

Newly arrived vocational students' situation in life and at school

Understanding teacher stories through Foucault's power and counter-power

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Abstract

This study investigates prominent themes about newly arrived immigrant students' situation in life and at school as reflected in interviews with four teachers in a vocational upper secondary school located in a Swedish city suburb dominated by residents with immigrant background. Foucault's concept of power and counter-power as well as Riessman's narrative analysis are used to discuss and analyse the interviewed teachers' descriptions. The results highlight the power and counter-power mechanisms involved in the discrepancy between well-behaved and ambitious immigrant students and the media representations of the students' housing area as criminal. The study also points to the power and counter-power relations between certain immigrant student groups with strong solidarity and other non-belonging students. There is also a power and counter-power dynamic between authorities making decisions affecting the immigrant students' life situation and resistance to these decisions. The study contributes valuable information of the mechanisms involved in the lives of newly arrived immigrant young students in Sweden, with possible relevance to similar contexts in other Nordic and European countries.

Keywords: Power, Counter-power, Newly arrived immigrant students, Vocational upper secondary school, Foucault, Narrative research

Introduction

In 2015, Sweden was one of the European countries that received many immigrants, including 40,000 immigrant youths aged 13-18 (Skolverket, 2016). Previous research shows that these young students, who had to learn Swedish together with several other subjects such as English, mathematics, history, social studies, and religion, created a new and challenging teaching situation for teachers (Brunnberg & Darvishpour, 2016; Jepson Wigg, 2016). The challenges can involve cultural differences, but also communicative and linguistic difficulties requiring individually adapted teaching (Bunar, 2015). Newly arrived immigrant students' varying educational backgrounds and their different conditions and needs in educational contexts can also create challenges for their teachers (Brunnberg & Darvishpour, 2016; Jepson Wigg, 2016). There is also a common conception among some people in Sweden that the immigrants who came in 2015 cause problems for Sweden. In their view, the immigrants have difficulty integrating into Swedish society due to differences in language as well as cultural and human rights values. This conception seems to be shared by the Swedish government. For example, on 9 December 2015 the Swedish government submitted the bill *Special measures in case of serious danger to public order or internal security in the country* to the Swedish Parliament, stating that the number of asylum applications continues to be at a level that poses a serious threat to public order and internal security in Sweden (Regeringens proposition, 2015), a view that some political parties in Sweden also seemed to share (Sveriges Radio, 2017; SVT Nyheter, 2018).

The reception of immigrants in Sweden takes place in accordance with Chapter 4 of the Swedish Aliens Act (2005:716), and the UN Convention on Refugees, 1951 (Regeringskansliet, 2005). In compliance with the UN Convention, Sweden receives refugees who have well-founded reasons to fear persecution due to race, nationality, religious or political opinion, sexual orientation, or who belong to a certain community group or are in need of protection, for example due to armed conflict in the home country (Regeringskansliet, 2005). Most of the immigrants who came to Europe in 2015 were affected by armed conflicts in their home countries (Atanasoska & Proyer, 2018). Nevertheless, some political parties in Sweden (and Europe) aim to reduce the number of asylum seekers by raising issues of lack of integration and high unemployment among immigrants.

In the context of such challenges facing newly arrived immigrant vocational students, it is of interest to know what some teachers can tell us about the students' situation. This article aims to contribute to our understanding of newly arrived immigrant students' situation in a vocational upper secondary school in Sweden, based on four teachers' accounts of meeting with and teaching these students. Our research question is:

What themes emerge in the teachers' descriptions of their newly arrived immigrant students' situation?

In understanding what the emerging themes can mean to the newly arrived immigrant students in a Swedish vocational school in a vulnerable area, we used Foucault's (1977) concept of power and counter-power.

Area and School Context

The context we describe in this section is based on what the teachers, anonymised here as Mats, Carin, Hanna and Eva, told us. Mats, aged 58, had 19 years of experience teaching history, civics and religion to vocational students. Carin, aged 46, had 16 years of experience teaching Swedish and English to vocational students. Hanna, aged 32, had six years of experience teaching vocational students Swedish and religion, and Eva, aged 29, had four years of experience teaching vocational students Swedish and English.

The teachers worked in a vocational upper secondary school, located in a residential area anonymised here as Forest River in a city in Sweden. Forest River was one of the so-called highly vulnerable areas, defined by the Swedish police as an area with high crime rates and social exclusion. The majority of those living in Forest River were immigrants and a majority of the immigrant students at the school in question lived in Forest River. The school, anonymised here as Automechanics School, started in an old but newly renovated building after 2015 when Sweden together with Germany and Austria received a large number of asylum seekers from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq (Atanasoska & Proyer, 2018).

Automechanics School offered vocational training in industry, construction, electricity, and painting and aimed to educate students for the labour market. The school had just over 70 students and a few teachers. At the time of the interviews, about 85% of the students had immigrant backgrounds and about 70% of them had come to Sweden in 2015 or later. The majority of those who came to Sweden after 2015 had been allowed to stay in Sweden through new legislation related to residence permits for unaccompanied young immigrants. The legislation came into force on 1 July 2018. According to this legislation, young people who were not allowed to stay in Sweden could apply for a residence permit to attend upper secondary education, but they must also find a job to support themselves within six months after completing upper secondary education in order to continue living in Sweden (Svensk författningssamling, 2017). Some of them had been granted residence permits, while some had had their applications for residence permits rejected. Many of them had appealed and were waiting for a reply while others had received a deportation decision. Some of those in a precarious situation were in the four teachers' classes. Most of the students were boys, maybe due to the male-dominated vocational programmes that this school offered. There were also ethnic Swedish students and students with an immigrant background born in Sweden, or who came to Sweden as children. However, since the four teachers' stories about the students who came to Sweden in 2015 or later were extensive, we chose to focus only on what was said about this group of students in this study.

Newly arrived immigrant students in Swedish vocational education

After the nine-year compulsory education in Sweden, students can move on to a three-year upper secondary school (alternatively, vocational upper secondary school). Vocational upper secondary school includes at least 15 weeks of practical placement. Since 2011, there has also been vocational apprenticeships involving workplace training for at least half of the total number of school hours, and this type of organisation applied to the newly arrived immigrant students in this study.

Since newly arrived immigrant students vary in age, educational background and potential for learning, they are assessed and placed in an appropriate class. They must learn Swedish in combination with several mandatory school subjects, such as English and mathematics, which creates new challenges for teachers (Brunnberg & Darvishpour, 2016; Bunar, 2015). In recent years, the Swedish government has invested to get newly arrived immigrant students into vocational education programmes (e.g., the healthcare programme) in occupational areas where there is a shortage of trained personnel.

Earlier Studies on Immigrant Students' Situation

Earlier studies show that immigrant students' situations are related to other factors, such as residential area, financial situation, ethnicity, income, educational background, parents' occupations, and social class. Reardon (2016), an American study, and Messing (2017), a European study with a focus on the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia, show that factors such as parents' income, educational backgrounds and residential areas are among the important factors when it comes to students' educational outcomes. According to Reardon (2016), differences in resources allocated to schools that white Americans and African Americans attend lead to educational gaps between students from these groups.

Oberti's (2020) study in France also shows that school issues are to a great extent intertwined with residential strategies. According to Oberti (2020), students studying in schools located in poor residential areas not only show poorer study motivation and educational results, but also feel unequal and discriminated against compared to students who go to schools located in well-to-do housing areas in Paris. Owens (2018) has studied the educational achievement among students of different ethnicities from families with different incomes in different school districts in metropolitan areas in the United States. The study shows that parents' income is important for students' school results and students with high income parents perform better than students with low-income parents.

Both Swedish and international studies further show that educational results must also be understood in relation to the students' social lives which include their economic situations and can lead to social class differences (Boterman, 2020; Gonzalez, 2013; Madanipour, 2020). According to Madanipour (2020), political forces can contribute to the creation of class differences among members of society, where members' access to different types of capital gives an indication of social class. As a consequence, there is reluctance against the norms that differ from the norms of one's own class/group (Hertzberg, 2003; Johansson & Hammarén, 2010).

Living in residential areas characterised by socio-economic challenges is likely to lead to fewer opportunities in terms of school results (Owens, 2018) and educational achievements and success in the labour market (Bråmås & Andersson, 2020). The social class that the students belong to is important for their ability to do well in school and education (Santos et al., 2020). Likewise, the teachers' background is important for the way in which they describe their immigrant students (Cutler et al., 2008; Drossel et al., 2017). When people feel a sense of belonging and when they perceive that the distance between different groups is short, the chances for connecting with others are good (Miranda et al., 2018; Treviño et al., 2018). Social cohesion is about people feeling that they are part of a society and that they trust each other. However, in a society with concentrations of different groups with similar backgrounds (for example, being from

the same residential area with similar living conditions), it can also lead to suspicion and lack of trust in others who do not have similar backgrounds (BråmÅ & Andersson, 2020; Plenty & Jons-son, 2017; van Noord et al., 2019; Villalobos et al., 2018).

Gonzalez's (2013) Mexican American study shows that white supremacy, capitalism, and white power converge to affect Mexican communities in the United States. For example, Mexican children study in schools where students are mostly Mexicans. According to Gonzalez (2013), this is due to the fact that the schools are located in the residential areas where many Mexicans live (cf. BråmÅ & Andersson, 2020). This basically means that Mexicans live in areas where white Americans do not live (Gonzalez, 2013). Mexicans are sometimes labelled by the white majority as culturally deficient and unambitious, which in turn influences political decisions in the United States. According to Gonzalez, white superiority is based on factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, and class. These factors are often related to the educational background and standard of living of Mexicans as a group. These factors in turn affect the application of human rights, including access to education, and social justice to Mexicans in the United States. The Faas' (2008) study of students in the United Kingdom and Siddiqui's (2017) study of students in Pakistan also show that students who live in exclusion, for example, in residential areas characterised by socio-economic challenges or attend schools in such areas are more negatively affected than students in other areas. Students' exclusion also has consequences for democratic participation (Bloodworth, 2020; Van Zanten, 2005) and the risk of getting into or being affected by crime (Siddiqui, 2017).

In Nordic research, Meuli (2011), for example, has studied classrooms in Finland where pupils with special educational needs were included in regular classes/groups and found that in a classroom where pupils with special educational needs are separated from other pupils, there is no sense of community between the groups. This in turn is shown to lead to groupings among the pupils, affecting their collaboration in study groups and teachers' conditions for teaching.

In Sweden, Sharif (2017) conducted a study focusing on immigrant students' possession of cultural, social, educational and linguistic capital and their migration experience as well as their plans for future studies. Sharif highlights sociological concepts such as ethnic and religious groupings, class and gender in relation to newly arrived immigrant students from Iraq. The majority of the newly arrived immigrant students in his study came from more affluent backgrounds, but they also had different school backgrounds: some having attended public schools in Iraq and some private international schools that were similar to Swedish schools, but much more demanding. The ethnic and religious groupings that Sharif deals with lead us to Behtoui's (2017) and Johansson and Hammarén's (2010) research which shows that groupings can be determined by different aesthetic bonds in a combination of different degrees of social, economic and cultural capital.

The placement of immigrant students in various forms of preparatory classes in Swedish is also noted by Bunar (2015). Bunar highlights the learning of newly arrived immigrant students, through teachers' and students' mutual respect, as well as the societal relevance of the subject, in relation to migration, the growth of multicultural society and school development. Socio-culturally supportive structures, organisational models and pedagogical practices create the best opportunities for these students to be included in the regular school activities. Bunar also argues that newly arrived immigrant students are integrated into society, received by society and included in the social relations of both school and society when conditions are created for them to

develop language skills in both their mother tongue and Swedish as a second language. Students who have stayed longer in the host country have better opportunities to achieve success in school than those who have just arrived. This is because they have developed a better understanding of the education system over time (Clycq, 2017; Sandell, 2007).

Previous research has contributed to the understanding of newly arrived immigrant students' lives and study situation, as a minority group with similar socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds and/or are from similar residential areas, but when we started to look at the research field in these areas we found that at least one piece of the puzzle was missing, namely teachers' accounts of newly arrived immigrant students. Such accounts could usefully be approached through narrative analysis and in terms of Foucault's concepts of power and counter-power, given the inevitable context of power relations and hierarchies involved in being a newly arrived immigrant student potentially anywhere, but, in relation to our study, particularly recognisable to similar contexts in Nordic and European countries.

Theoretical Approach: Power and Counter-Power

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) argue that the researchers can understand their research material by choosing a theoretical starting point. Foucault's dialectic of power and counter-power provides a useful tool to conceptualise the meaning of the themes embedded in the teachers' descriptions of newly arrived immigrant students' life and study situation. The concepts are applied to the context of a minority group (newly arrived immigrant students) living in a vulnerable area (marked by criminality) as described by the teachers at the school in the vulnerable area. In this case, the concepts of power and counter-power can be understood in relation to intersectionality. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2017), intersectionality is needed to understand as well as to combat the way in which minority groups (in our study, newly arrived immigrant students) are described as *different* by the majority group in society.

According to Foucault (1978, 1980, 1982) power should not be considered as belonging to specific individuals and groups only. Instead, the entire society consists of a system of power: «In reality power means relations, a more-or-less organised, hierarchical, co-ordinated cluster of relations» (1980, pp. 198). As Foucault (1978, pp. 93) asserts: «Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere.» It is a dimension of subordination and superiority as well as a vital aspect of all human actions (Foucault, 1978, 1980, 1982). Foucault categorises power in four different modes: sovereign power, which could be exemplified with the absolute authority of monarchy; disciplinary power, which can be exercised by self and through institutional knowledge and surveillance; pastoral power, which has its root in Christianity in reference to the good shepherd who takes responsibility for his flock, which to some extent can be regarded as the responsibility of a state for its citizens; and finally, bio-power, which can be understood as self-understanding and agency that relate to our status in society and our ability to act accordingly (Foucault, 1980, 2009).

The concept of power and counter-power can also be understood in relation to Arendt (1972), who defines the pathology of bureaucratisation in terms of its impact on the moral character of those who act within the bureaucratic structure. Power can be determined by organisations or authorities, but those who exercise power (employees within the organisation or authority persons) do not have to be those who decided on the application of power (Arendt,

1972). According to Arendt (1972), the transportation of the Jews to concentration and extermination camps was part of an expulsion program. Those who carried out the transport had been commissioned to do so. They did not have to be violent people, but they followed the orders they had received from their managers in the organisation or in authorities.

It is important to think about the concept of power (Foucault, 2002a) in relation to human actions and interactions. Intersectionality also investigates how, for example race, gender, sexuality and class, in interaction with each other, can play different roles in different environments (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), which in our study are a school and a housing area. Majority society is given interpretive priority to talk about how *different* a minority group is, and this *difference* becomes normalised. According to Foucault (1977), disciplinary power works by subjecting people to normative regulation through mass surveillance, social categorisation and corrective treatment.

Based on Foucault (2002b, pp. 59), we recognise that there are subordinate and superior relationships between the students (as a minority group) and the others as the majority (e.g., media, politicians, certain citizens, etc.) with the power to create a rhetorical discourse about these students. The majority exercise their disciplinary power, which makes it possible for them both to control the actions of immigrant students and produce knowledge about them. However, for Foucault (1977), power is not a resource, but a relationship. It is never held or owned but is exercised strategically. Inequality is an essential element of power and therefore there is a resistance, and this resistance is what Foucault (1977) calls counter-power. The power relationship is not always accumulated by capital, even if power, like capital, is unevenly distributed. Power and counter-power are exercised throughout the social constitution and where there is power there is always counter-power. Power and counter-power are constantly constructed and reconstructed by people in the society (Foucault, 1977), that is, as a social construction. We can also understand this social construction with the help of intersectionality. Intersectionality emphasises that the *definition of differences* (for example regarding race, gender, sexuality and class) is a social construction, that is, a product of social perceptions and relationships (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). However, we have a social constructionist perspective (Berger & Luckmann 2003) on stories and believe that what teachers say about the newly arrived immigrant students' situation in life and at school cannot be seen as the true truth but as a constructed truth that takes shape in the interaction between narrator and interviewer (author no. 1). In this process of social construction, the researchers are also involved, exercising both power and counter-power through the questions put to the four teachers in the interview, the conversations with the teachers, and follow-up questions, not to mention through choosing which parts of the transcribed interview material should be analysed and reported.

Foucault (1971) discusses the mechanisms that deal with the differentiation between reason and insanity. He states that the will to truth is the difference between true and false and it is the most important mechanism. This is because the will to truth creates power that is exercised in line with the truth and not with falsehood. What may be true for some may be false for someone else, but falsehood in turn creates power that leads to humans' exclusion. The mechanisms of power constitute a system used to define something that is considered to be true or false. A power can be exercised by a system that tries to communicate something that claims to be true about the specific institution. According to Foucault (1977), those who do not believe in the system's claim of truth can create a counter-power to show their dissatisfaction with the claim.

They can as a group (as a collective) become active opponents and take active actions, but can also be passive opponents, only watching the activities silently.

To understand the themes about newly arrived immigrant students' life and study situation displayed in teachers' descriptions, we learn from Foucault (1981, pp. 133): "The problem is not changing people's consciousness – or what's in their heads – but the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth". Similarly, when it comes to newly arrived immigrant students' life and study situation, the problem is not to change the consciousness of the dominant groups in a society or what is in the heads of the people, but the political, economic, institutional regime which enables them to produce truth about the newly arrived immigrant students. According to Foucault (1971), every society has its views of truth and what is accepted as knowledge. The dominant groups in a society produce the most "credible knowledge" for their context. Knowledge that is considered to be true is produced within dominant social institutions and disseminated. In this way, knowledge is created by and linked to the power systems in a society. On the basis of this relationship between power, counter-power and knowledge, discursive boundaries are established to determine what is considered normative or not within the discourse.

We draw on Delgado and Stefancic (2017) who claim that raising the majority's voices about the minority also gives a voice to the minority, placing the talk about the minority at the centre, and making the minority visible in society. Logically, this means that raising teachers' voices about their newly arrived immigrant students will contradict the discourse on immigrants as a societal problem. The teachers' voices can give the immigrant students a voice to oppose the power of the mass media and the authorities and the knowledge they produce about newly arrived immigrant students. The voices of teachers can also display the immigrant students' resistance (counter-power) to mass media and the authorities.

Based on Foucault (2002a, 2002b), it is important to note that the knowledge created in the interaction between the interviewer (researcher) and teachers in the interview situation is no longer about whether the students behave as they should but rather about the norm. The knowledge is about what is normal or abnormal in the school context, and this norm is determined by schools as institutions based on the norms of society, just as teachers' descriptions of newly arrived immigrant students are largely influenced by institutional and societal norms. This can also mean that newly arrived immigrant students (as a collective), create counter-power against institutional and societal norms and also against the teachers who are influenced by these norms.

Methodological Approach

This study is part of a research project, with a narrative-based approach, on what teachers in non-vocational subjects such as Swedish, English, mathematics, history, social studies, religion etc. relate about their teaching of students in vocational upper secondary schools. In this article, we report on a sub study of this project with a focus on teacher accounts involving newly arrived students, which turned out to be a topic often raised by the interviewed teachers. Collecting data for the of the initial project, author no. 1 interviewed 12 teachers in non-vocational subjects from four vocational upper secondary schools. The choice of Automechanics School and its four teachers, Mats, Carin, Hanna and Eva, for the present sub study was that these teachers

mostly talked about their newly arrived immigrant students. The teachers were interviewed twice, in 2018 and 2019, each time between one and one and a half hours, and the interviews took place at their workplace. At the first interview, the conversation between author no. 1 and the teachers was based on the open question (Riessman, 2008), «Can you please tell me about your teaching of your vocational students in the subject of English?» or, «How is it to teach vocational students the subject of history?» By asking an open question, the teachers were given the opportunity to decide for themselves which parts of their experiences of teaching vocational students would be told (cf. Goodson et al., 2010; Riessman, 2008).

The second interview was conducted as a supplement to the first interview where first author tried to fill in the gaps that existed from the first interview. For example, in the second interview first author asked Carin: «Last time you told me that your students who have the same language or the same religion often meet after school and they call each other brother, and that such a strong friendship also affects your teaching. Can you tell me how this affects your teaching?» Carin answered that when someone in the group stole someone's headphones in the classroom, other students said nothing although they knew who stole the headphones.

First author compiled each teacher's interview data from the first and the second interviews and structured the descriptions chronologically (Lieblich et al., 1998). In other words, it was first author who created stories from the teachers' stories (cf. Lieblich, 1993). Since first author and second author had to identify what was relevant to this study – in line with the constructive perspective on narratives (cf. Mishler, 1999) – we started by selecting a number of *descriptions* (Lieblich et al, 1998) that contained unique events that were highlighted by the teachers as significant in relation to their teaching of newly arrived immigrant students.

This study includes only four teachers' descriptions of their teaching of immigrant students, but like Mishler (1999) we hold that the teachers' descriptions can represent a larger group of teachers who teach, in this case, newly arrived immigrant youths (cf. Mishler, 1999). We have a social constructionist perspective (Berger & Luckmann, 2003) on what the teachers said. We also view stories as social actions that are constructed together with and in relation to other people (cf. Mishler, 1999; Goodson, 1991). From a social constructionist perspective (Berger & Luckmann, 2003) on stories, the teachers' descriptions can be seen as socially situated acts, which means that what the teachers said as well as how and why they said what they did was shaped by their experiences, but also by the interviewer and the questions the interviewer asked. The prominent themes about newly arrived immigrant students' life and study situation were, in other words, constructions made in the interaction between the interviewer (first author), the teachers and first and second authors who chose certain teachers' descriptions of their teaching for analysis.

Generally speaking, when teachers talk about their teaching experiences in interview situations, they look back on their lives and the times they met and taught their students (cf. Bruner, 1986). While talking about their teaching experiences, they reflect on their experiences (cf. Freeman, 2010) and in the interview situation, they highlight what they consider relevant to the interviewer and/or what they think the interviewer wants to hear (Mishler, 1999). This means that in our interviews the situation of newly arrived immigrant students in life and school was *not predetermined* but rather *constructed* through the conversations between interviewer (researcher) and interviewees (teachers), when the talking centred on the teachers' meeting with and teaching the students.

All interviews were recorded with a voice recorder and transcribed immediately after the interview. We followed the ethical principles stated by the Swedish Research Council (2017). For example, the teachers were informed about the study and had given their written consent to participate, and the data reported from the study were anonymised.

Thematic Analysis of interviews

Our approach to interpreting and understanding what Mats, Carin, Hanna and Eva told us was inspired by Riessman's (2008) description of thematic narrative analysis. In our thematic analysis we attempted to identify common characteristics of the teachers' descriptions. By studying what they were saying, we could identify different themes in their descriptions of teaching newly arrived immigrant students. These students appeared as students having different living situations, financial resources and study conditions compared to other student groups who were ethnic Swedish students, or students with an immigrant background born in Sweden, or who had come to Sweden in childhood. The difference may, for example, be due to the fact that newly arrived immigrant students have difficulties reading and writing in Swedish, are often social welfare recipients and have a poor educational background. Whether positive or negative, the teachers' descriptions were still the descriptions of a minority group that differed from the majority population in society.

A theme can, based on Riessman's (2008) theory, be discovered through comparison of different stories, or through the comparison of different parts of the same story, where certain accounts are repeated. We applied thematic narrative analysis by reading the teachers' descriptions multiple times and by coding the repeated, recurring accounts both in individual descriptions and in several teacher descriptions. One example of a recurring account that we coded as theme is the discrepancy between *the ambitious students and the media representations of the students' housing area as criminal*. The words *ambitious*, *good grades*, *study well*, *want to study*, *get a job*, *good attitudes to work* and even *image*, *media*, *newspapers*, *not recognize*, *problem in the Forest River*, *crime* and *unrest* occurred several times in the teachers' stories. Based on a comparative reading and coding, we arrived at the aforementioned theme. Also, other themes emerged in a similar way from the teachers' descriptions.

Results

The interview material involved three themes of power and counter-power interaction between: 1) ambitious immigrant students and the media representations of their housing area as criminal, 2) certain immigrant student groups with strong solidarity and other non-belonging students, and 3) authorities making decisions affecting the immigrant students' situation and immigrant students opposing such decisions.

Ambitious students and media representation

The first theme of power and counter-power interaction emerged in the discrepancy between *ambitious immigrant students and the media representations of their housing area criminal*. As Mats, for instance, put it:

There is unrest here sometimes, but overall, it's calm in Forest River. You yourself came here now: did you notice any unrest in the area? No, so the image that the media shows is a bit exaggerated. Many of our guys here, they want a quiet life. They don't want problems, but the media represent them as criminals. [...] If you look at these guys who've come here to a foreign country with a foreign culture and language, who are 16, 17 years old, before they can speak Swedish well, they pass all upper secondary school courses, it's unbelievable.

The extract above indicates a situation of power and counter-power, in which the media, by virtue of their influential role in society, exert power over a vulnerable group by conveying a restricted and unfavourable view of reality, which ambitious immigrant students resist by demonstrating their distortion of reality through commendable behaviour. The teachers also demonstrate counter-power, siding with the students. Both Carin and Eva said that they did not recognize the criminal image that the media provided of the immigrants in Forest River. Like Mats, they said that their students were cooperative, ambitious, had a good attitude to work, wanted to work, wanted to study and wanted to build their lives in Sweden. Hanna also said that her immigrant students were good and pleasant people at school. She loved teaching them, and they laughed a great deal together. Hanna further commented on the one-sided media reporting:

The problem in Forest River is blamed on the refugees there, and it is a pity that newspapers don't show the whole truth because I don't recognize that image of newly arrived [refugees]. I see it in my students. My students are super talented, things happen all the time, purely linguistically, and it's amazing. The funny thing is that they create their own Swedish words based on their mother tongues. Words that don't exist in Swedish, but still, it's Swedish, and I laugh so much.

To the battle of conflicting images of immigrants and their housing area, Hanna here adds an effective act of counter-power when describing how the students appropriated the Swedish language, making it their own, and incorporating it into their linguistic identity, thus resisting the power of the press and its language supremacy. Hanna's laughter and admiration of their ingenuity is also an act of resistance, undermining the power of the institutionalised printed word in newspapers blaming immigrants in Forest River for problems.

Group Solidarity and the Others

The second theme emerged as *certain immigrant student groups with strong solidarity and other non-belonging students*. Here is an example of this theme when Eva talked about groupings among students who have a common language or religion:

I see some groupings in the classroom. They can be about a group of students who come from the same country and share the same language, but also students who don't come from the same country, but they have the same religion. [...] Some students don't want to belong to any group, they want to be friends with everyone, but I think it will be difficult for them, because they can be very lonely instead without any friend. So, either you are with us, or you are alone. This is how I perceive them.

In Eva's description of the power of certain groups sharing a common feature, there is no counter-power, only non-belonging students missing out on solidarity, safety nets and protection, running the risk of remaining alone. In other words, this description does not display any strategies of resistance from the students who do not belong to any group, only from the teacher

speaking on behalf of them. Carin described similar observations of groups with an emphasis on group solidarity:

I notice that the students who are very close friends are also very supportive of each other. For example, someone's headphones had disappeared, they know who has taken them, but no one says anything. They don't gossip, it's a form of solidarity between students who come from the same country or have the same religion. [...]. Where are his headphones? Nobody says anything. And I think they are so scared to come outside if they belong to a special group. It is a form of safety net, solidarity that they belong to a group.

Again, this is an example of the power of groups based on solidarity and fear of being excluded. However, there is no suggestion of the extent to which non-belonging students have other resources to lessen and resist the impact of group power, with the exception of the teacher who, in vain, challenged the students' resistance to giving up their solidarity with members of the group. Carin also said that her students showed pictures or movie clips when someone they knew burned cars, but the solidarity within the immigrant group was considered to be so strong that the police could not get information about the car-burners. She continued:

I'm sure they know who does it because they're even showing pictures and movie clips of car fires, but there is a strong solidarity among the students. Although they know which of their friends are behind the car burning in the Forest River, which goes on night after night, the police can't reach them.

From the description above, it appears that there is an ongoing power and counter-power dynamic between students who are in solidarity with each other and the police. The superior power of the police force is resisted through silence. While the four teachers earlier claimed that they did not recognise the media representation of Forest River as a problem area, Carin here says that there are car burnings from time to time in Forest River. In other words, the media image of Forest River might not be completely wrong. Although the newly arrived immigrant students in the classroom seem decent, the Forest River residential area appears sometimes to be affected by car fires, but the solidarity between the group members is so strong that they do not gossip and the police cannot arrest the person/persons who set cars on fire and those who do not belong to any group say nothing probably out of the fear of being harassed by the group. For group member and non-belonging students alike, resistance to group/police power is silence whether based on solidarity or fear.

Authority decisions and the immigrant students

The third theme emerged as *authorities making decisions affecting the immigrant students' situation and immigrant students opposing such decisions*. Carin, for example, recalled a situation when she started working at the school:

I remember when I started working here, there was a surveillance camera there [she shows where the camera was placed in the classroom]. When you asked the students why the camera was there, they replied that it was probably some eraser that had once been thrown in here. You ask the school staff, because there was a bloody ruckus in the classroom after all, so I told the school management, we have to remove the camera and we removed the camera, and I haven't noticed any conflict here as the school management and the school staff claimed.

The principal as an authority had exercised his power in relation to the students by placing the camera in the classroom for surveillance. However, the students had no power to set the camera or remove it. Carin joined the students in the resistance to surveillance. The fact that the camera was removed from the classroom can also show that it was still the principal who had the power to take it down. Hanna also said that the camera was in the classroom due to conflicts among the students. She also said that the camera was removed because the students were dissatisfied with the camera, and they felt that the teachers and the principal did not trust them. However, when it was removed, there were no conflicts among the students and thus they proved staff and management to be wrong. Hanna also painted a picture of what life was like for her students. She explained the presence of crime and drugs in the Forest River area and also confirmed that some of her students were involved:

I know, many of my students are also threatened with deportation or have already received deportation decisions. They're nice guys, but what are they supposed to do when they are to be deported? When they hide from the police so as not to be deported? How can they support themselves financially? Of course, there will be gangs, crimes, and drugs.

Hanna's description can be understood in terms of counter-productive exercise of authorities making decisions on the deportation of those «nice guys», thus inviting criminal gangs to exploit the students threatened with deportation, and forcing students to hide from the authorities and the police. Eva also said that she has had students hiding from the police. According to Eva, «There are criminal gangs that take them straight in, they are vulnerable, and you know, when authorities let them down, the gang takes care of them». Mats also talked about the students who were facing deportation from Sweden:

What can they do when they are to be deported? Of course, they hide from the police, and then unfortunately, perhaps, the criminal way becomes the only way to get food in the stomach, for some at least, and then school is not important anymore. I understand their feelings, they will be coming here to school, and they will be writing a book review, but they will be thinking, what does a book review matter when I will go back to my old homeland anyway? When they force me to go back to suffering.

The Swedish Migration Agency has the power to decide over the future of the students and the students threatened with deportation. In such a situation, resistance comes in the form of choosing another path. Some of the students end up in crime in order to cope with everyday life. These students, who are to be sent «back to suffering» end up in a situation in which survival through criminal activity takes priority over school and education.

Discussion

As the results show, three themes about the situation of immigrant students emerged from the teachers' descriptions. These themes are not isolated from each other and must be understood in relation to each other. In other words, newly arrived immigrant students' life in Forest River, their studies in school, their insecure residence conditions in Sweden, their loneliness or group affiliation are related to each other, which creates a context in which their lives and their choices can be understood in terms of Foucault's (1977) theory of power and counter-power.

Foucault (1977) argues that the individual who possesses knowledge and power informs other individuals about how they should act in a situation. Power and knowledge can be seen as

a spiral consisting of two parts that reinforce each other. From the teachers' descriptions, it appears that the teachers know where these students live and what their situation is like in terms of getting a Swedish residence permit. They also have the power to talk about their newly arrived students. This power is constructed in the interaction between teachers, interviewers (author 1) and researchers (first and second authors) regarding the choice of descriptions and analysis of them). The teachers' knowledge of the students and their ability to describe them and their situation (a constructed power) reinforce each other as a spiral. Through this reinforcement, the interviewer was informed about how the teachers perceived newly arrived immigrant students in their current situation. Through a variety of practical perceptual abilities that are constructed between interviewer, researchers, and teachers, we can get a constructed picture of what the situation in life and at school might be like for newly arrived immigrant students. This constructed picture of reality also helps us to understand the power relations that exist between newly arrived students as a minority group and those in power in society (cf. Foucault 1981).

A power that can be discussed here is the power that the authorities, such as Swedish Migration Agency or the school, have in deciding on the future of these students, a power over which the students have little influence. In order to understand the power exercised by the school as an authority, the school staff and the Swedish Migration Agency, we must, according to Foucault (1980), focus on the unequal power relations where power-creating mechanisms take place because it is through these mechanisms that we can understand power. The unequal balance of power seems to apply to newly arrived immigrant students when the current rhetoric (Regeringens proposition, 2015/16:67; Sveriges Radio, 2017; SVT Nyheter 2018) place them in the position of *the others* who are immigrants and belong to the minority in society (cf. Plenty & Jonsson, 2017; Villalobos et al., 2018). In this context, it is also important to take into account that a person can never be described as completely powerless because a person always has the opportunity to exercise some form of resistance (Foucault, 1977). The resistance can also be seen as a counter-power from the students who wanted to remove the camera from the classroom, but did not have the power to do so. Finally, with the help of the teacher, they were able to have the camera removed from the classroom.

Power and counter-power as something indefinite, unlimited and nomadic could be identified in the teachers' descriptions of their students. The media have the power to create a rhetoric about these newly arrived immigrant students and the authorities have the power to decide on the fate of these students, whether they should stay in Sweden or be deported. We can, based on Arendt (1972), understand that people who are government officials and decide on the newly arrived immigrant students' fate (for example, to deport them from Sweden) are in a system. It is the system that governs them (gives them orders) to follow the rules and do as the law dictates. However, power and counter-power occur in relation to each other (Foucault, 1977). This means that when authorities with their decisions exercise power over newly arrived immigrant students, the immigrants also use their counter-power by being quiet and refusing to cooperate in exposing their fellow classmates' action in the classroom and other acquaintances' involvement in crime in their residential area, Forest River (cf. Foucault, 1977). In a broader perspective, the problem is not resolved. In order to get the situation in order, authorities are expanding their power (as a counter-power) over newly arrived immigrant students (for example, by re-

peatedly making it more difficult for newly arrived immigrants to stay in Sweden. A recent example is the new legislation related to residence permits for unaccompanied young immigrants (Svensk författningssamling, 2017). The newly arrived immigrant students affected by the authorities' latest act of power, in turn, increase the resistance to the authorities. Thus, the interplay between these powers and counter-powers can escalate and lead to possible riots or increased crime in society. In this way, a common conception has been created among some people in Sweden that the immigrants who came in 2015 create problems for Sweden.

Foucault's (1982) projection of the subject in relation to power makes the concept of power relational, where the relationships between individuals are characterised by power and solidarity. Power is applied at different social and interpersonal levels and in different forms (Foucault 1978) and social factors can cause inequalities in school results and educational trajectories (Bloodworth, 2020; Owens, 2018; Van Zanten, 2005). We also believe that social factors among immigrant students can lead to conflicts among them and we cannot ignore the fact that ethnic differences can also be a reason for conflicts among immigrant students, not least because many immigrant students come from regions where their countries have been at war with each other. This can be compared with Gonzalez's (2013) description of the society available to Mexicans in the United States, a divided society based on white superiority, capitalism, and white power, but also a society built on the community that exists among Mexicans, i.e. the common language and/or culture and/or religion etc. Based on Bunar (2015), Cutler et al. (2008) and Sandell (2007), many of the immigrant students are compatriots, speak the same language, celebrate common religious holidays, and participate in similar cultural traditions.

Based on Behtoui (2017), Johansson and Hammarén (2010) and Meuli (2011), we assume that immigrant students can seek security with each other through membership in certain groups, but in our understanding, this can also make it difficult for immigrant students to integrate into society when they create their own world and their own social groupings. Foucault (1977) claims that people in a society, through the interaction with each other, create different groupings in society, and belonging to a group is to hold a certain status. Within the group, classifications, hierarchies and decisive rankings are created (Boterman, 2020; Madanipour, 2020; Santos et al., 2020). In a way, the power to normalise has enforced a homogeneity, but it is individualised by making it possible to measure the deviations, determine the levels and take advantage of the differences by adapting them to others (Foucault, 1977).

Delgado and Stefancic (2017) observe that the majority is given interpretive precedence over what the minority is like, and this is gradually normalised based on the interpretive precedence. This means that the view of immigrant students as different people or as *the others* is also normalised in the majority's everyday experiences in society. As they have to support themselves for survival, when they have no other options, they become easy prey for criminal gangs. This means that students who could be integrated into society by obtaining a residence permit and being able to study and work and pay taxes, instead hide from authorities due to the threat of deportation and support themselves illegally. In other words, these students are excluded from society and a consequence of this exclusion is that it can increase crime in society (Faas, 2008; Siddiqui, 2017), and in our understanding, the constant threat of deportation of newly arrived immigrant students can also have the same unfortunate effect.

Conclusion

The majority of newly arrived students who come from the Forest River live in a world created through their interaction with people and the environment, and may have a sense of belonging to each other (cf. Miranda et al., 2018; Treviño et al., 2018). The group affiliation creates security for students and entails a status and creates some form of solidarity among the group members. Group affiliation between well-behaved and less well-behaved students seems to be strong, and if the well-behaved newly arrived students end up in deportation situations due to decisions made by the immigration authorities, the group can act as protection for them. In that case, if they reveal who is behind the car fires in Forest River or who is doing something stupid in the classroom, security will be lost. Based on Foucault (1977), our understanding is that these students also create different groups in Forest River and/or in the classroom, and/or that they take their groupings from Forest River to the classroom (and vice versa). Both Reardon (2016) and Messing (2017) see segregated residential areas as a contributing cause of exclusion. By this, we mean that a decision by the authorities (in this case the municipality) to place a group of immigrants in Forest River will necessarily lead to exclusion. In other words, the authorities contribute to the exclusion through the decisions they make.

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