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Modernization of upper secondary school in Denmark

Headmasters' reform interpretations and constructions of students

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Abstract

The Danish upper secondary school is currently undergoing a hyper complex process of modernization where new organizational forms, teacher-student roles and principles of management are introduced. The process is set-off most directly by a new reform. This article explores the implementation of that reform by focusing on how it is interpreted locally and put into practice by the headmasters of two different schools. On the basis of that analysis the article discusses the consequences that different ways of interpreting and managing the reform might have for the students — how do they understand, recognize and execute the new pedagogical discourses and constructions of students that the headmasters are launching? The theoretical and methodological approach of the article is based on Basil Bernstein's sociology of education. Empirically the article draws on qualitative interviews with the headmasters under analysis.

Keywords

Basil Bernstein, constructions of students, discourse, modernization, recontextualization, upper secondary school, young people

In 2003, a new reform for the Danish upper secondary school was designed by the present Liberal/Conservative government and carried forward by an almost unanimous parliament.¹ It was a rather exceptional event as the upper secondary school had not been reformed or undergone any significant modernizations since 1987, when the last reform had been carried through, also by a Liberal/Conservative government. Somehow the upper secondary school had been able to resist the modernization attempts with which other institutions in the Danish public sector had been more effectively confronted, in line with the idea of New Public Management.² Now, however, the time had finally come for radical changes and turmoil within this institution, too.

In the research project 'Gymnasiereform 2005', we are a group of four researchers who follow the process of implementing the new reform for the upper secondary school.³ We look at it from the perspective of local school management, teachers and students, respectively. The reform was put in effect in September 2005, but before that much preliminary work had to be done at the school level. Therefore, much of the empirical material produced so far relates to the preparation process, on which data drawn upon in this article is based.⁴ More specifically, I will study the reform from the perspective of local school management. I will analyze two interviews with headmasters from different schools in terms of their reception of, and attitudes towards, the reform. The question I wish to address is the significance of the reform for the way in which the headmasters construct local pedagogic discourse at their schools. On the basis of that, I wish to discuss what consequences the headmasters' reception of the reform might have in terms of possible new dilemmas and problems among the students. The latter part — the discussion of new dilemmas and problems among the students — does only amount to a hypothetical/theoretical discussion, as we have not yet, within 'Gymnasiereform 2005', produced empirical data on the students' reception of the reform.

The answers I offer do not claim to be exhaustive in the sense that they can be generalized as the only possible way of receiving and implementing the reform. The analyses will show great differences between the headmasters in focus, proving that there may be numerous ways of dealing with the reform. But exactly those differences are important to the argument which I will develop in this article: the reform is seen as a so-called negotiated reform, and in that perspective differences are inevitable or, in fact, necessary.

As for the theoretical and methodological approach of the article, I will adopt Basil Bernstein's sociology of education (Bernstein, 2000, 2001) in order to understand how external discourses like the orientations of the reform can be recontextualized, implemented and transformed in a pedagogical setting like the upper secondary school.⁵

I will start by presenting the theoretical framework of Basil Bernstein, or rather the parts necessary to analyze the interviews of the headmasters in the light of the theory. Next, I will present some of the central elements of the reform and the discursive orientations behind it. After that I will go on to the

actual analysis of the interviews with the headmasters. Finally, I will discuss the problems and dilemmas related to being a student in the newly reformed upper secondary school.

RECONTEXTUALIZING THE REFORM: THE RISE OF PEDAGOGIC DISCOURSE

Basil Bernstein is perhaps most known for his theory on elaborated and restricted codes from the 1970s (Bernstein, 2000: 90). At that stage of his work, Bernstein was preoccupied with showing relations between the division of labour and linguistic orientations among working-class children and middle-class children. The theory, very roughly, sounded that the linguistic code of working-class children was restricted (contextual) due to their connection with the field of physical production, whereas the code of middle-class children was elaborated (abstract) by virtue of their relation with the field of symbolic production. Because schools operate on the basis of the elaborated code, Bernstein was able to explain the systematic academic failing of working-class children (Bøje, 2004: 31).

The code theory received a lot of criticism because of its touch of structuralism and determinism (Atkinson, 1995). It was (possibly wrongly) viewed as a *deficit theory* with a bias against the working class and towards the middle class. In the later works, however, Bernstein's approach has changed towards representing a more dynamic view of the interplay between social structure and human conduct. The approach has been termed *constructivist structuralism* (Ahrenkiel, 2002) because the possibilities of social change from beneath — from the agency of humans and their local practice — are stressed more than earlier. It is this latter approach that I wish to employ in the present article.

Bernstein himself refers to the latter approach as a focus on the relation *in* the educational system as opposed to a focus on the relation *to* the educational system (Bernstein, 2000). The focus derives from an interest in the relative autonomy of the educational system — autonomy from, for example, the economic field of production or from the dominating principles of the state. Bernstein seeks to explain the conditions of that autonomy, that is, the principles under which it functions. For that purpose he develops the concept of the *pedagogic device*. It can be compared to a relay or social grammar that works to distort external power relations or discourses when these are put to play in the educational system. The device allows the external discourses autonomy within the educational system and thus turns them into what is called pedagogic communication. Bernstein mentions that numerous studies have shown the role of education in reproducing inequalities such as class, gender, race and ethnicity (Bernstein mentions Pierre Bourdieu as one example), but not many studies have been able to explain how such reproduction processes are brought about. The pedagogic device as a concept tries to capture exactly those processes.

The pedagogic device is constituted by three interrelated rules: distributive rules, recontextualizing rules and evaluative rules. Distributive rules refer to

a distinction between two fundamentally different classes of knowledge: the unthinkable and the thinkable. The unthinkable knowledge, in modern societies, is associated with the knowledge production at the upper reaches of the educational system, that is, the universities, whereas the thinkable knowledge is associated with knowledge reproduction in primary and secondary schools. As such, the distributive rules prescribe the way in which power relations, forms of knowledge, and identities are managed and controlled at a macro level in the educational system. At mezzo level, the recontextualizing rules lay down the principles for how external power relations and discourses are recontextualized and turned into pedagogic discourse in a local context, for example, upper secondary school. And finally, at micro level, the evaluative rules show the principles for turning pedagogic discourse into specific code modalities which again set the agenda for students' participation mode.

In connection with this article, the recontextualizing rules are the most important. They represent a conceptual means, albeit a very abstract one, by which it is possible to understand the headmasters' constructions of pedagogic discourse. Most commonly, Bernstein does not distinguish between the recontextualizing rules and the pedagogic discourse; in fact, he considers them jointly as 'a principle for delocating a discourse, for relocating it, for refocusing it, according to its own principle' (Bernstein, 2000: 32). Recontextualizing rules — *and* pedagogic discourse — are thus described as 'imaginary discourses' with the purpose of 'translating' external discourses (Bernstein mentions physics and carpentry as examples) into pedagogic discourses which are, in their turn, directed at transmitting certain contents of knowledge to certain learners in certain ways (physics in school is not the same as, for example, physics in industry, and equally, carpentry is not the same as woodwork in a school context).

Analytically, it is possible to regard pedagogic discourse as constituted by two underlying discourses, namely an instructional discourse and a regulative discourse. Empirically, the two discourses are always intertwined into one pedagogic discourse, but theoretically, the instructional discourse is the one that 'creates specialized skills and their relation to each other', whereas the regulative discourse is the 'moral discourse which creates order, relations and identity' (Bernstein, 2000: 32). The instructional discourse is always embedded in the regulative discourse — it is *dominated* by it, that is — since the question of moral and social order, according to Bernstein, is more important than the question of sequencing, selecting and pacing a subject such as physics. Hence the rules for transmitting subjects in local school contexts are 'social facts' relying on definitions of character, manner, conduct, posture, etc., more than they are 'natural facts' relying on the intrinsic logic of the subjects themselves.

When analyzing the headmasters' interpretation and recontextualization of the reform — their attempts at constructing pedagogic discourse — the aforementioned reflections imply that one should start out by looking at their views on the social order and the hereto related view on didactics. Do the headmasters think the reform will change any of these things, do they think everything will be 'pretty much the same', will they try to combine social order and didactics

in ways not seen before? Such questions are central to the analysis of the headmasters' pedagogic discourse.

It is important to stress the fact that this way of applying Bernstein's theory does not amount to an application of the whole theory. Rather, the use of Bernstein will be limited to the study of how external discourses are recontextualized and transformed (recontextualization rules) into pedagogic discourses at school level, that is, how the headmasters construct meaning out of the reform and thus also out of the new student roles which the reform implies. Concepts such as classification, framing and code modality, which aim at grasping power and communication relations at the interactional level (for example, classroom between students and teachers or consulting room between doctor and patient), can therefore not be incorporated. The article is a study of discourse-making and student constructions among headmasters, not a study of student-teacher interaction.

NEGOTIATED REFORM

Before commencing the analysis of the headmasters, I will present the central elements of the reform and the discursive orientations behind it. These are important to consider for an understanding of what the headmasters' pedagogic discourses might be local configurations of.

The reform for upper secondary school in Denmark is radical in at least two ways. First, it not only changes the educational structure (in other words, the line of subjects, number of lessons per week, specializations etc.), it also changes the core service of the school, namely the relationship between the subjects, on the one hand, and that of teachers and students, on the other. Second, it is an organizational reform which appears in connection with demands to the economic management of the school — from being administered by the state (that is, the counties in Denmark's public sector), the administration will now be handed over to the schools themselves. In that process the schools will change into market-like enterprises which have to compete for the money generated by each student in the Danish taximeter system.⁶

The relationship between the subjects will be altered in the sense that they have to enter into interdisciplinary relations where teachers have to work more closely together than before. In the 'old' upper secondary school system, the relationship between subjects was more of a parallel kind where teachers respected each other as experts on separate matters but rarely interfered with each other's work. Thus, the teachers were often referred to as 'private practitioners' in closed classrooms (Bøje and Delica, 2005). But all that has to change now, and so has the relationship between teachers and students. From being the central communicator of knowledge, the teacher must adopt a new role, as a so-called coach or supervisor who is able to guide the students through their independent and individual learning processes. Likewise, the students must adopt a role as exactly *students* instead of *pupils*. The latter role — that of the pupil — is much

too bound up with the ‘old’ upper secondary school where young people were more or less seen as passive objects who needed to be *taught* things instead of *learning* things. Or at least a lot of the rhetoric, prior to the implementation of the reform, has announced so. Project work is proclaimed as one of the work forms which must ensure the new relationship between teachers and students.

The reform can be understood as a so-called *negotiated reform* because of the many interests and political positions it attempts to tie together (Bøje, Hjort et al., 2005). As mentioned earlier, it was carried almost unanimously and naturally. That circumstance makes it a very tense reform with the potential for doing great wonders, but also for creating conflictual compromises that are hard to handle in practice. For example, the first six months in the new structure — that is, the basic course — were originally thought of as a ‘soft entrance’ to upper secondary school; an introduction during which students should not be overburdened by too many subjects but rather have the opportunity to get a feel of the game, develop study skills, and achieve the necessary competences to make the right choice about which subjects they would want to study for the last two-and-a-half years of the programme. But because the stakes were too high and too many political positions were dissatisfied with the wiping out of some subjects, a compromise had to be reached. The result was that now students must both achieve the necessary competences to make the right choice *and* follow a very packed line of subjects. In practice this means that the first six months of the education are a very hectic experience for both students and teachers.

The reform, then, is based on more or less stable orientations and alliances in the political sphere. In ‘Gymnasiereform 2005’, we have worked out a model (see Appendix 1) that tries to capture the most central orientations, that is, the ones that exactly render it a negotiated reform.⁷ In the following, I will briefly present those orientations — or discourses — because I wish to employ them as analytical tools for the analyses of the two headmasters. The model can thus be seen as a supplementary perspective to Bernstein. Whereas the latter focuses on relations *in* school the model focuses on relations *to* school.

The model identifies four discourses:

1. The project discourse
2. The competence discourse
3. The canon discourse
4. The qualification discourse

The original shaping of the reform was based on a discursive alliance between discourses 1 and 2, namely the project discourse and the competence discourse. I have earlier analyzed the alliance as a so-called *chain of equivalence* in the terminology of discourse analysis (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) in which the construction of a ‘new’ positive upper secondary school (discourses 1 and 2) rests on an idea of the ‘old’ upper secondary school (discourses 3 and 4) as a negative background or antagonism (Bøje, 2004: 66). Among others, the project discourse

has been strongly supported by the *reform pedagogues* in the teachers' ranks. Since 1987, when the last reform for upper secondary school was carried through, these teachers have felt suppressed by the strong focus on canon and traditional scholarship, which was characteristic of the 'old' upper secondary school. With the present reform, the reform pedagogues have finally had it their way and been witnesses to the *partial* realization of some of the elements they have always dreamt of seeing in upper secondary education—project work, student independence, interdisciplinary approach, social man, and so forth. The partial realization of these elements has only been possible because of the competence discourse's adherence to similar elements: the competence discourse draws nourishment from the new organizational forms of the industry, in which the use of interdisciplinary approaches, team structure, self-government among employees, etc., has become widespread (Sennett, 1999).

In connection with the reform of 1987, the reform pedagogues also fought to implement project work etc. in upper secondary school, but at that time they did not have the alliance with the competence discourse to persuade the then Liberal/Conservative government of the usefulness of such methods. If the current Liberal/Conservative government is willing to implement the elements, it must therefore be because of the competence discourse.

Discourses 3 and 4 — the canon discourse and the qualification discourse — are not dead; however, in the shaping of the reform they were not strong enough to compete with the alliance between the project discourse and the competence discourse. Nevertheless, their fingerprints can still be found in the reform (again the reform is a negotiation between various interests and positions). For example, the reform gives the headmasters more extensive powers to punish students who do not possess the required amount of *discipline* to obtain a satisfactory average mark, that is, one above a 6 in the Danish marking system (Undervisningsministeriet, 2004: 6).⁸ And now that the reform is in the process of being implemented, the canon discourse and the qualification discourse seem to have won hegemony over the project discourse and the competence discourse. This is partly due to new discursive winds in the Ministry of Education, where there has been talk of changing towards more centrally-defined standards (Wissing, 2005).

These new developments indicate that the battle of the reform is not finished yet. On the contrary, one might claim that it has only just begun since the implementation process will open up for new negotiations at local school level. In the following, I will give two examples of how that is done, namely, how the reform is interpreted and — in Bernstein's words — attempted *recontextualized* by two different headmasters.

'The academic level will be lowered but in return we get something else...'

Knud is the headmaster of an upper secondary school in a somewhat provincial area in Denmark. The school is rather new; it was opened in 1957 when the

educational system — as a result of the rise of the welfare state — began its transformation from being a privilege for the few to being available to rich and poor alike. The school has approximately 600 students and 70 teachers, which makes it quite a large school. So far, it is run financially by the local county.

As headmaster, Knud mostly thinks of himself along the lines of the traditional management of the public sector; that is, as an *administrative* leader who is responsible for a state-governed *institution*, and not — like for instance Hans, the next headmaster to be analyzed in this article — as a *strategic* leader who is responsible for a market-oriented *organization*. Still, the local surroundings, such as other youth education institutions, play an important role in the running of the school. Both as market *competitors* but also as possible *collaborators*; because the area is provincial and the educational possibilities are limited, the different institutions simply have to work together, according to Knud. That also counts for the local enterprises and the school; when the enterprises' employees are in need of supplementary training or extra courses, the school offers vocational teaching, and 'that on the other hand also gives the school an extra income'.

Applied to Bernstein's theory, such a school culture plays an important role in the recontextualization of the reform and the construction of a, possibly novel, pedagogic discourse. In the following, I will try to show how. As mentioned earlier, the pedagogic discourse is constituted by two underlying discourses — a regulative discourse (social order) and an instructional discourse (didactics and creation of skills); the regulative discourse always being the dominant one. To be able to analyze the pedagogic discourse at Knud's school, I will first take a look at what he has to say about the regulative discourse, or, initially, how he perceives and constructs the students:

We are very determined not to make it an elite school ... Actually, the whole area is a little distant from the idea of education. The case is not that 70 percent of the young people have parents who are academics or something like that. Rather, we are situated in an area where the number of people with an upper secondary education is at a maximum of 10–15 per cent. Therefore our goal is to help as many students as possible to get through instead of making it an elite school which one could choose to do. Naturally we have fights with some of the teachers who think the level should be at the top, which it of course also must, but still we would like to do as much as possible to help as many students through as possible.

At the face of it, the quotation indicates that there is quite a distance from the independent and self-reliant *student* of the reform to the educationally distant *pupil* at Knud's school. We are not presented with a construction of a student who can carry himself/herself through upper secondary school on his/her own initiative. Instead, we are presented with a construction that highlights the extra effort which the school must put into helping its (weaker) young people through. As a start, it therefore seems fair to say that the pupils' social basis at Knud's school constitutes a natural limitation to the recontextualization of the reform's modern student.

The construction of a rather weak and educationally distant pupil gives a preliminary view into the social order, or regulative discourse, at Knud's school. In order to get a better understanding of it, another quotation about the teacher-student relationship is fruitful:

When the pupils come here they are very accustomed to having a class teacher whom they can entrust with all their problems. ... The pupils therefore feel that if something happens they always talk to their class teacher about it. Of course they also have a student advisor, and they can also come up here, but in case something should happen they have that pleasant feeling of having the opportunity to speak to the teacher whom they see almost every day. That is a kind of sensation they have built up since preschool, you see.

The quotation shows that Knud relies on a regulative discourse in which the student-teacher relationship is characterized by the pupil in need of a solid class teacher who can provide him/her with *pleasant* feelings of safety; a regulative discourse in which the teacher is clearly in charge of, and responsible for, the pupils' education and well-being.

That kind of student-teacher construction calls for a specific didactics, a matching didactics, one could say; or, in Bernstein's terminology, a *matching instructional discourse*. The aforementioned quotation already gives some indication as to how that discourse might look: it must necessarily be one that puts the teacher in charge of the teaching and identifies him/her as a guarantee of a satisfactory academic level in the classroom. In Danish upper secondary schools, class teaching has been, and to Knud it still is, *the* method that ensures those things. All other teaching methods, such as project work, cause a lowering of the academic level 'but in return we get something else'. Knud mentions math (which he teaches himself) as one example, 'There is no doubt that they will not attain skills such as integral calculus'. The reason why the pupils will not attain those skills is because the reform reduces the amount of class teaching in favour of more student-activating forms of learning. In connection with the prospect of a lower academic level, Knud further mentions that, 'It is the first time ever we will see pupils coming through thinking they are students, which in fact they are not!' By this he means that the pupils will not have attained the necessary level to go on to higher education.

In short, Knud's line of thinking about teaching and learning expresses a rationale that holds the 'inner logic' of the subject as the *raison d'être* for class teaching; that is, for making class teaching the constituting element of the instructional discourse. In Bernstein's scheme of things, however, it is the regulative discourse — the social order between teachers and pupils — that dictates class teaching as a suitable instructional discourse.⁹

In my opinion this represents the general picture of the regulative and instructional discourse at Knud's school. Employing the analytic view on the four discourses of the reform (as described earlier), it seems obvious that Knud primarily thinks and talks about his school — and negotiates the reform — in terms of discourse numbers 3 and 4, the canon discourse and the qualification

discourse. He mainly regards the school as a state-governed institution where his responsibility is to administer rules in ways that give the teachers the best opportunities for passing on curricula and necessary qualifications. But, of course, the reform has stirred up things somewhat. At the time of the interview Knud was *beginning* to be confronted with all the new aspects of the reform (discourses 1 and 2, the project discourse and the competence discourse), only he did not *really* take them into consideration — at least not the pedagogical ideas which have, or could have, consequences for the pedagogic discourse of the school. His usage of language rather reflects a relatively *distant* comprehension of all the new ideas: whenever the talk touches upon some of those areas, for example, the new team structure between teachers, the interdisciplinary approach or the increased focus on new student roles, Knud refers to them as ‘*those things*’; things which do not, in a sense, concern him, but rather belong to someone else. The distant comprehension of the new can also be seen in the heading of this analysis: ‘*The academic level will be lowered but in return we get something else...*’. Knud knows that the academic level will be lowered as a consequence of the reform, but he only has a very faint idea of exactly what they will receive instead.

On the basis of this discussion, I would describe the pedagogic discourse at Knud’s school as one in which the new is contained in the old; where ‘the new’ does not get a life of its own but rather lives in the shadow of ‘the old’. Thus, we are dealing with a local configuration of all four discourses of the reform with an emphasis on 3 and 4 that determines the *distant* recontextualization of 1 and 2. This configuration primarily constructs the students as *pupils* — as educationally distant and security-seeking young people in need of adult guidance.

‘If I should put it in one sentence I would call it a change of culture’

Hans is a relatively new headmaster of a city school in Copenhagen. The school has approximately 700 students enrolled and 80 teachers employed. A distinctive trait of the school culture is a long tradition of pedagogic innovation stemming from the progressive environments of the 1970s and early 1980s (the project discourse). Many of the school’s older teachers have formerly been employed at progressive schools, and thus they are very familiar with the ideas of the current reform — project work, interdisciplinary approach, competences instead of qualifications etc.

From a financial point of view, the school is run a bit differently from Knud’s school. According to Hans, the main difference is that the school’s budget is tighter than what is considered normal. Another difference in relation to the economy is the location of the schools: because Hans’s school is located in the city, it has more nearby competitors than has Knud’s school, and it therefore faces the effects of the market economy to a much larger degree. These economic conditions greatly influence how Hans understands himself and his job. In general, he perceives himself in close relation to the market-oriented organization, and ‘*strategic management*’ is one of his key words.¹⁰ By that he means an attempt

to be constantly aware of external as well as internal indicators of change. He sees his job as primarily monitoring those indicators and navigating the school accordingly. He leaves to others, namely the school's mid-level managers, the technical administration (which Knud saw as his primary task), and to some extent also the pedagogic management.

This introductory school tale sets the parameter within which the analysis of Hans' pedagogic discourse is going to take place. I have mentioned that the school has a long tradition of pedagogic innovation and that Hans understands himself in terms of the market-oriented organization. This implies a focus on the dynamics between the project discourse and the competence discourse — not a focus on the encounter between discourse 1/2 and discourse 3/4 as in Knud's case. In the following, I will show which dynamics and conflictual relations this specific mix of discourses give rise to in relation to the recontextualization of the reform and the construction of pedagogic discourse.

Again, I will start out with the regulative discourse represented by Hans's construction of the students and their relation to the teachers. The following quotation allows a preliminary picture of that:

We have something of an atmosphere at this school. I can tell you that because I have not created it myself. First of all it is a very creative school. We have some fantastic music teachers, we have a gigantic choir, we have a large band, we have 14 orchestras at the time being That means there is always a lively atmosphere. The students are wildly dedicated to the school.... And there is a culture that says if you are here you need to be involved in something. ... Like one of the students said the other day, one could in principle spend one's whole life and SU¹¹ on the school.

First of all, the quotation stresses the difference between Knud's educationally distant pupil and Hans' educationally engaged student. Second, the quotation provides insight into how Hans draws upon the project discourse when trying to describe the students' and the school's special 'atmosphere'. For example, he emphasizes the *creative* school, the students' 'wild dedication', and the readiness to educate oneself solely for the purpose of education (not for the purpose of, for example, achieving the qualifications demanded by the job market). The project discourse in that way plays a determining role for Hans' construction of the students.

However, Hans is not the creator of the project discourse or the school's special atmosphere. It was there before his appointment as headmaster, and thus it has more to do with the teachers' tradition of pedagogic innovation (progressiveness) and probably also the students' social basis, which in a way fits the project discourse. In contexts where the question about the students' social nature is less explicit to Hans, he draws more upon the competence discourse in his characterization of the students. The following quotation gives some indication of that:

We did something which really pushed the culture at this place. Again it was a leading coalition that did it, namely the group of teachers appointed to follow the

development up to the reform. They made an extensive evaluation of all present 2.G'ere and 3.G'ere¹²... about their experiences with project work. ... The group of teachers analysed the material and then we gathered all the students in the assembly hall and presented the evaluation to them. The teachers were also there. All statements, all striking statements were projected onto a screen where the students were telling how some of the teachers are not very coordinated Some teachers felt very exposed. It gave basis for a debate. But the message was clear and the teachers pulled themselves together and said, well, something must be done. ... So the students are content with having things evaluated.

In this quotation, the students' critique of some of the teachers is emphasized by Hans. He links up their critique with the 'leading coalition of teachers', and he describes how the mutual efforts of these two parties 'pushed the culture' at the school. By referring to the students in this way, as a group which is at the teachers if they are not always coordinated, and which is content with having things evaluated, Hans implicitly identifies the students as *members of an organization* who are in alliance with its leading forces, members who help the wind blow the right way.

This specific mix of the project discourse and the competence discourse in relation to the regulative discourse does not normally cause any problems because in both discourses the students are extrapolated as very competent, independent, responsible and educationally self-propelling. The differences between the discourses are normally softened, so to speak. But in rare cases the differences emerge to the surface and become visible, and when that happens conflicts may arise. In general, though, Hans is very good at *preventing* that from happening — he keeps the differences hidden, one could say. However, now and again he refers to the students in ways that reveal the fact that these differences do, in fact, exist. It is mostly pronounced when the non-intentional description of the *organization member* merges into an idea of the student as a *customer* in a market-driven organization. Of course, Hans does not put it as boldly as that, but his remarks about the students' role as *complainants* all point in that direction: 'Previously, the students have simply put up with things and been sweet and kind, you know. That won't work anymore. Now it is necessary to discuss what the external world expects of us, what the students expect of us and how we make sure those demands are met'. An association pops into one's mind at the sound of this: the customer who has a legitimate right to discuss and complain about the goods on stock. If and when that kind of student construction should become a fact, along with the notion of the student as an organization member, disturbances in the regulative discourse could appear more clearly. But for the time being, the differences are kept down and the regulative discourse is based on exactly the 'friendly co-existence' of the project discourse and the competence discourse.

The analysis of the instructional discourse is easier. At this level the differences between the project discourse and the competence discourse are minor, in that both discourses consider project work, interdisciplinary approaches and social work forms as the best means of achieving the independent and self-educating

student whom they pretty much agree upon as the ideal (albeit with different agendas in mind). The school's many developmental 'experiments', up to the reform, with, for example, project work, interdisciplinary collaborations and study skill programmes, have played an important role for the construction of this instructional discourse. When questioned about the school's general attitude towards project work, Hans, for instance, says:

Actually, it has been very positive. It's funny because when I presented the proposal about project work at the very first pedagogic weekend, we appointed three work groups. They then worked for a year and by the end of that year, when it was all about to start, there were 46 teachers who voted in favour of the proposal, 20 against, and the rest abstained from voting. We then got started, and the year after, everybody was in favour of continuing. It was amazing. But we also did a lot to emphasize that we need to further fortify the school.

Of course, class teaching is still the preferred method, or instructional discourse, to some teachers at the school. But they are a minority, and Hans is in the process of convincing them that their individual subjects and the high academic level will not disappear because of the new work forms: 'The worry has of course been that all of this interdisciplinary work will be at the expense of the academic level. We then try to say no, the academic level must remain. Is it not possible to have both a high academic level and the interdisciplinary approach?' Thus, one can again identify Hans's management skills and ability to create discursive coherence in an organization that in many ways is incoherent at the time being.¹³

The overall characterization of the pedagogic discourse rests on exactly the ability to create discursive coherence or agreement where there should not necessarily be any; where, from one perspective, there should instead be more conflict or disagreement between the project discourse and the competence discourse. One of Hans' remarks might again prove clarifying, 'Yes, well I have tried to say that since there are so many new things we need to hold on to all the things we know. Let's stick to that, take our point of departure in that and then add some new things'. In analytical terms Hans is here saying, let us stick to the project discourse and then add the competence discourse to a level that we can agree upon. The pedagogic discourse therefore represents exactly the present agreement between the project discourse and the competence discourse, the contract written between the two at the present stage of modernization.

With respect to the students, this means they are constructed as exactly *students*; they are dedicated, competent, independent and responsible young people who take an education solely for the purpose of education.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE STUDENTS

After these analyses of Knud's and Hans' construction of local pedagogic discourses, I will now make some comments on the implications that the discourses might have for students. My remarks are, of course, hypothetical in

nature as we do not yet, within the research project ‘Gymnasiereform 2005’, have any empirical data on how the students experience the implementation of the reform. Nevertheless, it is possible to set up some meaningful scenarios on the basis of the two analyses. Hopefully they can provide inspiration for a subsequent discussion about the students and the reform.

At Knud’s school, one can imagine a scenario where the pedagogic discourse (the ‘new’ contained in the ‘old’) has the effect that some students are *disappointed* that the reform does not amount to more than this, whereas other students are *confused* because the reform is somehow difficult to understand. Here I propose a scenario — following Bernstein’s theory — in which the pedagogic discourse divides the students into roughly two groups when it comes to their understanding of and actions towards it:

1. The able students who have the abilities to calculate the pedagogic discourse and act appropriately towards it.
2. The weaker students who do not have these abilities and therefore act in confusion towards it.¹⁴

The able students could be disappointed because the local implementation and practice of the reform do not correspond with their expectations of it. These students may indeed have followed the rhetoric in the media and may have paid extra attention to some of the key words — project work, independent students, interdisciplinary approaches, coordinated teachers, and so on. Should they experience that these words are only an empty way of presenting in a new manner the normal way of doing things (that is, the teachers in charge and reproduction of singular subjects) and not a new practice in full force, a natural reaction may be disappointment. It might look to them as if a different and more student-focused school were not possible after all.

The weaker students *could* react with confusion because on the one hand, the explicit wording is ‘project work’, ‘independent students’, ‘new teacher-student roles’, etc., and on the other hand, practice seems to demand something else of them. If these students are not capable of seeing through the pedagogic discourse, it is possible that words and practice will remain separate entities to them, and confusion may therefore be the prevailing experience.¹⁵

It can be discussed which is (at Knud’s school) the least attractive of the aforementioned effects: that some of the able students are disappointed or some of the weaker students are confused? If one is to trust Knud when he says that most of the school’s pupils are unaccustomed to the academic world, it is perhaps not such a big issue if some of the very best students are a little disappointed. It seems a bigger problem if the majority of the students are confused with the pedagogic discourse of the school.

One can hope, however, that because of Knud’s interpretation of the reform, confusion will not continue forever. Instead, it seems likely that sooner or

later the weaker students will learn from their encounters with the pedagogic discourse. If they, for example, learn that their ‘normal way of doing things’ (that is, to work hard, do what the teacher says, and to try to find the facts instead of merely discussing things) somehow fits the school’s way of doing things — although it is not explicitly stated by the school — a new and safe match could be found. In that regard, it is my opinion that Knud, after all, has landed on the *right* pedagogic discourse for exactly his students, teachers and school. One could also formulate it like this: Knud is trying to ‘modernize’ his school in a way that fits the historical, cultural and geographical background of the school.

At Hans’ school it is likewise possible to identify two different scenarios or implications of the pedagogic discourse (that is, the tacit agreement between the project discourse and the competence discourse). On the one hand, one could imagine a scenario in which the students are very content with things. The students may experience that they ‘got what they came for’: the creative school, the aesthetic school featuring musicals, big bands and choirs, the lively atmosphere in which everyone is engaged in something else besides merely the teaching, the school with a (left-wing) political awareness, the school where education represents a purpose in itself, etc. At the same time the students may experience that they are taken very seriously as an important part of the new school organization; they are not just *pupils* as in primary school, they are rather *students* who have a role to play in discussions about teaching, organization, culture and social rules. As Hans mentioned, ‘the students are very content with having things evaluated’. The greater possibility of criticizing the teachers might also make some students content if, for instance, the teachers do not coordinate their different assignments, or if they, unlike the students, are unable to use the still more widespread internet-based communication system.

On the other hand, a scenario is possible in which the students could feel cheated because they feel exploited by Hans’ cultural fight against the teachers’ unwillingness to modernize. If the students feel that their critique and more influential role are only legitimate insofar as they serve another purpose — that of convincing the more traditional teachers of the necessary transition towards a market-oriented organization — feelings of being cheated or exploited seem a possible outcome.

More fundamentally, some of the students may become disappointed with their new role in the market-driven organization: the role as the *customer*. What initially seemed like a win for the students (being considered an active part of the school organization) may progressively turn out as a loss in the sense that the customer merely has the right to complain about the informative label of the goods on stock (that is, the teaching), not the goods themselves. The reasoning behind this sounds that the students/customers have had their chance to study the informative label, and therefore, if the goods are different from what they first expected, it is either their own fault for not having studied hard enough,

or it could be the informative label that needs a little adjustment. Once bought, the goods themselves seem beyond dispute. Overall, this tendency points in the direction of a democratic shortfall (but that discussion is beyond the limits of this article).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this article I have analyzed some of the provisional consequences of the ongoing modernization of the Danish upper secondary school. I have done that by adopting the theory of Basil Bernstein and a theoretical model developed in the research project ‘Gymnasiereform 2005’ in order to analyze how two different headmasters recontextualize the reform, transform it according to local school cultures, and construct new pedagogic discourses on the basis of it. In the first case, the reform is implemented as a ‘new’ discursive horizon which is contained in, and modified in accordance with, the ‘old’ school’s discursive horizon. In the second case, the implementation of the reform more narrowly depends on a configuration of — and between the headmaster and the teachers: a potential struggle — what I have called the project discourse and the competence discourse. After these analyses I have discussed what implications the different ways of implementing the reform — and consequently, the different kinds of pedagogic discourse — might have for the students. With respect to the first headmaster, I proposed that his pedagogic discourse could divide the students into two groups, namely (a) those who feel disappointed that the reform does not amount to more than this; and (b) those who feel confused about the mixed signals between the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ but eventually learn that their old study habits still hold water. With respect to the second headmaster, I proposed that his pedagogic discourse might on the one hand satisfy many students because they felt they ‘got what they came for’ — the creative school. On the other hand, his pedagogic discourse might also make some students feel cheated because after all it does not give them what they expected — it rather gives them a market-oriented organization where their role is reduced to that of customer. That is a situation which in the end calls for a discussion on democratic principles in market-driven education.

However, many scenarios and different kinds of modernization are possible. There is not one linear direction but rather many open endings, depending upon negotiations, political alliances and local school cultures. The use of Bernstein’s theory should hopefully have stressed that point by now.

Notes

- 1 Except for ‘Enhedshedslisten’ which is the most left-wing party in the Danish parliament.
- 2 See Klausen and Ståhlberg (1998) for an account of the breakthrough and practice of New Public Management in Scandinavia.

- 3 Besides me, the following researchers participated in ‘Gymnasiereform 2005’: Katrin Hjort, The Danish School of Education; Peter Henrik Raae, University of Southern Denmark; and Lene Larsen, University of Roskilde.
- 4 See, for example, Bøje (2004); Bøje and Delica (2005); Bøje, Hjort et al. (2005); Bøje, Gitz-Johansen et al. (2005); Raae (2005); Rasmussen and Gitz-Johansen (2005).
- 5 Initially, I was looking for a theoretical framework which dealt more directly with the relation between constructions of youth and educational planning, but I was not able to find many such references. Much literature deals with constructions of youth in general; some in relation to narrative analysis, peer groups, gender practice, urban life and so on, but not much in relation to education. One of the references that comes closest to this goal thus states: ‘It is still rare to find studies which address the interrelationship of youth and other dimensions of social identity; many studies would focus on one aspect of social life at the expense of others, rather than exploring the relationship between them’ (Chouliaraki, 2003: 305). Closest to the subject matter were Mørch (2003) and du Bois-Reymond (2004).
- 6 The system is based on a principle where the schools receive a fixed grant per student per year’s work. The system replaced the more inexact state predicting system in 1996.
- 7 It is important to stress the fact that the discourses — and their matching subject positions — are analytical constructions and not direct empirical impressions of, for example, specific individuals involved in the reform. On the other hand, the model is developed on the basis of extensive empirical readings of commission papers, hearings, discussion papers, etc. (see, for example, Bøje, 2004; Hjort, 2002; Hjort, 2005; Larsen, 2001; Raae, 2005), and does therefore represent the wordings of the most central reform actors. As such, the model represents a discourse theoretical perspective (Fairclough, 1995; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) which is empirically sustained.
- 8 Equivalent to 02 in the European grading scale.
- 9 This conception can, of course, be challenged from other theoretical perspectives and from empirical developments in the field. The regulative discourse may not always be the dominating one. In fact, the two discourses may not necessarily have much to do with each other; the individualizing teaching and learning techniques of the reform — for example, project work, log books, contracts, etc. — suggest it becomes more and more difficult for an educationist like Knud to *make* them correlate.
- 10 The question of strategic management in upper secondary school is analyzed in more detail in Raae and Abrahamsen (2004).
- 11 Statens Uddannelsesstøtte — the State Education Fund.
- 12 Second year and third year students.
- 13 From another theoretical perspective (for example, that of the Tavistock tradition which is represented by some of the researchers in ‘Gymnasiereform 2005’) one could possibly get a better understanding of what I here term the *incoherent organization*. By that I mean an understanding which more profoundly stresses the *social* practice as opposed to the *discursive* practice — the latter having been the primary focus of this article. Hans, for instance, fires quite a lot of teachers at the same time as he evidently creates discursive coherence in the organization; it seems worthwhile putting more effort into investigating those kinds of contradictory practice.
- 14 These propositions follow Bernstein’s theory in the sense that they apply to his conceptualization of how different types of students (roughly speaking: working class/educational distant students vs middle class/academically grounded students) master

what he terms the recognition and realization rules (Bernstein, 2000: 16–7). The students who master the recognition rules are capable of understanding the context they are in, they know the rules of the game, but they are not necessarily capable of participating in that context. In order to do so, they must also master the realization rules. This implies, in connection with the earlier discussion of the able students vs the weaker students, that obviously the able students master both recognition rules and realization rules whereas the weaker students only control the recognition rules. The propositions are in general sustained in earlier works of mine (Bøje, 2004; Bøje and Delica, 2005), but of course more empirically differentiated.

- 15 From other theoretical perspectives (for example, Mørch, 2003, and du Bois-Reymond, 2004), the rather coarse division between able and weak students can be criticized. One can, for instance, speak of students who are strong in some of the traditional subjects but not necessarily in figuring out the pedagogic discourse or the specific code modality of the classroom. Furthermore, it is possible to speak of students who are strong in their *opposition* towards school. Finally, one can speak about schooling which explicitly tries to take into account the individual trajectories of the learning subjects. As such, one can put forward the overall criticism that Bernstein's theory — and more specifically, the division between working class students (weak students) and middle class students (strong students) — rests on the assumption that both sets of students have an interest to do best in school and please the teachers. That assumption can, of course, be challenged.

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APPENDIX 1: DISCOURSES OF THE REFORM

| MODEL 1 | THE COMMON — THE SOCIAL | THE INDIVIDUAL |
|----------------------|--|---|
| | The student as part of a cultural community. Education towards personal authority and citizenship. Humanism — idealism — irrationality | The student as an actor on the global market. Education closely related to the demands of the work market. Rationalism — realism |
| Formal education | 1. THE PROJECT DISCOURSE Inspired by reform and experience pedagogy (learning by doing): – interdisciplinary approach – working together – student independence | 2. THE COMPETENCE DISCOURSE Oriented towards possibilities of application. Purpose: strengthening of individuals' and organizations' competitive advantages at the global market: – interdisciplinary approach – team structure – self-government |
| Formulated values | The human and democratic (The whole human being) | The economy of knowledge, competitive power. (The creative class) |
| View of human nature | 'Social man'. Social psychological theory of motivation | 'Psychological man'; individual psychological theory of self-realization |
| Material education | 3. THE CANON DISCOURSE Re-traditionalization. Maintenance/re-establishment of the technical contents of the 'old' upper secondary school: – traditional scholarship – national values – discipline | 4. THE QUALIFICATION DISCOURSE Compliance with immediate demands of application. Objective: Denmark must be able to measure international standards (PISA): – follow high international standards – elite – discipline |
| Formulated values | Technical Values, Danish values | The highest technical level, the best international position |
| View of human nature | 'Lazy man'. Theory of management via discipline and control | 'Economic man/rational man'. Theory of management via economical incentives |

Sources: 'Gymnasiereform 2005'; Bøje, Hjort et al. (2005); Statens Humanistiske Forskningsråd (SHF) (The Danish Research Council for the Humanities).

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