

Educable or not?

Teacher's alternatives when connecting curriculum to pupils

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Abstract

When working to connect homogeneous curricula with heterogeneous groups of pupils, teachers have to sort pupils according to the categories allowed for in the national school system. In this article, we compare German organizational differentiation, where pupils are divided into stable groups, to Norwegian pedagogical differentiation, where instruction is adapted to the pupils within the common classroom. This study is qualitative and explorative; the method employed is a modification of philosophical phenomenology, and the theoretical discussion is pedagogical-philosophical and educational-sociological. When teachers from these two systems reflect upon the equality of opportunity of their system, categories of educable versus uneducable pupils materialize. The individual teacher's academic background, combined with a heavily theoretical curriculum, creates a culturally delimited learning environment. This can be critical for pupils with non-academic dispositions or cultural perspectives. The question is whether the systems that employ ostensibly democratic differentiation principles legitimize an educational dictatorship, perpetuating an undemocratic understanding of knowledge and learning.

Keywords: Teacher's role, differentiation, homogenization, rationalities of knowledge, socio-cultural reproduction, theory-practice dichotomy

1. Introduction

The chief source of the 'problem of discipline' in schools is that the teacher has often to spend the larger part of the time in suppressing the bodily activities which take the mind away from its material. A premium is put on physical quietude; on silence, on rigid uniformity of posture and movement; upon a machine-like simulation of the attitudes of intelligent interest. The teachers' business is to hold the pupils up to these requirements and to punish the inevitable deviations which occur. (Dewey, 1916, p. 165)

If there is some difficult, or like uncontrolled behavior, then it's like... it can be harder. Because then... then they're so unmotivated, really, that they could ruin a... an entire class (...) they get so frustrated, right, because they... Well, I guess it's like a... vicious cycle... kind of, that instead of... ...I mean it's kind of their way of surviving... the school day, doing that... being kind of... being restless, 'cause they can't concentrate on the other stuff, so... (Norwegian teacher, p. 14)

Yeah. They're not as educable, I've always said that. That's putting it another way, isn't it? (German teacher, p. 31)

One hundred years after Dewey, educational processes in schools are still facing criticism for not treating pupils as a whole person, and not recognizing as equal all milieus of origin and their inherent knowledge bases. This criticism targets school curricula, teachers' selective behaviour towards pupils, institutional mechanisms for excluding certain pupils or the "new performance culture" of global educational policy (e.g. Bourdieu, 1974; Apple, 1999; Gomolla & Radtke, 2002; Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2009; Krüger & Sünker, 1999; Radtke, 2003; see Jobst, 2013; Lingard, Rawolle, & Tayler, 2005, p. 13).

One essential aspect of disciplining as well as of the concomitant homogenization and exclusion processes that are increasingly accepted as the norm since the rise of national schools is the artificial distinction between the practical and the theoretical. The critique here is that this distinction is perpetuated and entrenched in schools because theory is prioritized

over practice. Regardless of whether a school system is selective or inclusive, it is a fact that school curricula are distanced from practice (e.g. Dewey, 1916; Willis, 2004; Hestholm, 2017; Gjelstad, 2015; NHO, 2017).

Alternative school models have been established in response to this criticism, their aim being to support adolescents in their professional and social integration processes through practical learning; for example, by applying Dewey's "learning by doing" approach (see Bojanowski, 2012; Bundesverband Produktionsschule 07, 2017; Paving the way, 2015; Beaudin, 1995).

These measures, however, often focus on adolescents who are excluded from the general school system.

This article takes one step back and discusses the theory-practice dichotomy within the general, obligatory school system¹. We support the common didactical conception that all subjects could and should be taught both in a practical and a theoretical way. But when most of the subjects in the curriculum focus on theoretical understanding, this means that the practical element is largely reduced to a method for learning the theory. We consider practical knowledge to be a knowledge in itself, which means that we recognise the dialectical interrelatedness between theory and practice, but that we also believe that there are subjects that are primarily practical, and that their main form of instruction, therefore, must be

¹ In schools, theoretical subjects are understood as subjects in which the knowledge is mainly taught and learned indirectly, for example through reading, writing or talking about the knowledge. Practical subjects are subjects in which knowledge is mainly learned directly; for example, swimming and drawing are learned by swimming and drawing. In this respect, reading and writing can also be understood as practical activities, but these practices are primarily tools for achieving secondary learning goals, such as learning and presenting one's understanding in various subjects such as language, history and math.

practical. Here we support Gilbert Ryle's objections to the conception that «knowing how» is a product of “knowing that” (Ryle, 1949/2000, p. 29-30)².

We employ a high-contrast comparative study design (Hörner, 1993, p. 16) and compare the situation in two countries, namely Norway and Germany. The Norwegian school system is characterized by *pedagogical* differentiation, i.e. by the fact that instruction is to be differentiated within the framework of a common classroom that accommodates all pupils. In contrast, the German school system is based on *organizational* differentiation, where the pupils are assigned to homogeneous groups and types of schools according to performance/ability levels. We relate these different modes of differentiation, which are established at the national, macro level, to teachers' concrete practical experiences. Within a phenomenological theoretical framework, we compare and discuss experiences from these two models: one that gives all pupils the same, mainly theoretical instruction, and one that sorts pupils into groups that are given more versus less theoretically demanding educations. Educational-philosophical and educational-sociological reflections on the relationship between theory and practice, and theories about the teaching profession, set the theoretical framework.

2.0 Theoretical foundations

2.1 The theory-practice dichotomy: a classic and modern topic of educational theory

What should the goal of the school be, and what types of subject matter are needed to reach

² Ryle protests against what he calls “the intellectualist legend”, which argues that intelligent performance involves the observance of rules, or the application of criteria. However, according to Ryle: “There are many classes of performance in which intelligence is displayed, but the rules or criteria of which are unformulated” (Ryle 1949/2000, p. 30). As examples, Ryle refers to the practices of language, cooking, chess-playing and making jokes: “(...) the practice of humour is not a client of its theory” (Ryle 1949/2000, p. 30).

this goal? In recent history, the idea of a general education, independent of class and separate from vocational educations, can be traced back to Neohumanism, and particularly to Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835). It was considered that general education should be universal, and the contents of the instruction should be exemplary. This idea of a general and altruistic education has survived and created an institutional divide between general education and vocational education (Hörner, 2010, p. 18-26).

German philosopher and pedagogue Eduard Spranger (1882-1963) admired Humboldt's ideal of the general education, but felt that it should not be limited to an intellectual education. Referring to pedagogues such as Fröbel and Pestalozzi, who in their philosophies also allowed space for technical, aesthetic and social values, Spranger maintained that we cannot speak of a general education until man can utilize the spirit in its totality. The institutional divide between general and vocational education builds upon the idea that general knowledge and concrete knowledge can be seen as separate, but Spranger argues that no competent vocational education deals only with specific skills. The vocation is the core of a life network that general educational subjects are connected to (Spranger, 1918/1969, pp. 8-9).

The reform pedagogues criticized the intellectualist school on the grounds that it was far removed from daily life and children's active nature. For example, Dewey compared the overriding structures of instruction to maps that are handed to the pupil, stressing that "the map does not take the place of an actual journey" (1990, p. 198) because "An ounce of experience is better than a ton of theory simply because it is only in experience that any theory has a vital and verifiable significance" (Dewey, 1916, p. 169). On the basis of his pragmatic thinking, he argues that the subjects taught in school are formed by their own

traditions rather than being adapted to the pupil's way of approaching the world (1900/1990, p. 14).

It would be impossible to state adequately the evil results which have flowed from this dualism of mind and body, much less to exaggerate them. Some of the more striking effects, may, however be enumerated. (a) In part bodily activity becomes an intruder. Having nothing, so it is thought, to do with mental activity, it becomes a distraction, an evil to be contended with. For the pupil has a body, and brings it to school along with his mind. And the body is, of necessity, a wellspring of energy; it has to do something. But its activities, not being utilized in occupation with things which yield significant results, have to be frowned upon. They lead the pupil away from the lesson with which his 'mind' ought to be occupied; they are sources of mischief. (Dewey 1916, p. 164-165)

Nonetheless, Dewey, warns against what he calls "the new education", which celebrates the naive expression in every child, and thinks development can happen without guidance. In the book *The Child and the Curriculum*, he set up "the old pedagogy" against "the new education", which he thinks may be too "child-friendly" and disconnected from the researchers' world. Dewey believes the old and the new pedagogy represent two extremes or doctrines, the first stands for law, discipline and logic, and the second for spontaneity, interest and the psychologizing of subject matter. Dewey believes both positions in their extremity are wrong and argues for an approach somewhere between them. Both of these perspectives must be included in an educational process. Theory and practice must be seen in a dialectical connection. It is then that something occurs that is more than just the acquisition of a given curriculum; in his/her research work, the student can even discover new solutions (Dewey, 1900/1902/1990 pp. 186-188).

Thus, those who succeed in the educational system also suffer due to the dichotomization of knowledge; a theoretical focus will prevent any interaction between cultures of knowledge

and social fields from developing. When knowledge that is not physical or practical is given more value, «learned» and «unlearned» classes are formed in society, which leads to the cultures of both groups being impoverished in different ways. We then have the mechanical teaching of skills within practical educations, and teaching of a large amount of knowledge within theoretical educations (Dewey, 1916, p. 292, 298 and 1900/1990, p. 12). If children are to gain access to the concrete, physical and real world – the world that will spontaneously arouse their interest and catch their attention, and make them aware and active rather than passive and receptive – we need to introduce more varied activities into the schools (Dewey, 1900/1990, p. 18).

In the current theoretical debate on *Bildung*, this holistic approach to education and the interrelatedness between theory and practice is reflected in the praxeological perspective taken on *Bildung*.³ This concept focuses on the dialectical unity of subject and object, and thus refers both to the ongoing “self-transformation”, and to the changing of the “objective structures” and “objective world”. This means that practice is not conceived as an instrumental application of theoretical knowledge since, by interacting with the objective reality, the subject is practice-generating, and thus changing itself and society (Jobst, 2014, p. 268). The need to transcend the dualistic image of subject and society, theory and practice or mind and body is discussed as a critique of efficiency and output-orientated educational policies. However, it has its roots in the classical critique of the separation between general education and vocational education discussed above; in the idea that schools should be a

³ Rorty (1980, p. 320-333) discusses “edification” as the English translation of the German term *Bildung*. Like other translations of *Bildung* – e.g. the Norwegian term *Danning* – the humanistic tradition of *Bildung* as an endless transformation of self- and world relation should be underscored. The praxeological perspective on *Bildung* can also be seen in the humanistic tradition - but with a stronger focus on *Bildung* as practice including implicit knowledge and materiality as two distinct features of practice (e.g. Reckwitz 2003).

miniature image of the larger society (Dewey, 1900/1990, p. 18); and in the multidisciplinary tradition of practice theory (e.g. Reckwitz, 2003).

2.2 Curriculum and Teacher

It is in the educational content and the teaching of that content that a society's dominant ideas around culture, knowledge, values, expectations and options for action are made manifest.

The *official curriculum* is seen as the “most popular steering instrument of school” (Künzli, 1998, p. 7), helping to legitimate the educational content, objectives and methods to the public, and functioning as a guide for teachers (Vollstädt & Tillmann, 1999, p. 19). At the same time, curricula stand for a “selective tradition”: “That is from that vast universe of possible knowledge, only some knowledge gets to be official knowledge, get to be declared legitimate as opposed to simply being popular culture” (Apple, 1999, p. 11). The theory-practice dichotomy applied in formal education – including the domination of the theoretical dimension - is part of this tradition.

In addition to the explicit body of knowledge selected, there are also a great many implied constructs of legitimate culture in schools. These are based on an “organizational/institutional form of teaching and learning” (Fauser & Schweitzer, 1985, p. 340), which has come to be referred to as the “hidden curriculum” (Zinnecker, 1975). In particular, the principle of formal equality should be highlighted since it serves, ultimately, to legitimize processes of differentiation and exclusion in a school context (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1964/1971). Thus, formal equality, which is determinative of educational practice, is in fact “a cloak for and a justification of indifference to the real inequalities with regard to the body of knowledge taught or rather demanded” (Bourdieu, 1974, p. 38). The learning of (usually abstract) educational content in schools presupposes that the tools for learning – for example, an

elaborate language or high educational aspirations – have already been acquired. Schools, and the types of knowledge rooted in them, are thus regarded as places “of crucial struggles about the meaning of democracy, about definitions of legitimate culture, and about who should benefit the most from government policies and practices” (Apple, 1999, p. 13).

What role do teachers play in the conflicts surrounding the definition of the “right education”, and the “legitimate society”, and, ultimately, of what an “educable pupil” is? Studies show that teachers expectations influence their pupils’ development – a phenomenon which has become known in research on teachers as the “Pygmalion effect” (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1974). Research also reveals that teacher’s lessons and assessments of pupils’ performance are oriented to the “upper, well-educated” social milieus (e.g. Ditton, 1992, p. 192; Gomolla & Radtke, 2002). Thus, teachers embody a social group whose action reproduces fundamental social structures and cultural meanings; or to draw upon Bourdieu (1996, pp. 279), the social structure is found in the teacher’s habitus. However, for reasons of case dynamics within school and societal change, teachers constantly reformulate and develop further the worlds of meaning relevant to action and context (Jobst, 2010, p. 113).

To conclude the theoretical discussion, we want to stress that the theory-practice dichotomy in education is a crucial element within a complex historical, political and educational (philosophical, sociological, pedagogical) debate about the “right society” and the “right education”. Be it discussed in the context of the asymmetric relation between general and vocational education, between intellectual school content and daily life, or in relation to the “theoretical habitus” of the teacher, there is always the notion that this dichotomy is artificial and has to be transformed in order to meet the basic human need for a just society.

However, the specific nature of the relationship between theory and practice, and its practical consequences, requires further empirical investigations. Our focus is on the teachers' perspectives. Based on the above considerations, we assume that teachers navigate within an action field that contains conflicting requirements; for example, the need to both legitimize and deconstruct the theory-practice dichotomy. Professional practice can be viewed as a result of the dialectical interaction of teacher's habitus with the given situation (Jobst, 2010, p. 114), whereby the parameters of this situation are set by the specific conditions (such as school structure, curriculum policy, school culture or pupils life experiences). In the following, we explore the teaching profession within two very differently organized and structured school systems, namely selective schools in Germany and integrative schools in Norway.

3.0 Teachers and differentiation in Norway and Germany: empirical findings

3.1 The German and the Norwegian models of differentiation

The Norwegian pedagogical differentiation

In the Norwegian school system today, the term «unitary school» predominates, and within this, the idea of inclusion is important. In principle, everyone is meant to *learn the same things*, and learn them *together*⁴. But one has to admit that the pupils may approach the material in different ways, and so “education shall be adapted to the abilities and aptitudes of the individual pupil, apprentice and training candidate” (Opplæringslova, 1998, §1-3.). Thus, the differentiation is of a pedagogical nature, and takes place within the framework of one

⁴ In upper secondary school the pupils can choose an education programme based on their interests. But after 10 years with mainly academic education, pupils are best prepared to choose general studies (Hestholm, 2017; NHO, 2017). In 2006, about 85 % of pupils who attained high grades chose general studies (Bjørkeng, 2013). Approximately 50 % of pupils embark on vocational education programmes, but for many it is a “negative choice”; they have not figured out what their interests are, and they have little faith in their academic abilities (Sandal & Smith, 2010). Many of them do not graduate, and many switch to general studies (påbygg). Only 16 % of pupils who started in 2006 graduated with vocational qualification (Bjørkeng, 2013). Norway lacks thousands of skilled workers (NHO, 2019).

unitary classroom⁵.

One of the main arguments for a pedagogical differentiation is inclusion. According to The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, there should be academic, social and psychological inclusion in schools (Udir, 2015b). However, academic inclusion does not mean being able to choose subjects that are adapted to the individual pupil's abilities and aptitudes; on the contrary, the subjects have been chosen beforehand and are to be adapted to the pupil's abilities and aptitudes. The goals of the curriculum are not up for negotiation, so the inclusion aspect only has to do with *how* the subject is taught: "the curriculum of a subject provides scope for [adaptation] through different learning materials, strategies, methods and paces" (Udir, 2016).

Pupils who, with individual adaptation in place, still "do not or are unable to benefit satisfactorily from ordinary teaching have the right to special education" (Opplæringslova, 1998, § 5-1.). This right may be claimed when educational and psychological counselling services, have consulted with parents, therapists or other special education experts, and have assessed the pupil within the classroom context. When the experts' recommendation has reached the school principal and he or she has agreed that the pupil needs special education, then the school may move away from the ordinary curriculum, employing an Individual Subject Curriculum (IOP). It is important to note that the right to an IOP is triggered by a *problem* or a *deficiency* which prevents the pupil from reaching the goals for the curriculum. It is not about exploring the pupil's potential skills and abilities, but rather about finding

⁵ In the first seven years pupils are given no grades, but through frequent national and international assessments teachers still have to deal with academic ratings.

possible didactic methods for the pupil to approach the official curriculum. This is the scope of opportunities the Norwegian teacher has when dealing with a heterogeneous population of pupils.

In the curriculum of the common or unitary school, one might expect subjects to be more or less democratically represented. But within the Norwegian common curriculum, the so-called practical and aesthetic subjects⁶ make up 25% of taught hours, but the percentage of time spent on practical activities is far lower because the practical subjects have become more theoretical. The Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise (NHO) criticizes this fact:

Students learn in different ways, and a more practical approach would be great for many, and good for everyone. We also know that half of all pupils (...) will choose a vocational education. This fact is not emphasized in today's primary and lower secondary schools, which at best only prepare pupils for a specialization in general education. (NHO, 2017)

Moreover, practical subjects are often taught by unqualified teachers. Fifty-four percent of the "food and health" teachers and forty-four percent of "arts and crafts" teachers have no credits in these fields, nor are they required to have any (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2014; Utdanningsnytt.no, 2017). In cases where vocationally-oriented electives have been introduced in schools, they have been subject to organizational limitations that negatively influence the status of these subjects; the pupils who choose the "vocational subject" miss out on other, more strategically important subjects, as well as being lumped together with pupils who have been branded as having difficulties with concentrating or acquiring theoretical knowledge (Bakken, Dæhlen, Haakestad, Aaboen Sletten, & Smette, 2012). It is under these

⁶ The practical and aesthetic subjects in primary and lower secondary schools are *arts and crafts, physical education, music, and food and health* (Udir, 2015).

circumstances that Norwegian pupils acquire a basis for choosing their further education.

The German organizational differentiation

The German organizational education system is slightly complicated, and it is not made easier by the fact that there are different systems in different "Länder" or states. The federation develops the national framework for education, but then each state is responsible for its own education system, which sometimes may lead to great differences between the states.

Compulsory education in Germany most clearly differs from that in Norway due to its organizational differentiation, which means that relatively early in the course of their education, children are divided into groups. The most common practice has been that pupils are divided into three⁷ stable groups⁸ after year four⁹. A division between Hauptschule, Realschule, and Gymnasium has been the basic structure in most states since the late 1960s (Dreyer, n.d.b).

In most states, Hauptschule is a 9-year education and lasts from ages 10-11 to 14-15. It is meant to be practically oriented. One of the main subjects is *Arbeitslehre*, and great emphasis is placed on preparing pupils for choosing a vocation, often in collaboration with local businesses. In the general education subjects, the main goal is that pupils should acquire basic skills. A wide range of pupils attend the Hauptschule: there are those who perform as well as

⁷ Pupils with disabilities have traditionally attended Förderschule, but in 2009, the federation implemented the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, according to which children with disabilities must not be excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability. This reform has, for various reasons aroused great controversy, and in 2014, more pupils with special educational needs still attended Förderschule than Regelschule (bpb, 2017).

⁸ In some states, pupils may also choose to attend a Gesamtschule, a unitary school where all pupils are co-educated. However, pupils are organized in groups there as well, whether in different groups depending on the subject (integrierten Gesamtschule) or in fixed groups for all subjects, with PE classes being unitary (kooperativen Gesamtschule) (Dreyer, n.d.). In total, 13% of German pupils attend a Gesamtschule (KMK, 2016).

⁹ In Berlin and Brandenburg, the division takes place after year six (KMK, 2016).

Realschule pupils, other who have language impairments or learning disabilities, and those with immigrant or uneducated parents (Dreyer, n.d.b). In 2016, only six out of 16 German states offered a Hauptschule education, and yet Hauptschule pupils made up 13.9% of the national pupil population (KMK, 2016). There is now move to replace former Hauptschule or Realschule with a new form of school that caters for these pupils. In 2016, these were attended by 9 % of all pupils in Germany. Hauptschule pupils have to complete a tenth year of schooling to be able to apply for Berufsschule (KMK, 2016).

Realschule is a 10-year upper secondary education that is meant to be more practically oriented than a Gymnasium, and more technical and scientific than a Hauptschule. Language, social science and business are important general education subjects. Pupils who have attended a Realschule are able to move on to a Berufsfachschule or Fachoberschule, which Hauptschule graduates are generally unable to do. Realschule pupils may also apply for Gymnasium¹⁰ for the last three years (Süddeutsche.de, 2017; Dreyer, n.d.c). 22.8 % of German pupils attend a Realschule (KMK, 2016).

A Gymnasium education lasts for 12 or 13 years, depending on the state. Pupils admitted to a Gymnasium will generally have good or excellent grades from year 4. Usually they will also have received an *Empfehlung*, a letter of recommendation from a teacher who has assessed the pupil as being prepared for and capable of completing a Gymnasium education. At a Gymnasium, pupils receive a thorough general education, and are expected to develop independent learning abilities, emotional and creative skills, and social and humanist conduct. The instruction at a Gymnasium is highly theoretical, and qualifies graduates directly for

¹⁰ In the new federal states, a variant of Realschule has also been established, which can be combined with Gymnasium and Hauptschule (Dreyer, n.d.c).

higher education (Bax, 2018). The number of pupils attending Gymnasium has increased, and in 2016, 36.1% of German pupils attended a Gymnasium (KMK, 2016).

Hauptschule, Realschule and Gymnasium schools can generally be placed along an axis of practice versus theory, where Hauptschule represents the most practical option and Gymnasium the most theoretical. However, although the former two aim for more practical instruction, general education subjects are still central there as well. Both Hauptschule and Realschule have their own subjects that are not found in the Gymnasium, as well as a few weeks of professional training; but for the most part, the three types of school differ in terms of their academic *level* rather than school subjects. This creates a hierarchical school system that has discriminating effects; for example, with regard to the Hauptschule pupils further education and integration into the labour market (BMBF, 2018, p. 147; Protsch 2014).

3.2 Methodological approach

We wanted to investigate how teachers working within the differentiation systems described above understand their profession, and how this contributes to shaping their view of knowledge and education, and their view of their pupils. To focus on the depth of individual teachers' experiences, we conducted semi-structured interviews with one Norwegian and one German teacher. In order to acknowledge the time aspect – the creation of the teachers' view over a long period – we chose recently retired teachers. Both were teaching for over 30 years. The Norwegian teacher had taught in lower-secondary school; i.e. the last three years of compulsory education. The German teacher had some experience from the first four years of compulsory education, Grundschule, but had mainly taught in Hauptschule.

The study is explorative and concrete focusing on situations that make up the smallest units of lived experiences (Giorgi, 2009, p. 135). Given this qualitative approach, the results of this study cannot be generalized in a statistical sense. However, the informants review a number of situations that, when combined, cover about 30 years of experience with their national school systems.

Accepting the subjective and historically situated nature of reality, we have taken a phenomenological scientific position. By posing basic ontological questions about this reality, phenomenological philosophy aims to acquire valid knowledge through crossing any predetermined and unquestionable circumstances that alienate the individual from his/her own experienced reality (Husserl, 2004). According to Merleau-Ponty (2004, p. 84), when one leaves one's own experience behind in favour of the *idea*, one loses "contact with perceptual experience, of which it is nevertheless the outcome and the natural sequel". Merleau-Ponty offers a thorough analysis of the human who, in his integration into the existing world, adapts to his environment as it is. Similar to Bourdieu's notion of habitus, Merleau-Ponty understands the term *habit* as the knowledge that is in our bodily schema. One may speak of a continually developing "coding", in which we progress from perception through interpretation to action (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 99 – 105) or, as Bourdieu envisages it, of "an embodied story, a story that has become a body, written into the brain, but also into the wrinkles of the body, the gestures, the ways of speaking (...)". On the one hand, this immunizes against changes (hysteresis effect); on the other hand, the habitus "is a generator of freedom, which means that, based on the habitus, you can improvise, and within certain limits you have considerable room for improvisation" (Bourdieu 2001, p. 165).

Teachers' support of the values within the differentiation system into which they have been socialized can be viewed from this perspective. When asked what system best serves the pupils, the German teacher tended toward organizational differentiation.

I think, ah... getting them all to achieve one... the same goal... it's difficult, isn't it? (German teacher, p. 29)

The Norwegian teacher felt that a learning community of pupils with different academic abilities provides the best learning environment:

you see that in, in classes where... the strong pupils, academically strong pupils... also... dominate the social arena, that they often might, that is, when they're popular... that they often might... drag along... pupils who are... That, I think that may be a positive thing. That they shouldn't be these completely homogeneous groups of... but... (Norwegian teacher, p. 13)

From a phenomenological perspective, this coding is unconscious and intuitive.

In intentional interactions with the environment, humans are in a continuous dialogue with the world (see Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 105). This also has implications for the researcher's interactions with his informants: "I borrow myself from others; I create others from my own thoughts" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 159). One can speak of a field of possible variations (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 160) where an individual's dispositions find not an equivalency, but an opposition from which a creative dialogue develops (Østerberg, 2012, p. XV). Thus, researchers and informants alike are variants or instances of their cultures, but at the same time individuals who are contributing to *shaping* their cultures.

The analysis of the interviews began by gaining an overview of the informants' intentions. We then defined meaning units based on the focus of the study, which was the meanings in the informants' experiences. As two authors who have grown up in the respective countries the informants represent, we can here function as each other's "critical other" (see Giorgi, 2009, p. 131).

In accordance with phenomenological philosophy, we employed the process of free imaginative variation to transform the natural utterances to relevant pedagogical categories. This was not a matter of adding to or subtracting from the data, but rather finding categories in the data as they present themselves. The process was protracted, critically reviewed and repeated in order to assess whether the different steps could be performed in other, more precise ways. The result was a series of transformed meaning units (Giorgi, 2009, p. 128-137) which are presented in the following section.

3.3 Findings

In the data, we identified the following four meaning units that illustrate the teachers' perspectives on the hierarchy of knowledge within the two very differently organized and structured school systems:

Knowledge and exclusion

Both teachers were subject to institutional requirements regarding what skills and talents should be rewarded. In Norway, where the differentiation is pedagogical, the consequences of these requirements mainly affected individual pupils, who would stand out as academically

weak rather than as practically skilled. Even in practical and aesthetic subjects, their academic performance was most important. The Norwegian teacher had seen some pupils blossom in "food and health" class, but

(...) what was... kind of sad, was that they... they did well on the practical part, and then they fell through when we got to the theoretical part. Yeah... so then that meant that they couldn't get a five. Right? Yeah. Then they had to struggle with that four. So that was... And for those who, *that* was where they were hoping... to be able to... get a five, right. But, we couldn't, we couldn't give them ... that, 'cause, and there was a bit of a lack of understanding with the parents. Because, we're not allowed to give pedagogical grades. But... they would have, these kids, some of them would have deserved it. Trying to explain that to the parents, that we couldn't, weren't allowed, that... not everyone would get that. (Norwegian teacher, p. 23)

The Norwegian teacher justifies his decision with reference to the tension between his broad pedagogical task and the narrow definition of knowledge within the curriculum and grading system. This finding is confirmed by other research, that points to fundamental discrepancies within the curriculum process and within the professional practice field (see Helsper, 2002; Schütze, 1996; Jobst, 2010, p. 110). The findings also coincide with previous reflections on habitus and hysteresis effects. Although the teacher may reflect upon the discrepancy, the present study shows that even today – after retirement – the habitual modes of behaviour still have their effect.

This narrow definition of knowledge intensifies exclusive rather than socially inclusive learning processes (see Jobst, 2014; Lingard, Rawolle, & Tayler 2005, p. 13), which we also find in the data from Germany, where the differentiation is organizational. Here, however, the exclusion is manifested in a general pity for the Hauptschule class and their disadvantageous position in the system they are a part of:

(...) I think all of us... all of us in a *Hauptschule* have done it... we've tried... to motivate a pupil, and said "you're worth it too, you know". Haven't we? It's important, isn't it? ... "You're worth it too" ... I often think it was hard enough for pupils... at the end of Year 4... when they were told which school they'd got into... it's bad enough when they're told they're going to a *Hauptschule*. (German teacher, p. 30)

With reference to our theoretical perspectives, we can say that the illusory "equal opportunity" (Bourdieu & Passeron 1964/1971) manifests in two ways within the different school systems: in Norway, the academically challenged are individualized and made personally responsible throughout their education. In Germany, children are defined and placed into groups relatively early (after year 4), which hinders any mobility across cultures of knowledge. One might say that the hidden curriculum (see Zinnecker, 1975) is less hidden in Germany than it is in Norway. In Norway, pupils have ostensibly equal opportunities during 10 years of schooling, but given the heavily academic curriculum, this long period of community also serves to conceal and justify discrimination on the basis of cultures of knowledge (see Bourdieu & Passeron 1964/1971). The academically challenged Norwegian pupil may be described as more vulnerable, because the individual differentiation makes the maladaptation all the more personal. The academically challenged German pupil is granted an institutional space, but is less mobile organizationally, across cultures of knowledge, and in terms of status.

You know, I had pupils... they had to get through... *Hauptschule*. They... had to. Those who're at a *Gymnasium* now, that's a completely different kettle of fish, you know? They want to go further, they want to get their *Abitur*, and... It's a different clientele, isn't it? (German teacher, p. 9)

The unquestioned knowledge hierarchy

As we have seen, the pupil population at *Hauptschule* is widely varied (Dreyer, n.d.b). Within

this group, there are pupils with differing preferences in terms of cultures of knowledge, as was evident when the Hauptschule pupils went into training.

Yeah, they like the practical side. They enjoyed their work experience or whatever, didn't they? Enjoyed it a lot. (...) and... I think there were a lot who flourished, those who... weren't doing so well at school. (...) Yeah, but I also think, it's a different environment, isn't it? And... not school... you know? Not school. ... Yeah, I think so. (German teacher, p. 25)

The Hauptschule teacher acknowledges this without passing any criticism on the school system. Since practical knowledge is not part of the school's selective curriculum (see Bourdieu, 1996, p. 164; Apple, 1999, p. 11), it is beyond the teacher's area of responsibility.

Within the Norwegian unitary school, practical knowledge has a weak position in all pupils' schooling (see NHO, 2017). One might say that questions of academic status within a monopoly of knowledge are rarely raised because excluded forms of knowledge remain invisible. Thus, the knowledge which is manifested in the unitary school curriculum is part of a "selective tradition" (Apple, 1999) – perceptions of what kinds of knowledge the nation considers to be worthy of being included in compulsory education. We see a consequence of this when pupils are faced with choosing their upper-secondary education.

I've noticed it... with pupils when, when they come into year ten and have to choose... specialization in general studies or vocational training. ...Then there are a lot of pupils who *absolutely* should choose vocational training, who could do well there ... but it's not distinguished enough. (...) So then they... they push themselves into general studies and then ... (...) they fall right through (...)

When you ask what they want to become, they say a lawyer or a doctor. And so that's, that's an attitude they have picked up at home (...)

But on that, the counselors have been really good at... (sighs) informing me, and I tell them, I have, I guess I used to be sort of... snobbish, in that particular area. But... I have to say that... God knows I could use a craftsman in my family (laughs). I'd treat him like gold! (Laughs.) No, but it's really...

tradespeople today, that really... sort of, in terms of class differences, who, if they're good and skilled people and... and stuff like that, right, that... sort of (chuckles) have a really, really good life... (...) I mean in terms of material possessions and... (Norwegian teacher, p. 40-41)

The teacher grants craftspeople an increase in status, but probably for financial rather than academic reasons. This sequence reveals how both parents and teachers perpetuate a hierarchy of status from their own socialization within a culture of knowledge.

Our findings indicate that the low status of practical skills within both school systems correspond with the teachers' perspectives, regardless of differentiation systems. The three-tier system in Germany constitutes a hierarchy, so the question of status is more explicit (see German teacher, p. 13-14). Within the German school system, practical skills are recognized because they are attached to qualities in a certain group of pupils, namely the Hauptschule pupils; but they are not appreciated because the Hauptschule has a lower status and the practical instruction is limited and mainly takes place outside the school context (Ditton, 1992, p. 192; Gomolla & Radtke, 2002). Within the Norwegian unitary school system, practical cultures of knowledge are largely invisible. Practical skills are not formally attached to any particular group of pupils, and, because of weak representation, poor organization and lack of qualified teachers – are often not properly recognized or appreciated (NHO, 2017, Bakken et al., 2012; Utdanningsnytt.no, 2017).

Meeting the curriculum standard: the construction of the "educable pupils"

Influenced by their culture, (see Bourdieu & Passeron, 1964/1971) teachers tend to consider success at school to be synonymous with being educable. The German teacher is most unequivocal on this point:

But there are children who aren't that... educable. You're not allowed to say "thick", are you? (German teacher, p. 20)

The Norwegian teacher paints a similar picture, but realizes that, although the pupil in question in the sequence below is "hopeless" in class, he is quite competent in other areas.

(...) I'll never forget, I had a pupil... when I was in (city X). He was... pretty hopeless. He was (sighs), well he was a restless sort of kid, and he wasn't... doing well in school (...) And then... he was sort of, he had a certain sparkle. And then (chuckles) he said, one time he said to me: "Hey, (teacher's name), I bet you don't know your way around a... Harley-Davidson". And then I said, "you're right about that", I said. (...) But when he said that, I thought, 'cause he probably knew everything... about... motorcycles and cars and all that stuff, right? And that (laughs), he was right! But ... it was really like... I've never forgotten him. Because it was like a, I had a wake-up call. Really. That there are ... people know different things, right. And... in some areas... you're just... completely lost (chuckles). (Norwegian teacher, pp. 41, 42)

These extracts show two somewhat different understandings of the term "educability". For the German teacher, it seems that educability is solely a question of whether a pupil can master the curriculum. Academic knowledge is the standard and the scale by which the heterogeneous population of pupils is measured (see Gomolla & Radtke, 2002; Bourdieu, 1974; Apple, 1999). The politically correct word for pupils who do not meet this standard, is "uneducable", and a politically incorrect word is "thick". The Norwegian teacher, working within a unitary system, at least has a more holistic view of the pupil. But unless the pupil qualifies for special education (Opplæringslova, 1998, § 5-1.), the teacher is still obligated to evaluate the pupil by the standards of the common curriculum (see Norwegian teacher, p. 23); anything else would, within the rationale of the common curriculum, lead to a dead end.

Teachers are, after all, held responsible for producing results. Thus, if pupils do not perform as required, it reflects on them.

I always said that if a kid's good... is good at school, well fantastic, then (...) the kid, well, it's the parents, but if the kid's not good at school, then it's the teacher's fault. (German teacher, p. 9)

When the dominant, academically rationalizing economy of education assesses the pupil as "hopeless" (Norwegian teacher, p. 41) or "uneducable" (German teacher, p. 20), this assessment almost becomes final and absolute, for the pupil as well. Strengthened by the fact that pupils with an academic aptitude are treated differently (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1964/1971) and by the Pygmalion effect (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1974) where the teachers' expectations of the pupil's development are fulfilled, two groups arise: the included and the excluded (see Bourdieu & Champagne, 1996, p. 165). The included are viewed in an academically nuanced way within the school system; their skills and talents within the "organisational/institutionalized form of teaching and learning" (see Fauser & Schweitzer, 1985, p. 340) are identified, reinforced and developed by the teachers. The excluded also make up a nuanced group in terms of capabilities and talents, but these nuances are not relevant within the academic rationality. Whether the challenges they face are due to a lack of accommodation, a learning disability, social difficulties, or cultural or linguistic differences, or whether their abilities are more on the practical side than the curriculum allows for, this makes no difference within the academic rationality. Whatever skills and talents they actually have are rarely identified, and could not be taken into account even if they were, as evident from the Norwegian teacher's experience (p. 41, 42). Thus, within both systems of differentiation, notions of educable and uneducable pupils are created.

Practical knowledge as a foreign rationality

Both teachers express a personal distance to the practical subjects. The German teacher has chosen his profession knowing that the system is what it is, and thus becomes a piece that fits nicely into the puzzle he has chosen to become a part of.

I always wanted to be a teacher, that's why I never, ever... considered doing anything else. (German teacher, p. 7)

For the Norwegian teacher, this is manifested in an incompetence that he acknowledges and even insists upon.

I've never been a practitioner. (Norwegian teacher, p. 10)

When practical electives are introduced in Norway, this is felt to be an unannounced change in the predetermined rules of the school system, and is interpreted almost as a breach of contract.

Then we have these electives... which we have now. They are (sighs) electives, electives can be many things. (...) but what happened was that... the electives sort of were pushed on to the teachers who had hours to spare, who could teach them. And... what did (colleague) get last year? Something technology-related. (...) anyway, then... (colleague) felt pretty unqualified... to teach it. But... then (colleague) got some help from... a computer-savvy person, who is, he's not a teacher, he's at the school doing... doing all the computer-related stuff. And he... well, he was very helpful. So then ... But (sighs) it was like ... probably nobody wanted to teach that class (chuckles). Right, nobody felt that they had the competency for it. (Norwegian teacher, p. 22)

In the Norwegian teacher's view, practice is of value mainly as a method for learning.

(...) I think a lot of the theoretical knowledge we taught in food and health class, they learned it through the practical work. (Norwegian teacher, p. 28)

The German teacher acknowledges that practice can provide a new feeling of accomplishment for pupils, but still expresses the idea that this solution is mainly applicable to those who don't succeed with traditional subjects.

That they, um, do practical stuff... that they showed them, you know, woodwork and metalwork, you know? Maybe you'll do better with that than with... the... reading, writing, arithmetic, you know? (...)
And that's what we did with those... pupils. (German teacher, p. 23)

From the perspective of these teachers, practical knowledge is a foreign rationality within an established culture with specific notions of what school knowledge is. As seen in the theoretical discussion, this conflicts with a holistic and critical understanding of the theory-practice relation (e.g. Jobst, 2014, p. 268; Merleau-Ponty 2012, p. 9; Dewey 1900/1990, pp. 186-188).

3.4 Summary and discussion

We have seen how teachers who are socialized within a school system over a long period internalize divisions/categories that make sense within the academic rationality; and how they represent and perpetuate the mentality that dominates the system in which they operate. We have also seen how they reinforce and extend the academic culture when working to connect pupils to curricula; pupils whose cultures of knowledge are similar to those of the teacher are seen, strengthened and developed, whereas pupils with skills and interests that are irrelevant to the curriculum are unidentified and/or devalued, or even seen as "uneducable" (German

teacher, p. 20) or "hopeless" (Norwegian teacher, p. 41-42; see also Bourdieu & Champagne, 1996; Willis, 2004; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1974).

Outside of the academic rationality and in “a different environment” (German teacher, p. 25), the German teacher saw many pupils flourish who had not done so in school. Here, we see another axis of knowledge that is distinct from theoretical proficiency. Nevertheless, as long as the standardized school system categorizes the pupils (Dreyer, n.d.b; KMK, 2016), this potential will remain hidden.

If a Norwegian pupil has problems achieving the goals of the curriculum, the teacher may attempt to realize a potential for understanding "(...) through different learning materials, strategies, methods and paces" (Udir, 2016). In cases where this proves unfeasible, the teacher, in consultation with other involved parties, has to make the case to redefine or even *degrade* the pupil. We say degrade because it is about legally diagnosing the pupil as unable to reach the goals of the curriculum. Even when working to avoid this degrading, during the school year of 2016-2017, 7.8 percent¹¹ of all Norwegian pupils received special education (Udir, 2016b).

According to Dewey (1916, p. 164), “Something which is called mind or consciousness is severed from the physical organs of activity. The former is then thought to be purely intellectual and cognitive; the latter to be an irrelevant and intruding physical factor” because the requirements of the common curriculum demand, or authorize, the teachers to assess the pupils’ theoretical performance.

¹¹ This number is almost three times as high in year 10 as in year 1" (Utdanningsforbundet, 2016, p. 1).

Based on this, the overarching question is whether the attempts to implement "general education" in schools are really achieving the intended purpose. Spranger wrote that you cannot call it 'general knowledge' in the fullest sense until you are considering the evolving mind in its entirety (Spranger, 1969, p. 8), and according to Dewey (1916, p. 164) and Merleau-Ponty (2004, p. 84), the mind's entirety also includes the body and the physical experiences. Then, as these examples have shown, the realization of a democratic education is neither achieved by pedagogical or organizational differentiation as long as the curriculum is predominantly academic. In Norway, the imbalance between practical and theoretical subjects is substantial. In Germany, the practical dimension is to a somewhat greater extent present in *Hauptschule*¹², but it is separated from the school culture (see German teacher, p. 25), and thus cannot come in dialectical play with the theory. This prevents the holistic process of *Bildung* as reflected in the praxeological concept (Jobst, 2014) and legitimizes processes of differentiation and exclusion (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1964/1971).

4.0 Conclusion

What if we change the game and reshuffle the cards? What if we democratize the curriculum so it contains a socially representative selection of knowledge and skills, so the school can become a miniature image of society, «an embryonic society» (Dewey, 1900/1990, p. 18)?

We can imagine three consequences of this, the first being most evident:

With a democratic representation of knowledge, fewer pupils will be diagnosed as

¹² In addition to general studies, which make up the primary focus, *Realschule* shall also cover practical topics. This instruction, however, is also predominantly theoretical (Dreyer, n.d.c).

uneducable. A common, compulsory school that includes a more representative selection of knowledge and methods, and that builds on a holistic approach to the real world (Dewey, 1916; Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 9; Jobst, 2014) can lessen the need for differentiation in general, because the pupil's potentials will resonate with a broader range of knowledge and methods. Their educational specializations can then be found, not just from cultural affiliations, but also from individual inclinations.

The second consequence becomes evident when we imagine the status of knowledge as reset: with a socially representative curriculum, those who are defined as educable today would have a broader, more complete and democratic foundation for their education. This is about providing all pupils, including those who meet the traditional academic requirements, with a richer field of knowledge and experiences, in order to develop the creative, reflective and inclusive attitudes, which are crucial for shaping a democratic society. In addition, the resetting of the unbalanced theory practice relation within school curriculum will provide the opportunity to challenge the "selective tradition" of school curriculum (Apple, 1999) and by so doing the power relations within society (e.g. Bourdieu 1996).

The third consequence is incorporated in the previous two, but still needs to be stated: practice will not just add a new piece to an established system of understanding. With practical experience, an *other* basic knowledge rationality opens up, one that is essential if the individual is to understand himself in the world, and to participate in creating it (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 9; Dewey, 1916, 1900/1990; Ryle 1949/2000). When practice is included in the common curriculum, the praxaeological conception of education can be realized; the conception that goes beyond dichotomies to acknowledge that a relational, situated subject is

meeting an objective world, and that this interaction can develop the subject's life and society (Jobst, 2014).

As this contribution has shown, teachers working within two contrasting school-models of differentiation cannot realize these visions today. This highlights the need for a long-term democratization of the traditional curriculum and, as a direct result of that, a culturally representative recruitment to the teacher education. Such a comprehensive social, political and educational democratization would help to overcome the tendency to think in terms of shortcomings and binary attributions such as “educable” vs. “not educable”. It could also bring us closer to Dewey's educational goal (1916, p. 100-102): to qualify all pupils, regardless of their cultural background, to find, own, explore or criticize the knowledge and the values in the society. The aim of such an education is to empower all members of society to be active and intelligent participants in the dynamic development of society, and to create dialogue and tolerance between different cultures and nations by identifying and strengthening the bonds that link us together.

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