Teachers´ Experiences of School Choice from ´Marginalised´ and ´Privileged´ Public Schools in Oslo

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Oslo introduced a combination of school choice, per capita funding, balanced management and accountability in their public schools. Recent studies point out that this has increased segregation. In this study, teachers have been interviewed about their experiences. Bernstein´s *classification* and *framing tools* have been used to analyse the consequences for schools and relations between schools and parents/students. ´Marginalised´ and ´privileged´ schools find themselves in negative and positive spirals when it comes to popularity. These spirals are classed, raced and, (in upper secondary school), also gendered. Since attracting the ´right´ students and avoiding getting the ´wrong´ ones is essential for both school categories, school choice creates a *mutual interest* between the school and privileged parents/students in fortifying the latter´s voice. Three findings are especially interesting: 1. Cream skimming occurs in undersubscribed schools in a strictly public-school context. 2.

School choice affects internal priorities in marginalised schools so that segregation at the class level increases, thus the educational context may be more segregated than what is indicated by school level information. 3. School choice increases segregation in the local communities, as two schools near each other may have very different student compositions. Segregation is thus not only explained by segregated housing.

Key words: Bernstein classification and framing, public-school choice, segregation, marginalised schools, privileged schools

Word count: 13323

Introduction

Globally, education is being denationalised and the question is whether '...states are losing the ability to control their education systems…' (Ball 2012, 4). Global actors, such as the OECD, are found to frequently promote a neoliberal approach to education (Hovdenak and Stray 2015; Haugen 2013; Ball 2012), and are also found to be important premise providers in the Norwegian context (cf. Haugen 2010; 2013; 2014; Hovdenak and Stray 2015). In neoliberalism, the market is king (Burch 2009). In restructuring the education system into a market-like system, policy technologies (cf. Ball 2017) with roots in various interests are combined. Apple (2006, 55) describes the current trends as *conservative modernization*, combining traditional values and knowledge (neo-conservatives), market control through individual choice (neo-liberalism) and quality improvement through testing (new managerial middle class). Quality measurements through standardised testing form an important basis in creating a market where parents can choose a ´good´ school for their children (Apple 2006). The degree of parental choice is increasing globally, leading to a competitive situation between schools as they strive to attract children (OECD 2012).

Apple (2006) claims that in nations with strong social democratic histories (such as Norway), the neoliberal emphasis on the market has been mitigated significantly, but that greater sympathy for marketized forms in education may arise as racial dynamics enter the equation due to the growth of immigrant populations. Oslo is one of the fastest growing urban regions in Europe, with a high degree of international and national migration. A growing proportion of the population has a minority background, at the same time as the proportion

of the population with higher education has increased more in Oslo than in other parts of Norway. What is interesting here in an equity perspective is that the city has migrants arriving with few resources, whilst other arriving migrants have many resources (Ljunggren 2017). Oslo is especially interesting in the Norwegian context as decentralisation and political stability (a right-wing city council was in power from 1997-2015) made it possible to develop a ´Høyre-skole´ (Conservative Party school), where one of the specificities was to introduce school choice at all levels (elementary, lower and upper secondary school) within the public education system (the choice system will be explained below). That support for choice-based policies is strong in Oslo[1] may be related to the characteristics of its population (cf. Apple 2006 above). The question is how such differences in the population play out in school choice processes.

In an international and historical perspective, the Norwegian education system forms part of a special tradition, ´the Nordic education model´, which is described as a Scandinavian social democratic project institutionalising an ´unusually radical type of comprehensive education different from similar attempts in other European countries, such as Germany and England´ (Imsen, Blossing and Moos 2017, 569). Compared to the UK and USA, where emphasis has especially been given to a scientific curriculum, national aims and measurable outcomes, the Nordic countries' focus on equality, equity, democratic participation, inclusion and nation-building has been seen as more important (Imsen et al. 2017). However, over the most recent decades, when participating in global knowledge competitions, the Nordic countries

[1] The socialist coalition city council (Dahl 2017) chose not to reverse the school choice policy when it came into office, a decision that represents a break with the traditional lines between the political right and left in Norway (Hansen 2018).

have also been influenced by neoliberal trends. This has led to a focus on management by objectives, decentralisation, accountability and competition between schools (Imsen et al. 2017).

It has been found that school choice and new provisions, such as government-dependent private schools (e.g. charter schools, autonomous schools) combined with new funding mechanisms, have been expanded in nearly all OECD countries (OECD 2012). On this point, Sweden stands out in the Nordic context because it has restructured the educational system in a very radical way, from a monopoly to more or less total freedom of choice between public schools and publicly financed private school providers, combined with universal vouchers (see Bunar 2010; Imsen et al. 2017). In comparison, school choice has not been introduced at the national level in Norway, but has become an option for the local authorities, while the individual still has a legal right to attend his or her local school in the comprehensive education system (Imsen et al. 2017). Norway has a history of being very restrictive when it comes to opening for private providers of education, and even though the number of private schools has risen, the private school market is still strongly regulated (Bjordal 2016).

The Oslo school has gained a good reputation internationally, and other Nordic countries are turning to it for inspiration so they can improve their national results (Politiken 2017). However, little research is available on the effects of school choice in Oslo´s public schools. Two studies find increasing segregation along social and ethnic lines (cf. Hansen 2017; Bjordal 2016), which could be an indicator that school choice is challenging basic values in the Nordic education model. However, to gain deeper insight into how school choice is

affecting local communities and social reproduction, Bunar (2010) argues that it is important to examine how schools and teachers are dealing with the competition for students. Ball et al. (2012) also point to the importance of examining the school-specific context in policy research, as a number of actors influence the interpretation and translation of policies into practices. In her study, Bjordal (2016) has listened to the voices of school principals in Oslo and finds that for them the student composition at the school is important for how attractive it is found to be when parents/students exercise school choice. In the competition for students, ethnic Norwegian, resourceful, high-performing students are favourable for the school when it comes to gaining or maintaining popularity. The question then is how school choice is handled and experienced in schools characterised by very different student compositions.

In the Swedish context, school principals see fewer professional dilemmas than the teachers do, which is explained by them having taken on the role of business leaders (Lundahl et al. 2014). The role of school principals has also changed through the recent Norwegian reform as schools are given greater responsibility for their operations (Hovdenak and Stray 2015). For Oslo especially, schools are governed according to the decentralised model, with their own school board, and decentralisation of budget responsibility, in addition to being responsible for the school´s results (Bjordal 2016). In this context, teachers in Oslo experience that the relation between school principals and teachers has become more distant, and often more authoritarian (Haugen 2018a). For this reason, teachers could also provide a different perspective than the principals in the Oslo context.

With this point of departure, this paper pays special attention to what is one important and under-researched context, namely how school choice works in the public schools in Oslo

(see presentation below). The study gives voice to teachers whilst also drawing attention to how the specific school context may influence the practising of school choice in ways that create (in)equities within the public-school system. With increasing segregation in Oslo´s public schools as the point of departure, there is particular interest in how teachers working in schools characterised by very different student compositions in terms of socioeconomic background experience consequences of school choice in their specific school context and how these may be related to relational and communicational characteristics between schools and parents.

The following overarching research question is addressed:

> *How do power and control embedded in school choice processes contribute to increasing segregation between social classes, and what are the consequences for the educational context in schools with different student compositions?*

To understand how and why school choice processes play out the way they do in different schools it is necessary to focus on both the specific school context and the relation and communication between the schools and parents/students. The following sub-questions are thus also addressed:

> *What contextual features do teachers working in schools with a student composition characterised by low versus high socioeconomic backgrounds experience as consequences of school choice?*
>
> *How do teachers working in these different school contexts experience relations to and communication with marginalised and privileged parents/students[2] in the*

[2] Morken and Theie (2015) find that parents include their children´s wishes as an important consideration when choosing a different lower secondary school. It is expected that students´ influence in school choice will increase at the upper secondary level. Therefore, it is not always easy to separate between parents and

general collaboration between school and home, and especially in the exercising of school choice?

Before presenting the theoretical and methodological framework, more details relating to school choice in an international perspective to contextualise the specificities of the Oslo school will be presented, as well as international research on the relation between school and parents in school choice.

School choice and relational inequality

Drawing clear conclusions from the international research on social justice and school choice is complicated. Ball (2017, 141) argues that ´parental choice is one of the most contested and most difficult of concepts… Choice and voice are also slippery notions that are often used loosely and elusively by advocates, policy makers and critics´. Bunar (2010) finds that the research in this field is influenced by different research positionings, leading to different and sometimes contradictory conclusions. A further complication is that parental choice is carried out differently in different countries (OECD 2012), and given the diversity of models, policy types, outcomes and volume of research, it is difficult to draw clear conclusions about the effect of choice-based policies across contexts (Bunar 2010).

Advocates of school choice argue that market mechanisms in education can provide equal access for all to quality education, which is argued to be especially relevant in a social justice

students when referring to school choice. However, teachers at all school levels talk about parents´ involvement or lack of such.

perspective as disadvantaged families can send their children to high-performing schools instead of being ´trapped´ in low-performing neighbourhood schools (OECD 2012, see also Bunar 2010). However, according to this perception, the very concept of democracy is based on what Apple (2006, 114) refers to as ´possessive individualism´, where the citizen is only looked upon as a consumer. He argues that such an understanding of democracy is grounded in a process of deracing, declassing and degendering, or what he refers to as a process of depoliticization where those with less power will have a hard time being heard (see also Ball 1998). At the same time, individuals are ´deemed responsible for their own "self-capitalising" over their lifetimes´ (cf. Lingard 2009, 18); they can only blame themselves if they do not succeed within the system.

Bearing this in mind when reviewing international research on school choice, Bunar (2010) states that the international evidence illuminating the shortcomings of the market is convincing. Often reported effects of choice-based policies are that instead of contributing to equal opportunities for all, they contribute to increased segregation along social and ethnic lines (OECD 2012; Apple 2006). As stated above, little research has been carried out on how school choice functions in Oslo. However, two studies found that in the primary and lower secondary schools, school choice increases segregation (Bjordal 2016; Hansen 2017), and that grades increasingly depend on the parents´ educational level (Hansen 2017). In upper secondary education, there is no sign of schools being more effective in terms of how many complete and pass their studies, while it appears that segregation is increasing:

> [W]e (have) studied levels and developments in segregation and school results, and the transition from primary/lower secondary school to upper secondary schools… [T]he level of segregation is high and increasing in Oslo, and is a lot higher than what

> we find in the other large cities (in Norway, my addition). There is also a clear connection between parents´ income level and grade levels at the schools (Hansen 2017, 274).

The question is how and why this segregation is exacerbated. Ball states that how parents use the possibility to choose to their advantage may contribute to inequality: ´Inequality is also produced and reproduced relationally by the actions and strategies of the socially advantaged to enhance and maintain their advantages. This is typically ignored and often facilitated by policy – like school choice and school diversity and selection´ (Ball 2017, 169). Inequalities are explained by under-privileged parents being less likely to exercise school choice, by privileged parents tending to avoid sending their children to schools with a high proportion of disadvantaged students and by often choosing schools with ethnically similar populations (OECD 2012). It is also argued, however, that school choice can be important for poor minorities, and the international evidence is not clear as to whether or not the choice policies are undermining the state of equity in education (Bunar 2010).

There is little research on the role of parents in school choice in the Oslo context. One study investigates parents´ grounds for their choice when applying for a different lower secondary school than the school in their immediate vicinity (Morken and Theie 2015). This study finds that the proportion of students with Norwegian as a native language is of great importance for a majority of the parents in their choice of lower secondary school. However, this is not the only or most important reason for choosing a different school, as students´ own opinions, the fact that the school is located in the neighbourhood and that it has a good social environment are other reasons that are found more important. However, one

shortcoming in this study is that due to language problems, many marginalised parents probably have not responded to the survey (Morken and Theie 2015).

However, international research on school choice has found that not only parents but also the school plays an active role in increasing segregation. It may contribute to producing inequalities through selective admission, as oversubscribed schools are found to be cream skimming a student market where some students are found more attractive than others (OECD 2012). For example, cream skimming is found in charter schools in the US and autonomous schools in England (West, Ingram and Hind 2006; Jabbar 2015), and the effect of independent schools doing this has also been explored in the Swedish context (Böhlmark, Holmlund and Lindahl 2016). In Oslo, school principals see cream skimming in relation to oversubscribed public schools. However, there is little evidence of this practice and it is therefore difficult to ascertain the full extent of it (Bjordal 2016).

With this research background in mind, listening to teachers´ voices may be an important contribution to understanding how and why school choice increases segregation in Oslo´s public schools.

School choice in Oslo´s public schools

In 2004, school choice was introduced in Oslo´s public education system to ´ensure equal treatment´ in all schools (Bjordal 2016, 26). The public schools have ´guiding admission areas´, which means that parents, as far as it is possible, can have their child admitted to a local school in the admissions area. However, parents do not have the *right* to decide that their child shall attend one specific school, but they can choose to apply for a different

school than the one assigned to them, both within and outside the admissions area (Bjordal 2016).

Within this system, the educational authorities instruct the schools to practise free school choice as much as possible, with *capacity* being the main reason for *not* admitting applicants to a particular school. According to the educational authorities, lack of capacity can be based on various circumstances: ´for example, number of available rooms, the size of the rooms, the organising of each year group, reasonable teaching groups, and inner climate/instructions from the municipal director of health´ (Oslo local authority 2005). This means that the criteria are vague and there are many options when processing applications for a place in one of Oslo´s primary schools.

All young people who have completed lower secondary education have the right to three years of upper secondary education (Norwegian Education Act/*Opplæringsloven* 2017). In Oslo, school choice for the public upper secondary schools was introduced in its current form in 2008. The arguments were that school choice could provide students with the possibility to realise their abilities regardless of place of residence and social background, that the schools would strive to renew themselves and attract applicants, that they would work to even out differences and counteract segregation, and finally, that they would give the students the opportunity to break from established structures and meet students from other parts of the city (Guneriussen 2012). Students in Oslo can choose which upper secondary school they want to attend,[3] and the only selection criteria are their grades from

[3] In upper secondary education there are quite a few private schools in Oslo. In addition to 23 municipally-run upper secondary schools, there are 15 private upper secondary schools in Oslo which all have the right to receive state appropriations. These schools are approved according to the Private Schools Act and offer education that has been accredited as equally as good as under the public curricula. Students must pay a partial fee (Guneriussen 2012).

primary and lower secondary school. When applying for upper secondary education, the students will prioritise three different educational programmes in order of preference. Those students who do not have good enough grades to enter what they have applied for are offered a place they have not applied for at a school with places available (Vilbli.no-fylkenes informasjonstjeneste for videregående opplæring/county information service for upper secondary education).

In combination with school choice, *per capita funding*, or what the educational authorities refer to as ´the money follows the student´ approach was already in place in Oslo in 2003. Combining school choice with per capita funding is important for stimulating *competition* within the system, as ´[c]ompetition as a device is effective only when market recruitment is directly related to funding and the survival or well-being of individual organisations´ (Ball 2017, 54). Through per capita funding, the Oslo schools´ financial resources are based on the number of students they admit. Moreover, resources are dependent on the number of special needs students, socio-demography and students with minority backgrounds (Bjordal 2016). In the upper secondary schools, these are meant to function as incentives for the schools to ensure that students complete and pass their studies. If a student drops out during the school year, the school budgets will be affected by the non-completion rate (Guneriussen 2012).

Other characteristics of the Oslo school connected to school choice and per capita funding are: *decentralisation,* as schools operate as self-governed entities responsible for their budgets; *balanced management*, including a keen focus on standardised testing through

Test schedule Oslo (cf. Oslo kommune 2017); *accountability*, in the form of leader contracts for the school principals, where evaluation criteria and financial incentives are connected to the results (VG 2013); *comparison* of schools´ results and characteristics of each school´s student body, which are presented online (cf. www.minosloskole.no) (Bjordal 2016).

Theoretical and Methodological Framework

Basil Bernstein´s theory seeks to explore and explain how power relations are produced and reproduced in educational contexts: ´A school´s ideology may be seen as a construction in a mirror through which images are reflected. The question is: who recognizes themselves as of value?... In the same way, we can ask about the acoustic of the school. Whose voice is heard? Who is speaking?´ (Bernstein 2000, xxi).

To analyse and understand how power and control function in the relations and communication between school/teachers and parents/students in the school choice process, the theories of Basil Bernstein are useful. Focusing on how class works in pedagogic relations, it is important to understand the relation between education and the greater inequalities in society, as

> [c]lass cultures act to transform micro differences into macro inequalities and these inequalities raise crucial issues for the relation between democracy and education. … To understand whose voice is speaking is probably more important today than at any other period in time (Bernstein 2000, xxv).

When new policy technologies (cf. Ball 2017) such as school choice in combination with per capita funding, balanced management and accountability are introduced within the public-

school system, and when we see increasing segregation where these policies are implemented, important questions thus relate to whether and how this can be understood as a result of how differences between classes play out *through* school choice in Oslo´s public schools.

To analyse ´voice´, or who is speaking in school choice, the analytical tool of *classification* is used. This is a tool for analysing power that can be described as the relation *between* categories. Bernstein states that ´the principle of the classification attempts to establish, maintain and relay power relations´ (Bernstein 2000, 100). The classification can be described as strong or weak (+/- C) as it refers to the degree of insulation between the categories. According to Bernstein, power is what preserves insulation between categories, and ´[a]ttempts to change degrees of insulation to reveal the power relations on which the classification is based and which it reproduces´ (Bernstein 2000, 7). In this case, classification is used to describe different school contexts, as well as the relation between the school and parents. Classification describes the characteristics of the school contexts in terms of student composition, but also how '...one context differs from another (…), or the distinguishing feature of the context' (Bernstein 2000, 17). Here this is explored through how the teachers describe characteristic features of the consequences of school choice in schools with different student compositions.

Classification furthermore refers to how teachers working in marginalised and privileged schools experience their relations to and communication with marginalised and privileged parents. If the classification is strong (+C), the insulation between school and parents is strong, as in little contact between them, whereas the opposite is the case if the classification is weak (-C). If the relational characteristics are different, the power relations

are different. Here, this means whether the power relations between the school and parents differ according to class background. Classification also makes up the rules of a context, and ´[t]he rules that we indicate to provide an understanding of communication in its context are necessarily contextual rules´ (Bernstein 2000, 26), for example what counts as good ways of raising or educating children, or what counts as attractive students for the schools.

To analyse how classification *changes*, the concept of *framing* describing *control* is important, as ´control is double-faced, for it carries both the power of reproduction and the potential for its change´ (Bernstein 2000, 5). This means that changing the control over communication could simultaneously change the relational characteristics, i.e. the degree of insulation between school and parents. Through school choice, parents are given more control to legitimise criteria for what counts as a ´good´ school, and schools need to meet these criteria to be chosen. As money follows the students, being chosen can be of vital importance for the schools´ financial situation. This means that school choice potentially can affect the communication (framing) between the school and parents/students, and thus influence the power relations (classification) in school by strengthening the voices of the latter. Potentially, both categories of parents/students (marginalised and privileged) have equal control and thus power within the public-school system, as both bring money to the school. The salient question is whether this is actually the case.

Framing ´establishes legitimate forms of communication appropriate to the different categories. Control carries the boundary relations of power and socializes individuals into these relationships´ (p. 5), as it regulates relations *within* a context. This can refer to what parents or teachers can address or expect of each other in their collaboration in a child´s

upbringing and education. Like classification, framing can also be described as strong or weak. In the case of strong framing (+F), the school has control over the communication, whereas in weak framing (-F), the parents have more control in setting the premises for the collaboration. Viewing classification and framing together, Bernstein (2000) argued that classification establishes ´voice´, while framing establishes the ´message´ and that they are intertwined and in a dynamic relation. The data material for analysing how school choice establishes specific ´voices´ and ´messages´ has been taken from interviews with teachers working in different school contexts.

Data Material and Analysis

Twelve teachers were recruited through an open invitation letter to participate in a study focusing on how teachers experience their everyday work in the current educational context. The invitation letter was distributed by a teacher who had contacts in many schools in Oslo.[4] The twelve teachers work in primary, lower and upper secondary schools. As described above, the point of departure of the study was the documented increasing segregation due to school choice (cf. Bjordal 2016; Hansen 2017). The specific interest for the topic of school choice was to gain deeper insight into how the competition for students plays out in schools with different student compositions. Other themes from the interviews,

[4] The interviews with the teachers form part of a larger research project focusing on how the various agents in schools (principals, teachers, parents) experience the current Norwegian educational context.

such as pedagogic culture and knowledge and pedagogic orientations in marginalised and privileged schools are treated in other papers (cf. Haugen 2018a,b).

Therefore, the teachers were grouped according to having a high proportion of students from respectively lower or higher socioeconomic backgrounds. However, the sample of the participating teachers was not strategic as the twelve were the teachers who were willing to sign up for the study. Nevertheless, the sample gave a good balance with six teachers working in schools with a high proportion of students from lower socioeconomic background and six working in schools with a high proportion of students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. Moreover, there were teachers representing all levels (elementary, lower secondary and upper secondary school) in both school categories.

The categorisation of the schools´ student composition was based on different indicators of socioeconomic background. The initial categorisation was based on percentage of minority students in primary and lower secondary schools. This information was found at www.minosloskole.no. Students with a minority background often have parents with a low income level (cf. Hansen 2017). This implies that the percentage of minority students in the school can be an indicator of what characterises the student population in terms of class backgrounds. The initial categorisation for upper secondary schools was based on grade intake level. Hansen (2017) finds that differences in students´ class background is lowest where the grade admission level is high (the highest admission level in Oslo is about 50 admission points), and that the level of segregation is highest among the students with the lowest grades (the lowest is about 20, but anywhere around 30-35 is also considered a low

level). This implies that the highest and lowest grade admission levels may be good indicators of characteristics of the students´ socioeconomic background.

To ensure that the percentage of minority students and grade intake level were reliable indicators of socioeconomic backgrounds among the students, this initial categorisation was compared to the teachers´ own descriptions of the student composition at their school. It was complicated to categorise one school as the percentage of minority students was about 50%. Thus result indicators in terms of exams and grades in lower secondary school (cf. Hansen 2017 on relation between socioeconomic background and grade intake level in upper secondary schools), together with the teacher´s description of the student composition as a 'relatively resourceful student- and parent group' were essential in categorising this school.

Six of the teachers work in schools with a high proportion of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and six in schools with a high proportion of students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, and they all work in different schools. The teachers represent both genders (six women, six men), a wide range of school subjects and have between 5-40 years of experience working as a teacher. Many have quite extensive experience, which is of special interest as being in school over a long period of time may give a special sensibility towards what is changing due to school choice. The strength of this data is that it represents a broad picture of Oslo´s schools.

Teacher	**Indicators of social background**	**Years**	**Experience**

1	80-85% minority students	Years 1-7	5 years
2	90-95% minority students	Years 1-10	14 years in lower secondary level
3	75-80% minority students	Years 8-10	17 years
4	30-35 admission points	Upper secondary	23 years
5	30-35 admission points	Upper secondary	18 years
6	30-35 admission points	Upper secondary	7 years

Table 1: Teachers working at schools with a high proportion of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds

Teacher	**Indicators of social background**	**Years**	**Experience**
7	15% minority students	1-7	27 years
8	10% minority students	1-7	20 years
9	15% minority students	1-7	25 years
10	50% minority students, high results exams, grades, a "relatively resourceful student- and parent group" (Teacher).	1-10	20 years in lower secondary
11	45-50 admission points	Upper secondary	40 years

12	45-50 admission points	Upper secondary	13 years

Table 2: Teachers working at schools with a high proportion of students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds

The data examined in this article are related to how the teachers experience consequences of school choice in the specific school they are working in, how they experience their relations to and communication with marginalised and privileged parents/students in general, and specifically to the topic of school choice. It should be stated here that when talking about these matters, the teachers sometimes also describe how their school (not only the specific teacher him/herself) relates to and communicates with the parents/students. Thus, the analysed data can be on both a specific teacher´s relations and communication, but also on how the teachers experience that their school in more general terms relates and communicates with the parents/students.

In the interviews, teachers from schools with a high proportion of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds talked a great deal about how school choice affects their daily work and expressed many concerns for their students. Sometimes it was only necessary to say the two words “school choice” and the teacher had much to say about the issue. The theme of school choice was less prevalent in interviews with teachers working in schools with a high proportion of students with higher socioeconomic backgrounds. Examples of questions that were posed to the teachers were: What is your experience of school choice

and per capita funding? Do you experience that school choice increases segregation? Is there a difference in what types of student your school recruits and who leaves? Why do you think that your school is popular/unpopular?

There was also a difference in how much the teachers had to say on the theme of collaboration between schools and different parents/students. Teachers working in schools with a high proportion of students with lower socioeconomic backgrounds talked about their relation and communication with both categories of parents/students, whereas teachers working in schools with a high proportion of students with higher socioeconomic backgrounds often had less to say about the experience with parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Examples of questions that were posed to the teachers were: how is your collaboration with the parents? Is there a difference in how you collaborate with parents from higher/lower socioeconomic backgrounds? How does your school communicate with parents when it comes to school choice? Is there a difference in how you approach different parents? Do you experience that parents trust you/the school?

As the interest here was school choice processes in schools characterised by different student compositions, the analysis of all the data was based on a comparative approach, where similarities and differences both within and between the two school categories were in focus. In analysing the school context, characteristics the teachers related directly to consequences of school choice, for example the student composition, the capacity of the school, the financial situation and the social and learning environment were extracted. The analysis of how the teachers described the relation between schools/teachers and parents/students was first categorised by two themes: 1) The general relation and communication, and 2) The relation and communication specifically when it came to school

choice. The relational characteristics were then categorised as +/- C between school and marginalised/privileged parents/students, and the communication characteristics as +/- F between the schools and parents/students. Furthermore, these data were compared within and between the school categories to investigate whether the classification and framing characteristics were similar or different in the two school categories.

It should be stated that all the 12 interviewed teachers are critical to the current practice of school choice. Whether they are critical to school choice *as such* was not discussed; they are concerned with the consequences of the current system. They especially express concern over how school choice affects marginalised students, but also privileged students as they may become too competitively oriented, sometimes leading to too high pressure. However, this critical position may also be influenced by how they all experience that the competition between schools influences the *pedagogic culture* (cf. Bernstein 2000), characterised by high pressure on results, reduced professional autonomy and hard hierarchical relations (see Haugen 2018a).

Analysis

There are three sections in the analysis. First an analysis of which contextual features the teachers find are consequences of school choice in the two different school categories will be presented. This is followed by an analysis of what characterises the relation and communication between the two school categories and respectively marginalised and privileged parents/students when it comes to school choice. The last section presents an analysis of the relation and communication between the two school categories and respectively marginalised and privileged parents/students in *general terms*. The general

relational characteristics between schools and parents/students with different class backgrounds may contribute to understanding why school choice turns out the way it does, and what may be needed to improve an inequitable situation.

Consequences of School Choice in Different School Contexts

To provide the context the teachers work, how they experience their school context in relation to choice in schools with a high proportion of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds will be presented first. In primary and lower secondary schools, the teachers explain that the student group that populates the schools is influenced by housing prices in the area. However, the local demographics is not directly reflected as their schools are losing white, privileged students to neighbourhood schools. They are in what they refer to as a ´negative spiral´, losing white and privileged students so that their school is becoming increasingly ´dark´ and marginalised in terms of socioeconomic background. One effect of school choice in the local area is that two schools near each other have very different student populations:

> The students move to a primary school one kilometre away, where it is the complete opposite to this school. 15% minority students… It's like one street over, and there, suddenly there it's a completely different world that you wouldn't know about if you haven´t been there. (Teacher primary school)

> There are school-border areas, but you have the right to apply to another school, if it has capacity. And in our area, it has become like, our school has a lot of immigrants, whereas the neighbouring school does not. ... We're placed in an area where there is

> like a 60-65% immigrant population, and our school has between 80-100%. (Teacher lower secondary school, years 1-10)

The more the schools lose ethnic Norwegian students the more difficult it becomes to connect the students to the concept ´Norwegian´ to help them build a Norwegian identity and learn the Norwegian language. A teacher with 17 years of experience explains how this has changed over the years:

> Before we were 50-50% (ethnic minorities/Ethnic Norwegian, my addition), now, we're very ´dark´. Those from lower backgrounds stay where they are… It's becoming a ghetto – that's what the students themselves call the school. They see themselves as foreigners … We teachers try to counter these ideas, but now we can't use that argument anymore...you're Norwegian-Pakistani… and try to help them with their identity, but we've given up… it's hard to build a connection to the Norwegian concept. They don´t move a lot after school either. They stay in the neighbourhood. It's only me, as their teacher, who has the opportunity to influence them, no one else… The task is important, but so big that you actually feel a bit overwhelmed. (Teacher lower secondary school)

The teachers explain that they also find that the parental community at the school is becoming an increasingly weaker resource. It is difficult to hold social events, and students are offered fewer and fewer after-school activities. Some find it more challenging working at the school than before, with more unrest and problems. ´I guess we have more students coming from difficult homes. A relatively high percentage have contact with the child welfare services, they're carrying a lot of baggage… but there's little follow-up from psychologists, psychiatrists´ (teacher lower secondary school).

Teachers at upper secondary schools describe their schools as being characterised by many poorly performing students in a school many of them did not apply for, and where boys make up about 70% of the student group. Many of the students are in special education classes. The schools have capacity for more students and are anxious about losing students as this can affect their financial situation dramatically since the money follows the student. One teacher at an upper secondary school explains how school choice has problematic consequences for marginalised students:

> Some schools get the job of ´saving´ the 20% weakest students in Oslo. It's an important job, but I think the reason is just as much that the students who perform well want to have the opportunity to go to their own schools. Increasing segregation. I think it's a calculated development… Many students have a long way to go to get to school, they come to school tired and exhausted. Free school choice. Free in quotation marks, because many of the students who attend our school haven´t chosen this school at all. (Teacher upper secondary school)

The financial situation is described as difficult in the schools with a high proportion of students from a lower socioeconomic background. One elementary school teacher specifically relates this issue to the Resource Allocation Model.

> There's been a lot of talk about the resource allocation model in Oslo… You hear about schools that have a lot of money. I just don't get how that's possible. We always have red numbers. We have many students with special needs,.. but little money follows. (Teacher elementary school)

The financial situation influences the subjects offered in upper secondary school, where schools are forced to drop science subjects due to too few students, which is something,

according to the teachers, that makes it even more difficult to recruit privileged students. At another upper secondary school the teacher states that 'the financial situation looks good on paper. When students leave, the school loses money but they introduce austerity measures that enhance the result. Special education suffers, and the classes are too full' (Teacher upper secondary).

In addition to a difficult financial and consequently educational situation, the stress level for teachers at the upper secondary schools is described as high. This is due to unrealistic expectations and intense pressure from the educational authorities on raising statistics and results, at the same time that they experience being told that the students´ background is an invalid excuse for poor results:

> We have students who are so weak that they can hardly write or read in their native language, or English or Norwegian. Still they're supposed to complete school and pass. Either I'm supposed to solve the problem, or I have to cheat. (Teacher marginalised upper secondary school)

Teachers working at schools with a high proportion of privileged students describe their schools as ´winner schools´ in terms of school choice. Too many students want to go there, so if they lose students they have a waiting list and can easily fill up their places. Financial concerns are less prevalent in the interviews with these teachers. Since money follows the student, this ensures a stable financial situation for the school. However, one primary-school teacher states that the school has a bad financial situation at the moment.

The parents are described as resourceful with high education levels, high expectations and help their children in a very good way. The student group is described as ´easy´ to work with where the teachers get a lot for ´free´. In upper secondary education, the student group is

described as homogenic and high-performing, and about 70% of the students are girls. Different ethnicities are represented and many of these have clear plans and are ambitious. The school has a good financial situation with opportunities to go on excursions. One teacher with 40 years of experience says that: ´Parents with academic "baggage", their children are the winners, a lot more than before. There's a very big difference, the system is increasing the social differences in a very powerful way´ (teacher upper secondary school). However, although the students are described as easy to work with, there are also problems, such as stress among the students: ´They have very clear plans, high pressure on grades, a number of mental-health problems, eating disorders and perfect-girl syndrome, all of which are quite time consuming´ (Teacher upper secondary).

Thus, the picture the teachers paint of the context they are working in when it comes to school choice is that they are in negative and positive spirals in terms of losing or recruiting students, and that these spirals are classed, raced and, in upper secondary education, also gendered.[5] The students in schools with a high proportion of young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are facing an increasingly difficult situation in terms of resources among their peers and parents, and are having problems connecting to the ´Norwegian´ concept. The situation is different for schools with a high proportion of students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. These schools have stable resources, highly motivated students and parents with good resources for supporting their children.

[5] The gendered spirals in upper secondary education may be explained by the fact that girls outperform boys in lower secondary school (Forskning.no 2014), which gives them priority at the most popular schools in upper secondary education because the admittance policy is only based on grades. A review of the relation between gender and educational results concludes that social background has a major influence on both girls´ and boys´ educational performance, but that boys may be more vulnerable to difficult home situations than girls. Moreover, there are indications that differences between the genders may increase with age.

Similar findings are also described by Bjordal[6] (2016) in her study presenting the voices of school principals in Oslo´s public-school system. Based on these characteristics, schools with a high proportion of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are henceforth given the name ´marginalised schools´, whereas schools with a high proportion of students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are given the name ´privileged schools´ in terms of school choice.

Marginalised schools	**Privileged schools**
High proportion of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds	High proportion of students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds
Losing white, privileged students, not always full capacity	´Winner-schools´, popular, too many applicants
Upper secondary: preponderance of boys	Upper secondary: preponderance of girls
Poor financial situation	Stable (but not always good) financial situation
Few extracurricular activities, social events	Extracurricular activities, trips, involved and motivated parents
Increasing unrest, learning difficulties	Stress, psychological problems
Increasingly difficult to connect to Norwegian language and identity	Motivated, often ambitious students

Table 3: Distinguishing features of marginalised and privileged schools with school choice

[6] Bjordal (2016) developed the categories ´marginalised´ and ´privileged´ school contexts through analysing situated, material and external contexts. In these school categories, the composition of the student body constitutes an important distinguishing signifier, and the characteristics described by the teachers here share similarities to what Bjordal finds from the school principals.

School Choice in Marginalised and Privileged Schools

So how do the teachers working in, respectively, marginalised and privileged schools experience relations to and communication with respectively marginalised and privileged parents when it comes to school choice? Teachers working in marginalised schools claim that for the marginalised parents the relation to the school tends to be characterised by strong classification (C+) in the sense that they tend to be less active in choosing schools, and in exercising students´ rights. They say that the reason why people have their children in marginalised schools is often either because it is their neighbourhood school in primary and lower secondary education, or they have been allocated a place in the upper secondary school due to low grades. Thus, according to the teachers, most marginalised students have not actively chosen the school they are attending; the choice therefore does not apply to them at all.

However, what is more interesting is to look into the role played by the school/teacher in the relational and communicational characteristics in school choice. Teachers state that marginalised parents who want to exercise their choice do not necessarily have the same access to a chosen school as the privileged parents do. Teachers at marginalised schools say that their school is disinterested in recruiting marginalised students and that primary and lower secondary schools sometimes use strategies to actively avoid them. The relations between these schools and marginalised parents are thus characterised by strong classification and strong framing over the communication (+C, +F). However, this different

valuing of students is not something that is openly talked about, rather it is taking place under the surface. One teacher at a lower secondary marginalised school with 15 years of experience tells the following story:

> And it is during the last couple of years that I have begun to notice that attitude, conversations, and I hear things, we don´t talk openly about it, hear it in meetings, informal conversations. A, B and C students, we want the A students, they produce results, come with money, while with B and C students, you get the money, but the results go down. And the results are our advertisement/window display. (Teacher lower secondary marginalised school)

This means that whether the students can contribute to good results is regarded as more important for the school than the money that comes with them through the per capita funding. That the school acts selectively depending on who the student is, is something about which teachers express deep moral concern:

> If they ask us: do you want another student? We say: What type of student is it? Resourceful, we would have said yes, if he comes right from the refugee reception centre, no, we're full up. It's very cynical when the leaders make us decide in one way, it´s not right. We want this one, not that one... It´s morally reprehensible and deeply problematic. And it gives you a bad conscience, and what kind of people are we really? (Teacher lower secondary marginalised school)

Different students are considered to have different values for the school where ethnicity and results play an important part in how they are valued:

> The critical point (in school choice, my addition) at our school is Years 4 and 5 and Years 7 and 8 where we sense that they may choose another school. And then I feel that we try to hold on to Norwegian students, but if the weak students say they want to leave, so ok, just let them go, and there's something disgusting about that. (Teacher marginalised primary/lower secondary school)

Moreover, one teacher with 15 years of experience explains how school choice has changed the dynamics in the public schools into a game where the school attempts to avoid getting certain students:

> I´ve got two new students this autumn with bigger needs than what the former school told us about, so it's starting to get dirty, when you send away students, a student who is terribly weak, and skips school a lot, and they don´t tell you about that… Earlier it was simply the case that when a student applied for a school, yes, of course you get in, especially if you live close by. But now it´s like: no, we can´t take him because it will affect our results, or no, we don´t have the resources. This is how the principal and vice-principal talk. (Teacher marginalised lower secondary school)

Teachers paint a different picture when talking about privileged parents/students. Marginalised schools actively work to recruit them, and to convince them to stay. The classification and framing between marginalised schools and privileged parents/students is weak in the sense that the parents/students have authority (-C) and exercise a high degree of influence (-F) on deciding what the school should do. In order to avoid losing privileged (often ethnically Norwegian) students, teachers point out that marginalised schools carry out veiled segregation within the school, keeping white students in the same groups and class, while keeping the most marginalised students in the same class:

> We have talked about it in our school, that if we get four Norwegian students in Year 1, don´t split them up! Because they need each other. We have had such bad experience of them being alone, dropping out. It's not easy, kids are not just kids, they all have something about them. (Teacher marginalised primary school)
>
> There are still some white students attending this school, but then they are kept together, 7-8 in the same class. (Teacher marginalised lower secondary school)

As segregation within the same school is prohibited by the Education Act, (2017, section 8-2) which states that: ´Pupils shall not normally be organised according to level of ability, gender or ethnic affiliation´, teachers experience that schools are becoming creative at carrying out hidden segregation within the school in order to keep privileged students satisfied:

> There are some doubtful processes going on here, where (minority students) are in their own classes for the most part. And some classes are purely ethnic Norwegian actually. …They fill up classes on the first admissions round with students with high scores. And then comes the second admissions round. Then all types of students come in, typically minority students, who are placed in two of their own classes.… When we ask why it's done this way, the answer is that they are divided according to subject interests, which school they come from and where they live. They say that because it's illegal to do this according to last name or ethnicity or something like that. I think the system is to blame, they are so preoccupied about the reputation of the school that they focus on satisfying students in some of the classes very much to

improve the reputation of the school.[7] (Teacher marginalised upper secondary school)

In other words, at all levels in marginalised schools, teachers describe internal segregation where ethnic Norwegian students are placed in the same class as a recruitment strategy in terms of school choice. The reasoning behind this is explained as being socially motivated (considering that children have difficulties integrating with each other due to cultural aspects) or making a high-performing class environment to ensure privileged students are happy and to help build a positive reputation about the school so it can recruit more privileged students.

A similar pattern in classification and framing characteristics is described by teachers working in privileged schools. A teacher from a lower secondary privileged school also states that they consider the student before letting him/her in (+C, +F towards marginalised parents/students):

> The student comes with money, but if the student has special needs, it will drain our resources. So, the schools that get many non-native speakers need to make adjustments, and there will be socio-emotional problems, it will be difficult to prioritise other students. Parents who come with a disabled child may get this response: why don´t you apply to NN school instead? ... It must be humiliating for parents to experience that. (Teacher privileged lower secondary school)

[7] This school has an education programme that is also popular among privileged students.

Teachers at privileged schools describe similar classification and framing (-C, -F) characteristics as in marginalised schools in their relations with white, privileged parents and students. Here one of the teachers claims that privileged parents manage to get their child accepted even though the school is full:

> The school is full, right. But with a free school choice, some parents really want their child to go to this school, and they have good arguments. … so at our school, they let the student in, because they could, since the norm about class size is not working anymore. (Teacher at privileged primary school)

The privileged parents/students are described as having a high degree of power, and the schools stretch far to satisfy them to convince them to stay at the school:

> Students can walk between the schools, they can leave any day they want, the principals do whatever it takes to keep these students. Students can ... now they have started to ´shop´ teachers, I just heard about a colleague, the students had written to the county authority and complained, and the principal removed the teacher without explaining why. This is happening more and more, it´s dangerous. (Teacher at privileged upper secondary school)

In summarising the relational and communicational characteristics described by the teachers working in marginalised and privileged schools, their relation to marginalised parents/students is characterised by strong classification (+C) and strong framing (+F) over the communication, while the characteristics for privileged parents/students is weakly classified (-C) and weakly framed (-F). Thus, they describe the voice of the privileged parents/students as being stronger when it comes to school choice, as the schools stretch far to recruit them or satisfy them to encourage them to stay.

	Marginalised schools	Privileged schools
Marginalised parents/students	+C: disinterested in recruiting them, avoid getting them, make other schools take them +F: ok if leave, allocated, rarely exercise school choice	+C: avoid getting them +F: recommend them to apply to another school
Privileged parents/students	-C: active recruitment -F: veiled segregation to satisfy the parents, convince them to stay	-C: fight to enter full school -F: principals do whatever to keep them satisfied, convince them to stay

Table 4: Relations and communication in exercising school choice

Relationships between School and Parents/Students in Marginalised and Privileged Schools

In addition to the fact that the schools valued the students differently, variances in the general school-parent/student relationships may also help to explain why there is a difference between marginalised and privileged parents/students in exercising school choice. Similar classification and framing characteristics are expressed by the teachers working at marginalised and privileged schools with respect to how they relate to respectively marginalised and privileged parents in their daily schoolwork.

In marginalised schools, the classification for marginalised parents is described as strong (+C) in the sense that these parents typically have a high level of confidence and trust in the

school and the teacher, and respect his/her authority. The characteristics of the relations between parents and teachers is explained as being anchored in socioeconomic and cultural realities:

> We have many thankful parents who appreciate very much the work we do. They try to follow up, but it isn't always that easy since they may not have gone to school themselves, and often I see that the mother is alone, and the father has, excuse me, ´shit work´. Has to stay away all night, and other situations at the home as well. But I see that the parents appreciate the school very much, and where they come from they are used to respecting the teacher, which I find a bit ´un-Norwegian´ (laughter). (Teacher marginalised primary school)

The communication is described as strongly framed (+F) as the parents have little control over what counts as legitimate communication. One of the teachers describes how parents want to contribute to the school, but do not have the resources:

> So, it´s like they don't demand and demand, but more like, what can I do to help?... In my work I almost feel like a family therapist, so I ask: how are things at home, do you have a quiet place where your child can do his homework? They need some help. I'm the only contact to Norwegian society for many of the mothers. (Teacher marginalised primary school)

According to the teachers, despite having low education levels themselves, it is often found that marginalised parents look upon the school as important, but they trust the teacher to know what is best: ´Parents have high ambitions, although they do not have the best jobs in Oslo, they still have very high ambitions for their children´ (teacher marginalised lower

secondary school). However, in upper secondary school, the teachers describe parents as more pessimistic about what the marginalised upper secondary schools can do.

> Many of the students that we receive from the local community … have often failed in the test regime, they haven´t managed the schoolwork. Parents have given up, don´t come to parental meetings, it's hard to talk with them … The most resourceful parents come to the meetings. (Teacher marginalised upper secondary school)

The teachers describe that the relations with and communication between marginalised schools and privileged parents have different characteristics, weak classification (-C) and weak framing (-F). They are more actively involved and have a stronger voice in their relations with the school community. According to the teachers, they are concerned when the number of minority students at the school is high, which represents an important motivation for ethnic Norwegian parents deciding to move their child to a different school:

> (Ethnic Norwegian) parents find it hard when there are few Norwegians (at the school, my addition)... The parents (ethnic Norwegian, my addition) have started a campaign to strengthen the local community to get people to stay… Mostly directed at the Norwegians to get them to stay, that is. A couple of roads where many Norwegian families live. Probably they plan to live there for a while, so they ask others to think about it before they move their child. (Teacher marginalised primary school)

The teachers explain that privileged parents also see themselves as having higher authority and a stronger voice (-C) for setting the agenda (-F) and helping the teachers in their work:

> At our last parental meeting, one of the parents asked, a highly educated academic, what is it really like to work in an Oslo school, what pressure do you feel, can you say something about that? … we have quite a lot of power, if we as parents can help and push, since we are customers in a way. (Teacher marginalised upper secondary school)

In the privileged schools only one teacher talks about the relations and communication with marginalised parents. The classification and framing characteristics are the same as in the marginalised schools, where the teacher regards him/herself to be a higher authority (+C) than the parents in knowing what the student needs (+F):

> The integration problems are quite hard. You want to maintain the best possible dialogue with the parents, but at the same time you have to give advice and be intense at it as you see that it's heading in the wrong direction... Those of us working in the school, being closest to the kids outside of the home, we may be closest to see what the kids need, what they may lack, more than maybe the parents do, because parents aren´t objective, but we might have the unique position of being objective or neutral. (Teacher privileged primary school)

The relations teachers claim that privileged schools have with privileged parents also share similar characteristics with the marginalised schools: weak classification (-C) and framing (-F). According to the teachers, privileged parents operate as active agents, being supportive and sometimes demanding and having influence on what is going on at the school:

> Parents are less present in their children´s lives than before. Some support them well, but more are like: ´what can the school do´ instead of ´what can I do´. …They are concerned about results. (Teacher privileged primary school)

> We have parents with high education, great expectations about the school and support their children very well. Dedicated parents. They are concerned about academic development, results, national tests. (Teacher privileged primary school)

A teacher in a privileged lower secondary school describes how parents sometimes contribute directly to the teaching (-F):

> They can come into the school and hold presentations, offer knowledge in technology and design or other things. Many architects, and they take the students to their office, so they can see what they do. (Teacher privileged secondary school)

However, some teachers experience some of the parents as too demanding (-F), fearing they have too much power (-C) in the education system:

> We meet parents with a lawyer, and students who pester us about their rights, who are incredibly informed… they require documentation as if we were at a trial all the time. (Teacher privileged upper secondary school)

> There is a problem at these ´top schools´. I was the second examiner for an oral exam and I was threatened by a student who brought a lawyer with him because he was unhappy about his grade... The principal is very intimidated by these parents. The school´s leaders are very scared. (Teacher marginalised upper secondary school, about experience at privileged school)

In summarising the analysis, we see that the teachers describe that the relations and communication characteristics are different for marginalised and privileged parents, but the same characteristics are shared by marginalised and privileged schools. This indicates that the power relations are different, where privileged parents are described as having a stronger voice than the marginalised parents in both school categories. According to the teachers, both parental groups are described as having high ambitions for their children, but their relations to and communication with the school are different. Marginalised parents often *trust* the school and the teacher to know what is best for their child´s education (+F), seeing the school and teacher as a higher authority (+C), whereas privileged parents act with more power (-C) in the system, and have opinions and expectations. They claim their rights and influence the school (-F) to a higher degree. However, this pattern is created *relationally,* as teachers and schools are also active in the establishment of the different classification and framing values for different groups of parents.

	Marginalised schools	Privileged schools
Marginalised parents	+C: teacher respected as authority, many don´t attend meetings +F: lack resources to help, trust the teachers, teacher advises parents on upbringing, don´t know/demand student´s rights	+C: teachers regard themselves as experts on what the student needs +F: offer advice on upbringing

Privileged parents	-C: active involvement in educational community -F: regard themselves as agents with the power to demand concerning what students need	-C: active, supportive, demanding -F: pressure on teachers, influence and contribute to teaching, claiming rights, the school fears some parents

Table 5: Parental involvement in marginalised and privileged schools

Summary of the Analysis

Summing up the three parts of the analysis we see that the contextual features teachers experience as consequences of school choice in schools with a high proportion of students with lower socioeconomic backgrounds are different than in schools with a high proportion of students with higher socioeconomic backgrounds. The first school category is ´marginalised´ in a number of issues: a negative recruitment spiral, poor financial situation and an increasingly deprived and difficult educational and extracurricular situation. The second school category is ´privileged´ in a number of ways, as these schools are in a positive spiral when it comes to recruiting students, have a stable financial situation and a richer educational and extracurricular situation. The negative and positive recruitment spirals are classed, raced, and in upper secondary school, also gendered.

The different school contexts seem, however, to play a small role in how relationships between schools and parents/students turn out. According to the teachers, marginalised and privileged parents/students tend to have different voices (+/- C/F) in the school. This

counts specifically for school choice, but also for the general relationship between them. The combination of being found unattractive by the schools and generally trusting the school in knowing what is best makes the marginalised parents/students especially vulnerable. To manoeuvre in a choice-based education system, it may not be enough to have high ambitions for your child. School choice forces the schools to not only prioritise the privileged parents/students´ interests to attract them, but also to work to keep them from leaving their school. How this may affect the internal priorities of the school is demonstrated for example by the internal segregation described in marginalised schools. Thus, in relation to the question of whose voice is speaking (cf. Bernstein 2000) through school choice, it is evident from this analysis that privileged parents´/students´ interests are dominant.

Discussion

Traditionally, the Nordic model of education has been based on democratic ideals where educational institutions have been an arena where different social classes could meet to enhance solidarity between classes (Arnesen and Lundahl 2006). With neoliberal, marketized reforms, this ideal has been challenged. As Apple (2006) states: ´neoliberalism transforms our very idea of democracy, making it only an economic concept, not a political one´ (p. 15), and ´democracy is now redefined as guaranteeing choice on an unfettered market. In essence, the state withdraws´ (p. 39). It is thus up to each parent to choose the right school for their child. But as found here, according to the teachers, both the extent to which parents/students exercise choice differs, as well as their access to schools.

When it comes to international research on the relations between schools and parents in school choice, we see that the findings described by the teachers in Oslo are not unique to the city (see section school choice). That marginalised parents tend to be less active in exercising their choice, as described by the teachers here, is a known phenomenon internationally (cf. for example OECD 2012). This could be explained by the fact that the teachers in this study find parents with lower socioeconomic backgrounds to be more passive when it comes to school choice, as they trust the school and teacher to know what is best for their child in educational issues and lack important knowledge that would help them to manoeuvre in a choice-based system. That parents and students are considered to have different values for the schools, and that schools can be selective in admission processes in terms of school choice, are issues also found in other research (cf. OECD 2012; Cucchiara 2008; Apple 2006; Bjordal 2016).

However, what is especially interesting from this study, is that cream skimming is found in undersubscribed schools in a strictly public-school context. Cream skimming as a phenomenon is first of all described elsewhere in oversubscribed schools and in choice contexts where there is competition from independent or autonomous schools. One exception is a study from Slovenia demonstrating similar findings as described by the teachers in Oslo, that cream skimming also takes place in undersubscribed schools with centrally/locally regulated enrolment (cf. Trnavcevic 2002). The consequences of marketization might in other words not be any ´lighter´ even though the competition between schools is strongly regulated in the sense that all operate within the same educational framework and governing system.

Another important finding is how school choice may influence internal priorities in schools, increasing segregation at the class level (even though it is forbidden by law) as has been described as taking place in marginalised schools in this study. This means that the educational context may be even more segregated than what is indicated by school level information. This could be another example of how valuing privileged parents/students in terms of school choice gives them higher priority within the school they are attending. A parallel finding has been described in relation to a school striving to increase popularity in a US context, where 'middle- and upper-class parents are treated as sought-after customers who gain and retain positions of influence over the direction of the school once their children are admitted' (Cucchiara 2008, 165). However, as is stated by the teachers, the internal segregation is regarded as a necessary step schools have to take to prevent segregation at the school level because the educational situation is experienced as very difficult if the student is the only ethnic Norwegian in a class. If they do not do this, the marginalised schools will likely lose the few ethnic Norwegians they still have.

Nevertheless, if we are to understand the consumerist behaviour of the schools, we have to look at the wider context in which they operate. Other research demonstrates that both marginalised and privileged schools in Oslo experience intense pressure from the educational authorities to constantly improve their results, and fear falling into ´negative spirals´ due to the social composition of the school and its reputation (Bjordal 2016, Haugen 2018a). As described by the teachers in this study, the fear of poor results overrides the need for funding, in addition to the fact that the student could end up costing more than the funding he/she brings. The study demonstrates that the combination of school choice, per capita funding and pressure on results ´turns the world upside-down´, as it forces each school to be strategic in considering the ´value´ the student can add to it. It is precisely this

element that gives some parents such power, where the cultural capital (cf. Bernstein 2000; Bourdieu 1984; Apple 2006; Au 2009; Bjordal 2016) the students bring with them gives the privileged ones an advantage at the cost of the marginalised parents and students. In this way, the system establishes *mutual interest* between schools and privileged parents/students in strengthening the latter´s voice and prioritising their interests in both marginalised and privileged school contexts. Thus it is correct, as Ball, Bowe and Gewirtz (1995, 52) maintain, that ´middle-class parents are taking full advantage of "the market" to sustain or re-assert their class advantages´. However, as this analysis also demonstrates, the schools in a marketized governance system are not passive in this regard.

What is just as important to point out in relation to this is that it is evident that the governance system is to blame, not the individual school principal or teacher. As shown above, the teachers find the schools´ consumerist behaviour deeply problematic and even ´disgusting´, as the choice-based policies contribute to increasing both segregation and the streaming of the marginalised students into separate schools (and sometimes classes), where the message is that they are unwanted or unattractive.

A third important finding is related to how school choice affects local communities at the primary and lower secondary school levels. While there has been much debate on the development in Oslo's upper secondary schools in recent years, where the least popular schools are facing severe problems related to violence and criminality, little attention is paid to how school choice contributes to very different educational circumstances within the same local communities at the primary and lower secondary school levels. As teachers describe the situation, the school conditions are highly influenced by school choice, leading to an increasingly deprived educational situation for the schools losing in the local

competition for students within the same catchment areas. Explaining school segregation according to housing prices and catchment areas is in other words too simplistic, as two schools near each other may have very different student-group compositions. This is also an important finding in the study of school principals in Oslo (see Bjordal 2016).

Conclusion

The OECD states that having a heterogeneous student group is the best approach for underprivileged students and schools (cf. OECD 2012). Segregation in a city like Oslo is not only influenced by school choice, but also housing (Ljunggren and Andersen 2017). This means that the solution for increasing heterogeneity in the schools is not necessarily only a matter of reversing school choice (although this may be an important measure). The OECD (2012) suggests that providing more information and help to disadvantaged families so they can make more informed choices is one measure. However, as this study demonstrates, this may not help if their access to schools is not equal to what the privileged students have. To prevent cream skimming, it is important to introduce controlled choice programmes to ensure a more diverse distribution of students. Reviewing research on measures that can be introduced to ensure heterogeneity in school choice, Hansen (2018) argues that drawing lots (if there are more applicants than places at the school), allocating places according to performance or introducing affirmative-action measures based on social and ethnic backgrounds could be alternatives worthy of consideration. Moreover, as has been demonstrated in this study, looking more closely into the internal distribution of students within schools may also be an important step to ensure heterogeneity at the class level.

Oslo had a conservative municipal government for 18 years when these policies were implemented and have been in force. In 2015 there was a shift to a socialist coalition. In their *Plattform for byrådssamarbeid* (Platform for City Council Cooperation) (2015, 34) they state that ´(t)he schools in Oslo shall counteract class differences and segregation through equal opportunities for all´. As the socialist coalition has stated that they will not reverse school choice (Dahl 2017), the question is whether they have other measures in mind to decrease segregation and class differences. The Oslo schools´ promise to contribute to an integrated community where children from diverse backgrounds will be brought together will be impossible to fulfill if the system of market-based school choice continues unchanged.

The study here indicates that this issue is especially critical for students with lower socioeconomic backgrounds, as they face an increasingly harder educational context, while at the same time the choice processes may not be working in an equitable manner. Rather, this study indicates that the voices of the already privileged students have become stronger at the cost of the marginalised students. Teachers in marginalised schools talk about how school choice sends the message to the underprivileged that they are unwanted when they are allocated into their own schools. Exploring how this growing segregation influences students´ feeling of ´otherness´ could be an important issue for further research, where giving voice to the underprivileged parents and students is imperative.

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