CHALLENGES TO EQUALITY IN THE WELFARE STATE: THE NORWEGIAN CASE OF DRAMMEN

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Integration of ethnic and cultural minorities and social equality are two important goals in Norwegian public policies. The school system is a major institution for inculcating values and identities and for developing competencies in children that will later be expected of them as adult citizens. Studies of children's educational achievements indicate that parental resources and social class are the two most significant predictors of such processes and outcomes. This article presents a study of how a group of people of Turkish background in a middle-sized Norwegian town chose to try to compensate for a less-than-favourable family resource situation by organising a homework support programme under the auspices of a Muslim religious organisation that complemented the school curriculum. The programme comprised an identity (cultural and religious) component and a school achievement component. We examine the response to this programme, its combination of components, and the conflict it aroused in the local community. The programme and the responses to it are analysed in terms of theories of equality and related to central values in the Norwegian welfare state.

Keywords: multicultural, welfare state, equality, social cohesion, integration, Norway

The purpose of the article is to study some of the challenges to equality and social cohesion in minority-majority relations in the education field in Norway by asking a fundamental question: What is the impact of the quest for social integration by minorities on processes of social equality and how does this quest affect majority concerns about social cohesion?

In the process of accommodating and integrating immigrant minorities, what aspects of equality are made topical, and how are the challenges handled in a given society? The school system is a major institution for inculcating values and identities and for developing competencies in children that will later be expected of them as adult citizens. Thus, education is an important institution facilitating social integration and social cohesion (Faas, 2010). Social integration in this sense is highly dependent on academic achievement.

Several studies in the US on school achievement have explained low academic achievement in minority youth by lack of positive motivation towards schooling (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991; Steinberg, Brown, & Dornbusch, 1996). Along these lines, lack of motivation may be explained as a consequence of low expectations as to the return in the labour market to educational success. Low expectations may be caused by perceived mechanisms in the labour market, whereby certain minority groups experience serious obstacles to high status occupations (Ogbu, 1991). Ogbu argues that if parents believe that they cannot compete on equal terms for high status occupations, their children's achievement orientation may be affected in a negative way. Norwegian research on parents' ambitions on behalf of their children with regard to school achievement shows that minority language children believe that their parents have clear expectations regarding their children's school achievement. They appear to be exposed to stronger pressure towards school achievement and social mobility than majority language children (Bakken, 2003). As such, it may be that educational and labour market success in Norway is more explicitly emphasized in minority language families than in other families. Moreover, Norwegian parents may experience relevant labour markets as more open to language minorities than in the US, with relatively little systematic discrimination by private and public employers. This leads to greater equality in

the labour market, a basic value in the welfare state (Gullestad, 1989; Hernes & Hippe, 1992; Øyen, 1995). Hernes and Hippe (1992) have analysed dimensions of this concept and its relevance in Norwegian welfare policy. In this article, I will study the relationship of social cohesion to equality, as well as how the value of equality is made topical and possibly challenged in a multicultural Norwegian society where diversity has become more visible and equality is no longer to be taken for granted (Gullestad, 1989).

Relevant terminology

In social science literature, the phenomenon of social cohesion is conceptualized in different ways. On the one hand, the concept is widely used in EU documents, which signifies its political importance in the Union (e.g., CDCS, 2004). In this article, I will draw on Regina Berger-Schmitt's (2000) analysis of social cohesion, which is defined via two dimensions: 1) *integration,* or social inclusion/ exclusion, dimension; and 2) *relations,* or social capital, dimension concerning social relationships and values.

Integration means that minority groups participate in the common activities of a society or community, but still have the right to remain culturally separate from the majority. Related to education, we may associate this dimension with opportunities and possible inequalities in educational enrolment and qualifications; programmes to compensate unequal individual and family resources; availability of relevant support for parents and children; social isolation and/or discrimination; and lack of completed education.

The second dimension, relations, concerns aspects of social relationships between individuals and groups, "their mutual feelings of commitment and trust due to common values and norms, a sense of belonging and solidarity" (Berger-Schmitt, 2000, p. 5). Related to education, this concept may concern children's social networks in and out of school, parents' contacts with other parents and with the school, and the quality of the school and the education system. In more ethical terms, social cohesion may be defined as "the willingness of members of a society to co-operate with each other in order to survive and prosper" (Stanley, 2003, p. 5). Members' willingness means that they "choose to form partnerships and have a reasonable chance of realizing goals, because others are willing to co-operate" and "do good across group dynamics and organizational boundaries" (Heuser, 2005, p.13).

Equality, on the other hand, may fruitfully be conceived as a multidimensional concept, as related perspectives and dimensions are constructed in various ways (e.g., Craig, 2007; Hernes & Hippe, 1992; Miller, 2006; White, 2007). For the purposes of this article, I will primarily rely on Tariq Modood (2007), who refers to Charles Taylor (1992) as he distinguishes between two different concepts: equal dignity and equal respect in the context of ethnicity and multiculturalism. *Equal dignity* focuses on what all human beings have in common, as well as status equality. *Equal respect* is "based on an understanding that difference is also important in conceptualizing and institutionalizing equal relations between people" (Modood, 2007, p. 51), recognizing that individuals identify with groups. In this respect, Taylor claims that disregard for group identity or withholding recognition of it is a form of repression (Modood, 2007, p. 52).

A CASE STUDY OF DRAMMEN IN NORWAY

Drammen[1] is an old port industrial town and commercial centre of about 60,000 inhabitants. Occupying the southeastern part of Norway about 40 km south of Oslo, Drammen has become a regional service centre over the past 20-30 years. The Drammen municipality has the second largest population of immigrants with non-Western background in Norway relative to the total population, approaching three times the country's average. The proportion of minority language pupils in the schools in Drammen is about 20% (Angell & Wyller, 2006). In 1980, 27% of the employed population was in industry, as compared to 21% for the country as a whole. The heart of the industry was the river running through the town. The river and the nearby wooded areas provided the foundation for the establishment of forest-based industry, sawmills, planing mills, and paper mills. In 2005, industry made up 18% of the total employment, somewhat less than the national average. Over this period, Drammen changed to become primarily a trade and service town. In 2005, more than 80% of the gainfully employed persons

in Drammen worked in the tertiary industries (the service sector).

In 2006, about 50% of all first generation Norwegians with a non-Western background were gainfully employed, as compared to 67% of the total adult population in Drammen (16-74 years) (Aalandslid, 2007). This is a relatively low employment rate compared with other municipalities in the country that have a sizable minority population. Overall ethnic minorities with non-Western backgrounds are 2.5 times more likely to be unemployed than the majority population. With regard to occupational structure in Drammen, ethnic minorities are over-represented in some service-related occupations (hotels, restaurants). In upper secondary education, there was hardly any difference in overall enrolment between the majority population and secondary and later generations of Norwegians with non-Western backgrounds (the rate for both groups was about 90%) (Aalandslid, 2007).

The municipality established an international culture centre in 2003 in order to stimulate an expansion of the range and ethnic diversity of what is offered to the population in the field of art and culture. In terms of rationale, culture is seen as a means to support the integration of ethnic minorities in the local community, and also to stimulate cultural exchange across national borders. The municipality aims to build up the centre to become a national knowledge base for multicultural understanding, where institutions of higher education, the United Nations Association of Norway, the Helsinki Committee, and other agencies are involved (Innst.S.nr. 155 2003-2004; Drammen kommune, 2010). In another approach to facilitate cross-cultural integration, the municipality also has initiated a project called "Build Bridges, Not Walls" to facilitate social interaction and understanding between persons and groups across age and ethnicity (Soltvedt, 2002).

In the present case study, we chose to put our main focus on the relationship between majority society and the Turkish, predominantly Muslim, community as it is expressed in actions and interactions related to the educational system. The Muslim minority is the largest religious minority community in Drammen. People from Turkey came to Norway as labour immigrants in the early 1970s and are among the earliest (new) immigrant minority groups in Norway. Turkish immigrants represent several orientations within Islam, come from different places in Turkey, and have both urban and rural backgrounds. A large number of Turkish immigrants live in one particular area of town and almost 80% of the pupils are children who speak a minority language. In this way, the majority population and the Turkish population have a tendency towards ethnic segregation in Drammen. On the other hand, as indicated above, the municipality, in its political rhetoric and especially in its culture policy, celebrates diversity and attempts to create intercultural spaces, as is typical of the postmodern town. Both the tendency towards ethnic segregation and the celebration of diversity may be seen as illustrations of "polarised manifestations of Host-Stranger relations" in the context of the postmodern town (Alexander, 2003, p. 415).

Method

In our fieldwork, we combined several methods. Most of the information was collected through in-depth personal interviews. We also conducted focus group interviews. Most of our interviews were with Muslim parents of school children. Other categories of interviewees were religious leaders, leaders of minority group associations, heads of schools and teachers, local politicians, administrative staff, and grass roots level social and health workers. In most of the parent interviews, only the mother was present. We also interviewed one of the editors of the local newspaper, along with one of his associates. Newspaper content analysis was a key data collection method.

In the interviews with the parents four main themes were emphasised: 1) important welfare needs, 2) the role of the local welfare system and informal resources in satisfying important welfare needs, 3) experiences with the local school system and its values, and 4) trust relationships (persons and institutions).

SOCIAL COHESION AND EQUALITY IN NORWEGIAN PUBLIC POLICIES

In government statements and documents on welfare policy in multicultural Norway,

"integration" and "social inclusion" are two keywords. To the government, "integration" is about "making arrangements and adaptations to ensure that new immigrants are included in the society," and to ensure that they "are able to contribute their resources in working life and general society." "Social inclusion" means much the same, but emphasis is on the outcome dimension of equality; its aim is to "prevent the development of a class-divided society where persons with immigrant backgrounds have poorer living conditions and a lower rate of social participation than the general population" (Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion, 2009a). To this end, the government has identified targets for social inclusion of the immigrant population, involving the areas of responsibility of several ministries against which the relative degree of success may be measured (Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion, 2009b). The second dimension of social cohesion, the social capital dimension, is less explicitly addressed in government policy statements and documents. This tendency is in keeping with policies in the Western world following World War II, based on a consensus in favour of a welfare policy towards economic and social equality (Miller, 2006), which has been trending toward a more compromised stance since the end of the 1960s.

The value of equality has an important place in the Norwegian government's integration policy (St.meld. nr. 9, 2006-2007; St.meld. nr. 26, 1999-2000). The Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion states that the government's goal is "a tolerant, multicultural society" where "[r]ights, obligations and opportunities [for social participation] will be the same for all" (Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, 2009).The government claims that diversity enriches our society. We may connect such statements with Modood's equal dignity dimension. Provision of opportunities and rights are accompanied by obligations: The government states that "all inhabitants are obliged to participate, comply with the law and support the fundamental democratic values of our society" (Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, 2009). In the quotations above, and in terms of the way the equality concept is defined in the article, the government's emphasis is, thus, mainly on aspects of equal dignity. Little is said about equal respect. Nevertheless, in practical politics, the principle of equal respect is honoured (e.g., freedom of religion is established by law), and every registered religious and philosophical community has approximately the same financial support from the state in proportion to their membership (Angell, 2004). The arrangement establishes religious membership organisations based on a combination of ethnic or cultural and religious identity.

THE SCHOOL SYSTEM IN A MULTI-RELIGIOUS AND MULTICULTURAL LOCALITY

In Norway, the responsibility for primary and lower secondary education occurs at the municipal level. One of the main goals of the basic school system is to make the pupils into independent human beings who will relate to other people and to society as a whole (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 1998). Such a mission means providing pupils not only with required basic knowledge and skills, but also attitudes, values, and ideology as decided by the majority through political decision-making processes, in order to protect "the economic and social system's conditions for reproduction" (Brochmann, 2003, p. 44). This includes an acceptance of the ideology of the welfare state based on values like equality, justice, solidarity, and freedom. These also are the values on which integration policy is based at the national as well as the local level. Immigrants are incorporated in society through participation in this educational system, which requires majority language skills and training to ensure that discrimination is counteracted (Kymlicka, 2001).

In this milieu, it has been established that, on the average, school performance of minority language children is not as good as that of the majority language children (Bakken, 2003; UFD, 2007). One of the explanatory factors has been minority children's poorer language qualifications (Fekjær, 2006). Teaching and supporting the mother tongue in other subjects (bilingual subject teaching) (UFD, 2007) was part of the school curriculum in those schools in Drammen with a high rate of minority language children; in recent years, however, the scale of bilingual subject teaching--and teaching in Norwegian as a second language--for linguistic minority pupils has been reduced

(Pedersen, 2006). In terms of Kymlicka's (2001) political analyses, such steps reduce chances for language minority children to be successfully integrated in society – all other things being equal.

MINORITY FAMILIES AND THEIR EDUCATIONAL STRATEGIES

Generally, from our interviews with parents of minority schoolchildren, we are left with the unambiguous impression that the representatives of the Turkish minority group have high ambitions for their children as to school achievement and future career, as well as a positive attitude towards the public school system. It seems that the schools under study have made conscious efforts to create trust among minority families through adaptation to their voiced or perceived needs. One exception, however, is what these parents note as a lack of order and discipline in the classroom.

The school system expects children and parents to cooperate with the school (KUF, 1999). These expectations mean, among other things, that parents actively help their children with their homework. However, in many cases, minority parents have received little education of their own, have insufficient majority language skills, and have limited knowledge of the society in which they live, which makes them unable to live up to such expectations (Grande, 2008). Since children's education is seen as so important, parents do support the establishment of homework assistance programmes, something which the interviewed Turkish parents say they are familiar with from their home country. Several local Turkish-Muslim organisations organise such programmes; one of them is set up by an organisation called the Islamic Culture Centre in Drammen. The programme is structured in the form of a very light version of a boarding school (so far, only available for boys). It offers classes in Norwegian, mathematics, and English, but also in religious education ("Qur'an school"), where the children learn Arabic and study the Qur'an in order to learn about Islamic values and the Islamic way of life. The premises accommodate boys for up to several nights at a time. Analogous programmes exist in other European countries, and the organisation has contacts with similar Islamic Culture Centres around Europe.

According to the leader of the programme, the Norwegian language lessons are an important part of the homework assistance programme, as is the use of Norwegian in communicating with and between the children. Besides the goal of school achievement, the leader described one of the purposes of the programme as follows:

> The reason for setting it up was to pass our identity, our values, on to the children. The young children attend the classes in the Mosque during the weekends until they reach 8-10 [years of age]; then they drop out. [Early on, t]he parents wanted something with which the children could identify.

Parents interviewed emphasised the significance of the programme as a "place" where boys could learn proper conduct and politeness in addition to other educational benefits. Typical answers to the question about why parents send their children to this programme were as follows:

> **Parent 1:** There are many reasons. [The children] are assisted in their homework, they learn English, and they learn how to respect other adults; things like that, proper conduct.
> **Parent 2:** They learn how to live with others, they learn about friendship and many other things. [Parents send their children here] to protect against narcotics and many other things that might happen to them. It is difficult to look after the children. Therefore it is an advantage that they learn and that they are protected. It means a lot.

Thus, as described by some of those involved, the homework assistance programme is not only about supporting children's efforts in school in order to improve their performance and strengthen their religious identities; it is also about their specific Turkish-Muslim identities. Minority parents in Drammen want their children to be Norwegian, Turkish, and Muslim. Their educational strategy and their functional adaptation indicate "multiple identities." For example, in their relationship with the ordinary school, their "Norwegianness" is important; outside school, their "Turkish-Muslimness" matters most.

In another context, the issue of whether one should allow the establishment of a Muslim-based basic school in Drammen was raised in the public sphere. The municipal council gave its permission, but most Muslim parents interviewed in the local newspaper were sceptical. A leader in one of the mainly Turkish-Muslim communities commented in our interview:

> We want to abide by Norwegian law and traditions, and want [to have our children in] ordinary schools so that the children are integrated [in Norwegian society] without losing their identity.[2]

Though this comment was specifically connected with the issue of a Muslim-based basic school, we interpret it as relevant also to the homework assistance programme. Basically, such a perspective reinforces the overarching goal of such parents to have their children be integrated in the majority society while at the same time maintaining an identity associated with their country of origin.

In the local newspaper's coverage of the homework assistance programme, space was given to members of the majority community and minority groups, especially representatives of other Turkish-Muslim communities; perspectives appeared to be largely critical on two grounds: 1) accommodation was offered in premises without required permission from the local authorities (fire brigade); and 2) the initiative would contribute to social segregation rather than integration. More specifically, the local newspaper expressed critical attitudes towards the programme, characterising it as a means for social and cultural segregation.[3] Although classes were offered in Norwegian, mathematics and English, it was argued that they were a pretext for religious purposes (i.e., that the main goal of the school was for a religious or Qur'anic education). Moreover, critics have claimed that children spending leisure time in the programme takes away opportunities for them to socialise and play with majority language children, thus undermining the goals of social integration and the development of language competence.

In the wake of this debate, the municipal council committee on childhood, education, and social services recommended to the municipal council that all municipal schools in Drammen should offer homework assistance programmes to their pupils. Public authorities, like those who have produced statements in the local newspaper, considered the existence of the controversial programme a "danger" to the community, threatening social cohesion and affecting mutual feelings of commitment and the sense of belonging and solidarity in the community. It is noteworthy that other more "pure" arrangements for religious education (classes in the Mosque) have not met with the same amount of criticism in the public media or in the majority population.

DISCUSSION

The intention of this article is to observe the (at least latent) inherent tensions between values of equality and social cohesion in multicultural Norwegian society. Public support for mother tongue teaching and bilingual subject teaching may be interpreted as a desire to implement in public structures the value of equality in a multicultural and multi-religious society with regard to equal dignity and equal respect. The goal of social integration of minorities, as opposed to social segregation, is associated with the former (equal dignity); the recognition of group identity is associated with the latter (equal respect).

In this regard, public attitudes to the homework assistance programme presented in the article are telling. The organisers of such programmes define two main purposes: 1) contributing to social integration in majority society; and 2) providing resources for identity formation and maintenance. The former is seen as a legitimate purpose by the majority Norwegian community; the latter is perceived to be rather dubious to elements of the majority population, at least in its current incarnation. From an analytic perspective, we may interpret the negative reaction to the programme in the local community as an indication that equality has it limits when it comes to equal respect. Agents in civil society declare the programme illegitimate; public agents thus establish alternative homework assistance schemes in order to reduce the chances that parents will choose the religion-based alternative. One apparent goal here is to avoid the identity formation component of the programme, which also is associated with the equal respect component of the equality concept. One reason why other types of

organised religious education for Muslim children (e.g., classes in the Mosque) have not met with a corresponding degree of criticism may be that such arrangements occupy the children for shorter periods of the week and, consequently, leave more time open for the children to mingle with majority language children and less time spent under the influence of religious agents.

From the parents' point of view, it seems reasonable to interpret the homework assistance programme as a compensatory measure in a situation where the school does not fulfil important needs, and where agents in civil society may play a supplementary role. It is reasonable to see the homework assistance programme–successful by the standards specified by those who organise the programme–as contributing to social integration in the larger society. Improved school performance increases the likelihood that pupils will later gain access to higher education and be successful in the labour market (social inclusion) if they are not discriminated. Insiders within the programme see it as an effort to add to the chances that the children be successfully integrated in Norwegian society, a goal shared by both majority and minority groups, while at the same time developing a Turkish-Muslim identity. Outsiders fear it will undermine social cohesion; they are afraid the programme will contribute to maintaining or strengthening social segregation and prevent commitment among those who live in Drammen–and Norway as a whole–to a shared set of basic values.

The espoused value of education, the patterns of behaviour in children and parents that constituted a basis for concern among school representatives, and the emphasis on the need for passing on the parents' identity to the children may be interpreted as parts of a whole (i.e., as elements in the parents' adaptation to the situation in which they find themselves as minority in Drammen).

Engen (Engen, 2006; Engen, Sand, & Kulbrandstad, 1997) has hypothesized that a division of labour between school and home in educational matters promotes functional adaptation by parents. As Engen interprets the curriculum for the compulsory school in Norway, he sees a possibility that minority parents may interpret the curriculum as a way to qualify children for entrance and active participation in majority society. However, the school will likewise leave to the parents the main responsibility for tasks related to qualifying the children for the minority culture (Engen, 2006, p. 156). In this way, there is a common interest for the school and the parents to provide children not only with as strong a competence as possible in basic subjects such as mathematics and English, but also Norwegian language and how Norwegian society works. Such components may be understood by minority parents as an assimilation strategy by the majority. This tacit agreement of a division of labour between the school and the home makes it necessary for parents to take care of an important part of the "identity work" by means of separate structures within the community. This may be accomplished in different ways, and may be perceived in different ways by parents. The controversial homework assistance programme may be one way of dealing with this issue.

Engen points to a possible ironic consequence of this division of labour: In return for letting the school take care of children for qualifying purposes, parents may decide to withdraw children from informal contact with majority peers. Full integration in school thus means some degree of segregation outside of school. Such segregation may have negative consequences for children in terms of their chances to build up a career in the future; more specifically, segregation may impact their chance to learn the majority language and to develop a relevant Norwegian habitat, which could prevent them from building the informal social networks that are so endemic to majority youth.

In short, diversity in the population has created new challenges to the welfare state in promoting equality, while simultaneously maintaining a high level of social cohesion. Politicians may perceive a possible tension between the two; likewise, strong voices in the population may share the fear that equality may be pushed too far, at the expense of social cohesion, or that some kinds of equality are in conflict with other types of equality. In the final analysis, such dynamics may mean that "equality of respect" is implicitly and explicitly undermined, if it is valued at all.

NOTES

1. Data for this paper derive from a Norwegian case study which was part of a European

research project: *Welfare and Values in Europe: Transitions related to religion, minorities and gender* (http://www.crs.uu.se/Research/Concluded+projects/WaVE/?languageId=1).

2. Note that, in this quotation, the concept of "integration" may possibly be understood in a wider sense than was defined earlier in the article.
3. At the national level, the second largest political party, the right-wing Progress Party, came out in a recent debate in the municipal council with a clear negative stand towards the establishment of Muslim primary schools–but not faith-based schools anchored in other religions. The stand towards faith-based schools was shared by a left-wing party, the Socialist Left Party, both at the municipal and the national level. In both cases, the stand was explained by fear of cultural segregation. The Socialist Left Party is a member of the current government coalition and has taken a negative stand towards faith-based school as a general principle (Vivekananthan, 2009).

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