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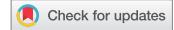
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Construction of ethnicity, immigration and associated concepts in Swedish vocational education and training

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ABSTRACT

Surges of migration into Sweden and other European countries have raised needs to adjust civic education to provide Bernsteinian pedagogic rights of enhancement, participation and inclusion, both generally and in VET specifically. However, associated issues have received little research attention even in countries with colonial histories and longer traditions of immigration and non-native ethnic minorities. Moreover, most published empirical studies on race and ethnicity issues in VET have had Anglophone settings. Thus, research in other contexts is needed to broaden understanding and distinguish between general and context-specific aspects.

This article addresses gaps in knowledge of the construction and significance of race and ethnicity in VET, particularly in Swedish contexts. First, it examines how critical understandings of being an immigrant, immigration and ethnicity are constructed in pedagogic practices in Swedish VET programmes, then analyses students' and teachers' discussion of these issues. Content related to immigration and ethnicity was sparse in monitored VET classes, but the presence of immigrants increased instances of both spontaneous and planned content. We conclude that pedagogic practices do not reflect the large increase in numbers of students in Swedish schools with immigrant backgrounds, and greater intercultural awareness is needed to safeguard their pedagogic and general democratic rights.

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Recently, as well documented in the media, there has been a strong surge of migration into Europe. In 2015, for example, 76.1 million people with a migrant background were living in Europe, 389,000 children applied for asylum in 32 European countries, and 2.8 million people sought refuge or asylum in these countries (UN 2016). Recipients of the largest numbers of refugees and asylum seekers were Germany (ca. 700,000) followed by Sweden, France and the Russian Federation (ca. 300,000 each) (UN 2016; see also Rosvall 2017). This has multi-level consequences for all socio-economic sectors in all European societies. This paper addresses aspects of its impact on education, and more specifically vocational education and training (VET), in Sweden. Although there was a similar wave of refugee migration during the wars in former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, there has been little research concerning refugee immigrants in VET in Sweden (Beach and Lunneblad 2011; Mikander, Zilliacus, and Holm 2018). Moreover, associated issues have received little research attention even in countries with a colonial history and longer traditions of immigration and non-native ethnic minorities (Avis, Orr, and Warmington 2017). Statistics showing numbers of immigrants who have continued from

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compulsory education to upper secondary level and higher education in Sweden and elsewhere have been compiled (Avis, Orr, and Warmington 2017; Skolverket 2016). A few studies have also considered how VET pedagogic practices deal (or fail to deal) with immigration and ethnicity issues in Sweden and other countries (Onsando and Billett 2017; Rosvall and Öhrn 2014). The findings indicate, *inter alia*, that some immigrants do not choose the VET route because some VET programmes (particularly male-dominated programmes) are especially associated with derogatory attitudes towards immigrants (Beicht and Walden 2017; Rosvall and Öhrn 2014). However, the research is sparse, and most empirical studies on race and ethnicity published in international journals that cover VET have had Anglophone settings (Avis, Orr, and Warmington 2017). Thus, research on relevant phenomena in other contexts is needed to broaden understanding of the phenomena and distinguish between general and context-specific aspects.

The overall objective of this paper is to reduce the gaps in knowledge of the construction and significance of race and ethnicity in VET generally and particularly in non-Anglophone contexts by reporting insights obtained in the second part of the ongoing research project 'Critical education in vocational subjects? Civic knowledge in vocational programmes, policy documents and classrooms'. Aims, investigations and findings of the first part of the project have been previously reported (for publications of part one see Ledman, Rosvall, and Nylund 2018; Nylund, Rosvall, and Ledman 2017). The paper has two specific aims. The first is to examine how civic education is constructed, in terms of critical understandings of being an immigrant, immigration and ethnicity, in pedagogic practices in courses that are specific components of the Swedish VET programmes. The second is to analyse how this content is discussed by students and teachers. Thus, both informants with immigrant experience and members of the majority society are of interest.

The Swedish VET context and theoretical framework

Vocational education in Sweden is particularly interesting because Nordic countries are often portrayed as socially just societies with educational systems that strongly promote equality (Holm 2018; Lappalainen and Lahelma 2015). In Sweden, this is manifested in a comprehensive school system in which students all follow the same curriculum until the age of 15–16 years when they select a track to follow in upper-secondary school. Post-war Swedish education policy prioritised the preparation of all students for life as active, critical workers and citizens, and reforms were implemented to reduce distinctions between vocational and academic education, creating a less stratified educational system (Hickox and Lyon 1998). In 1971, vocational education was integrated into the upper-secondary school system, and Sweden's first joint upper-secondary curriculum (Lgy70) was created. Under this regime, vocational education became, until recently, progressively broader, more generalised, and less tied to specified tasks or occupations. From an international perspective, Sweden's VET system has thus been regarded as relatively undifferentiated from more academic pathways (Brockmann, Clarke, and Winch 2010; Protsch and Solga 2016). However, the influence of neo-liberal ideas in political processes in recent decades has shifted the distribution of wealth and the balance of power in societies (Avis 2016; Hickox and Moore 1992). The Swedish 'class compromise', as in other Nordic countries (Isopahkala-Bouret, Lappalainen, and Lahelma 2014; Nylund et al. 2018), seems to have been somewhat abandoned in this process as capital has become more powerful at the expense of labour (Wahl 2011). In parallel, the policy of promoting unification and citizenship has become marginalised in favour of promoting goals such as competition and employability. In Sweden, this was especially manifested in a reform introduced in 2011 that, for the first time in many decades, sharpened the division between vocational and academic tracks. For example, the general eligibility for higher education that vocational programmes provided was abolished, and the general courses they included were reduced. The 2011 curriculum states the general ethical and democratic values steering upper secondary education in the first few pages (5–16 of 202) and stipulates that they must be implemented in all pedagogic practice. Thus, they are not repeated in syllabi for specific subjects

and there are no specific instructions concerning how they should be implemented. An implication is that civic education should be included in VET programmes in relation to workplace relevance. This triggered our interest in the extent and nature of learning processes that can be characterized as civic education in VET subjects, particularly in Sweden, and hence initiation of the 'Critical education in vocational subjects? Civic knowledge in vocational programmes, policy documents and classrooms' project.

In this paper, we focus specifically on civic education in terms of critical understandings of immigration and ethnicity. We use Bernstein's (2000) theory of the pedagogic device, i.e. the ensemble of rules or procedures via which knowledge is converted into classroom talk, curricula and communication (Singh 2002). In VET research the theory is particularly useful because 'the secret voice of this device is to disguise the fact that there is only one [discourse]. Most researchers are continually studying the two, or thinking as if there are two: as if education is about values on the one hand and competence on the other' (Bernstein 2000, 32). Analysis of VET is particularly prone to such division of discourse, as VET is intended to provide education and training for specific occupations, and there is a need to transfer knowledge of both workplace values and workplace competence. To understand the rules (distributive, regulative and evaluative) involved, Bernsteinian theory provides us with the concepts of *classification*, referring to the strength of boundaries between categories, and *framing*, referring to the knowledge transfer and acquisition processes involved in teachers' and students' daily practices. The key elements of *classification* in the settings examined here are whether knowledge regarding immigration and ethnicity is considered important, and if so what type(s) of knowledge. The key elements of *framing* are who controls the selection of communicated issues regarding immigration and ethnicity, and whether they are communicated as spontaneous content (usually initiated by students) or planned content (usually initiated by teachers).

In this work we do not apply strict definitions of immigrant, ethnicity or related issues. Thus, we do not regard being an immigrant or ethnicity as a 'reified object that can be measured as if it were a simple biological entity. [We rather see it as] a construction, a set of fully social relationships' (Apple, quoted in Avis, Orr, and Warmington 2017). The aim of the ongoing project is to analyse critical thinking in vocational subjects in a broad sense, aligned with the triptych of pedagogic rights (enhancement, participation and inclusion) conceptualized by Bernstein (2000). According to Bernstein, the first pedagogic right, individual enhancement, is 'the means of critical understanding and to seeing new possibilities' and access to it expands personal horizons, resulting in 'confidence' (Bernstein 2000, xx). The second pedagogic right, social inclusion, is 'to be included socially, intellectually, culturally and personally [including] the right [to be] autonomous' (Bernstein 2000, xx), and results in a sense of belonging. Civic education illuminates the interaction between individuals and social systems or structures. This knowledge allows students to gain insight into and ask questions about why people, including themselves, are as they are. The third pedagogic right is political participation 'in the construction, maintenance and transformation of social order' (Bernstein 2000, xxi). The pedagogic rights are analysed by using the concepts of classification and framing (Bernstein 1990, 2000). In other words, using concepts associated with the pedagogic device, we have analysed the classification and framing of civic education, in terms of the construction of critical understandings of being an immigrant, immigration and ethnicity, in pedagogic practices in Swedish VET. We also consider implications of these phenomena for the students' potential to participate in the construction and transformation of social order.

Methods

The data the article is based upon were ethnographically produced, through classroom observations (85 field days), interviews with students (N = 87), teachers (N = 10) and heads (N = 4) and collecting teaching material. Four researchers adopted a collective ethnographic approach (Gordon et al. 2006). More specifically, each of two researchers followed two VET classes, and each of

Table 1. Numbers of immigrants in each class sorted by programme. Immigrant background is defined as born abroad or born in Sweden with both parents born abroad. Students with unknown background are not considered here. The class numbers (1 and 2 for each category) are arbitrary designations.

	Health & Social Care	Vehicle & Transport	Restaurant Management
Nos. of students	Class 1: 23 Class 2: 12 Total: 35	Class 1: 15 Class 2: 16 Total: 31	Class 1: 15 Class 2: 14 Total: 29
Nos. with immigrant background	Class 1: 15 Class 2: 8 Total: 23	None	Class 1: 0 Class 2: 2 Total: 2

another two followed one VET class. Thus, six classes were followed in total: two Vehicle & Transport programme classes, two Restaurant Management classes and two Health & Social Care classes. Each researcher also made a smaller pilot study in one programme each, with observations, student and teacher interviews. Numbers of students with immigrant backgrounds in the followed VET classes are presented in [Table 1](#), pilot studies excluded.

The reforms of 2011 strengthened Swedish VET programmes ties to working life and increased their focus on apprenticeships, competition, employability and employer's influence over the curriculum (Nylund, Rosvall, and Ledman 2017). Thus, we focused on courses that were solely components of VET programmes, and how the content of those courses was discussed by students and teachers both in formal interviews and between lessons, as recorded by digital devices and recorded in field notes, respectively.

The empirical investigation involved the development, implementation and continual evaluation of a characteristic ethnographic spiral of research planning and reflection, data production and analysis, new planning, and further data production and analysis (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Walford 2008). During the analytical process, each researcher read individual fieldwork narratives and interview transcripts carefully to identify the main concepts and ideas, and their possible relationships and general implications, focusing on critical understandings of being an immigrant, immigration and ethnicity issues. Then reflexive interpretations were developed through jointly planned and collective discussions. Field notes and excerpts of interviews have been chosen and discussed by the research group to exemplify both general and specific phenomena. In the first step (cf. Charmaz 2014; Walford 2008) of the reading we paid attention to critical observed incidents involving constructions of being an immigrant, immigration and ethnicity. We also paid attention to silences – focusing on what was left unsaid. Throughout the process Bernstein's pedagogic device was an important element of the analytical framework, as described above. However, an important aspect (the immigrants' lack of linguistic proficiency in Swedish) is ignored, because it has so many facets such as schedule, speed, instructions, and peer interaction that it warrants specific analysis and will be addressed in forthcoming publications.

Immigrants in VET generally in Sweden and the focal classes

People have diverse reasons for emigrating, and immigrants with differing motives and origins are unevenly distributed among the European countries. For example, France and Great Britain have more immigrants from their former colonies, while most Swedish immigrants are refugees (SCB 2017). According to Swedish statistics and research on academic routes, most immigrants have high academic aims and hopes for subsequent status, which are reflected in their educational and job choices (Skolverket 2017). However, progress towards their goals is often reportedly hindered by multiple problems and weak support (Lundahl et al. 2015). Vocational education does not usually have high status either generally or among immigrants. In Sweden, fewer immigrants generally choose vocational education than native Swedish peers of similar social background and gender (Skolverket 2017). Variations in cultural understandings of professions may contribute

to this pattern, because (for example) some professions are learned through apprenticeships in some countries and through upper secondary education in others (cf. Orupabo 2018).

Proportions of immigrants enrolled in Swedish upper secondary programmes also vary. Of students starting in 2016/17, 23.8% who chose one of the six higher education preparatory programmes had an immigrant background and just 18.2% of those who chose one of the 12 VET programmes. In this article, our interest is in the vocational programmes, where the proportions of immigrant students also vary. Nationally, 37% of the Health & Social Care students have immigrant backgrounds, but only 6% of the Natural Resources Use students, according to Skolverket (2017). The traditionally female-dominated vocational programmes have relatively high proportions of immigrant students: Health & Social Care has the highest, but the Business & Administration, Child & Recreation, and Hotel & Tourism programmes also have quite high proportions (27, 21 and 21%, respectively). The male-dominated programmes usually have lower proportions of students with immigrant backgrounds: Vehicle & Transport (15%), Electricity & Energy (18%), Building & Construction (12%). Restaurant Management, which attracts a more balanced mix of females and males, also has a low proportion of immigrants (11%) (Skolverket 2017). Several factors are known, assumed or suspected to contribute to this pattern. Immigrants' low attraction to VET programmes generally is apparently related to their high aspirations in the 'new' country, which may offer far greater educational opportunities than their previous environments, for example for refugee immigrants (Jonsson and Rudolphi 2011). As mentioned above, cultural differences could also account for some of immigrants' low attraction to VET. In addition, proportions of immigrants selecting several of the male-dominated trades, such as Construction and Vehicle Maintenance, may be low because they have stronger than average associations with racism according to both media reports (Ahmadi, Palm, and Ahmadi 2016; Grindal 2018) and academic research (Arneback and Nylund 2017; Rosvall and Öhrn 2014). As stated in the *Methods* section, the classes followed in our project roughly followed the outlined pattern, as there were relatively few (or no) students with an immigrant background in the Restaurant Management and Vehicle & Transport classes, and more in the Health & Social Care classes.

Important structuring factors of upper secondary education, with further important implications, include the historically gendered associations of some trades and professions. Most male-dominated vocational programmes in Sweden provide good prospects for employment with a reasonable wage, status and a career. In male-dominated trades, capacity building is usually provided by private academies offering short courses during employment, with no requirements for upper secondary merits or university degree credentials. One such example is 'The Volvo academy', which provides courses in vehicle maintenance. The female-dominated trades such as Health & Social Care and Child & Recreation also provide good employment prospects, but with less good wages, status and career prospects. Capacity-building usually involves a longer university programme (at least three years), which requires special upper secondary merits (cf. Nilsson 2010). In our observed classes (in both the pilot and main studies) the shares of immigrants were highest in the Health & Social Care classes. Responses of students to questions about their thoughts on future occupations and careers revealed major differences among the classes. Very few in the Restaurant Management and Vehicle & Transport classes were considering higher education. In contrast, almost all Health & Social Care students, with either native Swedish or immigrant backgrounds, said that they were considering taking a University degree, either directly after upper secondary school or after working for a couple of years. In Sweden, VET programmes do not automatically provide eligibility for university, but all schools are supposed to provide options to take the required courses. Most Health & Social Care students of Swedish origin took those courses or considered taking them when offered. However, a few Health & Social Care students with immigrant background did not attend and/or intended to postpone university studies because of their lack of confidence

in the Swedish language. Even though the result presentation not started yet, we would like to present some examples. In the following interview excerpts, both students born in Sweden and students born abroad comment on immigrant background and eligibility for university studies:

- Interviewer: Will you take courses to get eligibility for university studies?
 The students in chorus: Yes!
 Interviewer: How common is it for people in the class to take those courses?
 One girl: The immigrants don't. (Interview, pilot study, three Swedish-born girls, Health & Social Care programme)
- Interviewer: Is assistant nurse your first choice of occupation?
 Boy, immigrant background: I'll work as an assistant nurse for a while. Meanwhile I'll take courses to get eligibility for university to be able to study to be a specialist nurse. When I came to Sweden I was analphabetic. Now I've struggled with Swedish and English. I need to rest my brain before continuing with university studies. (Interview, two boys, immigrant background, Health & Social Care programme)

As noted in these excerpts, fewer students with immigrant backgrounds attended courses required for higher education. The boy quoted above specifically mentioned illiteracy when he arrived in Sweden as a reason for postponing university education. However, the immigrant students mentioned several reasons for postponing university studies, two being lack of linguistic proficiency and inimical social relations.

Results

The study has been structured by the research questions. Thus, the presentation of results here starts with analysis of when constructions of being an immigrant, immigration and ethnicity occurred in the observed pedagogic practices. We then turn to how the processes were discussed by students and teachers. In this section, to increase the readability of the text, we sometimes use the concept of ethnicity broadly when referring to being an immigrant, immigration and ethnicity in general.

Part 1: pedagogic practice

Ethnicity arising as spontaneous content in the pedagogic practice

As stated above, there are variations in the focal programmes' traditional recruitment of students with immigrant backgrounds, as proportions of immigrants are highest in Health & Social Care classes, intermediate in Restaurant Management classes and very low in Vehicle & Transport classes. Accordingly, spontaneous content related to ethnicity was most common in Health & Social Care classes and we have no recorded incidences of its inclusion in Vehicle & Transport classes. Some of the content that spontaneously arose in observed incidents (mainly in the Health & Social Care classes) concerned cultural differences, in use of naturopathic drugs for example, encapsulated in comments such as 'In Sweden you do this, but where I come from we do this.', as in the following excerpt:

Each student is supposed to simulate an injury. Helen simulates having a wrenched ankle, Mabrouk an infection caused by a splinter, and Sajid a wound caused by a knife. They discuss how to treat each injury. The students are very active and inventive. They seem capable and knowledgeable, washing and using compression bandages. The boys with immigrant backgrounds give suggestions that *seem* to surprise the teacher. She says that she has not heard of suggested remedies, such as putting a warm onion over the ear to cure otitis, tying something around the head to alleviate headache, or spreading toothpaste or egg over a burn. When they discuss if toothpaste alleviates burns Bahar says: "You don't do that at the hospital. It's at home." The teacher adds: "It might be so, but here it is scientifically tested methods that we discuss." (Field note, Health & Social Care programme).

In this example the teacher dismisses the experience of the immigrant students as irrelevant, since the remedies they describe are not scientifically approved, and ends the discussion. Examples of

such differences linked to the culture of the immigrant students were raised on several occasions, mostly in Health & Social Care classes. However, there were also some examples (mostly related to food) in the Restaurant Management classes.

During the lecture on slaughtering animals, the teacher starts comparing different methods of slaughter and asks if the students know what Halal is. A student answers that it means slaughtering in a certain way. Another says, 'Hanging up'. The teacher elaborates by explaining that Halal involves emptying the animals of blood and compares it (with their idea of) Sami slaughtering practices and collection of the blood. (Field note, Restaurant and Management)

The student from Asia quite often refers to Asian food. He says it is because he does not know much about Swedish food, which he wants to learn more about how to prepare. (Field note, Restaurant and Management)

Thus, examples of cultural differences relative to the students' immigrant background (mainly related to the occupational field of their programmes) were observed in both Health & Social Care and Restaurant Management classes. When content related to ethnicity arose spontaneously, in most cases it seemed to be classified as relevant, and if it was dismissed it mainly seemed to be due to framing reasons, i.e. disturbing the pace or structure of the planned content.

As already mentioned, cultural content was observed in both Health & Social Care and Restaurant Management classes, but not in Vehicle & Transport classes. Moreover, content concerning social issues such as xenophobia or racism in society, at workplaces or in school, was only recorded in the Health & Social Care classes, as in the following example:

Today there are two teachers, they introduce an integrated task about work environment. [...]. One teacher says, "imagine you are introducing a new colleague at the workplace". Out of the blue, one of the students says, "There may be racism there as well". The teacher looks a little bit confused but affirms the student's comment by answering, "Yes, at some workplaces there may be xenophobia." The student persists, "There may be racism." The teacher glances at the other teacher, who is standing and straightens her back when she gets the glance, looks the student in the eyes and says, "Yes, may be racism, and that is important when talking about the work environment." The teachers then continue introducing the new theme. [...] Later when they talk about the task, both the teachers and students bring up issues related to racism. The second teacher uses the term racism, the first switches between racism and xenophobia, and sometimes hesitates before using one of the words. (Field note, Health & Social Care programme)

When discussion arose around racism and xenophobic content there was no derogatory language or comments between students in the Health & Social Care classes. However, one teacher mentioned that ethnic groups could sometimes be addressed:

Teacher: Sometimes they say things like, 'You Somalis, be quiet over there!' But it's said in a humorous way, when students disturb other students. It's humorous because they've never said not to do group work with someone because of ethnicity. (Interview, teacher, Health & Social Care)

No xenophobic comments were heard during the observation period in the Restaurant Management classes either, but an incident in one of the Restaurant Management classes was mentioned in both informal discussions during field work and later in interviews. One of the students made what he thought was a joke that included a racist association and the teacher responded by asking him to leave the classroom. This was the only recorded occurrence of openly expressed xenophobia or racism in the pedagogic practices. As it was mentioned in the student interviews, we will return to it as well as other comments in interviews with Vehicle & Transport and Restaurant Management students that could be regarded as xenophobic. However, it should be noted that racist remarks or behaviours observed in earlier VET research have often been reportedly dismissed as jokes and goofing around, or not intentionally hurtful (Pihl et al. 2018; Rosvall and Öhrn 2014). In contrast, in the mentioned case the racist comment was met with a strong stance against ethnic discrimination and racism, with the student being asked to leave the classroom.

Ethnicity arising as planned content in the pedagogic practice

Like the spontaneous content pattern, there were some observed cases of planned content raising questions of ethnicity, immigrant background or racism in the Restaurant Management and Health & Social Care classes, but not in the Vehicle & Transport classes. In the Restaurant Management classes, these questions again arose mainly as parts of a cultural theme:

The teacher is introducing the Food & Nutrition course and tries to problematize both production and consumption with historical and cultural perspectives. The question of whether or not meat eating is natural engages the pupils, and also the sorts of animals that are considered edible in different cultures. Student A – “We’re made for eating meat.” Student B – ‘No’. Teacher: “What is normal to eat is different. In India, cows are holy animals. In Iceland, they eat brains. One does that in many places, that’s good, right? In Vietnam they eat dogs. But in Sweden we eat pigs.” (Field note, Restaurant & management)

An important observation is that the teacher cites apparently normalised practices in different cultures and other practices that might be restricted due to cultural norms.

In instances of planned content including ethnicity and associated issues, cultural differences were classified as important, but there were also examples of important framing of tasks in terms of meeting ‘the other’. For example, one of the Health & Social Care classes included a theme on the elderly and differences in the understanding of aging around the world:

The teacher introduces the portrayal of elders in Swedish society and how it can differ in other cultures around the world. The teacher says she wants to illuminate elders’ health on individual and group levels as well as societal level. [...] Afterwards she summarises the lesson as it prompts an interesting discussion since many of the students have experiences from other cultures. She remarks that the immigrant students are assets for the group since they allow the native students to see the accustomed understandings and norms they have grown up through other eyes. (Field note, Health & Social Care)

The teachers in one of the schools referred to it as a multicultural school. The experience of working with immigrants also affected the pedagogic content and what was classified as important. There had been incidents of honour-based violence involving students from the school. Some students at the school lived with protected identity.

In the last lesson the students watched a movie as an introduction to this class. It includes two parallel storylines, one about honour-based violence and one about violence in close relationships. Both storylines problematise violence against women and interactions with the surrounding society, its culture and norms. The first as close family members push a young woman to suicide in the name of honour, the second as another woman meets silence and exclusion from friends and workplace colleagues when she reports her husband to the police. The teacher starts a lecture and problematizes different concepts as individualised culture and group culture, honour-based violence and psychological, social and physical violation. In terms of honour-based violence the teacher points out that it has nothing to do with Islam *per se*, but relates it to certain (Muslim) groups and parts of the world. The teacher relates group culture to Muslim societies and individual culture to protestant or secular societies. The framing is a bit forced and the teacher sometimes asks, “Do you have any questions?” without waiting for an answer. The teacher is the one who talks, or directs a question (with a given answer) to a student, i.e. the teacher controls the communication. (Field note, Health & Social Care)

Since socially challenging questions are frequently avoided in pedagogic practices, according to previous studies (Beicht and Walden 2017; Rosvall and Öhrn 2014), we admire the teacher for raising them and classifying knowledge of associated issues as important. However, as researchers our task is to analyse possible consequences of pedagogic practices. It is important to acknowledge the students’ interest in discussing difficult social matters and learn from the experiences of others. Moreover, it is important, as noted elsewhere (Anthias 2013, 334):

[...] not to divest it [honour based violence] of its gendered aspects, viewing such crimes as the result of cultural values rather than practices of gender-based violence more widely. The problematization of difference and diversity is especially clear here, where there exists a thorough culturalization of the social issues involved and their depiction as only related to the ‘other’. To critique such culturalization is not to deny problems of such gendered crimes or issues they raise about gender equality, however. This discourse stigmatizes minorities, and particularly Muslims, seeing them as a threat to Western values and national interests. It also

indicates how gender is often at the heart of culturalist constructions of collectivities. Indeed the culturalization of violence against women means that individual cases are seen as representing collective patterns and leads to demonization of the whole culture.

However, the discussion following the film in the lesson described above primarily culturalised honour-based violence and placed it as an element of Muslim culture. There are, of course, many ways to avoid culturalising honour-based violence. One could be to follow the example from the movie more extensively and compare honour-based violence towards women with violence in close relationships in Sweden generally, where women are the most common victims. According to surveys in Sweden, approximately 20% of women are victims of violence in close relationships during their life course (BRÅ 2014). In addition, the movie problematized group pressure in both storylines and highlighted commonalities in psychological violence by individuals and the surrounding society in both Muslim and native Swedish cultures, while the teacher associated group culture with Muslim societies. In the lesson described, there was strong framing as the teacher controlled the communication, as generally observed when ethnicity was discussed. However, we observed one occasion when the framing was weaker and the students had more control of the communication:

The teacher names a concept and writes it on the whiteboard. "What is negative socialisation?" One student answers that if someone says that you'll never amount to anything that might affect you negatively. [...] The teacher gives another concept: "Ethnic group!" The students give many examples of possible characteristic features of an ethnic group: clothes, appearance, language, religion, traditions, music, dance. "Nationality!" the teacher says, "What is the difference between ethnic group and nationality?" Ali answers "I'm a Kurd, ethnicity, from Iraq, nationality." Although the teacher controls the communication and what is classified as relevant content the framing is weaker and the student's contributions are acknowledged. When immigrant students elaborate on their own experiences the teacher leads the focus to the teacher's own domains. For example, the teacher says: "What is a majority group?" Ali answers: "Arabs in Iraq!" The teacher responds: "Or ethnical Swedes in Sweden." The atmosphere is lively and the students seem to liven up when they can contribute by raising their own examples and experiences. (Field note, Health & Social Care)

Interestingly, the students seem to have been enthusiastic when they were invited to contribute to the lesson's content. However, it is also noteworthy that the content was kept quite neutral. Power imbalance or conflicts between different groups were not discussed. Thus, content that could have enabled students to learn arguments for different standpoints, and possible root causes of conflicts, was not classified as relevant in this instance.

Patterns of structuring of spontaneous and planned content

We observed that teachers seemed more at ease when they had planned the content themselves. Spontaneously arising content was treated differently by individual teachers. On some occasions when students addressed racism issues the teachers' body posture and difficulty finding appropriate words (e.g. racism or xenophobia) indicated discomfort. Since there were only a few critical incidents in the Vehicle & Transport programme it is difficult to generalise, but we would argue that the treatment of these issues in the pedagogic practices can be characterised as silence and silencing. Questions of ethnicity seemed to appear when 'the other' was present, immigrants also raised themes related to ethnicity themselves. In other words, cultural differences and commonalities were acknowledged and there seemed to be openness and interest in discussing those questions. There also seemed to be an acceptance of immigrants and between immigrants of different origins that was both openly visible and expressed in Health & Social Care classes. In the Vehicle & Transport classes, where no immigrants were present, issues related to ethnicity did not seem to be raised, or therefore classified as important. In addition, in relation to theories on gender there were interesting differences between the programmes. Odih (2007) extensively described the historical development of a gendered labour market, where some occupations are associated with domestic work and thus with womanhood or motherhood. Work associated with women is also often associated with caring while work associated with men is often associated with production.

Thus, our observations that content related to caring for/learning about ‘the other’ occurred most frequently in the Health & Social Care classes, and was extremely rare in the Vehicle and Transport classes, may reflect the programmes’ gender associations as well as the presence or absence of ‘the other’. Hence, programmes’ historical associations as predominantly female or male may also be strong classifiers, i.e. determinants of the importance attached to such content.

Part 2: students’ and teachers’ talk of immigration/immigrants and classroom activities on ethnicity

As outlined in the sections above, immigration and ethnicity issues were not often raised in any of the studied classes, but they more commonly raised (both spontaneously and in planned content) in the classes that included immigrant students. In this section we focus on how students and teachers related to immigration/immigrants and ethnicity-related activities in the classroom.

Students’ talk

As stated above, there were substantial differences in numbers of individuals with immigrant backgrounds in the classes, which also seemed to affect the pedagogic content. However, the subjects were brought up by individuals in all classes, and as we shall see a wide range of expressions. For example, in the Health & Social Care classes where immigrant students were present the students of Swedish origin responded positively to the ethnic mixture:

Girl: It’s interesting when they give examples from their home countries. It kind of gives perspectives.

None of the students with immigrant backgrounds in the Health & Social Care or Restaurant Management classes mentioned being harassed by other students or teachers, although they could see it as a problem at workplaces with colleagues or customers/patients. A few immigrant boys, including the one who insisted on use of the term racism instead of xenophobia in the excerpt above, implied that it could not be fully understood by teachers since they had no personal experience of immigration:

Boy, immigrant background: We brought up racism at the workplace, which is good. The teachers discuss it. But they don’t understand. Then I drop it. It doesn’t get interesting when they don’t understand.

It might not be surprising that students with immigrant backgrounds most often spontaneously raised issues of ethnicity and indicated that they wanted to discuss it more fully. However, both students with and without immigrant backgrounds indicated that they felt related issues were not properly discussed. This included a small group of boys that confessed to thinking that the leader of the Swedish Democrats (a right wing nationalist party) was smart, although they were not xenophobic themselves:

Boy, Swedish origin: It’s not possible to discuss anything in our classes. Then the teachers get angry. For example, I think that Jimmi Åkesson [leader of the Swedish Democrats] is smart. [The boy imitates a teacher] ‘What are you saying! He’s an idiot!’ I do not necessarily hold Jimmi’s views but he’s smart. I made a racist joke and got thrown out. Like I’m a mega racist and will bomb the school one day. No, it’s not possible to discuss anything. (Interview, three boys, Swedish origin, Restaurant Management).

They also thought that it was impossible to discuss immigrant issues properly in the classroom. Previous studies have also found that students’ experiences of or attitudes towards racism seem to be avoided in Swedish upper secondary education, in both preparatory programmes for higher

education and VET (Rosvall and Öhrn 2014). It also corresponds with international (Bentrovato, Korostelina, and Schulze 2016) and Nordic findings ‘that teaching and social interactions in schools are conceptualised as being colour blind or culturally neutral, yet simultaneously cultural and educational ideas about “the normal student” based on white, Western and middle-class standards are being conveyed’ (Pihl et al. 2018, 27). Thus, rather than being a VET phenomenon, avoidance of sensitive issues in the pedagogic practices may be a general pattern. Nevertheless, our research and earlier studies (Rosvall 2015) indicate that students want to discuss their experiences of xenophobia and racism, regardless of whether they are immigrants or of Swedish origin, with or without admitting to having xenophobic thoughts themselves. As noted in the description of the programmes’ pedagogic practices, there were few occasions where any attempt to problematize ethnicity was recognized in the Vehicle & Transport classes. Similarly, ethnicity was seldom raised in the interviews with students of these classes, and when it did there was rarely interest in discussing it further:

- Interviewer: Are you interested in politics?
 Boy, Swedish origin: No, but I know that I’ll vote for the Swedish Democrats.
 Interviewer: What is it in their politics that attracts your interest?
 Boy, Swedish origin: I don’t know, I’ll just vote for them. (Interview with two boys of Swedish origin, Vehicle & Transport programme)

The Swedish Democrats is a nationalist party recognised as having a xenophobic agenda and, like many other right-wing parties in western countries, playing the role of underdogs challenging the establishment. Earlier research in Swedish Vehicle & Transport programme classes has shown that xenophobic ‘banter’ is considered part of vehicle worker identity (Kärnebro 2013) and in some cities the programme is traditionally associated with individuals openly expressing racist attitudes or wearing racist attributes (skinhead haircuts, steel-capped boots, American Confederacy flag) (Rosvall and Öhrn 2014). In our material there is little evidence that the Vehicle & Transport students held xenophobic or racist attitudes since there was almost complete silence on the matter. However, on the few occasions students expressed leanings towards the politics and arguments of the Swedish Democrats no counter arguments were raised, at least not in the official school practice we observed. Such silence may be a serious omission given the apparent importance of issues surrounding immigration, ethnicity, and interactions with immigrants in workplaces and elsewhere. Moreover, it may be particularly pertinent in Sweden, where 30 % of the children were either born abroad or have at least one parent who was born abroad (SCB 2013).

Teachers’ talk

During interviews and between lessons the teachers were asked to reflect, or spontaneously reflected, on their pedagogic practices, and some included thoughts related to being an immigrant, immigration and ethnicity in their responses.

I [the field researcher] walk with a teacher in the corridor towards the classroom. I tell her I’ve noticed that they work very actively with words and concepts to make students understand. She answers that they get the students they get and most of them have immigrant backgrounds. To ensure that they pass the course and programme she said that she has to work with words. She continues that it might have been more rewarding to work more with the subjects than with language. She then leans somewhat forward and looks at me, saying. “But you know this is rewarding as well. They are so full of life and eager to contribute to their new country. That must be as rewarding as anything else.” (Field note, Health & Social Care)

The teachers in the Health & Social Care classes commented not only that working with immigrants was rewarding but also sometimes easier than previously surmised:

After the lesson the teacher discusses how the students need to be physical with each other. In the exercises they lift and touch each other. They even change diapers with their clothes on. The teacher says that she thought that it would be a greater problem, but “It’s no problem at all.” (Field notes, Health & Social Care)

In earlier research students and teachers has commented on the school premises being a sanctuary from racism and violence towards minority groups in the surrounding society (Rosvall 2017; Rosvall and Öhrn 2014). We think that it is important to note that there were few racist or xenophobic comments in our interviews and observed classroom activities, and the issues were rarely raised (despite the cited excerpts). One reason for this is probably that socialization processes throughout their academic lives teach students the boundaries of acceptable comments in school. However, it was also noted that most classes had planned work to socialise the students in terms of accepted values and norms in the first weeks of upper secondary school. This also, presumably, affected what was officially expressed during classroom interaction:

- Teacher: The first year is kind of a 'growing into adulthood social training': learning to be an adult with aspects related to the labour market. What is expected from you as a colleague and in work.
- Researcher: Yes, you told me about the first week... [interrupted by teacher].
- Teacher: Yes, even on the second day [when the students started the programme] we go away [with the students] for two nights where we learn about each other. A classical honeymoon, err, and yes talking about conflicts that may occur and how to deal with them. It's us, the adults, that are meant to guide them in this process. (Interview, Vehicle & Transport).

The excerpt above is from an interview with a teacher in the Vehicle & Transport programme, where content related to ethnicity was almost non-existent. However, it was in the Health & Social Care classes that work to reduce xenophobia and raise cultural acceptance was most recurrent. One of the teachers related this work to the composition of students:

- Teacher: It is a multicultural school, which leads to conflicts, which in turn makes us work more with basic values, how we treat each other, how we show respect. Maybe even more than the curriculum stipulates. (Interview, Health & Social Care)

Although not explicitly about ethnicity, such socialisation processes convey information about and regulate accepted values. This and students' earlier school socialisation might influence students' openness about their thoughts on immigration. However, we have no reason to believe that racist attitudes were common among the observed students. On the other hand, our observations do not reflect changing attitudes in society either. According to an annual survey, Swedes' attitudes towards immigrants have become harsher in recent years, and over 30% in 2016 did not think that the state should provide resources for immigrants to develop their social and cultural values (Ahmadi, Palm, and Ahmadi 2016). Therefore, we might have reasons to think of the school as a sanctuary where racism and xenophobia were seldom openly expressed.

Conclusions

We conclude that content related to ethnicity was generally sparse in the VET classes we researched, but the presence of immigrants increased frequencies of immigration and ethnicity issues arising in both spontaneous and planned content. There also seemed to be somewhat more acceptance of immigrants among students in the Health & Social Care classes, where immigrants were present. These findings indicate that pedagogic practices have not changed much in response to changes in society and the classroom. More specifically, they do not reflect the large increase (to roughly 20%) in numbers of students in Swedish upper secondary school with an immigrant background and associated social changes. In that respect it could be argued that the pedagogic practices observed did not address tensions in Swedish society, except in a few Health and Social Care classes. Accommodation of the larger proportion of individuals with immigrant background (in terms of Bernsteinian pedagogic and more general democratic rights) will require intercultural awareness in education, at work and society at large. The growing popularity of nationalist right-wing parties in Sweden like the Swedish Democrats increases the urgency of addressing the issues (including the concerns that fuel

xenophobia) more explicitly, particularly as our study and others show that students want to problematize ethnicity and address racism in their education. As Mikander, Zilliacus, and Holm (2018) express this: 'A more socially-just education would take up problems and experiences that are part of students' lives, not only on a theoretical, decontextualized level, but also by directly addressing them.' A common response from VET teachers regarding content is that they need to include content that makes the students employable. Our research and other studies (Avis, Orr, and Warmington 2017) seem to raise the question what is classified as relevant content in terms of being employable? In particular, our observations in the Vehicle & Transport programme raise questions about why the concept of employability in traditionally-male dominated trades does not (apparently) include 'understanding of other people and the ability to empathise' with people with different backgrounds (to paraphrase the Swedish formal curricula for upper secondary school, p. 4), who will be important customers, colleagues and associated professionals. The relevance of such questions is reinforced by previously reported findings from the project, on gendered aspects of the formal curricula (Ledman, Rosvall, and Nylund 2018) and a divide in notions of critical thinking associated with the vocational and academic programmes in the formal curricula (Nylund, Rosvall, and Ledman 2017).

Finally, as illustrated by the cited occasions when ethnicity issues were raised in Health & social Care and Restaurant Management classes, they were mostly freely addressed and discussed when treated as neutral matters. However, when discussed in terms of social injustice in Health & Social Care classes, the teachers retained control and led the discussion. Some of the content can be seen as reproducing ethnic differences rather than highlighting commonalities, for example portraying violence against women as a trait of particular religious or ethnic groups rather than as a general problem. However, during the few occasions when the framing was weaker and the students had more control over the discussion, discussions became lively, indicating that students are concerned about and interested in discussions related to ethnicity. Thus, we observed some examples of possible starting points for socially just pedagogic practices, *sensu* Mikander, Zilliacus, and Holm (2018), which could potentially develop with teachers' experience, especially the inclusion of sensitive elements, such as critical understandings of power relations, xenophobia, and associated tensions. Thus Bernstein's concepts associated with the pedagogic rights, i.e. enhancement, participation and inclusion, could be more thoroughly addressed to enhance students' potential participation in the construction and transformation of social order.

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