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## **The Socially Competent Pupil**

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# The Socially Competent Pupil

## *Teaching and learning to go to school*

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### **Introduction**

It is stated in the object clause of the Danish Folkeskole (elementary school) that *“The Folkeskole is to prepare the students to be able to participate, demonstrate mutual responsibility and understand their rights and duties in a free and democratic society”*<sup>1</sup>. Thus schooling has an overall objective of socialisation, which emphasises participation and responsibility in society. An implication of this objective could be that the pupils are given opportunities of active participation and responsibility-sharing in school. The actual practices of socialisation and learning in school, however, depends on a variety of components, such as participants, resources, local situation and background features (Rasmussen, 2007) and have to be studied in detail to tell what happens in practice.

For every school class, teachers have to explicit their particular objectives in relation to subject as well as social competences. Such social aims for a primary school class may be:

*“We work to ensure the well-being of every pupil in the class. By this we mean that one should be able to speak one’s mind and develop one’s competences. One should dare to answer questions, even though one does not feel completely sure about the answer, and one should feel confident that no one is laughing at one. We are fully prepared to admit mistakes that we make and to apologize, if we have hurt somebody. The pupils should be able to work independently, both in pairs and in small groups. They should learn to take responsibility in relation to tasks/ pieces of work and not leave it at the wrong moment. The pupils should be able to take joint instruction, dare to take a challenge, and to solve problems – both technical and social ones. The pupils should learn to make presentations and to listen to each other, to wait for their turn, and to show respect for each others differences.”* (Written information/letter for the parents of 1.a)

My theoretical point of departure is that such social aims for the primary schooling are but mere intentions that may or may not work out in practice. During schooling children are accustomed to school and learn going to school as they participate in school as a social practice (Lave, 1997). It could also be expressed the way that children learn to go to school by going to school, they learn from each other and through the classroom interaction and social practice that they participate in. The concept of participation needs further elaboration though. If we want to understand why some pupils do not succeed in being viewed as socially competent pupils – why pupils learn and position themselves differently in school, we need to distinguish between different ways of participating in school work. For this purpose I will apply the relational perspective offered by Bourdieu & Wacquant (2001), in which pupils’ strategies for participation – or positioning – have to be seen in relation to their social disposition and actual possibilities of participation.

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<sup>1</sup> The Folkeskole Act, cf. Consolidation Act No. 730 of 21 July 2000

So, in brief, the ensuing analysis of pupil strategies in this paper generally follows traditions of classroom research that apply the idea of the hidden curriculum and its distinction between pedagogic intentions and practice (Bernstein, 2000; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Broady, 1981; Jackson, 1968). With similar approaches, the educational aims of democratic and equal opportunities of participation have been targeted by other research projects in the Nordic countries (i.e. Sahlström, 1999; Österlind, 1998), showing that the school, contrary to its declared intentions, classifies and discriminates children according to social background.

## **Methodology**

The purpose of this article is to illustrate, what it takes to become, or be viewed as, a socially competent pupil. It is based on ethnographic research that was carried out in two primary schools, located in suburban areas of two provincial towns in Denmark, and selected for my study due to their socially mixed compositions of pupils and pedagogies emphasising social competences. Fieldwork was conducted once or twice a week, from August 2003 to December 2003 in the first school (which I call the *A-school*), and from February 2004 to August 2004 in the second school (the *B-school*). The A-school pupil population differed from the B-school population in being less mixed and generally well-equipped with capital resources with only few exceptions. The B-school composition of pupils was more mixed, had generally less capital resources and included ethnic minority pupils, which the A-school did not.

The fieldwork included participant observations in four classes, at the first form level, *1.a* and *1.b*, and at the intermediate form levels, *5.a* and *4.b* (the letter names refer to the schools), which made a total of 85 pupils and 7 teachers. The amount of teaching experience varied among the teachers, but the two form teachers had worked as teachers for many years, and were form teachers at both form levels (i.e. the form teacher of *1.a* and *5.a* is the same person). All teachers, most pupils, and the two headmasters were interviewed about their school and classroom experiences, and additionally, the parents of the pupils answered questionnaires about their social background.

The different pupil portraits of the later analysis are drawn on the basis of the pupils from the two classes (*5.a*) and (*4.b*) at the intermediate form level. The central concepts of pupil participation and social competence, as applied in the analysis, are connected to an *interest* in school, which again is connected to dispositions and social backgrounds. These concepts are empirically grounded and captured through the concepts of *capital* and *interest*, as defined by Pierre Bourdieu (1997). As for the pedagogic practices, the regulation of the social interaction, the analysis applies the concept of *frame*. This conceptualises the strength of control, that is what is decided by the teacher (strong framing), or by the pupils (weak framing), and distinguishes between what is decided outside (strong framing) versus inside (weak framing) the pedagogic context (Bernstein, 2000; 1997).

## **Regulation of social interaction in classrooms**

In the first form (*1.a*), the teachers spend a lot of time regulating the children's behaviours in the classroom. This goes for all of the teachers, whether they have a long

experience or not. The following excerpt is from an episode where the pupils are working in groups.

*It is fairly noisy in the classroom. One group of children is particularly noisy. It consists of three boys and two girls. Three of them (the two girls and one boy) are concentrated on the task they have been given. Two of the boys are not concentrating on the task but competing with each other on making loud noises. The teacher does not appear to be in control of what the pupils are doing. She comes round to this group and asks the pupils in the group to keep working. The boys that are not working answer back: "But we have finished." "No", the teacher says, "you have to continue until I tell you to do something else." The boys try to do that. But they are still noisy and fool about, which makes the teacher say: "If you don't work now, you'll have to stay in the classroom during the break and do your work then." She also points out to them that they shouldn't take a break, when they are not given a break. (Field notes, 1.a, in the classroom)*

The excerpt illustrates a "typical" situation of group work in 1.a; bearing in mind that school work organized in groups is untypical compared to whole class sessions. In this group work the pupils' attentions are not directed towards the teacher but are split between several persons; between the other pupils in the group and the teacher, and between different tasks. As group work normally involves a lot of noise from talking and moving around, so it does here and the pupils are easily distracted from their tasks. And as group work is practiced fairly seldom in this class, it is not carried out according to some fixed routines or rules. What happens is that the teacher spends a lot of time, telling the pupils off and getting annoyed at them for being noisy or for not doing what they should be doing. It does not seem all that clear to the pupils though, what they should be doing. When the pupils take responsibility by acting in an autonomous manner – deciding by themselves that they have finished – the teacher overrules them and thereby removes their responsibility.

Contrary to such group work situations there are a lot of visible rules for plenary sessions on class. These rules appear when the pupils are told repeatedly that they should put up their hands if they want to say something or answer to a question, and wait until they are asked. When the teacher wants them to be quiet and attentive, she gives them a signal by striking a xylophone. This happens several times a day, and more such rules are given, as she says: "When I ask you to do something, you all have to do it at the same time" and "only do, what you are told to do!" Thus limiting their autonomy, the teacher also limits the personal responsibility of the pupils.

Compared to the practice in 1.a, group work in 1.b is – plenary sessions alike – characterized by more visible rules. The following excerpt is from a situation, where the pupils are first having a joint instruction and then supposed to work in small groups or pairs.

*The teacher is using an overhead projector to present some syllables and sounds for the children. While she is doing that she is keeping the pupils quiet by hushing at them now and then. She is also stating examples, as she moves some of the boys away from their seats, when they are disturbing. When the teacher has finished her presentation, she asks the pupils to work in pairs around the task that she has just shown them to do. "Then we'll put on the yellow sign", she says and sticks on the board a yellow notice with "whisper" written on it. "When you have finished the task, you can paint the small*

*drawings”, she says and continues: “I won’t come around and tell you, if it’s good enough. You’ll have to decide that with yourselves.”* (Field notes, 1.b, in the classroom)

As it appears from the above, the teacher makes it clear to the pupils what they are supposed to do. They are seated around tables in groups of four, but should only work with the one sitting next to them. The teaching instruction also includes what to do next, when they have finished the first task, and to be fairly quiet (whispering) when they do it. The teacher tells me that she is inspired by principles of classroom management that she has learnt in another (American) context but adapted to her own practice. These principles involve that the children are seated in groups; that they ask and help each other before asking the teacher; and that the structures and tasks are manageable for them.

While there are similar and fairly visible rules for whole class sessions, the school practices differ as to how they approach and organise pupils’ own work. At both schools the pupils in the first form practise less group work than they do later on, but they still practise some group work. In 1.a the teacher especially does so in the beginning of the school year but then finds it too chaotic and minimises the use of it later on. In 1.b the pupils are introduced to and practising group work at a fairly regular basis. They are seated in groups and are taught to function in groups around small and simple tasks, which are thoroughly introduced to them by the teacher.

Later on in school life, in the intermediate form of the A-school (5.a), group work is practised in a way that leaves many decisions open to the pupils. Such decisions include whom to work with and personal choices as to which themes to concentrate on. The pupils typically choose to work with pupils that are similar to themselves concerning gender and interests (football players etc). Girls cooperate with girls, boys with boys, and they seem to prefer cooperation partners with whom they socialise after school as well.

In the intermediate form of the B-school (4.b) there is a stronger group work control by the teacher, i.e. a relatively strong framing. It is usually decided by the teacher (by the seating arrangements that are taken care of by her) whom the pupils are to cooperate with, and she also sets the thematic frames and decides on which working methods to apply. By the teacher’s mediation the pupils usually work in mixed groups concerning ability and gender.

I have used the example of group work to demonstrate how the framing of the pedagogic practice varies between the classes. The following part of the analysis will concentrate on illustrating different pupil constructions in the context of these pedagogic practices.

### ***The sociable girl***

The pupil constructions in the following appear as an amalgam between teacher statements and teacher-pupil interactions. But it builds on the presumption that it is very decisive for the pedagogic practices, how social competence is defined by the teacher.

*“The girls in 5.a have had an immense influence on this class right from the beginning. It’s a reliable and well-functioning group of girls in a very positive way, but it’s also*

*something that has been developing. It has been developed by their interests and leisure time activities, which include scouting and football. (...) They have a social understanding for each other and an acceptance that somebody plays football really well and somebody is better at schoolwork. They know to distinguish between what is schoolwork and what isn't. You (the teacher, ed.) can leave the class, go and pick up something, and they'll just continue their work, because – you could call them well-behaved, but – they take their schoolwork for serious, they are proud of doing things well and presenting them on class. ” (Interview with the form teacher, 5.a)*

Social competence in the A-school as defined in the quotation is viewed as a gender specific quality that is most clearly demonstrated by the girls. Thus the teacher praises the girls for being very sociable. She also finds it important that the pupils can distinguish between leisure time activities (for fun) and school activities (for serious). She considers their (especially the girls') leisure time activities to be contributing very much to their well-developed social competences at school. Social competence in her view involves the kind of self-discipline, which is to know without being told what you have to work for (the implicit rules of school), to take it seriously, and – by an openness about it being socially accepted and valued – to contribute to a classroom culture that takes pride in schoolwork.

*Anne* is an example of the sociable girls mentioned above. She is very active in her leisure time, which includes activities such as singing in a choir, ensemble playing, riding and playing football. Some of these activities are practised together with the other girls from school, whom are also the ones she is usually talking to at school. She appears to be well-liked among the others, as she has no problems in finding working partners.

*“There is always a lot asking me. Then I usually chose the ones asking the first. It's hardly ever me, who asks somebody (if they want to work together, ed.), as they just come to me. I just pick the ones that I've been working with the most, or the ones that ask me the first.” (Interview with Anne, pupil, 5.a)*

She has and gives the impression that the pupils have a lot of influence on working methods and decisions in school. At home she is also used to being asked and heard in family matters such as where they go in their holidays and other joint activities. She comes from an academic family with plenty of resources; both parents work with consultancy in the private sector and thus earn well. The family – parents and two children – live in a one-family owner house near the school, which provides Anne with good opportunities of establishing and maintaining school based friendships.

### ***The nice fellow***

The gender distinction as appears in 5.a is less pronounced in 4.b. In my observations I noticed that boys and girls in 4.b had more interrelations both in and outside the lessons. Also, the socially competent pupil in 4.b might be a girl or a boy. The teacher mentions both girls and boys as nice fellow pupils that influence the social atmosphere in the classroom in a positive way, but in the below case it is a boy.

*“Jonas is one of those boys that do the talking. That is to say the others listen to him – they want to be good friends with him, they want to be in his group and work together*

*with him. He is also good at the school subjects of course. But he is not the type, who has elbows, he is a person that really listens, asks questions and reflects on matters.”* (Interview with the math teacher, 4.b)

When interviewed about 4.b, both of the two teachers praise the social climate of class and pay tribute to such personal qualities as mentioned in the above quotation. The socially competent pupil should be talkative but also attentive of others, which he or she has an opportunity to demonstrate in lessons of group work as shown below.

*The groups (four pupils in each group) are to present their work. The form teacher tells them that by now they should have finished their work, and now they have to make the presentations on class. The groups start presenting. When a group presents, all pupils from the group stand up in front of the class, and one of them is telling about their joint production, a story told as a collage. In the first group, it is a girl, Julie who is talking about their work. One of the boys, Martin, says a bit as well, but he and the other boy in the group are giggling and seemingly find the situation a bit awkward. The teacher says “thank you” to the group. In the second group, Jonas starts the presentation by telling what he finds important about their production (they have written a song). Apparently, they have not decided in advance who are to present – Jonas just happens to do it. After a few sentences he asks his partners in the group to tell something about the song as well. But none of the others take the word, and then Jonas continues, though a girl, Eva adds a few words. When the group is asked questions by the teacher, Jonas is the one who answers them. The presentation is finished by the whole group singing the song.* (Field notes, 4.b in the classroom)

In this situation, *Jonas* takes responsibility for his group by taking over the presentation. He is not pushing anybody aside though, but rather tries to encourage the others to contribute to the presentation. But when no one else does, he does it.

*Jonas* describes himself in a precocious manner as being a “bit spoiled” and probably having more to say at home than most of his friends. He is the single child in a well-educated career minded family, where both parents work as professionals in the public and private sector. He is very interested in football, which he plays in the first team and together with other boys from the school class. Besides that he goes to the after-school centre and generally participates a lot in the social activities on class.

### ***The reluctant outsider***

Contrary to *Jonas*, there are boys that do not at all fit with the school’s ideal of the socially competent pupil. There is one boy in particular, *Ahmed*, whose social relationships to the other pupils cause numerous problems in school. He is often involved in conflicts like in the incident below, which in the main has taken place during the break.

*When the pupils return from the break and arrive at the morning gathering (which takes place in the community room just outside the classrooms), Ahmed and Sune have started a fight. A teacher arrives, divides the boys, and takes Ahmed into the classroom. During the morning gathering, Sune is also taken into the classroom, where the teacher has a talk to both of the boys. When the other pupils arrive, Ahmed is crying, while he is still talking to the teacher. Januz, one of the other boys from the class, tells me that he*

*was also involved, as he was in a fight with Ahmed, when Sune came to help him. But it was actually Mesud, who had started it all, when he told Ahmed that the other boys were telling stories about him, which they were not at all. But that was upsetting Ahmed and made him start fighting with them.* (Field notes, outside the classroom, 4.b)

Misunderstandings often cause conflicts like in this excerpt. Regardless of what is right and wrong in the story, something has been very upsetting for Ahmed. The other boys seem not to take this as seriously as Ahmed, who is continuously upset about the incident after it being finished. He tells me that he is often teased by the others, who make him angry and fight back – with his fists. But then it is difficult for him to express himself in the Danish language, which he still does not master very well. It also adds to his communication difficulties that he is stuttering at times.

Ahmed has an Iraqi refugee background and lives with his family, parents and two younger brothers, in the nearby social housing estate. He came to Denmark about five years ago without knowing a word of Danish. His father had been in Denmark a few years already, but according to the teachers he does not speak the Danish language very well, is unemployed and does not always approve of the methods in school.

*“I think that the cultural understanding and practice – that we in our culture are more should we say socially minded and help each other – is different. Perhaps down there it’s more about getting by on your own, and if that works you don’t care about anyone else.”* (Interview with the math teacher, 4.b)

The teachers tend to blame the different cultural background of Ahmed and his family for his problems at school. From the above quotation however, it appears that there might be a lack of cultural understanding on both sides – parents and teachers.

The form teacher does not see Ahmed as causing any particular problems in group work though. Contrary to plenary sessions, where he is described as participating only with reluctance, it is seen as less problematic to include him in group work sessions.

*Interviewer: Does it cause trouble for anybody to cooperate in groups?*

*The form teacher: “No, I don’t think so. The children are good at seeing – even though some might not be so good and need to be helped by the others – that they (the not so competent children, ed.) have some other qualities. For instance, they might be good at drawing, which goes for Ahmed. He is extremely good at drawing, and when he can contribute with that in the group he is in fact a positive thing.”* (Interview with the form teacher, 4.b)

The expression “he is in fact a positive thing” indicates that this is seen as something counterfactual for Ahmed. He is first and foremost considered to fall short of being a socially competent pupil due an ethnic minority (Iraqi) culture, which in the school context of the Danish (majority) culture becomes equivalent to a cultural deficit.

### ***The “social losers”***

In both of the school classes at the intermediate form levels some children are wide of the mark of the competent pupil. Johnny (5.a) and Lise (4.b) share the fate of having



difficulties in living up to expectations of school, of knowing and playing the rules of the schools social game (cf. Bourdieu, 1997:155).

*Johnny* is not particularly fond of doing school work in groups. He perceives it as something compulsory – as something enforced upon him on behalf of the teacher – that is also deciding for him whom he is to cooperate with. He is able to mention several bad experiences of group works, which have not worked out well between him and his partners. It is particularly a problem for him, if he has to do group work with some of the girls from class, whom he refers to in the below interview excerpt.

*Johnny: “It is quite annoying to be in the same group as Janni, who will always make sure that the girls can do all the funny things, while the boys can just do the boring things.”*

*Interviewer: “What do you do about it – do you accept it?”*

*Johnny: “Well, we have to, because the girls will just say that we are sulky. All female teachers just believe in the girls, the boys are just jobs, they think.”*

(Interview with Johnny, pupil in 5.a)

In Johnny’s opinion, the boys are powerless against the teachers favouring the girls. It should be mentioned that all his teachers are female. The form teacher tells me that she finds it important to keep Johnny under strict surveillance in group work, as “*he is the type of boy, who will do as little as possible in groups*” (Interview with form teacher, 5.a).

Johnny is a single child at home, where his mother is suffering from permanent illness. His father spends most of his time working, and when he is at home, Johnny does not seem to have much room for manoeuvre. Johnny tells me about his relationship to his father that “*if you move around to much, he gets annoyed*”, which he ascribes to the father being stressed at work, because some of his good colleagues have been fired.

While Johnny at the A-school (5.a) is seen as a problem in group work, *Lise* at the B-school (4.b) is mainly considered problematic in plenary sessions. The math teacher describes her as a contact problem: “*She is the type who is always in need of and trying to get contact with the adult*” (Interview with the math teacher, 4.b), and the form teacher finds her *time-consuming* and *disturbing* (Interview with the form teacher, 4.b), which she also tells *Lise* directly at an occasion, where she talks with the pupils about problems during teaching. Here the teacher – with a specific address to *Lise* – makes it clear that a lesson only consists of 45 minutes and there are 21 pupils in the class, which does not leave her much time for each of them. But apart from this general time limit, it appears to be really difficult for *Lise* to get through to the teachers.

*The math teacher comes into the classroom and says: “It’s nice to be back – please take out your books!” Then he calls the register. He is sitting behind his desks and is talking about being back in class. Lise puts up her hand and waits. Ronnie puts up his hand and does not wait but starts telling that yesterday was the birthday of his younger brother and sister (twins) and they had many gifts. The teacher says: “Unfortunately we won’t have time to hear you Lise” and starts writing on the blackboard. Lise tries to get to say something, but the teacher dismisses her by saying: “Maybe later”. Then Frederik, without putting up his hand, says: “I don’t know if you’ve heard it, but my great-grandmother has died”. No, the teacher didn’t know that. He knew that Frederik had*

*had a little brother, but not the other thing. He asks him, how old the great-grandmother was, and Frederik answers: "Ninety three". "Well, that was old", the teacher replies, "but I'm sorry for you anyway".*

*Another day, when the form teacher is in the classroom, Lise has put up her hand. The teacher asks her, if she wants to answer a question. "No it's something else", Lise answers. "Then take down your hand Lise" the teacher says. There is some small talk on class about words describing what you need in your childhood. Lærke, one of the girls, tells the teacher that Lise has actually been waiting with her hand up for quite a while. "Yes", the teacher says, "but she has to wait because she wants to talk about something else".*

(Field notes, 4.b, in the classroom)

The teachers have developed strategies of disregarding Lise although she persistently tries to get their attention. Even if the classroom agenda appears to leave room for the social – for personal and family matters of the pupils – this agenda does not include Lise. Her family relations are characterised by several social problems, including unemployment, addiction to drugs, and unstable/unpredictable parent-school contact. She is living with her mother and two brothers in the nearby social housing estate. After school she goes to the after-school centre, but apart from that she does not participate in any organised leisure-time activities.

The form teacher tells me that she finds her relationship to Lise problematic, because she is asking too many questions.

*"It's the whole of her background, but now she is moving school. So you might say you might hope that things turn out better at the new place. (...) Well, she is asking all the time and she thinks she has to ask about just anything. But the things she is asking about are completely irrelevant. It almost seems I think that she only does it to get our attention. She is so demanding. And I think that I have been able to appreciate her more before, but now I find it very difficult."*

(Interview with form teacher, 4.b)

In the above excerpt the teacher further explains the problem as related to *background* and relevance of the questions that Lise is asking. By background the teacher refers to the relationship between home and school, which implicitly is described as having been too damaged to be repaired at this school (Lise might stand a chance at the new school). This case demonstrates that asking the relevant questions is a matter of implicitly knowing what school is about, which is the point that Lise fails at.

## **Summary and discussion**

This study basically shows how pupil actions and constructions in school relate to the pupils' social background resources and dispositions. To be socially competent implies that the pupil is familiar with the many implicit and unspoken rules of the various pedagogic practices. Social competences are demanded from the pupils but paradoxically also hard for them to achieve at school, as the pedagogic practices often presuppose certain interests and non-scholastic attitudes that are more suitably achieved outside school. The pupils are expected to employ their interests and resources from outside school but also to distinguish schoolwork from leisure time.

The identified differences of the pedagogic practice between the different school classes could be related to their different social group compositions. When the A-school classes with the most resource-rich children have a weaker framing, and the B-school classes with the most resource-weak children have a relatively stronger framing, it might well reflect the dominant social order in the local area of the school. Thus studies (in American schools) have indicated a clear connection between the individual school's social group composition and the pedagogic practice, especially concerning the inner framing as in hierarchical rules between teacher and pupils (Sadovnik, 1995:21). The higher the socio-economic status of the pupils, the more likely it is that hierarchical rules are implicit, and inverse, the lower the socio-economic status of the pupils, the more likely it is that the hierarchical rules are explicit and visible.

In overall terms and focusing on the external framing as a distinction between what is prerequisite for the situation (strong) and what is determined in the situation (weak), the similarities between the classes are more significant than the differences. It appears in all classes that the invisible pedagogies are embedded in visible pedagogies (cf. Bernstein, 2000:100), as generally there is strong classification, only few elements of a weak classification (interdisciplinary and subject-integrated teaching), and the framing is mostly weak.

According to Bernstein (2000:15) the weak framing contains the potential of change, as sooner or later the weak frames will influence on the classification. But presently, the elementary school in Denmark is moving in the opposite direction, towards a stronger external framing, as curricula have become more detailed, and more testing has been introduced. While this implies a strong framing concerning order and pace, it does not imply a strong framing in the sense of a more visible and explicit pedagogy, which means that the less privileged pupils still find it difficult to add meaning to school.

Pupil strategies and constructions in relation to social competence are seen to relate to both their background dispositions and to the contextualising pedagogic practice. It appears that many distinctions are drawn in the social construction of the socially competent pupil. Among others, such distinctions as gender, ethnicity and class culture influence on the pupils' possibilities of being perceived as socially competent, because they position them differently as to the school expectations of social competence.

Gender appears as one important differentiation category, as girls and boys are constructed as different pupils by the teachers and between them. Thus boys are more often than girls spoken of as *trouble*, and the gender of boyhood in some situations, with some (female) teachers becomes an obstacle to success that has to be overcome to be conceived as a socially competent pupil. This is particularly due in the 5.a classroom of the more laissez-faire like pedagogy (weak framing) of group work.

Ethnicity or culture appears as another important differentiation category. In elementary schools, ethnicity is described as *culture* and the children with an ethnic minority background are described as *bilingual*. But to have a double cultural belonging and a second language is usually not considered as a cultural resource but rather as a deficit in relation to the Danish majority culture in school.

The cultural grammar of the schools is based on an implicit code, which is taking many things for granted and self-evident. The taken for granted and self-evident things however, only appear so, if you are equipped with the necessary social and cultural capital to make sense and meaning of school. To some children the school just does not make sense, due to them not being equipped with the necessary capital to see the meaning of school (cf. Carlgren, 1997). In other words, there is a distinction between the “right social background” (understanding school matters) and the “wrong social background”.

The implicitness implies the ability to distinguish at school between matters of relevance and irrelevance. Other such distinctions include the ability to see the difference between leisure time activities and school activities; rules and school discipline versus norms and self-discipline; teacher responsibility versus pupil responsibility; teaching versus learning; and talking versus listening. This ability appears – not surprisingly – much more pronounced among pupils, who experience a correspondence between practices of freedom (invisible pedagogies) at home and at school (like Jonas).

Thus, to provide pupils (regardless of social background) with more equal opportunities, the school has to be more explicit about its cultural grammar. This means to take expected knowledge about *how to go about it in school* and make it explicit. Some schoolteachers do their best to practise such strategies, and as appears from my analysis, the teachers seemingly attempt to establish a practice based on conditions of the surrounding social environment. From such a point of view, it appears very important not to limit the teachers’ room for manoeuvre with further demands from above (strong external framing), concerning syllables and tests, which would be the same as limiting the teachers’ possibilities of tailoring teaching according to local conditions.

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