

‘Sociability before individuality’: Lesson structure in Lower Secondary Classrooms

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Abstract

This paper contributes to the research field of classroom research by offering an empirical analysis of classroom instruction on the level of lesson structure. The research questions are: What are the typical combinations of instructional activities in the lessons of eight teachers in four Norwegian Secondary schools? And how can the content-treatment of these structures be explained considering relevant pedagogical traditions? The method of the study is qualitative non-participatory observation in four Norwegian Secondary schools, with a total dataset of 79 lessons. We found that the most typical combination of instructional activities in the data was the plenary conversation-seatwork-structure. When the content-treatment was analyzed, an ‘expository-practice’-structure was revealed. This lesson structure is explained by the influence of progressive-constructivist pedagogical theories in Scandinavia, foremost Bildung-centred general didactics and Vygotsky-inspired socio-cultural theory. From the perspective of the hidden curriculum, we call this discourse ‘sociability before individuality’.

Key words

Lesson structure, classroom research, instruction, educational theory, Lower Secondary Schools

1. Introduction

In Scandinavia, recent classroom research has documented an increasing rate of seatwork versus plenary teaching (Klette, 1998; Eriksson, 1999; Eriksson and Heideman, 2013; Lindblad and Sahlström, 1999; Granström, 2003; Dalland and Klette, 2016; Bachmann, Haug and Myklebust, 2010; Haug, 2012). Further, seatwork is linked to the increased use of student work plans (Dalland and Klette, 2014, 2016). In the Scandinavian tradition of schooling, individualization, as well as differentiation, has historically been an issue of controversy, due to the strong ideal of teaching as a joint experience (Midtsundstad and Werler, 2011). According to Carlgren et al. (2006) seatwork and individualized teaching methods were introduced to accomplish differentiation within the comprehensive school system from the 1960s. It was supported by progressive ideology and child-centered psychology and strengthened by the growth of constructivist thinking in learning. In addition, the increase of time spent on seatwork has been explained by individualization due to influence of neo-liberal policy on the educational sector (Carlgren et al., 2006; Bachmann, Haug and Myklebust, 2010).

Within the field of classroom research internationally, studies of the cultures of schooling (Jackson, 1990) and of classroom interaction on the level of turn-taking and person to person interaction, have had profound influence (Cazden, 1988; Scott, Mortimer and Aguiar, 2006; Lo and Macaro, 2012; Sun et al., 2014). Klette (2007) however, points to the need of research bridging how the different thematic patterns, the teaching content, are linked to interaction in classrooms. This is also a concern for Alexander (2001), who argues that the cumulative and purposeful aspects of teaching content are the most challenging questions of classroom research currently.

Based on this background, this study contributes to the field of classroom research by doing an empirical analysis of classroom teaching on the level of lesson structure: Studying how the

content is treated using different instructional activities will give a contribution to the need expressed by Alexander (2001) and Klette (2007). Another contribution is a nuancing of the explanation of instructional activities in classrooms as results of neo-liberal policy.

In this paper we ask: What is the typical combination of instructional activities in the lessons of eight teachers in four Norwegian Secondary schools? And how can the content-treatment of this structure be explained considering relevant pedagogical traditions? The second question will illuminate how traditions influence teaching in classrooms, and how these traditions are enhanced, nuanced and challenged in contemporary schooling. Finally, we will discuss our findings related to Scandinavian classroom research and research on lesson structure.

2. Research on lesson structure

Maulana et al.'s (2012) study revealed the dominating lesson structure in mathematics-teaching in secondary education in Netherland and Indonesia: introduction, review, introducing additional content, student work time, closing and other (disruption, classroom management). Another study discusses the issue of whether the 'lesson' or other comparable units of classroom teaching are suitable for comparative research (Anderson-Levitt, 2004; Clarke et al., 2007). Martin and colleagues' concept of 'semantic waves' (Martin, 2012; McNaught et al., 2013) studies the development of subject matter content in the flow of lessons, but this research does not take the instructional activities into account.

Some studies have compared teaching practice across school subjects: Reichenberg (2016) found that teachers in mathematics and language preferred more seatwork, while teachers in social science preferred teacher centered practice. In a Norwegian study, Toppol (2012) has used methods developed in the TIMSS 1995 video study, to describe typical patterns of teaching in classrooms. By the concept of 'lesson signature', borrowed from Hiebert et al.,

Toppol compared mathematics and science. Teaching in mathematics mainly contained individual tasks, while teaching in science consisted of more collective interaction. Toppol explained the subject specific signature in mathematics by the apprehension of the subject's problem-solving orientation, as well as the idea that solving tasks is necessary for students' understanding of concepts and theories.

In another Scandinavian study, Lindblad and Sahlström (1999) documented the development of the lesson structure of 'mixed lessons' in Swedish classrooms. Mixed lessons consist of teacher-led communication (more than 2 minutes) and seatwork. Lindblad and Sahlström further found that the amount of mixed lessons was increasing from the 1970's to the 1990's.

Alexander's (2000) comparative study of primary education in Russia, India, France, England and the United States, documented how the lesson is divided into various parts and how they are constructed with beginnings (instructional or procedural), middles (unitary or episodic, with developmental, reiterative or cumulative episodes/parts), and endings (instructional or procedural). Alexander finds that the structure of lessons is different across countries and explains the differences with three main factors: the time at disposal (elastic versus rigid time frame), the cultural tradition (for example chanting in India incites a reiterative episodic structure in teaching) and pedagogic tradition (for example Vygotsky in Russia and progressivism in the United States). He further claims that the lesson as a starting point for (a comparative) analysis tends to be neglected in classroom research. Thus, how lessons influence and make sense (Meyer, 2007) to students, seems to be an underexplored domain in classroom studies, despite that it can be argued that the daily routine of structure, sequence and organization in classrooms can represent a powerful 'hidden curriculum' shaping roles, norms and ideology (Kelly, 2009). This study is inspired by Alexander's (2000) concepts on the various parts of the lessons, as well as by aiming to explain the instructional activities by pedagogical traditions. As lesson structures vary due to different cultural traditions

(Alexander, 2000), Scandinavian classroom research is chosen as the central context for understanding and discussing our data.

3. Methodology

The sample of this study is based on observation of instruction in classrooms in four lower secondary schools (13 to 16-year-old students). The schools are selected from two different counties in Norway, and they differ from each other in scores on national tests; one school with high score, two with middle score and one with low score. Eight teachers, two from each school, were selected for observation in the classroom in all academic subjects over a week. The observation was conducted as a qualitative non-participant observation. While non-participant observation on principle is not possible in social science in practice, it is however a valid research position in formal settings, such as classroom teaching (Fangen, 2004). Two researchers observed the teaching in each classroom: One researcher observed and described the sequences in the lessons (for example introduction, presentation of subject matter, discussion, interruption and so on), the time-frame of each instructional activity, and the frequencies and variation of students' participative verbal utterances. The other researcher recorded all teachers' subject matter-utterances (instructions, information, explanations, comments, questions, and answers to students' initiatives) and students' answers, questions and comments regarding subject matter. Most of the talk is recorded exactly, however, some teacher's utterances and students' activities (for example reading aloud from textbooks) were reported in summaries. This paper focuses on the description of sequences and activities, and the subject matter-utterances is used to study the content-aspect of the instructional activities. The content-aspect is visible in the utterances by studying the subject matter topic, shifts of topic, and explaining the findings with relevant pedagogical theories revealing the underlying ideas of subject-matter learning. Due to the design of the study, two researchers in the classroom, we did not document the conversation between students or teacher-student during

seatwork. The subject matter topics of the seatwork-sessions was recorded by collecting the tasks and exercises used by the students. Therefore, it is mainly the content of the plenary activities that is explained by pedagogical traditions in this study.

The whole dataset comprises 79 lessons. Most of the lessons last 45 minutes and are often followed by a short break before the next lesson. According to lesson structure research, a lesson consists of ‘a particular type of instructional activity in the delivery of a topic’ (Clarke et al., 2007: p 282). The weeks chosen for observation in each school were selected randomly, and so we cannot consider whether the subject matter topics were in the process of being introduced or in the stage of repetition in the lessons, which might have impact on the lesson structure. However, the teachers confirmed in interviews that the two weeks were typical of the teaching in the schools. In our study, ‘instructional activity’ is defined as a part of a lesson comprising of one work-method and one subject matter topic. In the first step of analysis, the data was categorized by the following instructional activities in the classroom: Beginning, ending, teacher lecturing, plenary conversation, individual seatwork, seatwork in pairs, group work, plenary reading aloud and plenary use of media. The categories were developed in a process that alternated between inductive and deductive approaches, inspired by Alexander (2000). The duration of the instructional activities was registered in minutes. Change in subject matter content was also registered.

After reviewing the data, the categories ‘individual seatwork’ and ‘seatwork in pairs’ were merged, as it was difficult to distinguish between the two, due to the cooperative style of students during seatwork. Also, at this stage of analysis the categories ‘beginning’ and ‘ending’ were omitted from further analysis, because they were all procedural and not instructional, and the category ‘media’ was renamed to ‘watching video’ as this was the only plenary use of media in the data except the use of textbooks. Further, students individual work with computers, was merged with the category ‘individual seatwork’.

The next step of the analysis was to categorize the lessons after the structure of the instructional activities within them: for example, some lessons contained few instructional activities and others had a faster pace and many changes of scene. We define the shift from one instructional activity to another as a ‘change of scene’. The sequence of the different methods was also important when we categorized the lessons. The result of the analysis is presented in section 4.

4. Analysis

4.1 Instructional activities represented in the data

To be able to account for the most typical combinations of instructional activities in our data, the instructional activities present must be described. The instructional activities we found in the study comprise of activities which we have denoted as ‘plenary conversation’, ‘teacher lecturing’, ‘reading aloud’, ‘watching video’, ‘seatwork’ and ‘group work’. ‘Plenary conversation’ in the data comprises of conversations between teachers and students in whole-class and is characterized as expository talk on subject matter. The term ‘expository’ is inspired by Alexander (2000) and denotes an explanation or interpretation of subject matter topics: the plenary conversation is sometimes IRE-structured; a conversation consisting of teacher-initiated questions, students’ response and teacher evaluation (Cazden, 1988); and sometimes the questions are open-ended, and the conversation includes students’ experiences, interpretations or opinions (Aasebø, Midtsundstad and Willbergh, 2017). We are aware that expository talk acknowledges students voices to varying degrees, see for example Aasebø, Midtsundstad and Willbergh (2017), but this will not be problematized in this study.

Teachers’ lecturing in the data is characterized by being teachers’ monologic, expository talk.

When *students or teachers read aloud* in these lessons, they usually read from textbooks.

Watching video in the data consists of plenary watching of documentary or fictional videos.

Seatwork consists mainly of students’ individual or pair work, usually with textbook tasks.

When *group work* appears, different work-methods are applied by more than two students, taking place inside or outside the classroom.

Figure 1 shows the occurrence in minutes of different instructional activities in the data. The activities are also classified as plenary activities, individual activities or group activities:

<i>Plenary</i>				<i>Individual</i>	<i>Group</i>	<i>Total</i>
1405				1353	191	2949
Teacher Lecturing	Plenary Conversation	Reading Aloud	Watching Video	Seatwork	Group work	
67	1026	182	130	1353	191	

Fig 1: Minutes used on different instructional activities

Figure 1 shows that the time spent on plenary activities and individual activities in our study is almost equal: about half of the time is spent on plenary teaching, and the other half on seatwork. Plenary conversation is the prevailing form of plenary activity, while teacher lecturing occurs more rarely. Further, the amount of time spent on group work is small in our study, compared to the time spent on seatwork and plenary conversation.

4.2 Combinations of instructional activities

Most of the lessons contain a combination of instructional activities, however, there are lessons consisting of solely seatwork, solely plenary conversation, or solely group work. We call these lessons *unitary lessons*. When we studied the combinations of instructional activities we identified three categories of combinations in the lessons: The first category consists of two instructional activities: *duplex lessons*. The second combinatory category consists of three different instructional activities, and the third of four or more. We call these types of lessons *triadic lessons* and *multiple lessons*.

Total number	Unitary lessons (no combinations)	Duplex lessons	Triadic lessons	Multiple lessons
79	15	29	15	20

Fig 2: The number of combinations of instructional activities in the lessons

As displayed in Figure 2, the most typical combination of instructional activities in the lessons, is the duplex lesson. Most of the duplex lessons consist of a combination of plenary conversation and seatwork, in line with the ‘mixed lessons’ Lindblad and Sahlström (1999) documented as increasing in Sweden from the 70’s to the 90’s. More than half of the duplex lessons started with plenary conversation and changed the scene to seatwork. In the other duplex lessons, we often find other combinations of plenary teaching and student work. Plenary conversation is often included in these lessons.

In the triadic lessons, plenary conversation and seatwork are included in most of them. We find two typical combinations of instructional activities in the triadic lessons: The first resembles the combination plenary conversation-seatwork in the duplex lessons, but with a ‘circular’ twist: plenary conversation or seatwork represents the beginning and the end of the lesson, with the other instructional activity in the middle. The second typical combination in the triadic lessons comprises of three different instructional activities: Most commonly plenary conversation and seatwork are combined with reading aloud.

Multiple lessons occur more frequently in the data than the unitary and the triadic lessons. This combinatory category consists of 3 to 10 changes of scene, and often there is not more than 1-4 minutes working with one method before a shift comes. The subject matter topic is however, usually unitary despite the variable mode of organization. All the work-methods in the data are represented in the multiple lessons, but the methods of plenary conversation, seatwork and reading aloud are the most common ones. Due to the rapid changes of scene in

these lessons combined with a unitary topic, we characterize the structure of these lessons as a *hyper-structure*.

4.3 Sequencing

To be able to study how content is treated in the lessons, how lessons makes sense (Meyer, 2007), the sequencing of the instructional activities and their subsequent treatment of the content also must be investigated, as it makes a difference when it comes to sense-making in what order and how the different activities are chained together. The content treatment in the lessons was analyzed from the recordings of all teachers' and students' subject matter utterances. The most typical combination of lesson structure in our data; the *duplex lessons* starting with plenary conversation and changing the scene to seatwork, had a unitary topic: the same subject matter theme was treated firstly in plenary, and then individually. The plenary conversation taking place in these lessons as data, can be characterized as being expository (Alexander, 2000: p 302): The exposition of subject matter content was teacher led, but was organized as a conversation in which the students participated. The subsequent seatwork-part consisted typically of solving tasks individually or in pairs, mainly from the textbook, practicing the subject matter topic previously exposed in plenary conversation. Consequently, the most typical sequencing found in the data, can consequently be characterized as 'expository- practice'. This pattern was also inherent as smaller units within the triadic and multiple lessons.

4.4 Summary

The most typical combination of instructional activities in the lessons of this study, is the combination plenary conversation-seatwork. When sequencing is considered in this lesson structure, the lesson structure can be characterized as expository-practice. The exposition-part was characterized by teacher-led plenary conversation with student participation. The

subsequent seatwork-part consisted typically of solving tasks, mainly from the textbook, on the subject matter theme previously exposed in the plenary session.

5. The content treatment considered by pedagogical traditions

5.1 Plenary conversation

Below we will discuss how the content-treatment in plenary conversation and the expository-practice-structure can be explained considering relevant pedagogical traditions. As mentioned, our design documented primarily the plenary activities and the subject matter topics of seatwork/practice was documented by tasks and exercises. It must be underlined that the pedagogical traditions considered relevant and chosen here to explain the data, are predominant traditions in Scandinavia. Consequently, we are aware that when plenary conversation and expository-practice-structure occur in classrooms in other parts of the world, they may be rooted in other pedagogical traditions, for example the Confucian tradition in Asia.

The plenary conversation as expository talk on subject matter between teacher and students in whole-class, is sometimes IRE-structured (Cazden, 1988) and sometimes interpretative and associative with open-ended questions. The interpretative conversation in the data can be characterised by being an open dialogue with possibilities for students to bring forth their understanding, experiences, associations, reflections or applications of subject matter (Aasebø, Midtsundstad and Willbergh, 2017).

The plenary conversation as an instructional activity can be traced back to many different pedagogical traditions throughout the ages. Socrates introduced conversational instruction in which the teacher's questions activate the students and make them realize the knowledge within themselves (Hopmann, 2007). The scholastic tradition of Aquinas stressed the importance of oral argumentation. The 'catechetic' tradition of St Augustine was extended by

Lutheranism with predefined questions with predefined answers (Tønnessen, 2011). However, we suggest that the hegemonic position of plenary conversation in our data, mainly can be traced back to two different pedagogical traditions which have had a great impact on the idea of instruction in Scandinavia the last 200 years: the Bildung-centred didactic tradition and the socio-cultural learning theory.

The instructional dialogue holds a strong tradition based on the Bildung-centred didactic tradition of Nicolai S. F. Grundtvig (1783-1872). Grundtvig promoted the use of national language in the classroom, in a ‘living dialogue’ between teachers and students (Midtsundstad and Hopmann, 2011). When students contribute to the plenary conversation in our data, with their own experiences, interpretations and opinions, it is therefore relevant to understand the conversation as a ‘living dialogue’ applying mother tongue creating the class’ local interpretation of subject matter (Willbergh, 2016). Below is an example from the data material which describes a plenum conversation in a science lesson in grade eight on ‘the universe’:

The teacher reads about the Milky Way from a Power Point presentation.

Student: I have seen a star glimmering in red and green

Teacher: Yes, it happens, it has to do with the breaking of light... we will learn about that in the 10th grade, we do not get into that now... but the eye can see 6000 stars

S: Our galaxy is going to crash with another one

T: Yes, but we will not be on earth when that happens... why are the moon shining?

S: It is like a big reflector

T: It reflects the light, that’s good

S: There is a movie about somebody coming from space and then a war is started

As mentioned in part 4.1 the interpretative conversation in the data can be characterised by open dialogue with possibilities for students to bring forth their understanding, experiences, associations, reflections or applications of subject matter (Aasebø, Midtsundstad and Willbergh, 2017). The example above is typical of this associative variant. In the example the students contribute with their experiences and wonderings about the universe (‘star

glimmering in red and green’, ‘our galaxy is going to crash’, ‘movie about somebody coming from space’). The teacher brings in subject matter content (‘the breaking of light’) and acknowledges and encourages them (‘why is the moon shining?’). The classroom conversation appears as interpretative and associative and the open-ended conversation makes a living dialogue, even if the teacher also uses the opportunity to bring in subject matter content and even pose questions to the students that are not open-ended. The conversation takes place as a social event in which many voices participate.

The social aspect of the plenary dialogue in the data can be tempting to trace back to the ideas of the pietistic tradition in Scandinavia, in which the ‘community’ of the class has had an especially strong standing (Midtsundstad and Hopmann, 2011). In the pietistic tradition, the (religious) crowd having a joint experience is of importance, bringing them closer together, enticing all senses. This initially religious heritage of schooling turned more secular in the twentieth century and is inherent in the Scandinavian concept of general education (Grundtvigianism, *Bildung*); enhancing sociability, morality and democratic participation through a joint experience of subject matter (Willbergh, 2015).

When dealing with contemporary data on instruction, as in this study, it is also relevant to emphasise the social aspects of this instructive style to socio-cultural theory as well. Socio-cultural theory, which is concerned with learning, insists that learning is inherently a social process. Socio-cultural theory relies on Lev Vygotsky’s (1896-1934) theoretical approach, in which social interaction is the fundament of human development. It also draws on Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1895-1975) concepts ‘dialogicality’ and ‘multivoicedness’ (Wertsch, 1993). The socio-cultural approach in Norway has mainly been influenced by Lave and Wenger’s theories on situated learning from the 1970’s (Dale, 2008). From the perspective ‘that learning is an integral and inseparable aspect of social practice’ (Lave and Wenger, 1991: p 31), they claim that students’ participation in a community of practice is decisive for learning.

The main concept is language, which is regarded as the fundamental source that makes learning and thinking possible. Consequently, verbal conversation has a considerable value in instruction. To share each other's understanding in the conversation is the most important and fundamental way to carry on knowledge and arguments (Säljö, 2002). Activities such as listening, and conversing are sources of new knowledge and skills (Dysthe, 2001), learner's own activity should not be isolated from the other participants and should be conducted with guidance and support ('scaffolding') (Säljö, 2002).

It seems like the two different pedagogical traditions, the Scandinavian version of the Bildung-centred didactic tradition, and the socio-cultural theory of learning mutually strengthen the value of plenary conversation which is a strong element in the data, and act as part of a dominant discourse on instruction which is about sociability before individuality.

5.2 The expository-practice-structure

When the development of the content in the lessons of this study, is observed as a process turning from exposition by plenary conversation (Alexander, 2000), to individual practicing by textbooks tasks, it is tempting to argue that modern instruction in classrooms also can be understood considering the influential pedagogy of Johann Friedrich Herbart's (1776-1841) principles of instruction (Herbart and Stern, 2002): Instruction should bring forward students' previous knowledge (clarity), on which new knowledge is built (association). Then the newly acquired knowledge is put in relation to a wider knowledge domain (system) and finally students practice the newly acquired knowledge and skills (method). Herbart's intention was moral education, and not to implement a formal recipe for lesson structure. However, the formal sequencing of 'herbartianism', the American interpretation of Herbart, still lives in the research tradition of instructional design (Merrill, 2002).

In the lessons of this study it can be claimed that the expository phase holds traits of being clarifying, associative and system-oriented. IRE-conversation and shared interpretation can be clarifying as it brings forward students' previous knowledge and experience with the subject matter. Associative and system-oriented as new knowledge is linked to previous knowledge in a joint experience, as the class' shared interpretation of the subject matter; an interpretation with associative dimensions. Finally, the methods-part in our material represented by students' individual work with textbook tasks. This structure can be illustrated with the following example of a lesson structure described in observation notes from a science lesson in 9th grade:

10:22 AM: Plenary session on the topic on the nervous system of the human body: Plenary conversation on students' experiences with mosquito-stings, as well as homework on reading about stings as illustration of the human nervous system.

10:31 AM: Plenary session on the human nervous system as a whole: parts of the brain, brain stem, spinal cord, motor- and sensory functions and so on.

10:51 AM: Individual seatwork on the human nervous system, the students work individually with tasks in the textbook.

11:00 AM: Students leave for a break.

In this example the clarifying phase is made up of students' previous experiences (mosquito stings) and readings beforehand (homework). The topic is further exposed in an associative and system-oriented way when the teacher lectures on the human nervous system. The lesson ends with 'methods' seen from the Herbartian perspective: individual work with textbook tasks on the topic of the lesson.

As this type of plenary session illustrated above, happens immediately before the practicing of individual textbook tasks; lesson after lesson, day after day, in all the four schools in the data, it is as if the lesson structure tells a story of the social as a prerequisite for individual work. This aspect of the expository-practice-structure can thus be labelled as a form of hidden curriculum (Kelly, 2009) telling a story of 'sociability before individuality'. It is as if the

overall message of this daily grind is that to be able to practice the subject matter, the topic must be deliberated in the community first. We will return to this hidden curriculum in the discussion-part.

5.3 Summary

We claim that the the content-treatment of the expository-practice structure can be explained by a dominant discourse of ‘sociability before practice’ in Norwegian schools, rooted in the Scandinavian version of Bildung-centred didactics, sociocultural theory and herbartianism. The expository-practice structure as hidden curriculum seems to appear as a strong tradition in the schools of our study. We consider the tradition to be a synthesis, or a fusion, of different pedagogical traditions. These traditions are likely to be transferred into schools as tacit knowledge on teaching shared by teachers and students. Concludingly, the tradition acts as a dominating and powerful discourse of teaching, while the origin of the discourse is not stated and necessarily made explicit to the teachers. In the data material the idea of ‘sociability before individuality’ is the dominating teaching discourse to all the teachers and in all the academic subjects, while time spent on plenary talk versus individual work/seat work may differ in different subjects, as Reichenberg (2016) and Toppol (2012) have described.

6 Discussion

We found that the most typical lesson structure in our material was the duplex lesson comprising of a content-treatment characterized as ‘expository-practice’. We claimed that this lesson structure can be explained by a fusion of strong pedagogical traditions in Scandinavia, representing a hidden curriculum we denote as ‘sociability before practice’. Below we will relate our findings to recent Scandinavian classroom research, discuss the challenges we can see regarding the livelihood of this hidden curriculum and comment on the limitations of lesson structure research.

Scandinavian classroom research has detected an increase in the rate of seatwork versus plenary teaching (Klette, 1998; Eriksson, 1999; Eriksson and Heideman, 2013; Lindblad and Sahlström, 1999; Granström, 2003; Dalland and Klette, 2016; Bachmann, Haug and Myklebust, 2010). To reveal such an increase, or decrease, would require quantitative studies, and cannot be argued from qualitative studies of eight teachers in four schools, such as ours. However, the most typical combination of instructional activities found in our study, was the plenary conversation-seatwork structure, and these two instructional activities were the most time-consuming in the data. By studying the content treatment in the lessons, and revealing a hidden curriculum, this study revealed a new perspective on the 'Scandinavian' mixed lessons that Lindblad and Sahlström (1999) found in Swedish schools from the 90's: An additional perspective on how lessons make sense (Meyer, 2007) appears, an overall message that to be able to practice the subject matter, the topic must be deliberated in the community first. Thus, this paper contributed to the need expressed by Klette (2007) to bridge content with interaction in classrooms. It seems to us that the study of the content treatment in lesson structures opens a space for studying the ideological discourses behind the structures of lessons.

Regarding ideology, in Norway neo-liberal governance of compulsory schooling was introduced after the turn of the millennium, by an accountability-system containing national test and a competence-based curriculum in 2006 (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2006; 2018). Although the Norwegian system can be characterised as a low-stakes system of assessment, the idea of teaching to promote competences and bringing in more monitoring and testing is still challenging for schools. As mentioned in the introduction, the influence of individualization due to neo-liberalism in education is a source of worry for Scandinavian classroom research (Carlgren et. al., 2006; Bachmann, Haug and Myklebust, 2010). It is also a growing worry that content will be subordinated to learning outcomes in

instruction, due to the wording of the competence-based curricula (Mølstad and Karseth, 2016). Considering the findings of this paper, these worries are not surprising. If our discovery of the dominant discourse of ‘sociability before individuality’ also applies for educational researchers, the threat of neo-liberalism obviously clashes with values of Scandinavian schooling, as Norwegian teachers and educational researchers are not familiar with competences and assessment (Midtsundstad & Werler, 2011). However, what is apparent when we look at how the content is treated in the instructional activities of this study, and how they can be explained considering relevant pedagogical traditions, is that the discourse of ‘sociability before individuality’ bridles the influence of outcome-based instructional activities. Outcome-oriented instruction is rather adapted and subordinated to the dominant discourse. When the expository-practice structure includes plenary IRE-sequences (Cazden, 1988) with predefined answers, an outcome-based reproductive line of thinking is indicated (Aasebø, Midtsundstad and Willbergh, 2017). But the interpretative dialogue is also strongly present, with a treatment of subject matter-topics that can be explained by progressivist and constructivist approaches to pedagogy.

As mentioned in part 4 of the paper, regarding the practice part of the expository-practice structure, we discovered that this part of the lessons was characterized by individual or pair-work with textbook tasks. This is also interesting regarding the debate on outcome-based education and neo-liberal ideology, as the textbooks are written to answer to the demand of the curriculum. Therefore, we cannot disregard the possibility that the seatwork we observed in the classrooms was outcome-based. However, regarding student differentiation, the textbooks are limited as they do not contain tasks that are individually adapted. Consequently, our study offers a nuancing perspective on the claim that the increased time spent on seatwork can be explained by the individualization inherent in neo-liberal policy on the educational sector (Carlgren et al., 2006; Bachmann, Haug and Myklebust, 2010). In addition, we could

not detect a dominant practice of student work plans in our study (Dalland and Klette, 2014, 2016). The students had work-plans in the form of plans for the week with learning outcomes adapted to them, but this was not the object of much attention in the lessons.

Regarding forces capable of challenging the livelihood of the dominant discourse of ‘sociability before practice’, we suspect that one of the other significant lesson structures we exposed in the data, the ‘multiple lesson structure’, can represent such a challenge. This lesson structure can be characterised as ‘hyper-structure’, denoting an exaggerated pace and over-active style of teaching (hyper in ancient Greek: over or above). The subject matter topic at hand in these lessons is subject to great variation and frequent interruption, not unlike the hyper media structure found in computer programs and popular youth culture (Buckingham, 2000; Sørensen, 2000; Veen & Vrakking, 2006; Ziehe, 2000). In principle, there might be elements of exposition and practice within the different activities in the hyper-structured lessons, but it may also imply fragmentation of knowledge and disturbances for learning. We assume that this is a form of lesson structure with potential to challenge the expository-practice structure, due to the subject matter topic at hand is subject to great variation, frequent interruption in an almost ‘casual’ style. The hyper-structure is harder to explain by pedagogical theoretical traditions, as the pace of shifts bears no resemblance to the most important influences on Scandinavian pedagogy mentioned above. Thus, the presence of hyper-structure in Norwegian Lower Secondary lessons must be explained by educational policy. ‘Varied instructional activities’ has been suggested as a Norwegian solution to students’ school motivation and boredom due to students’ hunger for variety (Grepperud, 2000; Ombudsman, 1999), with hope of increased learning outcomes (Birkemo, 2000). To solve students’ boredom with variety in instruction has become a mantra also for the government. A strategy plan which stressed the importance of ‘varied instructional activities’ as a tool to raise motivation and fight boredom in students, was implemented in schools in

2012 (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2012), the first year of this study's data collection, based on a White paper from the previous year which stressed the need of raising the level of motivation in Norwegian Secondary Education (Meld. St. nr 22, (2010-2011)). Varied instructional activities is also a solution for 'Adapted Learning', which is characterized by variation in use of content, methods and textbooks as well as organizing and intensity (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2006). In the long run, the 'hyper structure' may challenge the dominant discourse of 'sociability before practice', but it may also challenge the expressed desire to implement the concept of 'deep learning' in future Norwegian curricula, underlining that students should immerse themselves in knowledge over time (Meld. St. nr 28, ((2016) 28 (2015-2016): p 33).

As mentioned, research on lesson structure questions whether the lesson is a fruitful object of inquiry (Anderson-Levitt, 2004; Clarke et al., 2007). This is a relevant question to ask considering the results of this study as well. In contrast to Maulana's et al. study (2012), we find that instructional beginnings and endings are absent in our data. The lack of clear framing is also an aspect of what we called unitary lessons (lessons with no shifts in instructional activities), where exercises or discussions can be continuities of instructional activities that began the lesson before, the lesson last week, or the like. In addition, the triadic lessons (lessons with three instructional activities) apply much of the same combinations of instructional activities as in the duplex plenary conversation-seatwork-lessons, opening a possibility that the right unit of study could be the sequence of lessons following each other. Based on these observations, it can be argued that such studies of larger sequences of lessons is needed. However, it can contrarily be argued that such more encompassing studies should be based on studies of lessons, as the macro-perspective of instruction over a period can be built on studies of lessons, rather than on studies of turn-taking on a micro-level.

7 Conclusion

The first research question of this paper was: What is the typical combination of instructional activities in the lessons of eight teachers in four Norwegian Secondary schools? We found that the most typical combination of instructional activities, was the plenary conversation-seatwork structure. When we studied the sequencing, we revealed a lesson structure with plenary conversation being a mix of IRE-reproductive conversation and shared interpretative dialogue, and seatwork with textbook tasks. The typical sequencing of the plenary-conversation-seatwork-lessons we called expository-practice, as the general exposition of the subject matter topic most commonly preceded individual work with the same topic.

The second research question was: How can the content-treatment of this structure be explained considering relevant pedagogical traditions? We traced the form of plenary conversation-seatwork revealed here; the expository-practice structure; back to progressive-constructivist pedagogical theories, foremost the Scandinavian version of Bildung-centred general didactics, Vygotsky-inspired socio-cultural theory and herbartianism. When taking the sequencing into account, we found traces of herbartianism in the data. However, we stress that this is a herbartianism with a Scandinavian progressive-constructivist twist to it, which we have interpreted as a hidden curriculum called ‘sociability before individuality’.

We conclude that the instruction in our data from Norwegian Secondary Schools is more traditional than what was expected, and that the influence of neo-liberal policy, individualization and outcome-based instruction is present but not dominant. This does not mean that the ‘threat’ of neo-liberalism to schooling should be called off but it tells us that maybe the train has not left the station yet. Finally, we identified a challenge to the expository-practice structure and the hidden curriculum of ‘sociability before practice’,

namely the 'hyper structure', which we suspect that can be explained by policy needs rather than pedagogy.

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