Denmark

Integration, difference and (anti)discrimination in Danish Primary and Lower Education

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Summary

The aim of this case study is to analyse how discrimination and racism are formulated in the context of the Danish public school, the Folkeskole. The paper is based on a case study comprising policy studies and interviews with school leaders and teachers from the Folkeskole, as well as representatives from national and local authorities and Danish NGO´s. Research about school performances show that ethnic minority children perform significantly worse than ethnic majority children; between 47 to 55 pct. of ethnic minority children in the 9th grade are considered 'functional illiterate' compared to only 14 pct. of ethnic majority children. Research about in- and exclusion of ethnic minority in Folkeskolen to a very small degree focuses on discrimination or anti-racism when exploring and discussing the legal, social and emotional conditions for and school results of ethnic minority students. There has been an obvious lack of interest in multicultural or anti-racist pedagogy the last decade. Discrimination and racism is not specifically addressed in the Danish educational law, but an action plan on equal treatment from 2010 includes initiatives aiming at combatting prejudices and intolerance through dissemination of knowledge on discrimination. Discrimination is perceived as individual acts and most initiatives targets students. Mother-tongue education is an issue of debate in Denmark. Since 2002 only bilingual students from EU/EEA countries are entitled free mother-tongue tuition, causing critique from various sides (e.g. researchers and ECRI) for being in violation of equal rights.

Differing positions and voices reveal ambiguities and no straightforward consensus on the issue of discrimination and racism. Teachers and school leaders agree, however, on the importance of not treating bilingual students differently from other students, believing that all students benefit the most from being treated the same. The

dilemma of this idea is that social positioning of bilingual students is determined by the pervading striving for equality in the sense of sameness. In this perspective, being different becomes a problem per se. The general emphasis of equality and sameness that predominates Danish society, (re)producing the hegemonic integration discourse, allows no room for talk of discrimination. A refusal or hesitancy to speak about discrimination, even when issues of for example recognition or equal rights come up, indicates not only lack of a legitimate language to address discrimination, but also lacking recognition of the fact that a legitimate language is absent. Efforts towards equal opportunities for everyone – the combat of discrimination – are thus dissolved in colour-blind initiatives towards democracy and citizenship.

Introduction

The aim of this case study is to analyse how racism and discrimination are formulated in the context of the Danish public school, the Folkeskole. Focusing on social constructions of 'otherness' and (non)verbalizations of racism and discrimination, the analysis will explore how ethnic minority students are positioned in the Folkeskole. Applying a discourse analytical framework we analyse how questions of equal treatment, (anti)discrimination and (anti)racism are approached in primary and lower education.

Racism is a contested concept (Rizvi, 1993; Troyna 1993). Rather than being simply a terminological issue, it is inherently practical: how do we explain racism's persistence and how do we develop anti-racist initiatives (Rizvi, 1993: p2)? Two approaches to racism in education are present in western political and pedagogical debate; the multicultural and the antiracist approach or discourse. Within a multicultural discourse, racism is typically assumed to be primarily a product of ignorance, perpetuated by negative attitudes and individual prejudice, while the antiracist approach addresses and analyses racism as both individualized acts and societal structural occurrences (Sarup, 1993: p33).

Analysing questions of diversity in Danish public schools, the discourses drawing on multicultural and anti-racist theory constitute a relevant theoretical framework. However, focusing on the specific Danish educational context, a third discourse predominates; the 'integration discourse' (Gilliam, 2009).

This case study takes place in Copenhagen and is based on a combination of qualitative methods: a focus group interview, 12 individual interviews, participant observation at a school workshop (campaign against racism in sports and society) and a policy study of state educational policies regarding integration and (anti) racism in the Danish primary and lower secondary school (The Folkeskole). The informants include school leaders and teachers from the Folkeskole in Copenhagen, representatives from

national and local authorities and Danish NGO´s. The empirical data was collected in the period from April to October 2011.

2. Context and previous research

The unit of analysis of this case study is the Danish public primary and lower education; the Folkeskole. This section describes the overall context for and research on the Danish Fokeskole.

2.1. Danish primary and lower education

The basic education in Denmark is provided either by the public Folkeskole or the private elementary schools, which have the same structure and are known as 'free elementary schools'. The Folkeskole comprises a one-year nursery class, a nine-year basic school and a one-year 10th grade class. Only the nine-year basic school is compulsory. On completing 9th or 10th grade pupils can take the final Folkeskole examination.

The curriculum is determined by the Education Act, while regulations concerning the aims of different subjects are drawn up by the Minister of Education in accordance with the law. However, local authorities have the ultimate responsibility for the Folkeskole, including appointments, financial framework and curricula. Every school has a board of governors in which parents representatives are in the majority. This board determines the principles for the school's activities, draws up proposals for curricula and approves teaching materials that are made available to the pupils for free. The school leader has the educational and administrative responsibility for the school, while the teachers have a considerable degree of freedom concerning contents and teaching methods.

In 2008, approximately 91,000 children attended 510 private schools, while 590,000 pupils attended the Folkeskole, of which there are approximately 1600. About 14% of all children at basic school level (including the voluntary preschool class and 10th form) thus attend private schools. In the Folkeskole there are approximately 60.000 bilingual pupils (The Danish Ministry of Education, 2008; 2010).

2.2. Previous research on ethnic minority children in the Danish Folkeskole

Research literature about ethnic minority children in the Danish Folkeskole generally falls into two groups: one quantitatively based on survey material and statistics focusing on school performances, and another qualitatively based on ethnographic

fieldwork and qualitative interview focusing on social processes of ethnic, gender and student identity formation, and inclusion/exclusion in and out of different subject positions.

Research about school performances (Dahl 2005; Egelund & Rangvid 2005) show that ethnic minority children perform significantly worse than ethnic majority children. Thus, while between 47 to 55 pct. of ethnic minority children in the 9.th grade are considered 'functional illiterate' (have difficulties in transferring what they learn in school to other contexts), only 14 pct. of ethnic majority children are considered so (Dahl 2005:20).

Research about social processes of identity formation, in- and exclusion for ethnic minority in Folkeskolen to a very small degree focuses on *discrimination* or *anti-racism* when exploring and discussing the legal, social and emotional conditions for and school results of ethnic minority students. Generally there has been an obvious lack of interest in multicultural or anti-racist pedagogy the last decade (Horst 2003), and a lack of discussion of the potentials of such pedagogical approaches (Kampmann2003:112).

There may be various explanations of these trends in minority research. Within the last decade of Danish neo-liberal education and immigration ideology that deliberately excludes perspectives of structural inequality or conflict between ethnic groups or systematic injustice from the school system against certain groups of students, focus has unequivocally been centered on school performances and skills of ethnic minority children, communicated through policy concepts (Apthope 1997) or empty signifiers (Laclau 1996) like equal treatment, integration and subjective discrimination (see DK-WP 1 & 2). The lack of studies focusing on issues of *discrimination* or *anti-racism* may reflect the influences on researchers from this political trend. Another obvious explanation is that local political focus in Danish schools has been framed by the same ideological trend, affecting both actual school policies and rhetoric about ethnic and cultural diversity. Thus, even if researchers would want to study discrimination and anti-racism in the Danish Folkeskole, they would most likely find other kinds of native expressions for or ways of rephrasing such processes among teachers and students, expressions that are concordant with the Danish 'integration discourse' (see below).

3. Theoretical focus

Applying a discourse analytical framework, the aim of this case study is to analyse how discrimination and racism are formulated in the context of the Danish Folkeskole.

Two approaches to racism in education are present in western political and pedagogical debate; the multicultural and the antiracist approach or discourse. Within a multicultural discourse, racism is typically assumed to be primarily a product of ignorance, perpetuated by negative attitudes and individual prejudice. Racism is thus constituted as an individualized, exceptional phenomenon, which implies that social structures and institutions cannot be racist, only individuals can (Rizvi, 1993: 7). To counteract racism, this theory suggests that "where individuals are prejudiced, they must be trained to become more rational […] this theory assumes that racism is restricted to a few 'rotten apples' in a basket that is basically sound" (Rizvi, 1993: 7).

The multicultural approach thus stresses knowledge about other cultures. However, as advocates of the antiracist approach argue: people can be well informed and still be racist (Sarup, 1991: 29). While the multicultural education teaches of other cultures, emphasizing to break down stereotypes and promote greater tolerance of diversity in society, it focuses on a 'celebration' of cultures rather than on political processes and economic structures: "Much of this 'soft' multicultural education, then, is tokenistic, but it is more than that; as it is involved in an ideological struggle it actually tries to prevent radical social change" (Sarup, 1991: 30). This means that the multicultural approach instead of counteracting racism to some extend legitimizes and reproduces (potential) structures of racism and discrimination due to an inherent denial of structural discrimination (Sarup, 1993).

The antiracist approach differs significantly from the multicultural approach as it in addition to see racism as individual acts, addresses racism as structural societal inequalities. This approach thus analyses racism in both interpersonal (conscious or unconscious, prejudices, stereotyping etc.), institutional ('taken-for-granted' customs, routine practices and procedures) and state (policy and law) level (Sarup, 1993: 33).

In analyses of how questions of diversity are approached in Danish schools, the two discourses drawing on multicultural and anti-racist theory are also present. However, focusing on a Danish educational context, previous studies describe a third discourse; the dominant 'integration discourse' (Gilliam, 2009: 97).

The 'integration discourse' describes ethnic minority children as children that socially, culturally, linguistically are different and stand outside 'normal' Danish society, and need to be integrated in school, and through school integrated into society (Gilliam 2009). Also, the discourse presumes that 'integration' takes place when these marginalised children interact with Danish children and acquire knowledge about the Danish language, society and political system, and learn (are taught) the necessary competencies in order to participate productively and as democratic citizens in Danish society. The integration discourse terms ethnic minority children 'bilingual children', and

addresses the bilingual problem as one that needs to be solved through special measures that aims at strengthening the children's Danish linguistic abilities as the school's most important cultural capital (Gitz-Johansen 2006:152-3). In this way 'integration' is turned into a *technical* problem that needs to be fixed from an apolitical pedagogical didactic approach.

The integration discourse however, is based on an understanding of 'integration' that is in essence *assimilation*: ethnic minority children are expected to undergo the same formative processes as ethnic Danish children – acquiring the Danish language – and are thus neutralized as social categories and zs *students*. The best example of this assimilatory understanding of 'integration' is that ethnic minority students that are called 'integrated' are those considered to be the 'most Danish' children (Gitz-Johansen 2006:268). Thus, while at the on hand focusing on language skills, on the other hand this slide between linguistic 'integratedness' and 'Danishness' shows the ambiguity of the 'integration discourse': is embraces at the same time an assimilatory *and* a multicultural discourse and therefore succeeds in simultaneously creating consensus between opposing ideals and demands (Gilliam 2009:98).

4. State educational policies regarding integration and (anti-)racism in the Danish primary and lower secondary school (The Folkeskole)

On the national level, the Danish primary and lower secondary school is regulated by the Folkeskole Act (Education Act), which provides the overall framework for the schools' activities. The main purposes of the public school (Folkeskole) are to:

> "… provide students with the knowledge and skills that will prepare them for further education and training and instill in them the desire to learn more; familiarize them with Danish culture and history; give them an understanding of other countries and cultures; contribute to their understanding of the interrelationship between human beings and the environment; and promote the well-rounded development of the individual student…prepare the students to be able to participate, demonstrate mutual responsibility and understand their rights and duties in a free and democratic society. The daily activities of the school must, therefore, be conducted in a spirit of intellectual freedom, equality and democracy" (Danish Government, The Education Act § 1).

All municipal primary and lower secondary schools share a common aim and standard requirements concerning the subjects that are to be taught. However, it is the responsibility of the individual municipalities to determine how the schools are to be organised in practice, within the framework established by law. In addition, many concrete decisions are further decentralised to school boards, principals and individual teachers. This for example concerns the choice of schoolbooks and materials. There

may be both advantages and disadvantages of the locally administered public school. On one hand, it allows for a high degree of contextualization and flexibility. On the other hand, the absence of centrally set standards can lead to very different conditions, practices and approaches at the schools when it comes to dealing with religious, linguistic and cultural differences (Documentary and Advisory Center on Racial Discrimination (DACoRD), 2004).

The Education Act contains a number of Executive Orders. The three most important in this context concern the promotion of good order, mother-tongue tuition and education in Danish as a second language. In the Executive Order for the Promotion of Good Order in the Public School, guideline regulations are set forth outlining the schools' responsibility to establish codes of conduct, including an anti-mobbing strategy, and the disciplinary actions they can legally take regarding the students, for example in cases of mobbing. While the Education Act explicitly addresses mobbing it seems somewhat unclear, how the concept is defined and what it encompasses. It is not specified if ethnic discrimination and racism are included in the anti-mobbing efforts and if so, how these phenomena are related to mobbing. However, what is clear is that racism and discrimination are not specifically addressed in the guideline regulations.

In relation to mother-tongue education, the rules were changed in 2002 so that only children from Member States of the European Economic Area, the Faeroe Islands and Greenland are entitled to free mother-tongue tuition. The municipalities are not forbidden to offer mother-tongue education to all bilingual students, but they no longer receive financial support from the state to do so (Danish Government, Executive order on mother tongue education, DACoRD, 2004). This has led to a decrease in ethnic minority students' access to teaching in their mother tongue and a national mapping from 2008 showed that only 5 out of 98 municipalities were offering mother-tongue teaching to students from third countries on completely equal terms with students from the EU/EØS countries (Timm, 2008). In this way a dividing line is drawn between children from the EU/EØS countries, who are entitled to free mother-tongue teaching and children from third countries, who are not. This compromises the Danish principle of equality that emphasizes equality of opportunities regardless of ethnicity, gender, age etc.

The removal of the right to free mother-tongue teaching for all bilingual children has been criticized from various sides for ignoring national and international research and recommendations concerning mother tongue education and for discriminating against certain groups of children (ECRI, 2006; FRA, 2010; Kristjánsdóttir & Timm, 2007; DACoRD, 2004). In its third report on Denmark ECRI strongly recommended that

mother tongue education is offered to children on a non-discriminatory basis and that public schools should focus on integration instead of assimilation (ECRI, 2006). As a response to this critique the former Minister of Education, Ulla Tørnæs, said:

> "It is not unambiguously proved that mother tongue education leads to better integration. I believe it is the school's responsibility to teach children Danish. It is the language we speak in Denmark, and it gives the students the best opportunities to succeed academically and socially" (Ulla Tørnæs in Politiken, 2004).

This lack of priority given to mother tongue education seems to reflect a widespread perception in the Danish school system and in Danish society more broadly of different mother tongues as a problem rather than as a resource. Instead of recognising students' knowledge of other languages as an asset and an important goal in itself, focus seems to be on ethnic minority students' deficits and lack of Danish language skills (Nusche et al., 2010; Kristjánsdóttir & Timm, 2007). OECD states:

> "Through the complete exclusion of immigrant languages in school life, the education system is missing a chance to affirm immigrants' additional knowledge and cultural and linguistic background in a positive way, as an opportunity and not just a challenge" (Nusche et al., 2010:35).

This lack of recognition of the other languages than Danish seems to reflect a general uneasiness with difference and a tendency to understand integration as assimilation. Focus is on cultural and linguistic sameness and integration becomes a question of immigrants' cultural capacity to harmonize their values with Danish values (Hamburger, 1990; Jensen, 2010). Within this 'integration discourse' ethnic minority children is expected to undergo the same formative processes as ethnic Danish children – acquiring the Danish language – and are thus neutralized as social categories and standardized as students. The notion of equality is central to this discourse, but the perception seems to be that equality requires a certain degree of sameness. The more alike we are, the easier it is to sustain the idea of equality. To be equal in Danish society, thus tend to imply to be similar (Hervik, 1999). This notion of equality is closely related to the perception of Denmark as a cultural homogeneous country, and to the conceptions of social egalitarianism and universalism as constitutive elements of Danish society (Hedetoft, 2006).

The discourse on integration as assimilation is to some extend reflected in the approach to Danish as a second language, which is offered to bilingual children in primary and lower secondary schools if necessary and if so decided by the school principal (Executive Order on Danish as a Second Language). The underlying assumption seems to be that language proficiency is a precondition for learning. However, at the school level, Danish as a second language is often limited to basic remedial programs outside normal school hours and the effort is concentrated around

students in the first years of the primary school. Support is often not followed into the later classes to enable immigrants to enhance their proficiency in academic Danish (Nusche et al., 2010). This contributes to create a perception of Danish as a second language as something temporary, compensatory and exceptional and as a tool to be used "to solve a temporary structural problem in an assimilationist integration perspective" (Kristjánsdóttir & Timm, 2007:112).

4.1. Anti-discriminatory initiatives in education

The government´s Actionplan2010 has a number of initiatives directed at combating discrimination and racism in primary and secondary school. Some aim at strengthening the students understanding of citizenship, dialogue and democratic values through training; others seek to combat prejudices and intolerance through dissemination of knowledge and promotion of debates on discrimination and racism. While these initiatives are primarily targeted *students* in primary and secondary school, others are directed at teachers; for example an attitudinal change campaign focusing on the importance of meeting ethnic minority students with an appreciative and resource based approach, and the development of concrete methods and tools to be implemented in the teaching. Common to these initiatives is that they are all targeting individuals and that they aim at combating discrimination and racism through information and training. The underlying assumption seems to be that discrimination and racism are first and foremost products of ignorance, negative attitudes and individual prejudices. In this regard the government's anti-discriminatory initiatives in relation to education seem somewhat inspired by a multicultural approach, where racism is understood as an individualized, exceptional phenomenon that can be most adequately addressed through cultural awareness-raising and combating stereotypes (Aveling, 2007; Sarup, 1991; Rizvi, 1993). While critiques of the multicultural approach acknowledge that knowledge of other cultures is an important element in combating racism, they do not believe that it is enough to achieve goals of cultural tolerance and intercultural understanding. As stated by Madan Sarup, people can be well informed and still be racist (Sarup, 1991). Some of the same concerns have been raised in relation to the government's education policies and initiatives against discrimination in the education system. Kristjánsdottir & Timm (2007) accuse the educational policies for being discriminatory against ethnic minority students, since they are based on a white Danish majority norm. They argue that the Danish educational system has remained more or less the same over the last thirty years despite changes in the student composition and increased diversity in the classrooms. This means that ethnic minority students have no other choice than to adapt to the prevailing conditions if they wish to

succeed. Once again integration seems to be understood as assimilation and the presumption seems to be that 'integration' takes place when ethnic minority children interact with Danish children and learn about the Danish language, society and political system.

The Ministry's perception of racism as mental prejudices held by a small number of unenlightened people implies that structural discrimination is not acknowledged. A representative of the Ministry states: "Fundamentally there are no structures in Denmark that are discriminating. Single people or actions may be discriminating, but we do not have a discriminating education system, for instance." This view is also reflected in the Actionplan2010 that focuses on attitudinal changes and the victim's knowledge about their rights as the primary way to fight discrimination. Discriminatory structures are not addressed and, therefore, neither are questions of power and racism in inter-personal and institutional contexts (Aveling, 2007). This means that responsibility and blame implicitly rest on individuals – either the victims of discrimination or the few rotten apples in the basket that commit the discriminating acts (Kristjánsdottir & Timm, 2007; Rizvi, 1993). This lack of focus on the structural aspects of discrimination and racism has been criticized for ignoring embedded inequalities in the educational system and for overlooking "the discreet, hidden, invisible and unintentional attitude oriented cultural and institutional racism" (DACoRD, 2004:30).

Another focus area in the Actionplan2010 that is directly related to education is 'anti-Semitism and Intolerance', which is targeted by various initiatives. Some of these initiatives consist of developing and disseminating educational material for primary and secondary school, while others aim at initiating dialogue groups among different groups that show intolerance against one another. While Actionplan2010 directly targets anti-Semitism, it has been criticized by The Danish Institute for Human Rights for not dealing with islamophobia in Danish society, which is seen as a more widespread problem. The director of the department of Equal Treatment at the Institute describes anti-Semitism and islamophobia as related problems; in both cases an entire group of people is put under suspicion and discriminated against due to their religion. She therefore stresses the need to broaden the focus instead of focusing narrowly on just one dimension (The Danish Institute for Human Rights, 2010).

This lack of focus on Islamophobia is noteworthy since several studies show that Danes´ attitudes towards religion are among the most negative in Europe (Goul Andersen, 2002: 22). Particularly the image of Islam is constructed in opposition to ideas of anti-secularism, individualization and privatization of belief (ibid. 98), and the public debate to a large extent generates an opposition between Danish and Muslim identities, categorizing Islam and Muslim immigrants as incompatible with Danishness

and Danish identity. ECRI has on several occasions expressed its concern about the general climate of intolerance and discrimination against minorities in Denmark, in particular Muslim minorities, and particularly blames the Media and the politicians for this development (ECRI, 1999 & 2006).

5. Discrimination and racism in education: verbalizations, understandings and social constructions of 'otherness'

> "I don't think it [discrimination] is a problem at our school. I actually think that the children sense from teachers and schoolmates that we stick together at this school, we are all children or adults. We are humans and that's what is important" (Teacher)

Discrimination does not happen in the Danish Folkeskole, and racism is non-existent. Or is it? Differing positions and voices present in the material of this case study reveal ambiguities and no straightforward consensus on the issue of discrimination and racism; e.g. as previously mentioned researchers and the ECRI drawing attention to unequal access to mother-tongue education as discrimination, strongly contested by the Ministry of Education. Or, as we will notice in the following analysis, when teachers maintain that discrimination does not exist in the Folkeskole – perhaps with the exception of 'somewhere else' – while students allegedly keep "pulling the racist card". While discrimination and racism are contested concepts, the *occurrence* of discrimination and racism are yet more disputed. One common denominator among most interviewees is, however, the hesitancy to speak of discrimination, let alone racism.

The reluctant attitude towards talking about racism and discrimination is not particular to the Folkeskole, rather it's an attitude saturating Danish society. As stated by representatives of authorities, a main challenge dealing with discrimination is the overall societal consensus about the inexistence of discrimination in Denmark. Discrimination is considered as almost a mortal sin, and nobody ever admits that `what we did was discriminatory´ (see also DKwp2.1 and DKwp2.2). When it comes to racism it's even worse, since people usually refer to racism with a reference to either Nazism/anti-Semitism or to the oppression of black Americans in the USA. The historical connotations of the concept racism, combined with general notions of equality and having equal possibilities and rights, implicitly lead to a denial of the existence of racism in Denmark (Hervik, 1999; Jensen, 2010). The narrow focus on anti-Semitism (as an alternative to focusing on discrimination based on religion per se) in Actionplan2010 also awake the historical associations to racism, as do the educational material on racism in lower and primary school. According to the interviewed teachers,

this material typically springs from Holocaust or from the American Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s.

A study done by the municipality of Copenhagen, investigating discrimination in the Folkeskole in Copenhagen, concludes in 2010 that discrimination is not a major problem in the Folkeskole (Municipality of Copenhagen 2010). Drawing on results of the study, the municipality assesses that the few incidents of discrimination, which might occur, are well handled by the schools (about one third of the schools have initiated efforts to counteract discrimination). This view is contested by other representatives; e.g. by professional agents working with bilingualism and bilingual students' position in the Danish educational system. They point to factual discrimination in the Folkeskole in regard to mother-tongue education (which is only offered students from EU/EEA countries), insufficient teaching of Danish as a second language leaving bilingual students on unequal footing in the school and a mono-cultural curricula. Several interviewed teachers likewise point to the issue of mother-tongue education. They find it problematic that they are not able to include it more in general teaching (due to lack of resources and political will) and they argue for the necessity of viewing bilingualism as an asset rather than a challenge. None of the teachers, however, explicitly draw a line from lack of mother-tongue education to structural discrimination.

The ambiguities regarding discrimination and racism point to the need for further investigation into perceptions core understandings of the concepts; how is discrimination and racism perceived, understood and handled in a school context? And, how do teachers and school leaders (not) talk about it? Questions concerning the terminology and discourse of discrimination and racism are important to ask because the understanding of the term and concept are fundamental to enable practical counteraction (Rizvi, 1993).

5.1. Anti-discrimination initiatives

Few schools in Copenhagen have specific anti-discriminatory initiatives. Some schools have more general initiatives that aim at creating room for diversity, assuming this will disable discrimination. As previously described, these initiatives (initiated by the school or centrally by municipality or Ministry of Education) seek to promote equal opportunities and combat discrimination by information dissemination, and they most often target students. One project, called 'Room for Difference', has included teachers from four schools in a course on conflict management in a multicultural setting. The teaching sprung from actual challenges the teachers had met in the classroom: e.g. lack of teamwork between students with different social and ethnic backgrounds;

teachers who experience to have negative expectations of bilingual students; bilingual students having negative self-expectations; teachers finding it hard to motivate students and to use social and ethnic backgrounds as a resource in teaching. This course has, no doubt, been beneficial for the teachers, and the project has resulted in the publication of a 70 pages report to inspire other schools in multicultural conflict management. Discrimination or racism is not mentioned in this report. The colour-blindness is striking in this effort striving towards making room for diversity (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). Multicultural challenges, difficulties and conflicts are recognised, but ethnic discrimination and/or racism is pulled out of the equation, assuming that we are living in a post-racial world (Goldberg, 2010). This perception is further illustrated when school leaders and teachers are asked about the need for anti-discriminatory efforts. A school leader says:

> "We have children from many different countries; this creates diversity and a natural tolerance towards difference" *(School leader)*

The school leader assumes that a 'natural tolerance' will occur, because they are used to diversity. This is an example of schools emphasizing their ability to treat everyone the same, thereby missing the point that the playing field is not a level one and that equal treatment does not guarantee equitable outcomes (Aveling, 2007: 79). Given that equity is often confused with equal treatment and given that the nature of racism is poorly understood with no agreed upon definitions on what constitutes ethnic or racial conflict, it is not surprising that so many schools subsume antidiscrimination under their school-based behaviour management or anti-bullying policies (Aveling, 2007). Furthermore, with racism and discrimination constructed in terms of individual pathologies it can be subscribed to the notion that racism can be adequately addressed through cultural awareness and ''being nice'' without engaging with ''questions of power and racism in inter-personal and institutional contexts'' (Gillborn, 1995: 6, quoted in Aveling, 2007: 73)

Before taking a closer look at the verbalizations of discrimination and racism, we glance at the construction of the 'otherness' of bilingual students: the position of 'being different', which is relevant to grasp the formulations and understandings of discrimination and racism in the Folkeskole (and society in general).

a) Construction of 'otherness'

A general consensus exists among teachers and school leaders on the importance of not treating bilingual students differently from other students. Disregarding that some bilingual students speak another (additional) language, hold another religion and have grown up with cultural practices, differing from majority Danes' cultural practices, the

hegemonic assimilatory integration discourse leads to a belief that all students benefit the most from being treated the *same.* The dilemma of this idea is that social positioning of bilingual students is determined by the pervading striving for equality in the sense of sameness. Being different becomes a problem per se within this perspective, since any deviation shakes our 'common ground'. An interviewee working with qualification advancement of teachers and educators, explains how this is expressed in the Folkeskole:

> "The greatest challenges is the 'deficiency-approach' that is so common in society. If you are bilingual then it's a problem. What I find challenging, and what I try to work on, is to get the teachers to see the bilingual student's resources – among other things in the form of their language" […] "The school needs to face that challenge. The school must want to be a multicultural, intercultural school with a focus on bilingual students, and they must see it as a resource that their students are different" (Interviewee working with qualification advancement of teachers and educators)

This interviewee states that bilingual students should be considered privileged rather than disadvantaged due to their language. This is a common perception among all interviewees who believe that lacking, or insufficient, mother-tongue-education in the Folkeskole is a problem; from a professional teaching perspective and due to the point of view that a refusal to recognize mother-tongue-languages contributes to a negative perspective of bilingualism. As the above quote indicates, there is a gap between teachers saying this and actually doing it; e.g. in regard to the difficulties of incorporating resources based on diversity into the teaching. As long as difference equals deviance, the difference will be categorised as not belonging – it's there but it's 'matter out of place' (Douglas, 1966). The following description of teaching of Christianity illustrates this point:

A teacher talk about the importance of making room for everybody while also having a common ground and rules in the classroom:

> "We make some common – you can't call them rules – about what we think should count in our small community or classroom, but it can also be the whole school. Being a good friend is obviously not about being from Denmark or Iraq – I mean it's something that's general for all children, so I think that we kind of build the community on such general things that has nothing to do with where you are from […] Let's take class rules. The students and I make them together. You know it's basic; it doesn't matter where you're from. It's about being a good classmate, to respect each other, help each other, be this and that. But then, sometimes when I teach Christianity, then I choose to focus on differences […] here I build up the lecture around, well we have Christianity, that's what you are supposed to teach, it's in the curricula and so on. Then you have to point to all the other religions, so that's where I can use the different student's experiences in the lecture, and what they know about their religion. Well, I can for example ask, well about the Bible, we are sort of relaxed about that. It's okay to drop it on the floor or throw it into the garbage bin when it's used, or we know that it is – what do you say – we know that it is written by humans. Then I ask one of the Muslim kids, and she says, our Koran cannot be dropped on the floor, and you should wash your hands before opening it, and it is God's words written in the book, and that's where it's from so it's very sacred." (Teacher)

The teacher uses this example in the interview to illustrate how she uses the student's background as a resource in teaching. She establishes a common ground, focusing on

sameness. A position, from where it becomes innocent and safe to talk about religious differences. But the talk is neither safe nor innocent. The teacher builds up a distinction between 'us' and 'them'. Islam is constructed as abnormality versus normality. In Christianity '*we* are relaxed about the Bible' and '*we know'* that the book is written by humans. A Muslim student is then positioned as 'them' and a representative of Islam per se. Furthermore, if 'we' are 'relaxed' and 'knowing' about the holy book, what are 'they'? The effort that this teacher perceives as drawing on different religious backgrounds in teaching, actually becomes a classical example of a *strategy of splitting* (Hall, 1997) where those who do not fit norms of society are excluded, and their exclusion is cemented by fitting them to a set of stereotypes – the 'other'(Hall, 1997).

The ambiguity in this area is great, indicating how some teachers are not adequately equipped to teach bilingual students in the Folkeskole. A point emphasised by several of the teachers themselves. They know they are supposed to look at resources, and they know how stereotyping – which many equates with focusing at differences – can be counter-constructive. However, they don't know *how* to focus on resources and avoid stereotypes. A teacher talks about challenges concerning bilingual students, illustrating the ambiguity:

> "It's more common for the bilingual to settle things physically. It's generally in regard to behavioural issues that cultural differences are most visible in a negative way. Then there is also, when we talk cultural differences, great challenges concerning contact to parents and the way they relate to the school" A few minutes later in the interview the teacher continues: "We don't do anything in particular with the bilinguals, we don't have initiatives targeting bilinguals; you know, besides teaching Danish as a second language. We see them as individuals. Some of the challenges that we see in regard to the bilinguals might as well occur in a Danish family" (Teacher)

Not realising her own prejudice against bilinguals 'who settle things physically', the teacher finds it important to look upon the bilingual students as individuals. That is why they don't have particular initiatives at the school. Previous research has shown how social relations, positioning and social practice in institutions contribute to construct 'problem identities' of ethnic minority (pre)school children (Bundgaard, 2004; Vitus Andersen, 2005). In Scandinavia, including Denmark, people construct and act upon cultural and social categories based on an *ideology of equality* (Gullestad, 1992). This ideology leads people to avoid differences and focus on things they have in common, resulting in fear of the great differences because they are seen as a threat to community; the social order of sameness. Deviances are fixed into categories, easier to handle and understand as something external to the community (Hall 1997). These categories are used as explanations for the 'deviant' behaviour or characteristics; they are *total categories* (Bundgaard, 2004). Religion – more specifically *being Muslim* has

become a total category. Often, teachers refer it to as an explanation ground for challenges:

> "The bilinguals say they are Muslims, but they actually don't know much about their religion – they often haven't read the Koran. They are motivated and have an interest compared to the Danish students
> Interviewer: can you say the religious differences are an asset?
> Yes, I hear that a lot. But some are also very fundamentalist. Islam is very much a 'religion of rules', and that's in opposition to Christianity, and that's why they have a hard time understanding the core aspects of Christianity. It creates barriers that they can't see their religion from the outside. So the religious aspect is at the same time an asset and a barrier, since it's hard for them to relate to other religions. They are told at home that other religions are bad religions. In this case they are the ones contributing in a 'Us' and 'Them'" (Professional agent)

The above quote contains several stereotypes of being Muslim (e.g. being fundamentalist, and in general opposition to other religions). The stereotype is a means, like categories, to make sense of the world by creating social order. The stereotype, however, differ from the category, because it always works within, and as a reproduction of, dominant relations of power. The stereotypes (in this case of being Muslim) fixes – or locks – categories in a hierarchy of relations (Pickering, 2001: 4), hereby constructing discursive positions determining the space of agency (for students as well as teachers). 'Being Muslim' is not the only total category used. Bilingual has become a total category in itself, constructed by stereotypes of bilingual students as 'problems', 'lacking qualifications', 'lacking support from parents', 'being Muslim' etc. (Gitz-Johansen, 2006; Kofoed og Larsen, 2010). The common denominator being that 'Muslim' and 'Bilingual' are constructed as deviations to the common 'Us'.

5.2. (Not) speaking about discrimination and racism

Interviewees in this case study formulate difference and (negative) differential treatment (discrimination) in opposition to a universal, 'decent human nature', thus constructing a social order of sameness. Difference is, in this sense, the ambivalence of social order. Ambivalence is "a denial of all that the order strives to be" (Bauman 1991: 7) - it is the negation *and* condition of order, since order cannot exist without its' opposition and negation (Bauman 1991). Ambivalence is a product of a system of social relations. As defined by Douglas in "Purity and Danger – An Analysis of concepts of pollution and taboo", it is the category rejected by our schemes of classifications – it is "matter out of place" in "the eyes of the beholder" (Douglas, 1966:2). Ambivalence is the thing that just doesn't fit in. Like difference (and discrimination) does not fit into the discourse on equality in the sense of sameness. In her work, Douglas describes different coping strategies concerning abnormality or ambivalence. Negatively, the ambivalence can be ignored, not perceived or perceived and condemned. Positively, the ambivalence can deliberately be confronted, trying to

create a new pattern of reality in which it has a place (Douglas, 1966: 39). Drawing on these coping strategies, the dominating verbalizations and narratives on discrimination and racism can be related to the negative strategy; reluctance or refusal to speak of difference and discrimination, (implicitly or explicitly) assuming that it will vanish. The teacher, speaking in the introductory quote of this chapter, believes that focusing on the social order of sameness or equality – 'we are all humans' – will most likely ensure equal treatment. This perception of equality leading to equal treatment is strong. Several teachers and school leaders, who state the importance of not focusing on difference because it will lead to being different, communicate it:

> "I think that if you focus too much on difference and diversity, you maintain the existing difference. You maintain the position and of the bilingual and their experience of being different. You make the bilingual a problem to be solved" (School leader)

The sensitivity on not constructing bilingual students as 'different' – which on the particular school is implemented in a school politic with an explicit *non*-focus on differences – creates a position, from where no one is able to speak about differences, let alone the discrimination that might occur due to for example ethnic or religious differences. Furthermore, assuming that it's more beneficial to look at similarities than differences, anti-discriminatory initiatives or efforts are not prioritized. An interviewee involved in qualification advancement of teachers and educators mention this reluctance of speaking about racism and discrimination:

> "We don't talk with teachers about racism – and actually neither about tolerance. We talk about 'recognition' and 'equal rights'. But it is indeed racism and tolerance we are speaking about – we just talk about it in another way" (Agent working with bilingualism)

The general emphasis of equality and sameness that predominates Danish society, (re)producing the hegemonic integration discourse, allows no room for talk of discrimination. The refusal to talk about or the inability to perceive discrimination is evident in several interviews, illustrated in a school leader's reflections on discrimination during an interview:

> "I don't think it [discrimination] exists. But I don't know if I've become blind to it since we have no focus on it. But I don't think I experience it here at the school." Later in the interview the school leaders says: "It's as if discrimination doesn't exist, but that's because we are so afraid to talk about it" (School leader)

The refusal or hesitancy to speak about discrimination, even when issues of for example recognition or equal rights come up, indicates not only lack of a legitimate language to address discrimination, but also lacking recognition of the fact that a legitimate language is absent. 'We are so afraid to talk about it' reveals that the refusal is not due to inexistency of discrimination, rather it's due to fear of discrimination as ambivalence in social order. When interviewing teachers about discrimination and

racism, they are forced to reflect on the concepts. As the above quote shows, consistency is not pervading in regard to the concepts (and occurrence) of discrimination and racism, and although the immediate coping strategy in most cases is refusing to accept the happening of discrimination, other coping strategies appears. While Douglas describes a positive coping strategy opposite to the negative – a strategy of confronting ambivalence and trying to create a new pattern of reality – the coping strategies of teachers seem to be placed in between; more precisely at a safe distance. In other words, when teachers acknowledge the existence of discrimination (not racism) it's at a safe distance; what we call a *social strategy of distancing*. This strategy draws on different arguments or accounts articulated as *physical space*, '*the other*', *non-intentionality* or *downscaling*.

a) A social strategy of distancing

A very common social strategy of distancing is formulated in terms of physical space; in other words, simple geography. Some interviewees explain how they in schools in Copenhagen are so used to diversity, hereby claiming that they are free of discrimination and racism. In other parts of Denmark – far out in the country – you can, however, find discrimination and racism. In small towns, the interviewees continue, they have a lot of prejudices; it's "fears without reason, just because something is unknown".

Distance can also manifest itself by ascribing racism or discrimination to 'others' – either as few 'in-group' individuals who need correction – the few rotten apples in the basket (Rizvi, 1993: 7) – or in the sense of a constructed 'out-group-other'. Very often the concept of reverse racism (notice that in this case the term racism is used) comes up in the interviews. Here it is problematized how (few) ethnic minority children harass their ethnic Danish friends using name-calling:

> "Some teachers in the Folkeskole have prejudices and lack empathy, but we shouldn't mix racism into thecritique of the Folkeskole" On the other hand there are a lot of reverse racism: "They create a subculture because they have no success in Danish society. They don't feel included. They end up hating Danes, their teachers etc." (NGO)

No matter if 'the other' is part of an in- or out-group in these accounts, it's essential that discrimination (or racism) in any case is viewed as individualized acts rather than as structural occurrences. Furthermore discrimination is often ascribed a contagious element, which legitimizes not dealing with it systematically:

> "When it only concerns few persons, then there's no reason to spread it. Not that we try to cover it up, but there's no reason to spread the bad vibes everywhere" (Teacher)

Another social strategy of distancing, articulated among teachers, is explaining discrimination by reference to intentionality; it's only discrimination when you *mean* to treat someone differently/bad.

> "It can be experienced discrimination, without being discrimination – meaning that it's not done out of bad intentions […] It's important not to suddenly describe everything as discrimination. If we look at the structure of this school, there would probably be a lot, that in principle would be defined structural discrimination. But it is not" (School leader)

A definition based on intentions contributes to the fear of admitting discrimination – and makes it even harder to address the issue since people by instinct becomes defensive if the topic comes up. A teacher says:

> "You don't choose a school like this [with many ethnic minorities] if you want to discriminate against the parents or children or something. Really, if I was accused of that I would definitely put up a fight" (Teacher)

The final social strategy of distancing in accounting for discrimination or racism in the Folkeskole context is to scale down the problem. Some teachers refer to discrimination as "too strong a word", since it is just kids, who don't know what they are doing: "It's just teasing", or it's just a way of talking; a "jargon". In this sense, discrimination is negligible. A teacher says: "If it was a widely existing problem, then there would indeed be an action plan".

Other studies of discrimination and racism in school contexts have likewise found this tendency to scale down the problem as 'just bullying' (Aveling, 2007, Raby, 2004). Based on studies of racism in Australian schools, Aveling explains how the tendency of scaling down racism springs from the fact that it's easier to focus on rectifying individual aberrant behaviour than to deconstruct pervasive and normalised praxis; e.g. by seeing racism as nothing more than 'normal' schoolyard bullying. Moreover, because racism is so ''loaded and negative'', it may be more convenient to call it something else, something that can be more easily identified and ''fixed'' (Aveling, 2007: 79).

5.3. "Pulling the racist card"

The social strategy of distancing is applied when speaking of discrimination while racism is yet a more or less forbidden word (with the exception of reverse racism). However, a common narrative among interviewees is told about racism. In this narrative racism is told as a fictional or imagined phenomenon among bilingual students. A claim these students use defensively and/or strategically. A teacher explains:

> "The bilinguals often draw 'the racist card' when they fell pressure. They use it as a defence; 'it's just because you're a racist' they might say. Then I go into dialogue with them and say: 'No it is not'" (Teacher)

A school leader tells how he has heard a few students accuse teachers of being racist, but explains that he thinks that the kids just find the teacher too demanding. Other interviewees similarly account for these accusations as expressions of frustration and perhaps feelings of exclusions.

> "Some kids – especially the ones with Muslim background – use any given opportunity to say it´s racism. Then it's the teacher's task to say: 'it's not racism'. It is not racism when I tell you to get here on time – it's not because I don't like Muslims'. They use it all the time. It's that debate about them and us; are we now excluded?" (Teacher)

Regardless of the objective truth in the cases referred to by the interviewees, it is interesting to notice, that they don't even consider the fact that racism or discrimination *perhaps* could be the case. The response is a teacher who engages in 'dialogue', by saying 'no it is not (racism)' or a school leader pointing out the teacher's task of telling the kids it's not racism. An interviewee from a NGO states: "all the kids who say there are racism in the Folkeskole; it's a lie".

"To pull the racist card" seem to be an identifying category of the dominant discourse of integration: The ones who feel excluded 'pull it', because they feel excluded. Thus, to pull the racist card becomes a marker of exclusion rather than it's legitimised as a factual call out against a discriminatory act. The call out is delegitimised partly because 'they use it all the time' and partly because the teachers articulate the issue within the dominant discourses of integration assuming that discrimination does not exist. In this context no one calls into question *why* the bilingual students feel excluded to an extent where they need to pull the racist card. The narrative of "pulling the racist card" is thus a hegemonic coping strategy of ignorance against racism as the ambivalence of the social order of sameness (Douglas, 1966).

6. A social order of sameness

The discursive field of understanding, discussing and addressing ethnic diversity in the Folkeskole, including equal treatment, discrimination and racism, is dominated by the hegemonic integration discourse; produced and reproduced by the idea of a social order of sameness. The field is likewise occupied by both multicultural and anti-racist discourses.

The multicultural approach is articulated in a general belief that potential discrimination can be overcome by greater knowledge of each other and by many examples of 'celebrations of cultures' (Sarup, 1991). An interviewee describes it like this:

> "The school has a summer party where people bring ethnic food and entertainment – a mixed, colourful folk festival. They also do that at [name of school]. The cultural diversity is also reflected in the school interior, where they for example have all the flags up and things the students have brought from their home country. But schools don't do that enough. It's important that the families can see that they are part of it – that they know they have brought something along" (Professional agent).

Teachers and students might decorate the school with flags from the student's 'home-countries' (that apparently aren't Denmark) and they might celebrate school parties where they eat "ethnic" food. Ethnic is in this case defined as something *not* Danish. This well-meaning, and seemingly innocent, celebration of cultures contribute however to obscure issues of disadvantage and structural inequalities which would seem to be much more crucial in any attempt to provide minorities access to power and improve their life chances (Rizvi, 1993: 5).

The less evident anti-racist approach is articulated when teachers recognise how the specific resources of bilingual students must be actively included in teaching, or when a few interviewees point to structural discriminatory occurrences in the education system calling for action. However, as Gilliam argues, within the framework of a hegemonic (assimilatory) integration discourse, references to the multicultural and anti-racism discourse are only made through 'discursive phrases' without any formative power (Gilliam, 2003). In other words, the multicultural and anti-racist are counter-discourses never challenging the hegemonic integration discourse; rather the counter-discourses adjust to the hegemonic discourse participating in the reproduction of dominant relations (Gilliam, 2009: p100). The 'cultural differences' are merely decorations that don't challenge our sense of common ground or sameness, and the call for action against structural discrimination fades away in a shared perception of the sufficiency in focusing on equality to counteract (potential) discrimination.

Based on a refusal to speak of, or focus on, difference, efforts towards equal opportunities for everyone – the combat of discrimination – are dissolved in colour-blind initiatives towards democracy and citizenship (non-legal sense), leaving the Folkeskole a major role:

> "The feeling of citizenship is extremely important, and the Folkeskole play a significant part in this. Folkeskolen has a central position because it's one of the few institutions everyone is in contact with growing up. Citizenship is our task." (School leader)

Simultaneously, the teachers and school leaders articulate the importance of making room for everybody and cultural differences, hereby tapping into the dilemma of the individual, democratic right to be different and the idea of the Danish democracy build on community and common values. The only room available for difference is, however, in a category of deviance – or ambivalence – as a negation of 'Us', while real inclusion requires sameness. At best, the presence of difference is accepted – at least the

delightful diversity – but not included on the common national 'us'. The diversity is in the Folkeskole (or society in general) but it's not included into the Folkeskole: Mother-tongue-language is not officially valued as a *resource* in the Folkeskole, diverse cultural or religious backgrounds are discussed in school – perhaps even included in curricula by some teachers – but always as something 'other' than 'Danish' culture/religion. Not part of it. Is this discrimination, or is it just the social order? The institutional racism is frequently unintentional because the structures and processes that give rise to institutional racism have been so naturalithat they defy interrogation. Discrimination or racism is pervasive to the point that we take its manifestations for granted. In other words, the ways in which ''things are done'' (e.g. in schools) have the potential to be discriminatory even though school leaders believe that they have a genuine commitment to ''equal opportunity'' (Aveling, 2007: 70-71). Thus, to move beyond the taken-for-granted practice, obscuring discrimination and racism, it is necessary to recognize that we lack a legitimate language to address.

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DK-WP2.1 (Jensen, T.G; Tørslev, M.K; Weibel, K, & Vitus, K: 2011) Employment Conditions for Ethnic Minority Youth in Denmark.

DK-WP2.2 (Jensen, T.G; Tørslev, M.K; Weibel, K, & Vitus, K: 2011) Employment Conditions for Eastern European Migrant Workers in Denmark.