

The Discursive Governing of Elementary School Student Identity in Norwegian Educational Policy 2000–2015

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Abstract. Drawing on a study of five Norwegian white papers from the period 2003–2013, this article illuminates how student identity is discursively negotiated and constructed in educational policy documents in a period of transformation in Norwegian education. By employing discourse analysis using ‘the student’ as a nodal point, the white papers are analysed in four phases: (1) identify identity resources, (2) construct subject positions, (3) cluster subject positions into student identities, and (4) identify the discursive governing of student identities. Our analysis of the documents shows how the policy documents draw on traditional and well-known educational discourses, but also how a new discourse, ‘The discourse of compliance’, emerges in this period. In particular, the article discusses possible challenges and dilemmas that might arise, such as the challenge of ‘metonymic transfer’ and ‘the temporal dilemma’, when student identity is negotiated and constructed in the intersection of different educational ideologies and discourses. The article also elucidates how ‘The discourse of compliance’ is relevant for the development of the new Norwegian educational reform of 2020. Our findings are of interest for all actors within the educational context and underscore the importance of investigating student identity in policy research. The article also lays the groundwork for several suggested approaches for further research on the topic.

Keywords: Student Identity; Educational Policy; Bildung; Competence; Compliance

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Introduction and background

This article illuminates and discusses how Norwegian educational policy documents discursively negotiate and construct elementary school student identity in a period of transformation in Norwegian educational policy. The aim of this article is to demonstrate how policy documents construct 'the student' and to discuss the possible consequences and dilemmas this construction might cause for schools and students. This article will also show how global, neo-liberal educational ideas are incorporated and negotiated in national educational policy (Dale, 1999) where social-democratic values, the *Bildung*-tradition, and progressive pedagogy have previously held a strong position.

From the late 1980s elements of neo-liberal educational and governing ideas have been gradually introduced in Norwegian education (Hansen, 2011; Helgøy & Homme, 2016; Hovdenak & Stray, 2015). However, both educational policy and curriculum in Norway has mainly been influenced by a combination of ideas originating from social-democratic values, the *Bildung*-tradition, and progressive pedagogy. This strong influence, as well as a cross-political consensus in Norway's parliament on the "public provision of education, organized along comprehensive lines", (Wiborg, 2013, p. 420) made Norwegian education relatively resistant to neo-liberal policies throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Wiborg, 2013). This changed at the beginning of the new millennium, with what has been characterised as 'the PISA-shock' (Prøitz & Aasen, 2017). The fact that Norwegian pupils performed worse than expected on the first PISA-test, combined with a conservative government from 2001 to 2005, paved the way for the 2006 'knowledge promotion' (K06) educational reform (Prøitz & Aasen, 2017; Skarpenes, 2014; Wiborg, 2013), a reform that marks a significant change toward an emphasis on more neo-liberal educational ideas in Norway.

The increased emphasis on neo-liberal ideas in the K06 reform resulted in explicit and tangible changes in the Norwegian educational sector, such as an increased focus on the relationship between education and employability and the transition from a curriculum with content specifications to a curriculum stating measurable learning outcomes. The curricular change was also accompanied by an increased focus on outcomes and evidence in the governing of schools, resulting in the implementation of accountability systems and a national framework for quality control (Prøitz & Aasen, 2017). The introduction of educational ideas steaming from neo-liberalism in Norwegian educational policy has continued throughout the first decades of the millennium (Hilt, Riese, & Søreide, 2019; Prøitz & Aasen, 2017; Skarpenes, 2014; Wiborg, 2013).

However, a recent study investigating the initiating document of an ongoing educational reform (Reform 2020) in Norway illuminates how neo-liberal educational ideas and traditional ideas and values from social-democratic, *Bildung*, and progressive traditions intertwine in Norwegian educational policy (Hilt et al., 2019). Additionally, Skarpenes (2014), Prøitz and Aasen (2017), Helgøy and Homme (2016), and Vislie (2008) show how these traditional values and neo-liberal educational ideals intertwine, merge and/or support each other, both in the period before, during and after the development and implementation

of the K06 reform in 2006. Apparently, instead of replacing central, traditional educational values, such as a unified educational system, solidarity and inclusion, neo-liberal educational ideology seems to be adapted and adjusted in dialogue with traditions in the Norwegian context (Hilt et al., 2019; Prøitz & Aasen, 2017).

This adoption might also be why Norway's educational policy framework has been relatively consistent throughout the first decade of the new millennium. In 2005 a centre-socialist government (Stoltenberg II) replaced the conservative government (Bondevik II). The Stoltenberg II government mainly continued the conservative government's educational policy trajectory and implemented K06 with only minor adjustments (Telhaug, 2011; Tolo, 2011; Wiborg, 2013).

Although brief, this introduction shows how the development of Norwegian educational policy, in the period 2000–2015, is simultaneously characterised by change of, merging with and stability in educational ideas. As different policy ideas and discourses grant access to different student identities, it is especially interesting to investigate the discursive negotiation of student identities in these periods of transformation. Nevertheless, few studies have explicitly focused on how policy discursively constructs student identity in this period in Norway, although there are a few studies that discuss the relationship between policy and how groups of students are categorised. Skarpenes and Nilsen (2014) discuss how assessment policies might classify and categorise groups of Norwegian students as deviant and in need of special attention and special needs education. Skarpenes (2014) also uses Norway as an example to discuss how the merge of ideas from progressive education and neoliberalism construct a specific form of individuality that underwrites educational policy and practice. This, he claims, has resulted in a focus on self-regulation and adaptive education that might alienate and exclude groups of students.

In our research we build on the above-mentioned research on Norwegian educational policy (2000 – 2013) and the discussions on how this policy “make up” categories of students. By using a discourse analytical approach our article contributes with more detailed insights into how educational policy documents, in this first decade of the new millennium, draw on both neo-liberal and more traditional Norwegian educational discourses in the construction of student identities. However, our analyses also show how a new ‘discourse of compliance’, often associated with neo-liberal identity, is introduced in this period.

Theoretical framework

In this article, we draw on Foucault's understanding of power as a nonessential, relational phenomenon that regulates meaning and identity (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 1994, p. 303). Based on this understanding of power, we consider white papers to be an institutional act and part of a complex discursive system which controls subjects (Andreasson, 2007) through the construction and governance of identity. Further, our understanding of the construction and governing of identity is framed by discourse theory (Laclau & Mouffe, 2014;

Torfinn, 2003). Discourse theory emphasises discourses' significance in the construction of identity, as discourses regulate the way we think, speak and act in/about life (Bjordal, 2016). One of the ways discourses construct and regulate identity is by offering identity resources or subject positions. Subject positions are patterns of thought, speech and act. Identity is constructed by the way individuals and groups of people are assigned and/or consciously and unconsciously choose from the accessible palette of discursively constructed subject positions. When subject positions cluster or they are combined in certain ways, they form identities (Søreide, 2007). White papers can, in other words, be understood as a circulating power which implicitly and/or explicitly constitutes discursive patterns of thought, speech and action (Schei, 2007), or student identities.

In periods of transition and change, several discourses will have access to, and attempt to regulate, the field of education, and educational policy can, in such periods, be defined as a "field of discursivity" (Torfinn, 2003). The field of discursivity can be described as a space where different discourses meet and negotiate definitions of elements. This space is neither completely outside nor inside a discourse, but an area that is "... discursively constructed within a terrain of unfixity" (Torfinn, 2003, p. 92), leaving a number of discursively constructed elements, such as student identity, open for negotiation. This negotiation between discourses is not to be understood as a fight for existence, but more as a game of domination (Torfinn, 2003). The metaphor 'playing field' is therefore deliberately preferred in favour of 'battlefield' when the 'field of discursivity' is described.

In this playing field, the discursive negotiation over meaning and identity can play out in different ways. If a discourse, or a bundle of discourses, becomes dominant in the definition of student identity, the result is hegemony. However, it is also in the field of discursivity where antagonisms are revealed and most visible. Antagonisms, or conflicts, are necessary for discursive negotiations to exist, and arise when two or more discourses block each other's definition of elements (Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999; Torfinn, 2003). In a later section of this article, we will show precisely how three different discourses negotiate over meaning and identity in the policy documents. First, we will describe the material and the analytical approach.

Method

The analysis of the empirical material is inspired by approaches to discourse analysis (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Andreasson, 2007; Jørgensen, 2002; Krüger, 2000; Schei, 2007; Søreide, 2007) that are compatible with the theoretical framework described above. In the following sections, we will firstly give a brief introduction of the five white papers that constitute the empirical material before we describe the more specific analytical phases.

Material

As described in the introduction, the first 15 years of the new millennium (2000–2015) comprised an especially interesting period when it comes to the discursive

negotiation over educational policy ideas and student identities in a Norwegian context. We have therefore selected white papers for analysis that are published in this period. A white paper is a document that reports the Norwegian government's ideas and policies within a particular field to the Parliament (Norwegian Government Security and Service Organisation, 2016). White papers from the Ministry of Education will consequently represent the current government's future policy ideas and initiatives for the educational sector. The selected white papers include descriptions of general expectations and goals for all pupils in all elementary and lower secondary schools in Norway. White papers that, for instance, exclusively focus on special needs education or inclusion of pupils from minority language groups were excluded. Based on the above criteria, we selected the following five white papers for analysis:

- 1) Report No. 30 to the Parliament (2003-2004) "A Culture for Learning" [Kultur for læring]: As an element of the introduction of a (low stakes) accountability system in the governing of schools, this white paper replaced a content-based curriculum with descriptions of learning outcomes/expected competencies for students. The report also introduced five basic skills: 1) oral and 2) written communication, 3) reading, 4) numeracy and 5) digital competencies.
- 2) Report No. 16 to the Parliament (2006-2007) "Early Intervention for Lifelong Learning" [Tidlig innsats for livslang læring]: This white paper is a part of the government's pursuit to reduce social and economic differences in society. Through early intervention and support for students that struggle with their learning, kindergartens and schools must ensure the opportunity for a high-quality learning outcome and the completion of basic and upper secondary education for all students. According to the report, these educational measures will enhance opportunities for social mobility and participation in society, working life and lifelong learning.
- 3) Report No. 14 to the Parliament (2008-2009) "Internationalisation of Education in Norway" [Internasjonalisering av utdanninga]: This white paper proposes a series of measures with the intention to ensure that students on all levels develop the necessary skills to act and interact in what is described as an increasingly globalised world.
- 4) Report No. 22 to the Parliament (2010-2011) "Motivation - Ability - Possibilities" [Motivasjon - Mestring - Muligheter]: This white paper specifically focusses on lower secondary education and how schools and teachers must work to stimulate and uphold a feeling of mastery and motivation for learning in students grade 8-10. Such motivation is presented as vital for the students' learning and thereby for their future possibilities in education, society and working life.
- 5) Report No. 20 to the Parliament (2012-2013) "On the right path" [På rett vei]: The purpose of this white paper is to introduce measures so that comprehensive education in Norway can be better equipped to face pupil's

needs and abilities, as well as the expected future demands of society and working life.

Analysis

Due to its capacity to investigate text, language and communication processes (Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999) we use discourse analysis as an analytical approach, to analyse the text in the policy documents. Discourse analysis also has the capacity to identify how student identity is communicated and discursively constructed in the policy documents. As underscored in the theoretical framework, different discourses use different semantics to conceptualise 'the student' in different ways. These conceptions give students access to a variety of identity resources, or subject positions, which again cluster and construct identities. In the analysis, 'the student' is therefore perceived as a "nodal point" (Laclau & Mouffe, 2014) that several discourses aim to fill with meaning. The analytical aim is thus first to identify what identity resources, or subject positions, the documents offer students, second to identify how these resources construct student identity and third how student identity is discursively governed and negotiated.

The analytical procedures of the documents consist of four main phases, which we describe in the following. The first author conducted the analyses. However, all categories, codes and findings were discussed with the second author, who has extended experience with the analytical approaches and procedures and is familiar with the selected documents. First, expectations and descriptions in the documents of what pupils should know, do, feel, learn, and perform were identified and excerpted. The excerpts were then thematically categorised. These categories constituted the base for the construction of 23 subject positions that were listed, numbered and described (see appendix 1). The numbers representing each subject position were then used to code the policy documents. This second phase of the analytical process illuminated the distribution of accessible subject positions within and across the five documents. The third phase of the analysis identified how subject positions cluster and construct student identities. In total, 10 student identities were constructed and described in this phase (appendix 2). In qualitative analyses transparency in the analytical process is vital, as it enables readers to assess if findings are reasonable given the theoretical framework, the material and the analytical process. To ensure such transparency and reader validity, appendix 3 exemplifies how findings from phase three build on findings from phase two, which in turn are built on the findings from the first phase of the analytical process. Finally, we identified how three discourses govern the 10 student identities in the policy documents. This analytical phase had two theory-informed discourses, namely 'The *Bildung* discourse' and 'The competence discourse' as a point of departure. Throughout the analysis, it became evident, however, that a third discourse, termed 'The discourse of compliance', was also active in the construction and negotiation of identity resources and student identities.

In the following, we will first give a brief description of the three discourses before we show how they govern and negotiate hegemony over the student identities identified in the documents.

The discourses

As mentioned above, the final part of the analysis considers two theory-informed discourses, 'The *Bildung* discourse' and 'The competence discourse', as a point of departure. These two discourses were initially selected based on our historical knowledge of the development and changes in Norwegian educational policy. As described in the introduction, *Bildung* is a phenomenon which has deep roots in Norwegian education, and the focus on competence and employability are increasingly emphasised in educational policy from the turn of the millennium. In the process of categorising identity resources and identifying student identities, a third discourse, 'The discourse of compliance', emerged from the material. In the following paragraphs, we will provide an account of the three discourses along with some examples of semantic indications of their presence in the documents.

The Bildung discourse

In our definition of the 'The *Bildung* discourse', the critical and non-instrumental aspects of human existence are underscored. The latter draws on the idea that knowledge, relationships and things we do as humans have an intrinsic value. For instance, learning and knowing are considered important and valuable in its own right, regardless of whether what is learned will eventually result in better grades or better jobs. The critical aspect of *Bildung* entails the idea that, although it is important to learn as well as adjust to the norms and rules of the society, both learning and adjustments should be done in a critical and reflective way. This definition builds on the concept of *paideia* (Doseth, 2011; Myhre, 2009; Solerød, 2014), which takes its meaning from the ancient Greeks and refers to an individual's active and conscious enculturation into society (Doseth, 2011). Adjusting to society requires comprehension and acceptance of the present social structures, but also an awareness of opportunities for evaluating and altering these existing structures (Torjussen, 2011). Consequently, individuals can contribute to both the upholding and the change and development of social rules and structures.

Semantic indications of the presence of 'The *Bildung* discourse' in the empirical material are words such as 'democracy', 'democratic understanding', 'cooperative learning', 'student participation', 'student council', 'class council' and 'student influence'. These words are connected to qualities of *Bildung* that encourage a critical approach to and understanding and development of the society. These words are central in the descriptions of the subject positions that construct, for example, the student identity of 'the democratic student'.

The competence discourse

The more instrumental and performative aspects of education are core to the way we define 'The competence discourse'. This definition is based on the Latin origin of competence, *competentia*, which refers to having enough knowledge, sound judgment, skills or strength to perform satisfactorily and attain a requisite outcome (Lai, 1995, p. 17). To perform adequately means to use the things you know in a way that meets the demands of the situation you are in (Gullichsen, 1992, p. 7), whether these demands are explicated as expected educational

learning outcomes or tasks to be handled in a workplace. In this discourse, it is consequently not so much the things learners know that are important, but how they now and (in the future, will) transform their knowledge into competencies that enable them to perform adequately. In 'The competence discourse', knowledge and competence are therefore valued by their utility to society as a whole, but more importantly to businesses, professions and workplaces (Gullichsen, 1992, p. 7; Nordhaug, 1990, p. 19). Hence, an instrumental or functionalistic understanding of knowledge and education is a crucial feature of the way we define this discourse.

'The competence discourse' is also very much future-oriented. First, because the skills, knowledge and competences students learn and develop in school should be relevant for their future life as students and employees. Second, and in slight contrast to the former, this future-orientation positions the student as a lifelong learner. To be a lifelong learner means to face the demands from an increasingly uncertain future society and working life and to acknowledge the need for continuous learning and development to be employable and able to perform adequately.

Semantic indications of the presence of 'the competence discourse' in the empirical material are words such as 'continuing education', 'competence', 'competence goals', 'career', 'labour', 'labour market', 'entrepreneurship' and 'mapping tools'. These words are examples retrieved from subject positions constructing, for example, the student identity of 'The goal-oriented student'.

The discourse of compliance

In the analytical process, we identified how words, text segments, codes and thematic categories drew on 'The *Bildung* discourse' or 'The competence discourse'. However, some words, text segments, codes and thematic categories were not completely aligned with either of these two discourses. For instance, some text segments describing students overlapped to a large degree with our definition of 'The *Bildung* discourse', but with a significant lack of key semantic indications such as 'reflection' and 'critical thinking'. In other words, there seemed to be an analytical gap between 'The *Bildung* discourse' and 'The competence discourse'.

In our attempts to understand and frame these semantic indications more theoretically, we turned to the Norwegian philosopher Hellesnes' (1999) discussions on socialisation. In these discussions, *Bildung* and a more compliant attitude are characterised separately. In contrast to socialisation as *Bildung*, socialisation as compliance indicates a non-reflective and non-critical acceptance of the social conditions of which the individual is a part (Hellesnes, 1999, p. 25).

With the above as a backdrop, our definition of 'The discourse of compliance' positions the individual as somebody who accept, internalise and *submit* to the available social frameworks, norms and rules. Education and socialisation are consequently perceived as unilateral enterprises, where the society is active, and the individual is positioned as a far more passive spectator of its socialisation

process. This discourse does not emphasise insight into how power relations govern and control the existence of the individual as a part of education and socialisation. Consequently, students might interpret all difficulties as personal and self-inflicted (Hellesnes, 1999, p. 25), as the ulterior and societal causes to the difficulties they encounter are under-communicated (Torjussen, 2011).

Student identities

In this section, we will present the ten student identities we identified in the analysis. Further, we will show (see Figure 1 below) and explicate how these identities are governed by the three discourses presented above. These descriptions are complemented by appendix 1 – 3.

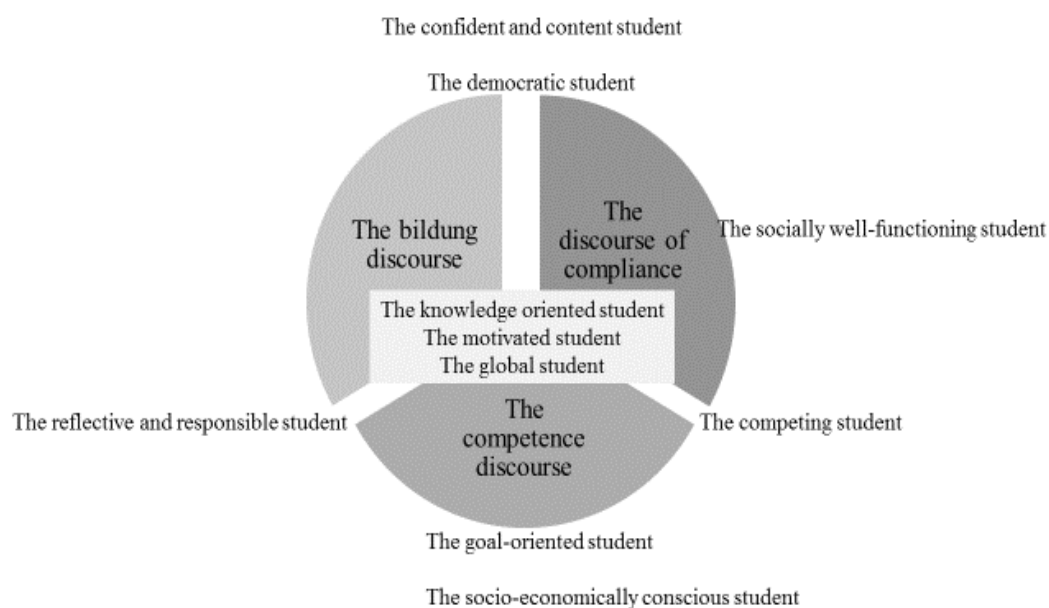


Figure 1: Visualisation of identities and their governing discourses

Student identity 1: The knowledge-oriented student

Lifelong learning and subject-specific knowledge are the core elements of this student identity. The basic skills and subject-specific knowledge the student learn, are used as a foundation for the desire to constantly acquire more knowledge. This identity consequently positions the student in a constant and lifelong search for more knowledge.

The significance of knowledge and lifelong learning to this student identity can be interpreted as a will to attain enlightenment and a recognition of the intrinsic value of learning and knowledge. It is, therefore, possible to argue that this identity is regulated by 'The *Bildung* discourse'. However, lifelong learning is currently closely associated with employability and the ability to adjust to a flexible and changing working life, and thereby also incorporates the instrumental aspects of 'The competence discourse'. There are few explicit descriptions in the material of precisely what knowledge students should acquire and how this knowledge should be learned. It is therefore unclear whether this identity promotes an unreflective reproduction of existing

knowledge, drawing on 'The discourse of compliance', or the more reflective construction of knowledge associated with 'The *Bildung* discourse'.

Student identity 2: The motivated student

This student identity positions the student as highly motivated, not only to learn but also to educate herself. She is interested and eager to learn in all situations and highly values all opportunities to access new knowledge. This student is therefore thankful for all learning opportunities and explicitly appreciates the opportunities to learn and access knowledge that education offers.

This student identity is firmly grounded in a positive attitude towards learning and knowledge, which is an indication that the identity draws on 'the *Bildung* discourse' in its will to attain enlightenment. Importantly, this positive attitude is also clearly directed toward education. This direction, in turn, can be understood not so much as a will to achieve enlightenment, but rather an intention to educate oneself, which is a slightly different undertaking, as it very well might imply a more instrumental attitude towards future employability. Thus, it can be argued, this student identity might also draw on central elements of 'The competence discourse'. Finally, in the description of the motivated student, a certain submissiveness can be found in the use of words such as 'appreciate', 'thankful' and 'opportunities'. This can imply an expectation that students should accept and be grateful for the opportunity to be educated, rather than to critically reflect on their educational opportunities. This final point illustrates how this student identity also might draw on elements from 'The discourse of compliance', as well as 'The competence discourse' and 'The *Bildung* discourse'.

In other words, there is room for all three discourses to actively negotiate the more precise meaning of significant elements in both of these first identities. Likewise, the third identity presented below is governed by all three discourses. In this third identity, the dominant position of two of the discourses is more easily identified.

Student identity 3: The global student

The global student is positioned as someone who is eager to learn about Norwegian culture and heritage as well as other cultures. She is also focused on learning multiple languages. This student will actively use her language and cultural knowledge as a tool to build friendships and collaboration, bridge different cultures both nationally and internationally, and to ensure that she is well prepared to function optimally in a multicultural and global future society. Although globally oriented, she will also use this knowledge to preserve Norwegian culture, heritage and identity in this future society.

The process of socialising young people for the world as global citizens with knowledge about languages, cultures and the benefits and challenges of a multicultural and global world, is traditionally closely connected to 'The *Bildung* discourse'. However, the significance of language and national and global cultural knowledge in this identity is not framed as important due to its intrinsic value or to stimulate reflection. These competencies are underscored because

they equip the student with useful tools to cope with, function in, and adapt to a future society. Consequently, this identity predominantly draws on the instrumental aspects of 'The competence discourse', as well as the significant adaptive element of 'The discourse of compliance'.

The following four student identities are all governed by two of the discourses, in different combinations. Here it varies to what degree it is possible to identify the dominant discourse in the hegemonic struggle over the identities.

Student identity 4: The reflective and responsible learner

This student is conscious and constantly aware of her learning processes and which study techniques that enable her to learn the best. Consequently, she reflects on and takes responsibility for her learning processes. This makes her an efficient learner, as it enables her to keep the right focus on learning, to utilise all learning opportunities and to maximise her learning outcome throughout her educational career.

At first glance, this student identity's explicit focus on reflection and responsibility seem to draw on central characteristics of 'The *Bildung* discourse'. Yet, the equally explicit focus on effective learning situates the reflection and responsibility within a more instrumental frame associated with 'The competence discourse'. Still, one might argue that 'effective learning' can also be conceptualised in line with 'The *Bildung* discourse', if effectiveness is understood as a drive and will to be enlightened and educated. Although this identity draws on both discourses, the way 'effective learning' is connected to utilisation of learning opportunities and maximisation of learning outcomes indicates the dominant position of 'The competence discourse' over 'The *Bildung* discourse' in the discursive negotiation of this identity.

Student identity 5: The confident and content student

This identity positions the student as someone who thrives at school and considers school to be a secure place to be and to learn. This student flourishes academically and socially. Her academic accomplishments and confidence, as well as her social surplus, enable her to contribute to an inclusive, positive and safe learning environment, where her fellow students also can thrive. Consequently, she has good relations with other students as well as teachers.

This identity is governed by both 'The *Bildung* discourse' and 'The discourse of compliance'. The former is visible in the central position wellbeing, inclusion, accomplishment, socialisation and good social relationships take up in this identity. To be academically and socially confident and competent is valued as important in themselves. However, there are no semantic indications of critical reflection about how students are socialised into school or the way schooling is done, connected to this student identity. This identity positions the student as someone who thrives under the current circumstances. Students are consequently also expected to acknowledge and adapt to school's academic and social expectations, traditions and context, rather than to challenge them. In sum, this indicates a dominant governing function of 'The discourse of compliance'.

Student identity 6: The democratic student

The democratic student values cooperation and working in groups. However, she underscores that cooperation and collective processes, both in the classroom and in the society at large, must be framed by democratic principles that ensure participation and enable everybody involved to contribute to the process.

The collaborative and participative attitude and democratic thinking that characterises this student identity are easily associated with values that are central to 'The *Bildung* discourse'. This will, however, presuppose critical reflection as a significant part of the democratic, participatory and cooperative attitude that is so central to this identity. There are no explicit semantic indications of such reflection and critical thinking when it comes to 'The democratic student'. As already underscored, the lack of reflection and critical thinking will be at odds with 'The *Bildung* discourse'. In sum, this might be an indication that 'The democratic student' identity is governed in the overlap between 'The *Bildung* discourse' and 'The discourse of compliance'. Neither of the discourses are dominant.

Student identity 7: The competing student

This identity positions the student as someone who strives to perform and deliver results at her best ability. This student is therefore always, implicitly or explicitly, competing against her own and others' accomplishments to ensure that results and performances are in accordance with expected learning outcomes. For the same reason, she is always eager to have her academic accomplishments assessed and compared to fellow students' and her previous work.

The focus on performance, learning outcomes and comparison underscored in this identity is in line with neo-liberal educational policy ideas that advocate the comparison of individuals', schools' and national states' abilities to perform in accordance with pre-defined quality indicators. These educational ideas are also central to 'The competence discourse'. 'The competing student' is, in other words, an identity that draws heavily on the performative elements of 'The competence discourse'.

In the material that constitutes this student identity, the student is positioned as well-adjusted and well-functioning in a competitive and performative educational context. This indicates that 'The discourse of compliance' is also significant in the governing of this student identity.

These seven first identities are subject to discursive negotiation over significant elements of the identities. This means that there is a hegemonic struggle between two or all three discourses over these identities. The final three identities presented below are, on the other hand, more clearly governed by one dominant discourse.

Student identity 8: The socially well-functioning student

The socially well-functioning student is positioned as law-abiding and socially competent. She is concerned with norms, laws and regulations, and considers it

vital for a well-functioning society that people know and act in accordance with social and juridical laws and norms. The student is thus interested in learning the social codes that regulate different social situations and relationships.

Compliance with the society's social and juridical laws and rules as well as social competence are vital skills for 'The socially well-functioning student'. The focus is on socialisation and incorporation into society. Although the focus on socialisation might indicate the presence of 'The *Bildung* discourse', the identity's dominant focus on learning established social frameworks does not really open the opportunity for (re)construction of social, ethical or normative frameworks. Thus, this student identity constructs students who rather adapt to, than critically reflect over, the established norms, laws and rules. Consequently, we can argue for the dominant position of 'The discourse of compliance' in the governing of this identity.

Student identity 9: The goal-oriented student

This identity positions the student as confident about her future professional career. She consequently uses her education to consciously and systematically discover, develop and improve her talents in accordance with these career plans. For the same reason, she also makes school activities as relevant and useful as possible for her perceived future career.

Within this student identity, talent development and school activities are valued due to their relevance and significance for the student's future professional career. The instrumental, functionalistic and future-oriented aspects are so strong that it is difficult not to conclude that 'The competence discourse' has a hegemonic position in the governing of this identity.

Student identity 10: The socio-economically conscious student

This student does her best not to become a socio-economic burden, both as a student and as a future citizen. She aims to be an active and economically profitable contributor to society throughout her life. As a student, she therefore consciously makes sound and appropriate educational choices and avoid selecting the 'wrong' educational trajectories that might be at odds with future career goals. In addition to being conscious about her educational and professional choices, this student also focuses on living as healthy as possible, both physically and mentally, to avoid being a burden to the welfare state system.

This student identity is based on the idea that in and through their educational efforts, all citizens should ensure that they are useful to society, employable and as light a burden as possible. The explicit instrumental, economic and future-oriented features of this student identity make it rather apparent that this identity is dominated by 'The competence discourse'.

The discursive governing of student identity: some issues and dilemmas

As Figure 1 (page 144) and the above presentation of identities and discourses show, all three discourses are involved in an ongoing, discursive game of hegemony. In the following sections, we will discuss some issues and dilemmas this regulative game over hegemony has evoked.

Antagonistic, dominant or hegemonic discourses?

The theoretical framework and the empirical findings presented above, creates a backdrop for a discussion about the relationships between the three discourses: are the relationships of an antagonistic nature, are one of the discourses dominant, or do the discourses support and strengthen each other, creating a cooperative hegemony of values, meanings and identities?

To identify and assess the strength of the three discourses in the regulation of student identities is not a straightforward matter. In our analyses, the strength and dominance of a discourse were identified by scrutinising the way values, goals, outcomes, knowledge and competencies, are legitimated in the policy documents. Based on this, we will argue that the governing of the student identities is slightly dominated by 'The competence discourse'. The instrumental aspects of 'The competence discourse' are central in the legitimation of outcomes and competencies in the documents. This situates 'The competence discourse' in a dominant position when student identities are governed by this discourse in combination with one or both of the two other discourses. 'The competence discourse', either alone or alongside one of the other two discourses, is also involved in the regulation of the majority of the student identities we identified.

The analyses also show how 'The discourse of compliance' gains a significant position in Norwegian educational policy in the first decade of the new millennium. Also, this discourse is involved in the governing of a majority of student identities, although its presence is not so explicitly linguistically identifiable as the 'The competence discourse'. The introduction of 'The discourse of compliance' is nevertheless an important element in the policy changes experienced in Norway over the last two decades. The features of 'The discourse of compliance' are highly associated with neo-liberal educational ideas (Hodgson, 2019). It could, therefore, be argued that the introduction of 'The discourse of compliance' and the student identities it regulates, facilitates the emphasis on neoliberal ideas such as self-regulation and responsibility (Hodgson, 2019), that characterises student identity in the current ongoing Norwegian educational "Reform 2020" (Hilt et al., 2019; Riese, Hilt, & Søreide, in press).

When 'The discourse of compliance' regulate identities in tandem with 'The competence discourse' the two discourses strengthen each other. As identities that draw on 'The discourse of compliance' more easily accept, internalise and submit to available social and normative frameworks, these identities will be more open to the core values of 'The competence discourse'. It can be argued that the two discourses exist in a complementary, rather than an excluding

relationship where the two make up a hegemonic unity that has paved the way for other neoliberal values, such as the abovementioned emphasis on responsibility and self-regulation.

Based on our understanding of how the discourses construct 'the student', the discursive relationship between 'The *Bildung* discourse' and the two other discourses is much more conflicting and even somewhat diametric. When student identities are governed by 'The *Bildung* discourse' in combination with the other discourses, the struggle over meaning are more a question of either – or: Are students expected to critically reflect over knowledge ('The *Bildung* discourse') or are they expected to accept and reproduce what they learn ('The discourse of compliance')? The relationships between the 'The *Bildung* discourse' and the two other discourses are, in other words, antagonistic. This antagonism can create tensions, but also opens the opportunity for students to identify with different variations of policy-constructed identities.

Metonymic transfer

As underscored in the introductory section of this article, *Bildung* has had a strong – at least symbolically – position in Norwegian education. *Bildung* is affiliated with the early stages of institutionalised education and the conception of 'the student' is closely linked to this institution. This indicates a hegemonic and robust relationship between 'The *Bildung* discourse' and the Norwegian conception of what a student is.

However, as 'The competence discourse' arguably expands and is joined by 'The discourse of compliance', the game of defining and controlling how 'the student' should be understood is changing. In the analysed documents 'The competence discourse', accompanied by 'The discourse of compliance', clearly dominates the triadic game of definition. This weakens the governing power 'The *Bildung* discourse' traditionally had over student identity, which again, as we will argue, is an indication of *metonymic transfer*. Metonymic transfer can be identified when one discourse takes control of a concept previously strongly connected to another discourse, initiating a new and competing definition of the concept (Torfing, 2003). Through this action, the 'new' discourse(s) strengthen their antagonistic position.

Metonymic transfer is sometimes difficult to identify, as it might be the meaning of the words, and not necessarily the words themselves, that are changed. An example from our analysis where metonymic transfer is visible is in 'The reflective and responsible learner'. As previously described, this identity draws on central characteristics of 'The *Bildung* discourse', with its explicit focus on reflection and responsibility. Framed by 'The *Bildung* discourse' a reflective and responsible learner reflects on the knowledge she is engaged with and on how this knowledge can make her a responsible person. However, when reflection and responsibility are framed by 'The competence discourse' and efficiency, utilisation of learning opportunities and maximising of learning outcomes, the meaning of the words change. To be reflective is to be conscious of your learning process, and to be responsible is to utilise this consciousness to maximise your

learning opportunities. In other words, although the words might be unchanged, the focus has shifted from *what* the students learn and how this can enlighten young people, to *how* efficient students learn. This example also shows how the policy documents intertwine neoliberal educational values, such as student efficiency and self-regulation, with what we can call more traditional values, such as reflection, in the Norwegian educational system.

The temporal dilemma

Finally, we will discuss a dilemma that is temporal, as it is related to the tension between the present and the future in the policy documents we have investigated. In the documents, the student is partly situated as a child or teenager currently attending elementary school (grade 1-10). Simultaneously, many of the descriptions of expected skills, competencies, behaviours and values concern the students' future adult identity. The temporal dilemma is especially evident in the many policy statements that describe what the student must learn in school to be prepared for upper-secondary school, college and university, employment, or citizenship. There is a tension between a 'here-and-now-presence' and an 'in-the-future-presence', which indicates that the student must simultaneously concentrate on both states of presence.

A dual focus on the present and the future is not unusual in educational policy and curricular texts. It is not controversial to argue that education is intended as preparation for something, implying that school is based on some kind of futurity. Although framed differently, a dual present/future perspective is also not exclusive to either of the three identified discourses. Nevertheless, we will argue that the dominant position of 'The competence discourse' and its strong instrumental features that value education in accordance with its usefulness amplify the temporal dilemma in the material we analysed. School becomes a time of transition focusing on the after-education life rather than the present and on *developing* rather than *being*. Consequently, the student becomes more a "work in progress" (Daniels & Brooker, 2014) and less an elementary school student in his or her own right.

Concluding comment

The construction and governing of identities are essential in all public policy initiatives (Béland, 2017; Hodgson, 2019; Mulderrig, 2019). The above presentation of student identities and their regulatory discourses shows how the logic surrounding the K06 reform not only resulted in explicit changes in curriculum and governing practices, but also in specific descriptions of what a student is, what a student should know and how a student should act and perform. Although often idealised, descriptions of and expectations for 'the student' in educational policy send very real messages to teachers, school leaders, school owners, parents, and most importantly, the students themselves about how to be a student. As student identities and the discourses that regulate them define normality and deviance, it is crucial to include analyses of identity in research investigating public policy.

Although we have discussed some issues and dilemmas that our analyses have evoked, what concrete, everyday consequences these policy-constructed identities have for students and their teachers lies beyond the scope of this article. However, by this article we encourage further research on this topic. Further research might also explore the interface between policy and practice concerning the dilemmas reported in this study. Another interesting approach should be a comparative analysis of two or more countries' educational policy documents and their construction and governing of student identities.

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Appendix 1: Identified subject positions

	Subject position	Description
1	The student is oriented towards globalisation	The student learns to master several foreign languages, oriented towards utilising this knowledge in adult life.
2	The student prepares for a multi-cultural society	The student learns to use knowledge about different cultures to show tolerance and to build 'cultural bridges'.
3	The student enjoys school	The student thrives and feels secure at school.
4	The student is motivated for learning	The student is motivated to learn and learns to become motivated to learn. The student is engaged in his/her own learning process
5	The student experiences school as meaningful	The student learns to notice how schoolwork is related to his/her other significant discourses.
6	The student is responsible for his/her own learning	The student learns to perform and to be focused, persistent and hardworking.
7	The student realises and develop/enhance his/her talent(s)	The student learns to utilise latent and/or undeveloped abilities and/or talents.
8	The student reflects on his/her own learning	The student learns to know his/her limitations and potentials for development.
9	The student is oriented towards becoming a benefit to the society	The student learns how to contribute for the benefit of the society.
10	The student is confident about future career choices	The student learns which field of work/study is right for him/her, and thus avoids reselecting work/study.
11	The student acquires specialised knowledge	The student learns basic skills as well as specialised knowledge in every school subject.
12	The student is focused on becoming among the best in the world	The student scores high on international tests, and thus demonstrates that Norway is a "knowledge nation".
13	The student is law-abiding	The student learns norms and laws that regulate the members of society
14	The student is tolerant and inclusive	The student learns to be tolerant in relation to others' prerequisites for learning
15	The student accomplishes and shows results	The student learns to be goal-oriented, deliver results and to be judged by the accomplished results
16	The student is positive about education	The student learns to see the usefulness of education and knowledge
17	The student is an efficient learner	The student learns how to maximise his/her educational outcome, and thus avoids individual learning resources going to waste.

18	The student is focused on collaboration and teamwork	The student learns to work with others to achieve goals and learns that collaboration is an important key to success
19	The student is financially profitable for society	The student learns to not waste society's investments in knowledge and to be an efficient student.
20	The student is oriented and positive towards democracy.	The student learns that democracy is an important advantage in Norwegian society and learns how democracy is to be used.
21	The student is focused on preserving and developing Norwegian cultural heritage	The student learns how Norwegian culture is created and why it is important to continue/develop this culture
22	The student is oriented towards lifelong learning	The student learns to learn, and learns that learning can/should continue throughout life
23	The student is socially competent	The student learns different social codes and learns to become a socially well-functioning individual.

Appendix 2: Examples of subject positions that cluster and construct student identities

Subject positions	Student Identity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The student enjoys school • The student is tolerant and inclusive 	The confident and content student
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The student is motivated for learning • The student is positive about education 	The motivated student
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The student is responsible for his/her learning • The student reflects on his/her learning • The student is an efficient learner 	The reflective and responsible student
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The student experiences school as meaningful • The student realises and develops/enhances his/her talent(s) • The student is confident about future career choices 	The goal-oriented student
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The student is focused on becoming among the best in the world • The student accomplishes and shows results 	The competing student
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The student is oriented towards globalisation • The student prepares for a multi-cultural society • The student is focused on preserving and developing Norwegian cultural heritage 	The global student
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The student is oriented towards becoming a benefit for the society • The student is financially profitable for society 	The socio-economic student
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The student is focused on collaboration and teamwork • The student is oriented and positive towards democracy 	The democratic student
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The student is law-abiding • The student is socially competent 	The socially well-functioning student
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The student acquires specialised knowledge • The student is oriented towards lifelong learning 	The knowledge-oriented student

Appendix 3: Examples of text excerpts, subject positions and student identities: phase 1, 2 and 3 in the analytical process.

Source	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
	Text excerpt	Subject position (no.)	Student identity
Meld.St.20 2012-2013, s.10	“In a positive learning environment, the students contribute and support each other's work and learning”	The student enjoys school (3)	The confident and content student
Meld.st.16 2006-2007, s.80-81	“The school should be a place where everyone thrives, feels belonging, and where everyone feels valued as individuals, regardless of family background, faith, ethnicity or cultural background”		
Meld.st.30 2003-2004, s.86	“An inclusive education requires that students with special needs also belong in an inclusive school community, and that they face challenges adapted to their needs and prerequisites”	The student is tolerant and inclusive (14)	
Meld.st.20 2012-2013, s.91	“In an inclusive comprehensive school, students with different backgrounds and different prerequisites meet and receive teaching in a school community”		
Meld.St.20 2012-2013, s.67	“Society and working life are more diverse, and the labour market is increasingly characterised by international competition and cooperation”	The student is focused on becoming among the best in the world (12)	The competing student
Meld.St. 30 2003- 2004, s.7	“Norway is well placed to create the world's best school”		
Meld.st.16 2006-2007, s.11	“In primary and secondary education, there are both compulsory tests and other artefacts teachers can use to map students' competence and skills”	The student accomplishes and shows results (15)	
Meld.st.22 2010-2011, s.17	“Students learn best when they understand how work tasks are related to learning outcomes”		