Implications for academic integrity of secondary school students: Collaborative strategies in dealing with individual written assignments and National Tests in Sweden.

Charlotta Rönn, PhD-student, Mid-Sweden University, Sweden

Aim and objectives

In Swedish schools, a development towards an individual focus on the pupil has led to a frequent use of self-regulation. Pupils need to master strategies for favourable development of knowledge, in order to develop the sense of responsibility they need to succeed in a goal and result oriented school system. According to the Swedish curriculum (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018) and in line with curricula in many countries pupils are to be helped to identify their strengths and weaknesses in order to get accurate scaffolding and guidance from teachers and peers (Harrison & Howard, 2013). In helping pupils understand the purpose of their learning and direct their learning towards specific goals, the pupils are thereby supposed to be able to taking responsibility for their own learning. However, pupils sometimes do not understand neither where they are heading, nor how they are to get there. On the one hand it can be argued that it is important that the teachers help the pupils to visualize the goals that are central for the pupils (Harrison & Howard, 2013). On the other hand, it can be argued, in line with Carlgren (2015), that the pupils' learning process becomes awkward when the pupils are supposed to know what they need to know and the grading criteria for knowing it - *before* they have learned it. Due to that school classes in contemporary society are less heterogeneous from both a cultural and age aspect than before, traditional teacher steered whole class lessons become difficult to preserve. At Swedish schools, "own" work, where the pupils are to work independently is now the most frequent present-day working methods. It is common today that the pupils work independently on tasks where they get the opportunity to plan their work and time, which is becoming important in a society where the individuals are to regulate themselves (Carlgren, 2015). Carlgren describes that the teachers often put in priority that the pupil finish the task, rather than to learn the content. The pupils on the other hand want to get a passing grade, which does not always match a willingness to deepen their knowledge. Being able to show a behaviour responding to an ability, does not necessarily express a knowing-how or a required ability; the pupils' development of knowledge is not necessarily linked to finishing tasks. Thus the teaching could be described as rather aiming at making the pupils pretend as if they "know-how" (Carlgren, 2015).

Research on issues regarding academic integrity rarely focuses on compulsory school. The purpose of the present is to explore and gain knowledge on pupils' collaborative coping

strategies when dealing with individual tasks such as individual written assignment and National Tests.

1. What coping strategies do pupils develop together with peers when dealing with individual written assignment and test-taking?
2. Why do the pupils develop these coping strategies?

Method and theoretical framework

This ethnographic study was based on a long-term participant observation during 4 months where the researcher interacted with and learned from pupils in one class. The observations covered all school subjects, resulting in a 120 000 wordy document of field notes comprising cultural descriptions. A school was selected where 50 % of the pupils had a minority background (born abroad or with both parents born abroad). There were 25 pupils in the chosen 8th grade class. The participant observation was followed by video recordings of lessons in Swedish, Social Studies, English as a foreign language and Mathematics during a couple of weeks. The video recordings focused on the pupils' informal conversations between peers during lessons. Interviews with the same pupils were carried out when the pupils were in 9th grade, resulting in 18 interviews (about 60 minutes each). In 9th grade at Swedish schools, which is the last year of compulsory school, the pupils take between 15 – 18 National Tests in various school subjects. The study was approved by the Ethical vetting board in Umeå/Sweden.

From a sociocultural perspective, learning is regarded as a fundamental social phenomenon where the individual competence is developed through interaction with others (Säljö, 2000/2010). The theory gives an opportunity to understand how schoolwork can both hinder and promote the aimed learning (Carlgren, 2015).

The study also draws on Lazarus (1966) who points out three processes in dealing with stress; first to perceive a threat to oneself, second to mentally prepare response to the threat and third the process – the actual coping – where the process of the response is executed. Pollard (1984) argues the greatest potential threat to pupils' coping at school is associated with teachers' authority and the power of assessing and grading.

Result and discussion

To a great extent the pupils were loyal to peers inside and outside the classroom and showed a willingness to help out. The help could be to correct grammar in peers' assignments or to brainstorm and help out with ideas on how to proceed. However, helping could also be to log in on peers' computers and write assignments for them in the classroom without the teachers being aware. Outside school, and outside the teachers' supervision, pupils who chilled out and valued their leisure time highly sent requests by text messages to more hardworking classmates. They asked them to take pictures of their written assignments and forward them so the pupil could rewrite them "in their own words". Due to the developed coping strategies,

the boys had less access to the high achieving girls' competence and support than the girls had in this goal and result related school context with a focus on both formative and summative assessments.

The pupils used coping strategies in dealing with test taking, where leaked national tests were shared with peers through digital tools and social media. Pupils who had relied on peers and copied their assignments during previous years were more likely to share and look at the national tests beforehand than those who put more efforts in schoolwork and wrote their own assignments. The copying peers relied on short-term coping strategies and seemed to be at greater risk to continue to rely on short-term coping strategies in upper secondary school. This might lead to that they might be in more vulnerable positions when it comes to school achievements – and later on higher education and working life – than those who mainly rely on long-term coping strategies where the make efforts themselves in schoolwork. The pupils with short-term coping strategies were more dependent on digital tools and mates using social medias, while those with long-term coping strategies tend to have better dispositions to develop autonomy and responsibility for their life-long learning.

Main conclusion

In the class, social networks and digital tools were frequently used in dealing with individual written assignments which created a gap between the pupils in the class, resulting in several excluding aspects such as: a) language mastery, b) gender, c) tools and socio-economic issues, d) space, e) academic (self)esteem and independence, f) social punishments and denied credit of their work and know-how, but also g) in expressing their own opinions and making themselves heard. This can be related not only to gender equity but also to justice in education.

Some identified key factors rendering the pupils' coping strategies related to stress and grades were:
* self-regulated learning in combined with assignments not restricted to the classroom
* supportive peers with a willing to assist,
* a shared regard amongst pupils on grades being somehow important
* the goal-oriented Bologna-grading system
* access to digital tools to forward pictures of assignments and National Tests
* an assessment and testing culture at school.

References

Carlgren, I. (2015). *Kunskapsstrukturer och undervisningspraktiker.* Gothenburg: Daidalos.

Harrison, C., & Howard, S. (2013). *Bedömning för lärande i årskurs F-5 : inne i "the primary black box"* (2. uppl.. ed.). Stockholm: Stockholm : Liber.

Lazarus, R.S. (1966) Psychological Stress and the Coping Process. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Pollard, A. (1984) *Goodies, jokers and gangs.* In "Life in School – the sociology of pupil culture", (Eds Hammersley, M. & Woods, P.) Buckingham: Open University Press.

Swedish National Agency for Education. (2018). *Läroplan för grundskolan, förskoleklassen och fritidshemmet 2011 : reviderad 2018* (Femte upplagan. ed.). Stockholm: Skolverket.

Säljö, R. (2000/2010). *Lärande i praktiken - ett sociokulturellt perspektiv.* Stockholm: Norstedts akademiska förlag.