use of the concept of habitus, Bourdieu explores how members of a social group come to acquire, as a result of their socialization, a set of *embodied* dispositions. Minority students and majority students, as well as teachers and formal school leaders, live out their ethnic habitus implicitly, as a result of historical and customary practice. Bourdieu's notion of habitus is also concerned with investigating the *interrelationship between agency and structure*. Habitus does not determine individual behaviour, he argues. Individuals have a range of choices which orient, rather than determine action. In Bourdieu's terminology people have both conditioned and conditional freedom, since not all choices are possible for all. Habitus is both a product of early socialization, and continually modified by our circumstances, which bring out Bourdieu's third key point – the *interplay of past and present experience*. Yet a potential for transformation and change, it happens slowly, and still the tendency of reproduction is more probable. The fourth element of habitus is the *relationship between individual action and group mores*. Bourdieu argues that individual practices will conform to those of the group. He also emphasizes that each individual system of dispositions is a structural variant of the others, expressing the singularity of its positions within the group and its trajectory (ibid:60).

Habitus is relevant in the discussion of ethnicity and the politics of multiculturalism, since it is occupied with the inequalities in power between dominant and subordinate groups (May 1999). The individual and collective habitus of the dominant group is invariably constituted as cultural capital, i.e. recognized as socially valuable and normalized as such. The individual and collective habitus of the subordinate groups are not (ibid).

May (ibid) suggests three key principles that a critical multicultural education needs to incorporate in order to develop effectively a non-essentialist politics of cultural difference. The first is related to unmasking and deconstructing the apparent neutrality of civism, i.e. the supposedly universal, neutral set of cultural values and practices that underpin the public sphere represents the particular cultural and linguistic habitus of the dominant group. May warns that most teachers assume the discourses they employ in the classroom are culturally universal. Pioneering studies have argued for more culturally appropriate (Au and Jordan 1981), culturally compatible (Jordan 1985), and culturally responsive (Erickson and Mohatt 1982) pedagogies that accommodate for the different cultural discourse practices that minority children bring to the classroom. Only responsive pedagogy appears to a more dynamic process of mutual accommodation between the cultures of home and school (Ladson-Billings 1995). A second key move in the development of a critical multiculturalism⁴ is to situate cultural differences within the power relations, trying to unmask reproductive processes and lead the school to prefer certain cultural values and practices over others.

⁴ See Ryan, J 2006, Inclusive leadership.

Ladon-Billings (ibid) has examined a number of successful teachers of African American students, and she found that the teachers adopted a culturally relevant pedagogy, comprising of three key criteria: an ability to develop students academically, a willingness to nurture cultural competence, and the development of a socio-political or critical consciousness (Nieto 1995). This is still not enough. An emphasis on distinct cultural boundaries may lead in turn to a further implication of cultural boundedness and contained in their culture as minority students. The third, and arguably the key move in developing a non-essentialist critical multiculturalism is to maintain a reflexive critique of specific cultural practices that avoids the vacuity of cultural relativism and permits critical analysis of all cultural practices. Bhabba (1994) introduces a reflexive position on culture and ethnicity. He differs between cultural diversity and cultural difference. Cultural diversity treats culture as an object of empirical knowledge, historically bounded, to be valued but not necessarily lived. Cultural difference involves a dynamic conception of culture. It ought to be necessary to recognize that all speak from a particular place, out of a particular history, out of a particular experience, a particular culture, without being contained by the position (ibid:258).

From the discussion of these theoretical frameworks five main points can be emphasized: First, recognition is a presupposition for avoiding assimilation of majority students. Secondly, recognition goes beyond ethnicity in particular. Third, schools may be blinded by the myth of ethno-cultural neutrality. Fourth, putting too much emphasis on cultural differences may result in ethnic cheerleading. Fifth, members of social groups acquire a set of embodied dispositions as a result of their socialization. I will return to these issues in the discussion. In next section I will present the methodological approach.

The methodological approach

This is a case study of leadership in an Upper Secondary School. A case study is defined as the exploration of a system in which the focus may be a happening, an activity, an institution or a social unit (Stake 1995; Merriam 1998 ; Bassey 1999; Hammersley and Gromm 2000). The article is based on an initial research in Norway. Therefore a case study may be appropriate as I expect it to generate new information about practices which have not yet been discussed. The findings here indicate that there is potential to develop this study further.

Setting

Fossen Upper Secondary School is situated in the South East of Norway. It consists of approximately 10 per cent minority students. The amount of students was one of the reasons for selecting Fossen. According to Statistics Norway⁵ there were 13 800 immigrants in upper secondary education in 2004. This makes up 8% of the total amount of students. Hence, the school represents an average. Since I am currently situated in the South East of Norway, I wanted to make sure that I did not spend too much time travelling too far. Thirdly, the school seemed interested and somewhat enthusiastic to my project. It has about 1300 students and more than 160 teachers and school leaders, advisers and other staff members. Among the 12 formal school leaders there are 7 men and 5 women. All members of the staff at Fossen are of Norwegian or Scandinavian origin. Traditionally it is a vocational upper secondary school. Starting in the autumn of 2006, 12 education programs in upper secondary education and training were offered: [Three academic specialization education](#)

⁵ The official Norwegian statistics agency (<http://www.ssb.no/emner/04/02/30/utvgs/>)

[programs](#) and [nine vocational education programs](#). Fossen has seven vocational education programs. It can provide university admission certification after one additional year at upper secondary stage 3. The school mainly recruits students from its city, but there are also students from the surrounding areas.

Participants

Pseudonyms have been given to all participants and any identifying references in the transcripts have been deleted or renamed. In the group interview with the Deputy Head Teachers, there were only three who could not meet. Nine persons in a group interview may be too many. However, I wanted to try to get as much out of a discussion between them as possible. A great advantage having a group interview is that the dynamics in the group has the potentiality to give a synergy effect. The group had several spontaneous discussions, which in turn produced insight which rarely or never occur when using other methods (Stewart and Shamdasani 1990). I had two separate individual interviews with the Head Teacher, one Deputy Head Teacher and the Social Adviser. The Deputy Head Teacher was responsible for the special education needs, so I wanted to have a separate interview with him. After the interviews I reflected upon the lack of students' "voice", so I decided to interview four minority students.

The social adviser asked the teachers from four different school programmes to ask students from the Middle East⁶ or Africa to volunteer as interviewees. I decided to ask students from non-European origin due to reports about groups of non-European origin were meeting the greatest challenges in upper secondary education (Bakken 2003; Markussen, Wigum, Frøseth et al. 2008). Three of them were 18 years old, and one was 17. In this case, I had to seek permission from the parents as well as the student.

Data collection

The empirical data were collected through semi structured individual and group interview in the spring 2008. I also conducted observations, although most of the information used in this article are based on interview data solely. I organized the interviews within main themes, as described in the introduction. The questions to the school leaders were related to what kind of adaptation they were doing, what kind of challenges they met, and their strategies for handling the challenges. The students were asked about what they considered to be a good school for them. I also asked them about understanding of subjects, their skills in reading, writing and understanding of speech. They were also asked about bullying and expressions of disapproval. I taped and transcribed the interviews. The Head Teacher did not want the interview with him to be taped, and I only have written notes from that interview. Hence, the information about school leadership is basically produced in the interviews with the Deputy Head Teachers and the social adviser, where I could collect detailed more detailed and verified answered. Interviews were transcribed and imported into Atlas.ti⁷ which was used as a workbench for analyzing the data. The coding was used as a heuristic tool in order to make the interpretation easier. The analysis of the information from the school leaders and the students were organised through the concepts of challenges related to minority students, adaptation for minority students, and perception of adaptation for minority students. I analyzed the data from the minority students through how they identified themselves, and how they seemed to experience the teaching and relations to their teachers and majority students.

⁶ The Middle East has no clear boundaries, but traditionally encompasses countries or regions in Western Asia and parts of North Africa. The broad term is used to make sure the informant is not identified.

⁷ Version 5.0

Findings

I will first present the empirical findings from the school leaders. Finally I will explore some results from the individual interviews with the four students.

Challenges related to minority students

The Head Teacher Otto, (HT) pointed at several challenges related to minority students at Fossen Upper Secondary School. These can be broadly grouped as follows: Norwegian linguistic proficiency, educational background, family background and what were described by the HT as challenges which they have in their backpacks related to behavior. He emphasized that as a group they are very heterogeneous. Referring to a meeting with one minority student and his parents a few days ago, he stated that the issues on the agenda had nothing to do with the student's ethnic background. "He is Norwegian", Otto (HT) stated. I observed this meeting. Otto (HT) confronted the student with his continuous problems with his anger and bad behavior⁸. The student had provoked lots of teachers several times. One of the Deputy Head Teachers, Roland (DH), who was also present, admitted that he just recently had responded to the student's behavior by saying: "I am so angry that I could smack you". The student's problem of behavior was primarily connected to the recess. He claimed that he was submitted to surveillance from the teachers. Less than half an hour after the meeting, I observed Roland (DH) and another Deputy Head Teacher, Lucy (DH) sitting together watching the student in the canteen.

Although a very popular place to come together, the canteen was reported by the teachers to be a place where some minority students competed and positioned themselves as "kings" or "leaders". Three of the Deputy Head Teachers discussed it. Roland (DH) thought it may be a result of an increase of minority students at one of the educational programs in particular⁹. Gro (DH) had identified that there was a question of positioning oneself as a leader. They confirmed when I asked if the cooperation and dynamics were difficult to identify and understand. Tommy (DH) suggested that having somebody who could understand them better, would be helpful in order to identify and reveal the patterns of cooperation and communication.

I learned even more about what they considered to be challenges asking them: "If you were able to choose, optimally within realistic frames, what kind of adaptations would you prefer?" Tommy (DH) repeated his concerns pointing at the problem not knowing what they were talking about when using their first language. He suggested two or three social workers. "In the class room?", I replied.

Tommy: Yes, and in recess, in the library or anywhere. You meet them, and you listen to a language that you do not understand. They use their own language, and even if you demand that they shall speak Norwegian, they seldom do. I wish that we had a kind of social worker who could have had a certain kind of control regarding what was going on internally in these groups".

Lucy (DH) had identified lack of cultural understanding and respect for Norway and the Norwegian society. She expressed concern about some of the minorities' behaviour. In her opinion the Norwegian society is not a society of racism, but bad behaviour from minorities

⁸ I could not identify how bad behavior was defined.

⁹ Electronics

creates racism. Roy (DH) supported her and emphasized better the need for some minority students to display a better understanding of the school's rules, such as not coming late to classes.

The discussion turned back to the formal part of schooling. Christina (DH) and Roy (DH) pointed at the difficulties getting a contract of apprenticeship. Roland (DH) believed it to a great extent depended on the minority students' Norwegian language proficiency. Ninni (DH) emphasized the necessity of language proficiency as apprentices at the hairdresser. "If you do not speak Norwegian and know how to communicate with the customer....., it may be very unfortunate. So, we struggle a lot getting contracts..."

The Head Teacher did not believe the case with the student had anything to do with the student's ethnic background. In order to understand the minority students more comprehensively, social workers who could translate what was happening was suggested. Lack of cultural understanding may lead to racism, it was claimed. The difficulties of getting an apprenticeship were believed to depend on lack of understanding Norwegian language.

Adaptation for minority students

Sissel (SA) reported that in the two school subjects Norwegian and English all students who need additional instruction may have up to two hours a week. These two hours is an offer for all the students in general and not only for minority students. Lucy (DH) reported that there are three teachers involved, which makes it possible to make three groups, and occasionally there may be minority students in one significant group. Roland added that homework assistance is given one hour two days a week, which is open to all students. Gro (DH) emphasized that there is a language laboratory with computers in which the students can do different types of activities. There are teachers in these classes. An important aim of this offer is to serve both those students who want to make good marks even better and for those who have a very low English language proficiency. She said that it mainly consists of minority students, but there are also majority students there who have not had English as a subject in secondary school. "It works relatively well to connect these groups. One of several dynamic discussions started when Ninni (DH) reflected upon the school's praxis of adaptation.

Ninni (DH): I am sitting, thinking about it....., we do not differ much between minority and majority students.

Roy (DH): No, we don't.....

Ninni (DH): We try to handle it all in one way, and as Gro says, there are quite a few majority students too who do not have much with them, whom may fit with the minority students.

Gro also focused on testing of Norwegian language proficiency.

Gro: All students starting at upper secondary have a test. They go through different kinds of tests, and we also have more extended tests, e.g. for minority students. However, often we have the ordinary tests for the minority students. And if we see that there are big problems or big holes, lack of knowledge, such as little understanding of concepts and less vocabulary, we extend the testing. One of the adviser takes care of that. She used to have a particular responsibility for the minority students.

Accordingly, Sissel (SA) reported that the school was able to find out if a minority student needed additional instruction through information from the secondary schools, and as referred to by using a test. Sissel (SA) referred to the “Bergen- test”¹⁰.

I asked the group of Deputy Head Teachers to give some more concrete examples of adaptation for minority students.

Ninni (DH) assured that she had several examples:

I can give lots of examples. In a class where there was one minority student, where the teachers felt that the student did not have proper language proficiency and therefore seemed to have difficulties with understanding academically. Then we used the Educational and Psychological Counselling Service (Pedagogisk psykologisk tjeneste). We had discussions concerning how we should plan and deliver adequate teaching for the students. We also discussed what we were doing wrong and a psychologist and a special consultant monitored the teaching in the class room.

It is displayed that the additional instruction is offered to both minority and majority students. It is explicitly stated that they do not wish to differ much between minority and majority students. The school used a particular test in order to find out who needed particular adaptation

The school's perception of its adaptation for minority students

The school's perception of its adaptation for minority students is based on information first and foremost from the school leaders and the social adviser. I will start with some critical expressions from the social adviser. She is identified as the person who has been working particularly with minority students. For the moment she is very little involved in questions related to minority students. In Sissel's (SA) opinion there is too little emphasis on planning and organizing adaptation for minority students.

She is convinced that use of a qualified mother tongue teacher or assistant especially in the vocational programmes would benefit the minority students: “A good bilingual teacher would have been ten times better than an additional Norwegian teacher”. The additional hours in Norwegian and what she called a very casual additional English hours, she viewed as “bad” and considered it to be “absolutely not enough”. Because there are students at this school who do not get the benefit they should have because they do not get the teaching they have the right to”. She has not noticed any exclusive mechanisms. “We just do not know how to help them when they do not have proper Norwegian language proficiency”. She believed that there is no systematic work or knowledge related to adaptation for minority students. She also believed that dealing with cultural diversity is not an issue for discussion, except when there is some particular incident, such as a fight or something, or if you have low score or problems with understanding due to language proficiency. The definition of a minority language is related to the level of Norwegian language proficiency.

“This is a Norwegian school, and here you are a Norwegian student, and either you speak Norwegian or you do not speak Norwegian. Probably the most critical point she made was

¹⁰ Test i norsk – høyere nivå (Advanced Level)

Test i norsk – høyere nivå assesses proficiency in receptive and productive language skills, as well as knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. It represents a standard by which to evaluate the level of proficiency in Norwegian as a second language of foreign citizens wishing to apply for admission to Norwegian universities.

related to the challenges with minority language students: "Our focus is on how to avoid....We can have minority students but they have to speak Norwegian. That is how we focus. They have nothing to do here if they cannot speak Norwegian. That's how we focus".

If a student does not have a proper Norwegian language to understand the subjects, the support from the teachers does not bring the students further enough, she reported. One exception was made in relation to the education programme Health and social subjects.

Fossen Upper Secondary School was involved in a Government initiated programme with focus on collaborating with the minority students' parents. Asking Sissel (SA) what came out of it, she replied: "Nothing came out of it". In her view one of the conclusions from the project¹¹ was that it was not sufficiently attached to the school's leadership. She believed it could have come something out of it, but she did not have the strength to continue because she nearly got sick working alone with the project with very little support.

Rene, a Deputy Head Teacher (DH) in an individual interview, responded that the school was able to deal appropriately with all kinds of challenges. When asked the same question, Sissel (SA) gave the opposite answer

I do not think the school deals with it at all, frankly speaking.....there is no focus on difference, that they have brought something with them.....Either you speak Norwegian or you do not.. We have not made more progress than that....

In the group interview I let the school leaders dwell on whether the school should make room for recognizing the worth of the minority students' distinctive feature, related to their own, or their parents', country and language of origin, and if so, what kind of adaptation may be needed for minority students. More precisely I asked the group: What kind of differentiation strategies may be needed between "Ola and Ahmed", and to what extent may differentiation be necessary? One of the Deputy Head teachers, Carl (DH), emphasized that the student's name had no relevance at all. "Of course not", he stated. "Neither has the background. I think the danger to stigmatize is even much more present if we separate them as a group. A student is a student", he emphasized. A few minutes later I returned to the same issue, focusing on specific dimensions of multicultural education (Banks 2006). I started questioning practice in relation to content integration (ibid).¹²

Interviewer: Do teachers use examples and content from different cultures and groups to illustrate important concepts, principles, generalizations, and theories in a school subject? I am now focusing on identity construction, we may say.

Lucy (Deputy Head teacher): It is in the math books.

Interviewer: So the subject books play a role in that respect?

Lucy: Yes, and I think... Frankly speaking, what you talk about, they should have had before they started here, I have to say. We are a school which are supposed to prepare them for a job.....They ought to be finished with elementary school curriculum before they start here. And what you are pointing at now should also be part of the preparatory, because I do not think that is our task, it is too late for that.

¹¹ Unidentified in order to keep the school anonymous

¹² The others are knowledge construction, an equity pedagogy, prejudice reduction, an empowering school culture (Banks 2006)

From what I understand she points at the minority students' skills before they start in upper secondary school. She also stressed that the students have to be made aware of the necessity to be prepared for a job market in which Norwegian language is needed, as a minimum. She also emphasized that it is equally important that they have finished elementary school in order to be able to get something out of the upper secondary school. Then she claimed that issues related to using content from different cultures and groups is not something which upper secondary school should be responsible for.

Later in the interview I asked questions about how to cope with some of the challenges related to lack of Norwegian language proficiency. Ninni (DH), if being allowed to choose, she would give priority to translation of textbooks from Norwegian into different languages in order to make sure that as many students as possible were able to better understand the subjects. Two of the deputy head teachers had quite opposite views. Tommy argued that translation would imply "a shift in the wrong direction", as he put it. Supporting him, Morgan added that as long as you are a student in a Norwegian school, a presupposition ought to be that you are able to understand what is being said in that school. Roland (DH) said that he did not think the school was particularly good at handling neither the culturally nor the linguistically. "However, I think this is basically because quite a lot of the minority students really do not want to...They resist", he continued.

According to the Social Adviser (SA), there was no focus on minority language, and systematic work in relation to this issue was absent. Cultural diversity was not an issue for discussion. The definition of a minority language was related to the level of Norwegian language proficiency. It was also argued that the danger of stigmatizing minority students may be greater if they were organized in different groups. Issues related to using content from different cultures and groups seemed to be understood as something in which upper secondary school ought not to be responsible for. In the group interview they did not agree if translation of texts was a good strategy. One of the Head Teachers believed that some minority students resisted the school's struggle to handle the diversity related to culture and language.

Students' voice

I interviewed two girls and two boys. Safina, an 18 years old girl. She is born in Iran and has lived in Norway for 8 years. She has a boy friend of Iranian origin. This is her first year at upper secondary school. Chaman is also an 18 years old girl in her second year at this school. She is a Kurdish from Iraq. When she came to Norway 6 years ago, she had not seen her father for 8 years. Her mother is currently attending a Norwegian language course for adult immigrants. Osman is an 18 years old boy from Somalia. He has lived in Norway for 10 years, and this is his second year at Fossen. Mohammed is Iraqi and has lived in Norway for 7 years. He is 17 years old and is finishing his first year at upper secondary school. All of them are in different groups.

I will focus on some of their sayings which may be of interest to discuss in the light of what the school leaders report, and finally in relation to the question particularity and universality. All four students exclaim that Fossen Upper Secondary School is a good school for minority students. Both Safina, Chaman and Mohammed characterize the teachers as kind and helpful.

Safina, Osman and Mohammed seemed to be satisfied with being looked upon as an ordinary student, and not as an immigrant. Osman explained that he preferred to try not to be different from the Norwegians". Mohammed said that he prefer to be together with his Norwegian friends at school, adding: "It is better to be a Norwegian and not a foreigner". I also asked how they experienced the teachers' adaptation and conscience about the fact that they were minority students. They all seemed to be content with the help they got from the teachers. Safina explained that she can easily ask the teachers or any of the students if there were words that she could not understand. Chaman was pleased that the teachers were aware of that she is a Muslim and that she was not supposed to eat pork, or stay overnight somewhere else than in her home. Osman spoke of adaptation in relation to using his mother tongue language:

I: Your are saying that it is not allowed to speak Somali in groups. What do you think of that?

O: It is not ok. The others speak Norwegian, and me and my friend speak Somali. We talk about the same things, helping each other with the homework, but they think we are talking about something else, since they do not understand what we are saying.

I: Could it be of help to speak Somali if there is something that you do not understand in Norwegian?

O: Yes it helps. For example when there is a Norwegian word I do not understand. Then I ask him, and he can explain what it means.

Osman reported that they have been ordered out of the class room. "It is difficult because I speak Somali without being aware of it. And then the teacher said "Get out of the class room". Mohammed was satisfied with the organisation in small groups because he felt safer to speak and ask questions. I asked more specifically about his satisfaction with getting the help he needed. He felt that he could ask up to 20 times in the same lesson without being embarrassed. When I asked him if he did, he said no. He also admitted that there could be situations where he needed help and hesitated to ask for it. He mentioned the test situations in particular: "The teacher comes straight to me because she knows that I need help. When she hands back the test, she writes a text which explain what to do, and that is good" Chaman reported differently: "When I get homework, and I do not understand, I do not dare to ask the teacher. It has been quite a few problems". She said that her teacher had told her to ask if there were things that she could not understand. When I asked her why she did not ask for help earlier, she responded that she was afraid of being embarrassed. She had a performance about Kurdistan's National Day, and only the teacher was present because she could not speak in front of all the other students. Chaman explained that this was related to language and that she was afraid of making mistakes and not speak correctly. The interview was conducted in the end of the school year, and until just recently she had started to ask if there was something that she could not understand.

I: A whole school year is soon finished, and until just recently you have not dared to tell the teachers that you do not understand.....?

C: Yes.

I: What about the preceding months?

C: The teachers talked to me and said that I had to ask.....You have to ask and ask, and tell that you do not understand.

The previous year the teachers had asked "occasionally" if there was something that she did not understand. The current year, she reported, they had not asked "often". Her wish was that the teachers should explain more about the different subjects, explain difficult words

and be aware of times when she did not understand words. Mohammed explained the same challenge: "The teachers have to ask more. They ask me, but there is an Asian girl in the group and they should pay much more attention. She does not dare to speak because she does not speak Norwegian. She needs more help than she gets".

Chaman reported from an incident in the class room. The other students had laughed: "I said something wrong, and they started laughing, they started laughing at me. I went into the wardrobe and said that I wanted to change school. This happened a month ago". The other student had talked about and laughed at her mistakes later too, and Chaman expressed that she really "hated that". Last year she experienced that one girl at school had applied to the others to stay away from her. "Do not go with her, she is a foreigner". She also said that she some times could see from how the students look at her that they did not like her. "They look at me in a bad manner". She claimed that she was able to notice it immediately.

Osman reported about a problematic beginning of the school year. He had been told by one of the other students in his group to go home i.e. to his country of origin. His friend started a fight. The teacher had stopped the fight and made them all talk. Osman said that now it is better in the class. Since the minority students and the majority student do not have any contact, he seldom experience negative utterances. He believed that some "Norwegians are afraid when they see a foreigner". "They look in another direction to avoid us." Osman referred to some episodes outside school in which he conceptualized as "racism". I asked if he has experienced the same in school. He then referred to an episode with a teacher who had tried to provoke him to do or say something in order to "have something on him". The teacher had asked about his work on an exam task:

O: The teacher asked: Who learned you this, your father?

I: Why did he ask you that question? Was it bad or good the item that you had made?

O: It was a little bit bad, right..... May be he tried to be funny. It was irritating, though. I did not bother to respond.

I: Do you think he did it to be rude or funny?

O: I think he did it to be both rude and funny.

I: Does he know your father?

O: No, he does not know my father. I have never liked him. He used to be a substitute. I did not like the way he talked to us. I used to go away when was there.

I: You noticed him in particular?

O: Yes....I would not say anything back, because that was what he probably was after. That I should do something in response, so I did not.

Some pattern may be identified from the students' voice. First they all seem to be generally satisfied with the conditions at school. Osman seemed to be the most critical. He points his critique at one teacher in particular and one expression of what he believed to be racism. He also regret that he was expelled from using his first language to get a better understanding of the school subjects. Chaman focused on negative episodes in relation to other students. She also explained that the teachers had advised her to ask more if there was something that she did not understand. From Mohammed's point of view the teachers should ask more in order to secure that the minority students could understand.

Summary and implications

In the case of how minority students function in upper secondary schools, they are identifiable by two main factors: their country of origin. Other positioning discourses – identity issues including issues related to using content from different cultures and groups is not something which upper secondary school ought to be responsible for. Do the students not need more recognition after elementary school? If not, it would imply that the identity construction process stops after a certain time or age. Referring to Taylor it is possible to argue that circumstances, which earlier in life once had an effect on the identity that one bears today, may still have relevance even if these circumstances are not present today. In contrast to what Lucy seems to believe, there should be at least two reasons for using relevant content even in upper secondary school. Minority students being assimilated, even unconsciously, into an identity construction they have little influence over. A relevant question may be: To what *extent* should school take language and ethnic background into consideration? According to Appiha (1994), we ought to acknowledge people as what they already are. However, this must not imply that school leaving the traditions which are not traditionally looked upon as “Norwegian” to the private sphere, as Kymlicka (2000) argues. His conceptualization of ethno-cultural neutrality reminds us about the danger of treating all students the same, failing to recognize the unique identity for each individual in terms of Taylor’s (1994) politics of difference. The understanding of “a student is a student” and “the background has no relevance at all”, may be viewed as a supposedly difference-blind principle in which Taylor (*ibid*) urges us to avoid.

One relevant question may be if it is possible at school, within the frames of a liberal democratic culture, to let different cultural traditions develop fully their potential for expression. Is it possible for minority students to undergo significant intellectual, social, moral and religious changes while maintaining continuity with their past? Both Rockefeller (in Taylor, 1994) and Waldron (1993; 1997) would probably argue that our universal identity as human being must be seen prior to any particular identity, such as ethnicity. A consequence could be to pay less attention to the students’ and their parents’ ethnic origin. The latter would also be in accordance with Taylor’s point; the necessity for the children’s separation from their parents. One may ask how important it is to focus on role models and the country of origin. Is it important to focus on role models, or background from a past that many minority students hardly remember? Should a belief in oneself that springs from personal achievement count as a resource for identity construction, rather than ethnic pride and references to their parents? Shlesinger (1992) has warned against ethnic cheerleading, understood as ethnic celebration.

May (1999) stresses the importance of ethnic background and particularity as important elements for a continuous identity construction building, emphasizing cultural autonomy as a prerequisite. In this respect, Morgan’s supportive argument for Tommy (DH) when the question of translation was raised, we should probably also ask questions about how to conceptualize “Norwegian school”. We probably ought to have a closer look at whom the school is structured for and which cultural traits are dominant, following Wolf’s (Taylor 1994) suggestion.

Tommy (DH) argued that translation of certain texts is not a good adjustment strategy. It is beyond the aim of this article to more thoroughly discuss the positive effects of using the students’ first language in order to understand texts and subjects in school. However, I will argue that the school probably loses a good opportunity to recognize a necessary skill, which in turn may be based on an unconscious practice and discriminatory arguments. The discrimination may be identified in the danger of minority students being excluded when

missing important elements of the teaching and process of learning. In the interview two of the Deputy Head Teachers claimed that it was very unfortunate that minority students used their first language, since the teachers could not understand what they were talking about. It may be more unfortunate that the school's teachers, and eventually the majority students, mirror back to them a contemptible picture of themselves (Taylor 1994). The resistance that Roland (DH) refers to, and that some minority students' wish to become "leaders", may be a natural response to the school's structural and cultural conditions, in order to become more comfortable with the school as an institution, rather as a motivation for resisting adaptation.

I will emphasize, in particular, what I regard as one consensus element from the empirical findings: The honest will to give all students a proper and adequate teaching, based on the conviction that they do not want to treat minority students differently than majority students. As we have seen, the social advisor's point is the opposite of the last point in this sentence. I could have put forward a simple argument that treating everybody the same does not necessarily imply equity pedagogy. However, I do not think that would be a fair claim, because the question of difference seems to be more complex. The school would have made use of a mother tongue teacher if he or she were sufficiently competent in both Norwegian language and school subjects. They also seem to be well aware of the fact that even within a particular ethnic group there are significant differences, compared to cross ethnic groups. The school's concern seems to be the fear of putting majority students at a pedestal. At first glance such a stand may be considered as avoidance of stigmatization. A second look, may give more than a glimpse of trying to let minority students pass as something they are not (Kymlicka 2000).

Minority students, like majority students, are a result of both historical and customary practice, although their action is not predetermined. The school is important when it comes to the question of conditioned freedom to orient oneself at school. Integration is supposed to be both a reciprocal process and a goal, which takes time and request mutual patience. It seems to be reasonable to claim that the school's practice is centred on *majority students'* cultural capital as socially valuable. Thus, the school does not seem to emphasize a practice which reflects that identity is of great value and importance for minority students.

Exploring the empirical findings, there does not seem to be a focus on a responsive pedagogy which appears to a more dynamic process of mutual accommodation between the home sphere and the school sphere. There are little evidence of situating cultural difference within the power relations, such as language proficiency or the preference of certain cultural values and practices over others. Probably the most significant indication of misrecognition in this part of my empirical findings, is the failure to recognize that all speak from a particular experience. As Bhaba (1994) emphasizes, cultural difference involves a dynamic conception of culture. That does not mean that minority students ought to turn their back to their former preferences in favour of the majorities'. Nor does it mean that they must insist on celebrating customary traditions whenever the possibility is there. Although a student is not contained by his/her position, a student speaks from his/her position and that position may imply substantial variations.

From the context the questions were asked, and the responses given, I had reasons to believe that they were both concerned with giving all students an appropriate education. Rene (DH) defined minority students as students having difficulties with language proficiency. He reported the approximate amount to be 45. Sissel (SA) on the other hand, was convinced that it was necessary to have a broader approach, including more than 45 students. This implies, and may require taking a more active stand in order to assure difficult discussions related to the following questions: 1) Are we conscious enough when it comes to

the question of recognition as a presupposition for avoiding assimilation of minority students? 2) Are we blinded by the myth of ethno-cultural neutrality? 3) Do we balance well enough considering emphasis on cultural differences and ethnic cheerleading? For further investigations I would suggest: How may the traditional standard of the majority's judgments implicitly and unconsciously work to melt the minorities into our categories?

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