PUPILS' INFORMAL SOCIAL STRATEGIES IN MANAGING INDIVIDUAL REGULAR SCHOOLWORK AND LEAKED NATIONAL TESTS – THE SIDESTEPPING OF TWO CONTROL SYSTEMS FOR EQUITABLE GRADING

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Abstract

Informal networking, where people share information and experiences, in for example social media such as Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat, is increasing worldwide. At the same time there is a development towards an increased focus on the individual and the individual pupil's achievements in formal education in many countries (cf. Carlgren, 2015) including Sweden (Dahlstedt & Fejes, 2019). According to the Swedish curriculum (2011) pupils are intended to develop their sense of taking responsibility for their learning and an eagerness for lifelong learning. Visible learning (Hattie, 2009), and the closing of pupils' achievement gaps, have had a considerable impact on curricula and teaching methods world-wide and especially in Sweden. The teachers are required to ask questions such as "Where is the pupil?" Where is (s)he heading?" and "How is (s)he going to get there?"

It is not only teachers who assess the pupils' results; pupils need to develop abilities to assess their own written assignments as well as those of their peers; in the Swedish curriculum and its annotations it is stressed that pupils must learn to compose text together with peers, and give and receive feedback from peers, in order to develop their skills (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2017, 2018). Furthermore, summative assessments have gained ground in Swedish schools. This includes extensive national testing (Lundahl, 2009) with the aim of enabling equitable and equivalent grading (National Agency for Education, 2019). Over recent years, numerous National Tests have been leaked in Sweden before the scheduled test-date. In order to prevent future incidents of leaking the National Tests are to be digitalized from 2023 (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2020).

The aim of this study was to explore and analyze what informal social strategies pupils apply in dealing with regular individual schoolwork and how this could be understood from goal-oriented and result-oriented school contexts, with specific focus on pupils' achievements and where the pupils are constantly assessed and graded.

The theoretical framework is Goffman's (1959) theater metaphor, in which people's behaviors are considered as being enacted either on the

"backstage" or "frontstage" of social life as a part of impression management. In this study, backstage is used for pupils' interaction with peers beyond teachers' sight. Frontstage is used for assignments handed in to teachers for assessment.

This ethnographic study comprised four months of observations and two weeks of audio-visual recordings of one class in year 8 (14 year-olds) in spring 2017, followed by 18 semi-structured interviews with the same pupils one year later at a Swedish municipal lower secondary school. At the school, about 90% of the teachers were qualified teachers, and the teachers of the selected class were still working at the school in autumn 2021. The Regional Ethical Review Board in Umeå, Sweden, reviewed the study.

The analysis showed that some of the pupils took responsibility for their learning and developed an autonomy in line with the curriculum's (and teachers') intentions, and (to a great extent) did their assignments on their own. In order to obtain more elevated grades with minimal effort, others relied on the achievements of classmates, which tended to go unnoticed by teachers. For example, out of the teachers' supervision some pupils logged into their classmates' Google classroom accounts (both inside and outside the classroom) and wrote original texts for them, others took pictures of their completed assignments and forwarded to peers who reformulated the texts in their "own words". Not knowing who had sat in front of the computer and produced a text led to an assessment dilemma. The results indicate that the visual learning's central questions, the a) Where? b) Where to? and c) How? may deviate for teachers in assessing pupils, and for pupils in assessing their own and their peers' texts. In interviews with pupils in Year 9, where they took 15 National Tests, they spoke frequently about the leaked National Tests and the leaked instructions for teachers on assessment, which were spread nationwide through social media. These documents were shared by the pupils in the Snapchat group of the class, and pupils helped peers to prepare for the National Tests with help of the leaked information. The pupils who relied on classmates to help them with regular schoolwork were more likely to read the leaked tests beforehand. Exclusion mechanisms related to gender, language mastery in Swedish, as well as socio-economic issues, were part of the pupils' informal social strategies. More details of the findings will be presented at the conference.

In accordance with Lantz-Andersson, Linderoth, and Säljö (2009), it is the user of the technology device who decides how to use it. In the present study, computers, smartphones and social media facilitated the pupils' informal social strategies when they were doing regular schoolwork and preparing for the National Tests out of the teachers' sight. This can lead to unfair assessment and grading, since the ability and knowledge of some pupils will not be reflected in the submitted assignment.

The study exposes an issue, where curricular changes bring less desirable "results" than intended, and where the control system for equitable grading was sidestepped at two levels by the informal social strategies applied by the pupils: the classwork grading as well as with the National tests which are designed to regulate the classwork grades. In a goal-oriented and result oriented school context with an enhanced focus on assessing and grading the pupils, the pupils applied informal strategies and used digital technology out of the teachers' supervision; some pupils made the visual learning invisible for the teachers by moving it out of the teachers' sight, and some pupils turned their individual assignment into a social exercise by relying on assistance from peers (Rönn, 2022).

It is important to discuss and further explore the rationale of pupils behind their informal social strategies and their sharing and reading the National Tests and the assessment instructions for teachers beforehand.

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