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Paper presented at Mini-conference on class and culture, Eastern Sociological Association, Baltimore, February 23rd-24th, 2018

**Reproducing class?
Exploring Class-Based Cultural Practices Among Danish and American Teachers**

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**** First draft, please do not quote ****

Abstract:

In numerous studies, class-based cultural practices have been shown to have importance for family strategies for child rearing, and for the ways in which children manage to navigate in schools, from Kindergarten to Universities. However, not many studies demonstrate how cultural and professional practices of frontline professionals in schools may contribute to these effects. Within public administration, it has been demonstrated, how frontline professionals, working within political and economic constraints, may also engage in class-based cultural and moral practices, drawing on and reinforcing, existing social and symbolic boundaries. Building on these contributions, this paper explores how teachers address, evaluate and categorize children from different class backgrounds, when asked to identify children in need of extra help. Focusing on the identification of possible problems allows for the exploration of class-based assumptions and the use of class stereotypes. Also, it allows for an analysis of how policy- and professional discourses may be deeply entangled with such class-based assumptions. The paper builds on empirical data from 71 semi-structured interviews conducted with teachers and preschool-teachers in Denmark and USA, using both traditional semi-structured interviewing techniques as well as a vignette experiment allowing for a systematic test of class difference. Also, the comparative nature of the data allows for the exploration of possible similar mechanisms across different national contexts with respect to both educational institutions and policies and class structure. With these analyses, the paper contributes to deepening our understanding of the school system as a key mechanism for class reproduction.

Introduction

The intersection of class and education, has been intensely studied and debated throughout the last century. On one hand, in most western democracies, education has been put forward as a key solution to class inequality and difference of opportunities, and thus as a way to create a society where all citizens have “the chance to make out of their lives what they will” (President Obama, Dec. 10th 2015, when signing a rewrite of ‘No Child Left Behind’, cf. Davis 2015. See also Hochschild and Scovronick, 2003). On the other hand however, numerous studies have demonstrated how the goal of changing class relations through education is rarely achieved (Bernstein, 1970; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Goldthorpe, 1996; Reay, 2017). Different theories and explanations for this failure exist, many of them focusing on the ways in education and schools reinforce existing inequalities, by creating a school and learning environment more favorable to children from middle- and upper class families (Bernstein, 1971; Bourdieu, 1996; Jæger and Breen, 2016).

Most studies on the reproductive effects of the school focus on overall distributive effects of cultural capital and school achievements. However, we know from both sociology and political science that schools also shape and structure patterns of identity and status (Bourdieu, 2014; Bruch and Soss, 2018; Soss and Moynihan, 2014), as explained, for example, by Josie, a young working-class girl, interviewed by Diane Reay:

My whole sense of myself when I was at school was that I was no good at anything, that I was hopeless at learning (Reay, 2017: 68)

Also, we know from e.g. public administration that institutional practices depend on local context and the agency and cultural practices of individual teachers (Lipsky, 2010; Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2003). Following these insights, the paper focuses on the cultural practices of teachers addressing, evaluating and classifying children, and thus creating, in their mundane and everyday

encounters with children, a framework for these children's identity and status lessons. Combining public administration theories on frontline agency with sociological theories on class categories and categorization, I explore how the practice of identifying children "in need of an extra hand" potentially introduce class bias, and thus potentially work as a mechanism for class reproduction. I do this using semi-structured interviews with teachers, collected across two very different settings, namely Denmark and the American Mid-West. These settings vary in so many respects that finding similar mechanisms will strengthen the potential for analytical inference.

Schools, reproduction and the importance of frontline encounters

We know from numerous studies that educational mobility has been difficult to obtain throughout most western democracies. Instead, many studies demonstrate how the transmittance of cultural capital, knowledge and habits in the family, the investment strategies of parents, the formation of student identities, and the interaction between students and teachers typically reproduce educational attainment (Barone, 2006; DiMaggio, 1982; Evans et al., 2010; Georg, 2004; Graaf et al., 2000; Kraaykamp and Eijck, 2010; Landersø and Heckman, 2017; Lareau, 1987, 2003; Lareau and Horvat, 1999; Reay, 2006; Reay et al., 2010; Tramonte and Willms, 2010; Van De Werfhorst and Hofstede, 2007). Partly as a result of this, education and more broadly cultural capital, has become part of how we understand social class and social reproduction (Jæger and Breen, 2016; Lamont and Lareau, 1988; Lareau and Weininger, 2003).

As mentioned above, most studies focus on the distributive effects of schools, and the ways in which specific institutional practices come to function as a closure mechanism favoring the learning styles and thus the acquisition of cultural capital by children from already privileged backgrounds. However, studies in policy learning suggest that citizen engage with public institutions in way where they not only get allocated specific resources, such as e.g. economic

resources, health benefits, knowledge or education, but also learn about who they are, and how they are perceived and evaluated by society (Bruch and Soss, 2018; Schneider et al., 2014; Schneider and Ingram, 1993; Soss, 1999; Soss et al., 2011). Encounters with public institutions thus teach citizens valuable identity and status lessons, thereby forming both their sense of self and their sense of place. This point aligns with insights from some of Bourdieu's late contributions to understanding the state (Bourdieu, 2014), where he emphasizes that the state not only distributes cultural and economic resources, but also symbolic resources as well as legitimate world views and symbolic principles of classification. Further, state classifications carry a special weight, grounded as they are in the state's "monopoly of symbolic violence" (Bourdieu, 2014), and they may therefore be particularly important for understanding the reproduction of class relations.

Also, most studies treat schools as uniform institutions, typically guided by educational policies, institutional regulations and professional norms (e.g. Reay, 2006, 2017). However, we know from studies in public administration that what happens in public institutions, and thus also in schools, seldom follow general policies or general professional norms, but often depend on local context, agency of frontline professionals and even characteristics of specific encounters (Bartels, 2013; Brodtkin, 2012; Dubois, 2010; Harrits and Møller, 2014; Lipsky, 2010; Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2003; Soss et al., 2011). In their book *Cops, Teachers, Counsellors. Stories from the Front Lines of Public Service*, Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2003) demonstrate how frontline professionals are guided not only by policies, laws and rules, but also by their own world-views, norms, preferences and identities, as they engage in "judgements of who people are, their perceived identities and moral character, as the desire for cultural abundance" (Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2003: 4, see also 2012). Other studies (Dubois, 2010, 2014; Epp et al., 2014; Harrits and Møller, 2014; Møller, 2016) have in similar ways demonstrated, how practices at the frontline

are informed by social identities of both frontline workers and citizens, as well by judgements of clients' moral and social worth.

From a slightly different theoretical perspective, results from the literature on representative bureaucracy emphasize similar points. Here, the main idea is that a match between personal characteristics of frontline professionals and citizens will affect the results of frontline decisions, interactions and results, including, for example, the interaction between teachers and students, and the achievements of students. Typically, the key mechanism of representative bureaucracy is considered to be direct advocacy of frontline professionals based on a convergence of identity, interests, policy preferences, and values (Andrews et al., 2014; Keiser et al., 2002; Sowa & Selden, 2003; Wilkins & Keiser, 2006). As summed up by Bruch and Soss (2018), drawing on Latour (1986) and Feldman and Pentland (2003), results from these literatures underlines the importance of not only focusing on the ostensive aspects of schools and educational policies, but also the performative aspects and the ways in which practices and interactions continuously shape what schools are and what they mean to children. In the following, I further discuss how to study such these performative aspects by focusing on the discretionary practices of teachers, and more precisely on the construction and use of class categorizations.

Discretion, categorization and class

In his famous expose on the nature of public institutions, and the importance of studying policy making from “the bottom up”, Michael Lipsky (Lipsky, 2010) suggest that the discretion given to frontline professionals are constitutive of the autonomy of these professionals, as well as of frontline institutions and policies and services delivered to the people. Discretion, understood as the need to make concrete and situational judgements based on policies, regulations and the facts of the case at hand, is thus necessary, because general rules and regulations, as well as concrete situations

and people, always needs to be interpreted and transformed to “fit”. A similar idea is expressed in Abbott’s (Abbott, 1988) theory on professional discretion as the use of abstract and general knowledge for making concrete diagnoses and treatments, where both these practices involves a negotiation of how to fit information about the concrete patient with general knowledge, and professional experience. Further, both Lipsky and Abbott emphasize, how discretionary judgements are not guided only by the ostensive elements of policies and knowledge, but also by the performative aspects of encountering concrete information and people. Maynard-Moody and Musheno (Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2003, 2012) further pushes for the recognition of these performative aspects by suggesting to conceptualize judgements made by frontline professionals under a heading of agency, i.e. the making of judgements in the context of different resources and constraints. Similarly, they suggest to study the meaning making of frontline agents moving beyond rule-bound decision making. More specifically, they suggest that frontline professionals typically supplement their political and professional resources by drawing on their own social and cultural background and the cultural context of the communities they work in, acting as what Maynard-Moody and Musheno refer to as citizen agents, who are focused not only on law abidance but also on cultural abidance. As explained by Soss et al., in a study of social workers, frontline practices are “rooted in social identities that come from outside the welfare system. When case managers arrive at work, they do not check their personal histories and social statuses at the door” (Soss et al., 2011: 234).

One aspect of frontline professionals’ judgements and meaning making is the ways in which frontline professionals in general, and teachers in particular, come to understand, identify and classify the citizens (children) they meet. As mentioned above, school lessons on identity and status are embedded in the classification schemes (Bourdieu, 1984, 2014) used and (re)constructed in

policies and professional knowledge as well as in the cultural and discretionary practices of teachers.

To explore these schemes, I take a point of departure in Bourdieu's general theory on symbolic classifications as existing both at the level of individual habitus, and as collective classification schemes, embedded in lifestyle practices and categorical distinctions (Bourdieu, 1984, 1985, 1987, 1991). However, to get a more nuanced sense of how categories and categorizations are constructed and reconstructed in continuous practices, I draw on Lamont's theory on symbolic boundary work and the cultural processes of categorization, valuation and evaluation (Lamont, 1992, 2000, 2012; Lamont et al., 2014; Lamont and Molnár, 2002), as well as Skeggs' writings on the symbolic dimensions of class and self (Skeggs, 2004).

According to Lamont, the processes of categorization and boundary drawing, understood as the construction of conceptual distinctions between groups, and are key processes in the distribution of symbolic worth, as well as the distribution of cultural and material resources. More specifically, categorization involves both the construction of difference and value – what Lamont also refers to as valuation – as well as the evaluation of specific people using these valued categories (Lamont, 2012). Similarly, Skeggs suggest to distinguish between the construction and exchange of value, and the inscription of value on concrete bodies (Skeggs, 2004). Also, and more in line with Bourdieu than with Lamont, Skeggs insist that both inscription and the construction and exchange of value is always performed from a specific perspective, and that such perspectives should be explored in the analysis (for further discussion of categorization see Harrits and Møller, 2011; Lakoff, 1987; Yanow, 2003).

Returning to the theory on discretion, relevant perspectives in this context may include the state and policies, professional knowledge and the social and cultural background of individual teachers and communities. To explore how teachers construct and use categories, and

thus perform potential identity and status lessons towards the children, I therefore focus on **the ways in which teachers construct categories of children**, as well as how they use these categories to **evaluate concrete children from different backgrounds**. More specifically, I first explore the different **perspectives used to construct categories** and discuss to what extent these perspectives construct identity and status lessons beyond the school, i.e. whether or not they are **informed by and inform general hierarchies of status, lifestyles and class**. Following this, I explore to what extent children with different class and status characteristics **are evaluated differently**, i.e. whether or not value is inscribed differently towards children from different backgrounds. As explained further below, the analysis builds on semi-structured interviews with Danish and American teachers, employing also two vignettes, i.e. case stories describing two different children. Both in the semi-structured interviews and in the vignette stories, I focus on a task often performed by teachers, namely the task of identifying children in need of extra help, as a way of accessing teachers' construction and use of classification schemes.

Design, data and methods

Exploring both discretionary judgements and the construction and use of categories and classification schemes, many scholars choose semi-structured interviews as a way of accessing the discursive nature of categories and the meaning making processes involved here (Lamont and Swidler, 2014; Raaphorst, 2017). Surely ethnographic field work and observational data could give further insights into the performative aspects of especially the encounters between teachers and students, and thus explore not only teacher's cultural practices, but also the identity and status lessons experienced by citizens. However, focusing solely on teachers, and aiming at a comparative study across different contexts, **semi-structured interviews provide a more resource-effective way of accessing categories and categorization**. Further, to allow for **comparisons across contexts**, the

semi-structured interviews included a vignette design, presenting similar stories to each of the interviewees and thus giving the opportunity to explore and compare how teachers engage in categorization.

Two country cases were chosen for the study, interviewing teachers in Denmark and a mid-western state in the United States. Denmark and the United States vary greatly with respect to inequality and social mobility. Denmark is among the most equal OECD countries, and has a rather high income mobility, whereas USA is among most unequal, and has a rather low income mobility (Landersø and Heckman, 2017, OECD Income Distribution Database (IDD)).

Also, the Danish educational system is universal and generous, providing high quality and free daycare to all children, a free public primary and secondary (tiered) school system for children from the age of 6 to 18 years, and free tertiary education, also offering a monthly 6-year stipend for all students. Compared to this, the United states K12 system offers free education for children aged 6 to 18, targeted programs for day care supplemented by private day care institutions, and a tertiary education system with payed programs offered by both state and private colleges and universities. Overall, the Danish system **invests more heavily in especially early education, resulting in a more equal distribution of cognitive and non-cognitive abilities between children** from different family backgrounds (Landersø and Heckman, 2017). Curiously, however educational mobility in Denmark and USA is **remarkably similar** (Landersø and Heckman, 2017), meaning that despite a strong effort to distribute resources in the Danish schools, results in the form of a higher educational mobility is not obtained. This makes the comparison of cultural and categorization practices among teachers in Denmark and USA **highly interesting and relevant**.

With respect to specific political and administrative contexts the two countries also present many differences. Overall, in both countries, educational policies over the last 20 years have increasingly been targeted at using investments in and reform of the educational system, to increase

opportunities for all children (Møller and Harrits, 2013; Rhodes, 2012). In both countries, teachers are thus asked not only to teach children a specific subject area, but also to continuously be aware of children in need of extra support. It is this task of continuously trying to identify and prevent problems that I here use to access the construction and use of categories and classifications schemes. The political and administrative systems surrounding schools and education vary immensely, however, especially with regard to day care and elementary schools, which are the focus of analysis here.

For elementary school teachers, differences are related to the fact that Danish teachers typically teach only a few subject areas, and they teach in different classes, whereas American teachers at this grade-level teach most subject areas in one class. Danish teachers also have considerably more plan time compared to American teachers, and they are more or less free to choose their own curriculum, which is not the case for American teachers, where national and state standards are rather comprehensive. In general, fewer regulations exist with regard to the work performed by Danish teachers, and although some standardized testing is done in Denmark, it is not nearly as much as what is carried out in American schools.

Furthermore, the professional education of Danish teachers typically focuses on a combination of academic courses (in e.g. math, Danish languages, science etc.) and some general courses in psychology and pedagogy. The Danish educational program for teachers lasts 4 years, including a practicum in a Danish school, and it is located in specialized teaching academies at non-research-based University Colleges. To teach in a Danish school you must have graduated from such an education program, but there is no other licensing, and very few Danish teacher complete a master's degree before becoming a teacher. American teachers typically have a background from an educational program at an American college, some at the BA- and some at the MA-level. Courses are a combination of academic courses and courses focusing on didactics, but the variation of

courses seem to be much wider compared to the Danish context, where the content of the teacher education program is rather strictly regulated by national policy. Also, teachers will have to obtain a State-based license before being able to teach in American schools.

For pre-school teachers, differences are even bigger. In Denmark, 80% of children attend public child-care institutions, and child-care professionals are considered specialized professionals referred to as ‘pedagogues’. The aim of day-care institutions is thus primarily to support the development of children, emphasizing play over learning, or learning through play. The educational program for becoming a pedagogue is 3.5 years, located in pedagogical academies in the same University Colleges hosting teacher education. The content of this program is general courses in child psychology, child development, and pedagogy, and courses in e.g. special education. In comparison, American public pre-schools are typically targeted towards children in social risk situations or children eligible for special education, and most American children will therefore attend a private pre-school or day-care center. The educational background of pre-school teachers is more diverse compared to Denmark, with some having a background in special education, and others a background in early childhood education.

As mentioned, despite these differences, the task of identifying children possible in need of extra support is quite similar across the two countries, and across teachers working in elementary schools and day care institutions. This was used in the semi-structured interviews, which focused on how teachers think about and handle this task, asking what typically would make them start worrying about a child, and start thinking about the possible need for extra support. However, whereas asking teachers in this open and explorative way facilitates the analysis and comparison of valuation, i.e. the construction of valued categories, it makes comparisons with regard to categorization of specific children difficult and dependent upon the children that teachers meet in their concrete daily interactions. Therefore, each interviewee were presented with two

hypothetical yet realistic and authentic stories about a family and child experiencing problems in school. Presenting such vignette stories in an interview setting mimics the ways in which frontline workers make judgements in their everyday practices, and it facilitates a conversation about how and why frontline workers interpret and reason in these situations (Jenkins et al. 2010; Barter and Renold 1999). Each story was constructed to present the following information:

- a possible problem related to the child's academic (math or reading) or developmental performance (language or motor skills)
- a possible problem related to the child's behavior in the classroom
- a description of how the family handles school work / homework
- a description of the family's own interpretation of the problem
- a description of the social background of the family, using occupation of the parents as a proxy for social class background

Six stories were constructed, varying information on social background and the precise nature of problems, and making two sets of stories aimed at elementary school and day care (see appendix for full length stories). Each interviewee was first given a story about a middle-class child, with a set of problems (cf. above). Following this half of the interviewees was given a story about an upper-class boy and half of the interviewees was given a story about a lower class. Besides information about the social background, all other information in these two second vignettes were identical. The design of the vignettes thus explicitly aims to give cues about both academic, developmental and possible behavior problems, which all are deliberately described in an ambiguous manner, so as to facilitate interpretations of the severity of the problem by the interviewee. In other words, the problems were designed so that the interviewees could legitimately interpret them as not necessarily requiring extra help, or the opposite. Also, cues were given about class background of the families,

to facilitate the study of how categorization relates to different class backgrounds. At the same time, all stories were presented with boys' names and names connoting white/Caucasian ethnicity. Thus, even though social identities are often constructed as complex intersections of class, gender and race, this study chooses to focus specifically on differences related to class.

The vignettes were first constructed for interviews in Denmark. To make sure that the vignettes were constructed as authentic as possible, a small observation pilot study was conducted in a Danish school and a day care institution, and each vignette was discussed with teachers before making a final version. After finishing the Danish study, similar vignettes were constructed for the American interviews. Small adjustments were made to make sure that the stories would be perceived as realistic and authentic in the American context, at the same time as the nature of the problems were kept as similar as possible. For example, a slight change of the description of behavior problems in the school vignette was made, due to the fact that children in American second-grade classes often have only one teacher. Also, slight changes were made in the description of the academic and developmental problems to accommodate the standard expectations in American schools, and slight changes were made in the description of parent employment and age, to match a realistic description of American families. These changes were made consulting with several American academic experts doing research on education and thus familiar with everyday practices in American schools and day care institutions.

After being presented with the vignettes, the interviewees were asked an open "think-aloud" question about the boy in the story and his problems, followed by questions on whether or not they would be concerned for the boy, and what they would do in a situation like this. This provided a rich material of interpretations and reasoning about the nature of the problems, situations and interventions, as well as about the construction and use of classification schemes. Also, to make sure that the stories presented valid and authentic problems close to the everyday experiences of the


interviewees, each interviewee was asked if she, in her own classroom, could meet boys like the ones presented in the stories. Most interviewees replied that they could, and many of them said that the stories made them think of specific students that they had met. The vignettes were presented mid-way in the semi-structured interview, following the open questions on identification of problems, as well as questions on the everyday practices, the local context and the professional identity of the teacher. After the discussion of the vignettes, the interviews focused on the personal background of the teacher.

A total number of 70 interviews were collected (22 teachers and 20 pre-school-teachers in Denmark and 17 teachers and 11 kindergarten or pre-school teachers in USA). Although inferences to any broader population should be made with caution, the selection process was designed to make sure that different types of schools and teachers were represented in the data, for example collecting data in school districts varying with respect to social homogeneity and status. However, only 3 male teachers were interviewed in Denmark and 2 male teachers were interviewed in USA. This possibly reflect the gender distribution of teachers in the lower grades in both Denmark and USA, but it nevertheless may mean that inferences especially to male teachers will be problematic. Further, inferences to the American context in general may be limited by the fact that data was only collected in one mid-Western State. With these limitations in mind, it should be remembered that the goal here is not to make statistical inferences to a broader population, but rather to explore in-depth the construction and use of categories in teacher's cultural practices. In the final part of the paper, the possibilities for analytical inferences will be discussed.

All interviews have been transcribed verbatim by student assistants following a detailed guide for transcriptions. Further, interviews have been coded in two rounds, using the same coding frames across the Danish and American interviews (Saldana, 2013). The coding frame was developed coding the Danish interviews, in a process with an open round of coding, followed by

axial coding collapsing several coded into a coherent frame. Following this, the American data was coded in a first cycle using the Danish coding frame and supplementing this with an open coding generating new codes and themes where relevant. Finally, a second round of axial coding was performed, further collapsing and condensing codes into overall themes covering both the Danish and the American data and thus facilitating analysis (see appendix for full coding frame). Codes focus, first, on the ways in which different types of valued categories and hierarchies are established by teachers spontaneously describing the children they meet in their classrooms, and more specifically describing how they identify children in need of an extra hand. Second, coding the ways in which teachers interpret the two vignette stories, a similar coding frame is applied, followed also by a coding of the final categorization of each of the children with regard to the degree of worry (i.e. is the teacher worried or not with regard to this specific child).

Professional categories and symbolic hierarchies in Denmark and the US

Overall, and in both Denmark and the US, three different types of categories are constructed by teachers, namely categories referring professional knowledge on children's skills, development and behavior, categories referring to the distribution of resources and social characteristics, and cultural categories referring to the lifestyles and values of the families and children. Also, most teachers use  all these categories, although social and especially cultural categories seem to be more prevalent among Danish teachers.

The construction of *professional categories* is quite similar across contexts. Here, categories come to signify either different levels of competence or different degrees of acceptable and expected behavior, both referring to an underlying but typically unspecified assumption about *normal* child development. The valuation performed in the construction of these professional categories thus refer to teacher's professional knowledge and experiences with regard to what most

children normally do. This is for example the case when teachers refer to the development of skills and constructs a set of categories based on the level of skills expected to be reached at a certain age or a specific grade level (code: Skills and development). Sometimes these expectations are very explicit, also referring to a variety of test results categorizing children with respect to e.g. math literacy, writing skills or language and motor skills development:

Well, we have this child, and in the beginning ... one and a half years ago ... there was no language at all [appropriate] for a 3-year old. And it was, with clothes, [he] could not, I mean ... with no motor skills at all. (DKPSC11)

Typically, these categories are limited to specific skills, but sometimes more aggregate categories are established, differentiating, for example, between the 'higher-thinking' and 'lower-thinking' children, or between children who 'get' and children who do not 'get it'.

I have kind of like higher thinking kids and my co-worker next to me has some lower thinking kids, and I might reach through and are able to expand on a topic, where she is still reviewing to make sure they get it. Ehm, and so that's where it, you know, we can kind of differentiate between, you know, what we need to do. And sometimes I'll have like two or three kids that don't get it, and so the rest of the kids we'll go into centers, and then I can pull them one-on-one or two-on-one and teach them and make sure they really get before moving (USTA02).

Interestingly, the American political-administrative context in itself seems to construct a valued set of categories following the multi-tiered-system of support (Jimerson et al., 2016). In this system, which is used in many states, including the state in this study, most students are considered tier-1 students, meaning that they can follow whole-group instruction and participate in individual problem solving. Some students, however, are considered tier-2 students, needing extra instructional help in small groups often conducted in class by the teacher. Finally, a few tier-3 students have problems requiring individual instruction and help, oftentimes by specialists outside of the classroom. This comprehensive system for testing students and following up with support has also generated a vocabulary for describing the students, and most US elementary school teachers refer to these differences, e.g. children needing extra instruction, or categorizing children by

specific test scores such as reading levels (code: special needs tier groups). This rather specific language is not found among the Danish teachers, as there is no equivalent comprehensive multi-tiered-system of support, no mandatory system of testing different skills in the Danish schools, and typically no grading of children before the 8th grade. In general, the Danish teachers thus use somewhat more vague categorizations, although some also refer to “reading levels”, implicitly referring to different reading tests.

Across Denmark and the US, many teachers also refer to behavioral problems, such as e.g. aggressive behavior, or not being able to sit down quietly and follow instructions, and often these behavioral problems are regarded as problems in themselves, at the same time as they are seen to indicate underlying and more serious problems (code: Behavior).

We have a boy who has been to several different schools. And now it's 3rd grade. [...] And he has had ... well problems with both teachers and students, and he can get really violent, and very outward reacting (DKTD19).

Partly overlapping with these behavioral categories, teachers also refer to specific diagnoses, such as e.g. ADHD, anxiety or stress (code: diagnoses, code: mental and emotional problems). Here, the construction of categories is less performative, though, as teachers typically refer to children already diagnosed by other professionals. Also, especially Danish teachers refer to a very specific set of signs indicating abuse, thereby constructing a risk-category of children who need extra attention (code: abuse).

Finally, many Danish and some American teachers refer to a somewhat vaguely described set of social skills and an expected way for children to engage, interact and form relationships with other children (code: social relationships with other children):

Seeing that they respond to you ... ehm... if you introduce yourself or say “hi” and they immediately... pull away or immediately turn their back to you. Ehm ... to me that's a huge red flag. Ehm... ... I've had students before that upon getting to the classroom they immediately go and hide under the table or in the corner. (USTA05)

And then, of course, we also have children, where it continues to be difficult, right, I mean you can work and work and work. These are children who are ... off, that's a strange word to use, right, but you know what I mean [...]. And who just, where they just rub off in a negative way in the other children (DKTA01).

These vaguer categories include, especially in Denmark, the expectation that all children should be able to form relationships and friendships with the children they meet, and also be able to continue these relationships outside the school or the day-care institutions. Furthermore, in Denmark, but not in the US, categories are constructed with regard to the relationship between children and parents referring to a set of implicit expectations as their quality and normality:

Some parents easily manage to be parents around their children. Even though they do not have much time. And others, well ... Perhaps they could use some more time. For just ... seeing the child in the morning, and ... well, being a bit close before dropping off the child, right. Some children have a 'full tank' when they arrive. And others do not. [...] It has to do with that you ... you have gotten a hug and some love before leaving home. Some attention, and yes, the hair is combed, and you have been cuddled a little. It's not just: "come on, come on". I mean, you can feel that there is a little energy in the children, when they arrive here. (DKTD19)

However, whereas such categorizations here have been coded under the overall theme of professional categories, there is clearly an overlap to the theme discussed below, regarding cultural and life-style categories. We thus return to the specific valuation going on here with regard to parenting.

In summary, the categorizations performed by teachers are thus surely embedded in the professional context the school as an institution that distributes knowledge and evaluates students, by e.g. testing and grading with reference to a specific set of goals, but also by identifying problems related to both learning, development and behavior. The construction of valued categories thus have a logic of professional judgement, of diagnosis and intervention (Abbott, 1988), referring to what Canguilhem describes as scholastic conceptions of normality, i.e. a conception which is built on a scientific distinction between what is both prevalent and preferable (i.e. healthy), and what on the other hand is problematic or pathological (Canguilhem, 1991). Also, the logic of the

valuation ascribed with these categories is connected to interventions, either by seeking to eradicate the pathological (such as aggressive behavior) or as seeking to normalize the pathological (as with problems regarding the development of skills). Normalization in this context, however, could be interpreted as the wish to distribute help and resources to overcome problems and pathologies, i.e. to distribute opportunities for learning.

In addition to this professional logic of diagnosis and intervention, the professional categories also construct a symbolic hierarchy of accomplishment and worth beyond the specific learning and development goals, identifying, for example, the higher and lower children, or the good and the bad children (Bourdieu, 1996). Thus, identity and status lessons embedded in the professional categories are not solely confined to the professional identification of competence, or of problems and the subsequent distribution of resources to remedy these problems, but also to a broader social hierarchy. As we shall see below, similar identity lessons on worth are constructed in the other two types of categories constructed by the teachers.

Social and cultural categories in Denmark and the US

Whereas the construction of professional categories refers to professional knowledge on child development, the construction of social and cultural categories seems to refer to teachers' common-sense knowledge on the societal distribution of resources and lifestyles, and thus to teachers' social and cultural context. *Social categories* refer to the distribution of resources, distinguishing between families and children with different degrees and types of resources. The categories are thus somewhat blurry, functioning more as hierarchies than distinct categories. In both countries, most teachers refer to an overall and composite understanding of families with resources and families without resources, focusing mostly on families struggling and not giving adequate support to the children:

And so... a lot of these kids... they don't... they can't help their circumstances, none of them can. But a lot of these kids, you can just tell... you know if they just had a little bit more. A little bit more support at home... (USKA04)

Well, this is ... this is a family where the mother is alone, and she also has a difficult time handling herself. So, it really centers a lot around support. Some control from home. There is a lack of control from home (DKTC17)

The reason for families struggling or lacking resources and support for their children is varied, sometimes relating to marital status, single-parent households, but mostly just vaguely referring to the lack of stability in the home (code: Resources in general). Some teachers also refer to neighborhoods as 'weak' and 'strong' as a way of referring to the overall distribution of resources among families, and in the US some teachers use the category of 'free-and-reduced-lunch' as a way of signifying a specific category of children.

Further, both Danish and American teachers refer specifically to the distribution of economic and cultural-educational resources as a way of hierarchically sorting children and families. In the US, however, economic hierarchies are dominant, whereas Danish teachers more often refer to the distribution of educational resources:

In my previous school one of the hardest things was ... very little parent involvement because of the high poverty. ... So... and there were some days... when I would just lie awake at night because I wasn't sure if some of my kids had eaten that night (USTB10).

It can also be the case that it's difficult for them to help their children. And ... like if you tell them "you need to make a huge effort". When I say "huge", I mean work with them [the children] every day. And maybe half an hour or an hour, every day, helping them at home. And there are just some parents who themselves have bad experiences from school, and so on. They can't handle it. (DKTB10)

Supplementing this categorization of resources, Danish teachers also refer more specifically to families lacking mental resources due to different psychological disorders (code: Mental resources), and both Danish and especially American teachers refer to ethnic minority families, using both a language of race, ethnicity, immigration status and language (code: Ethnicity and race).

Interestingly, whereas the vague hierarchy of general resources focus mostly on the lack of resource, support and stability, the hierarchies referring to economic and cultural resources mention both families with many resources and families without resources. Particularly among Danish teachers, social categories sometimes involves a negative valuation of not only families without especially economic) resources, but also families with an abundance of (especially economic) resources:

Well I have what we mostly refer to as rich families [...]. In other words, you can say, these are children, which in my universe, are 'wished-for' children. They are planned. That also means that they are somewhat selfish children. They are used to saying "me, me, me". And they are used to adults stopping and listening to them, when they say something (DKTA05).

This structure of negative valuation overlaps with the cultural categories constructed both in the Danish and the American case.

Not surprisingly, these *cultural categories*, display a somewhat larger difference between teachers in the two countries, even though the overall themes of the categories are quite similar. Many teachers in both countries, construct a set of valued categories around parenting and the behavioral norms that children are being given in the family (code: behavioral norms and parenting). Here, American teachers mostly construct a vague category between "good and loving" families, and the opposite, referring, again vaguely, to different types of "inappropriate" behavior, as well as to parents being too loose or "overindulgent" around their children or acting as "helicopter parents":

And it's when I learned the term helicopter parent... [...] Even when I just taught music... I had parents emailing me, you know, all the time about... things. They were mad about something or they were, and I'm happy to answer questions, blowing things out of proportion. "I heard that this happened, what are you... why did you let that happen?". Like... "you weren't there..." (USTA06).

In Denmark, however, teachers construct a more specific set of valued categories distinguishing between on the one hand "normless" families with too little control over their children and what

goes on in the family, and “over-controlling” parents, who – similar to the “helicopter parents” – are too overindulgent with their children:

When I eat with the children [in the lunch-break] I want them to sit still on their chairs, legs under the table, speaking with a calm voice. You are not allowed to run around the classroom. So, when these types of demands are made, some [children] have a really hard time. And ... perhaps at home they are used to that in order for them to be quiet, it's ok to wander off and watch TV once they have finished their meal. (DKTA05).

Sometimes it's Well, there are children who are very much like “see me, listen to me”, like a product of ehm of the parents. (DKPSD20).

In the US, some teachers also construct categories referring to the lifestyles of families, e.g. the food children eat, their hygiene and clothes, as well as their living arrangements, and a few further refer to the organization of everyday life in the families, mostly by referring to parents being “busy” (code: lifestyle, food, hygiene, code: rhythm and planning):

Here [...] my babies don't eat dinner or... they come to school hungry or they came to school dirty, or parents aren't working or maybe they're homeless or they just moved here from Mexico, which did happen, we had a family move in last week. (USKA01)

And ehm, I think it's important that, you know, not all the time, even in a community like this, where you have... you know, they're very wealthy families and, you don't always, I mean, we all know money is not... money can't make you happy. But sometimes we see kiddos out here with more emotional needs, because... dad always travels or mom's able to stay home, but dad gotta travel all the time, and dad is never home, you know, and they never have family dinners together. (USTA04)

As in the example above, most lifestyle categories constructed by the American teachers are quite descriptive, and closely connected to the categories constructed around resources. This is also sometimes the case in Denmark, where categories referring to lifestyles and the organization of everyday life is much more elaborate (code: lifestyle, food, hygiene, code: rhythm and planning). However, the construction of these lifestyle and everyday life codes among Danish teachers also connect to the valued categories on norms, and the distinction between too little and too much control, mentioned above. The valuation in the Danish categories is thus stronger, involving not

only a descriptive understanding of resources, but also of the quality, normality and moral soundness of lifestyle choices, such as how healthy is the food, or how good are the activities that parents choose for their children during the weekend:

I have had a child [...] who just did not fit in. There was no real support from home, dad was not really present, and mom was, both ha and the mom were dyslectic, and not really interested in, ehm ... She made sure that he had had his fourteen yoghurts for lunch each day, so he could really get a sugar rush. A boy who came to school each day smelling of piss, and haven't taken a bath. Really dirty and sad, and he had a hard time in school, because he couldn't find any friends that were a match to him. (DKTB09)

We have had a child where we thought, that the conditions at home they are just not right for this child to have an optimal development, right [...] So following up on his development, and like normal parents would read for the child, perhaps draw stuff, simple things like that, right, that you just do at home. It was just the computer and the TV, right. And he was really inactive when he was at home. (DKPC11)

Well, when you enter a home like that [a wealthy home], where no dust is to be found, ad where it's just completely tidy in the children's rooms, and cut out of a magazine, then I think: "Okay, where are all the small thingies from the Donald Duck Magazine or from McDonalds, right? Where are they? Are they just thrown out? Or what, I mean ... Those drawings that they came home with, where are they? (DKTB10)

In summary, the social and cultural categories, especially in Denmark, present a set of categories and hierarchies valuing middle class families, as having not too much and not too little of both resources and control, and also making appropriate lifestyles choices. In the US, this valuation of the middle class is not as strong, and categories are more vaguely constructed referring to the distribution of resources, and the distinction between "good and loving" families and families struggling, sometimes also referring to inappropriate norms or behaviors. However, some American teachers also make a valued categorization of wealthy families as too busy, not being able to give emotional support to their children, and of "helicopter parents" and parents being too overindulgent with their children.

As mentioned above, the construction of these social and cultural categories is not made referring to a specific set of goals or to professional knowledge. Instead, teachers are here

performing as citizen agents, referring to a more common sense understanding of society, and to the set of social and cultural categories of this society that exist as repertoires in our (national) culture, as well as embedded in the (class) habitus of teachers (Bourdieu, 1984; Lamont, 1992, 2000).

Following Canguilhem, normality thus exist not only as a scholastic conception, but also as a popular conception, referring not to a specific set of knowledge or science, but to our everyday experiences and common sense: “it is possible for the normal to be a category of popular judgment because their social situation is keenly, though confusedly, felt by the people as not being in line, not “right” ” (Canguilhem, 1991: 237).

The identity and status lessons encountered by children in the schools are thus not only related to their performances and behavior in school, i.e. to what they do, but also to who they are outside of school. Also, they are related and embedded in national cultural categories and status hierarchies, as well as in the middle-class habitus and culture of the teachers continuously (re)construction categories and categorizations in the encounters with children. This is particularly evident for the Danish teachers in this analysis, who construct cultural categories which are embedded in a strong sense of the moral worth of a middle-class lifestyle.

Class background and the categorization of children

The significance of these identity and status lessons, however, becomes even more clear when turning to the analysis of how the valued categories and hierarchies are applied in categorizations of specific children. This analysis draws on the vignette design on the study, presenting – as described above – each teacher with two stories on two children from different social backgrounds and experiencing different but still similar problems in the school. Using vignettes in a semi-structured interview facilitates an analysis both of how interviewees, i.e. teachers, interprets the information, as well as how they choose to act towards this information. In this case, the vignettes give the

opportunity to explore both how teachers construct and use categories in the interpretation of the information given in the stories, as well as how they choose to combine this information in a final evaluation and categorization of the child, i.e. whether they are worried or not about the child in the story.

Supporting the analysis above, teachers in both Denmark and the US construct and use both professional, social and cultural categories quite similar to the categories constructed when describing their own classrooms. Also, these categories are used more or less seamlessly together, for example when describing and categorizing children's academic problems in combination with a description and categorization of parenting choices:

And we need to address that, both at home and in school. That he refuses to do things. That adults will stand up and tell him, that there is a thing called "must". And it's okay that school is boring. Not everything is a computer game, where everything is fun. Because when you learn, it's okay that things are boring. Because you practice. And that can be quite boring [...]. But he needs to do his homework, because when we say homework, it needs to be done. And homework requires control. Because when you say homework and it is not done, then you hold everybody for fools. I mean, it needs to be controlled. Because when it's not done, then they [the children] need to be confronted and need to get going. Mike needs to understand that. (DKTA04, talking about the lower-class vignette)

As far as the homework, I mean, you can never ... tell a parent how to parent [...]. But ... I would definitely say, you know, "I'm doing as much as I can to help him here at school ... and if you would support me at home, it would help his progress so much more." He would see that I am pushing the importance of learning and doing your work, at school, but then if he goes home and that same importance isn't pushed at home, then... you know [...]. Yeah and I'm like "Guys you ... it takes you twenty minutes. Twenty-five maybe". One math sheet or they read a chapter of their book. So, it's nothing! But, you know, they [the children] say "I have dance" and "I have basketball." Or "I have football." And... I'm like ... I try to get them to do it in the car... "Read in the car. Read on the bus." (USTC11 talking about the middle-class vignette).

Well... I have some concerns on their parenting (laughs). I'm just kidding. I mean, I think I would suggest that ... I would suggest that his homework, if he doesn't do his homework, he doesn't get the iPad. That would be my first suggestion (USTA01

talking about the upper-class vignette).

Also, categorizations of academic problems and behavior in combination with categorizations of the social position and resources of the families are used by teachers in both Denmark and the US:

He says it's boring, it's just that, that excuse-word. There's something else. You're lazy and you don't want to, or it's too hard, or, you know, or it's too easy and you don't, you don't wanna. You just honestly don't want to take the time to do it [...] They [the parents] seem like pretty busy, 'cause, or, or maybe not. Maybe they can clock out at five and be home, uhm... ... seems like he's trying to get attention though, you know, just his behaviors are... It's good he's a confident kid, but uhm, he's trying to get something in class, that he's not getting... elsewhere. Any time someone state, you know, any loud announcement to the class, I'm like "okay, you want my attention, you want some to..." And especially that he is selective, if he is interested he will do it, if not he won't. (UTSA05 talking about the upper-class vignette).

Right away I am thinking that these are parents where you can say that they don't have the resources for, uhm, for example helping their children with homework. And then it's not the child that you need to get a hold of, but the parents, and find out, concretely, do they have the chance of creating a small 'home work room'. So, so, we always find something that kind of can be, something positive for them to do [...]. So, so, uhm, but I will also suggest that it is important that they kind of find a way to get some time for homework (DKTA03 talking about the lower-class vignette).

Sometimes, teacher use the interpretation of social resources as a way of explaining the problem, at the same time as they morally value the effort of the families, whereas other times teachers describe resources as a way of also ascribing responsibility and a negative value to the families. Here, however, the most interesting thing is that professional, social and cultural categories are used in combination, when teachers interpret the stories.

Turning, then, to the final analysis of the decisions teachers make on the degree of worry, we can use the difference in class backgrounds in the two stories, to explore how class bias may be introduced in the encounters between teachers and children. As explained above, the academic and developmental problems in the two stories are quite similar, whereas the descriptions of social class background and lifestyles are different. Differenced in the degrees of worry between

the vignettes should, therefore, be related to the social class and lifestyle differences.

In Denmark, most teachers and pre-school-teachers evaluate the middle-class vignette concluding that they are “somewhat” worried, although their worry is not so serious that they would begin any intervention or initiate any screening process – yet (see table A.3 in the appendix). As several of the interviewees explain, they are not “worried worried”, but “a little” worried, and worried enough to “keep an eye” on this child in the coming months. A few conclude that they are not worried at all, and even fewer conclude that they are worried. Compared to this, more Danish teachers and pre-school-teachers conclude that they are worried about the second vignette, regardless of whether this second vignette present the child as coming from the lower class or the upper class.

More precisely, 40% of the Danish teachers and 70% of the Danish pre-school teachers worry more about the lower-class vignette, whereas 58% of the teachers and 40% of the pre-school teachers worry more about the upper-class vignette. Further, a similar pattern is found in the US, where most teachers, kindergarten teachers and pre-school teachers worry “a little” or not at all about the middle-class vignette. Also, 78% of the teachers and 20% of the kindergarten and pre-school teachers worry more about the lower-class vignette, and 38% of the teachers and 50% of the kindergarten and pre-school teachers worry more about the upper-class vignette. Also, it is worth noting that very few teachers in both countries worry less about the upper- or lower-class vignette.

This pattern suggest that teachers use the information on social class background and lifestyle in combination with information on academic and behavioral problems, when they categorize children and make decisions on whether to worry and think about giving children extra help or attention. Also, the pattern supports the findings above from specially the Danish case that the categorizations tend to value middle-class normality and thus categorizes both upper- and

lower-class backgrounds and lifestyles as potentially problematic.

Given the design of the vignettes, one could speculate as to whether it is the nature of the problems in the vignettes that causes this difference, and not the difference in social class background and lifestyles. However, further analysis of the interpretation and reasoning supporting the final decisions suggest, that this is not the case, as most teachers and pre-school teachers more worried about the second vignette explicitly refers to differences in “the family” as the reason for their decision.

In summary, the analysis of the construction and use of categories in the interpretation of information about specific children thus suggest that the professional categories are often used in combination with social and cultural categories in a composite categorization. The identity and status lesson performed by the teachers thus seem to refer both to what the children do and who they are. Even though this is sometimes (but not always) done with the explicit intention of helping children, for example by giving children struggling both academically and with problems at home extra resources, the identification of problems drawing on social and cultural categories runs the risk of reinforcing existing categories and hierarchies. This is particularly the case, where the categories applied involves a tendency to value middle-class resources and lifestyles as *normal*, and thus a tendency to see other types of resources and lifestyles as in themselves problematic. Doing that, the teachers end up signaling to children that in order to gain access to the resources in school they must change not only what they do, but also who they are.

Concluding discussion: Social reproduction and the cultural practices of teachers

To be written.

Discussion will address

- How does the cultural practices of teachers introduce class bias in the encounters with children, and in the identity and status lessons embedded in the categories constructed by teachers?
- What does the similarities and differences between Denmark and the US tell us, and how does it contribute to making analytical inferences?
- What does this analysis teach us about the possible role of schools and teachers in the distribution of resources, identity and status, and the consisting results that schools often fail to achieve promises of “opportunities for all”. And why is it particularly interesting to find these results across the American and Danish cases, where policies specifically address the goal of social mobility, and where resources and regulation for many years have been targeted towards achieving this goal, especially in the Danish case?
- What does the results mean for sociological theories on the relationship between schools, class and status?

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OECD Income Distribution Database (IDD), <http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=IDD>).

Appendix

Interview guide, selected questions used for analysis here

- Can you say something about the families you meet in your daily work? I'm not interested in specific families, just general comments.
- Sometimes teachers have to find out if children are in need of an extra hand due to some kind of problem. It could be children who need extra help or attention in the classroom, or it could be children that may need some extra resources, for example special education or at-risk-programs. And as a teacher, it is sometimes up to you to help identify these children – especially those who are not 'clear-cut' cases, i.e. children that are not already identified and enrolled in specific programs, and children who may only have temporary problems that you can easily help with in your classroom.
 - Can you tell me something about how you normally identify such children who may have some problem or need an extra hand? What does it take for you to be especially attentive or a little concerned for a specific child? Could you give an example and tell me about a specific child that you have been worried about?
 - And how about children who may be at risk – how is that visible in the classroom. Is that something that you pay attention to? How?
- Introduction of vignettes: I have also brought with me some examples of children written in small case-stories. Please read these two cases.
 - What do you think about this case? Would you be concerned for these children?
 - What would you do here?
 - Which of the cases would worry you the most?
 - Are these children and families someone you could meet in your classroom?

Vignettes

Vignettes for teachers used in Danish interviews

Middle class

Imagine a boy in the second grade. You are his class teacher. His name is Mads, he is eight years, and he started in the class just five months ago, when his family moved to the town. The mother is 38 and pedagogue, and the father is 44 and teacher, and they both work at the local school. Mads is the mother's only child, while the father has two children from a previous marriage.

Mads has had a fine start in the class. He is a funny boy, and he has gotten a lot of attention from the other boys by telling jokes, for example from "Klovn" (a Danish sitcom primarily for adults), that he watches together with his father. In the classroom this creates some disturbances, and some of your colleagues have mentioned to you that they have difficulties getting Mads to be quiet. Also, the gym teacher has told you about some episodes where Mads has acted out very strongly, because he has felt that he has been treated unfairly.

During the last month, the parents have told you that Mads has difficulties making really close friends in the class, and often he does not have anybody to play with during the afternoon or in the weekend. The mother tells that it has been difficult moving. For example, she has been separated from her mother and older sister, and the family has not yet made many friends in the area yet, just as Mads has not yet found any after school activities that really interests him.

While preparing for a regular meeting with the parents, you have talked to the math teacher. He tells that Mads is somewhat behind in math compared to the rest of the class. Mads lacks some basic skill: he can't tell the time, and he is not quite sure about the numbers above 20. The parents have told the math teacher that they have stopped pressuring Mads to do his homework in math, because he often gets very upset. And due to the moving and Mads beginning in a new class, they have avoided putting too much pressure on him.

Upper class

Imagine a boy in the second grade. You are his class teacher. His name is Vitus, and he is eight years old. The mother is 40 and a MD, and the father is 43 and engineer. The mother works on a hospital nearby, and the father is employed in a private company.

Vitus is a popular boy in the class, and he often takes a rather dominating role both in class and in the breaks. During breaks it is often Vitus decides on the teams that will play football, just as he acts as a referee and solves conflict. In class, there is always a lot of disturbances around Vitus, and sometimes he will state, very loudly, that the activities started by the teachers are "boring" and that he doesn't want to participate. But sometimes he will be a very active participant in class discussions.

Parents tell, that during the last six months they have had difficulties getting Vitus to do his homework. Even though the homework is not much (typically it will be reading fifteen minutes a day, and some small math assignments), they often end up in conflict. The parents have also told you that Vitus describes the homework and the activities in schools as boring, and often he ends up being allowed to play the computer. The parents think that Vitus lacks sufficient challenges, and they are considering putting Vitus in a private school with a higher academic level.

While preparing for a regular meeting with the parents, the Danish teacher has presented the results of the last reading test. The Danish teacher explains that the test confirms her suspicion, namely that Vitus' level has dropped severely in the last six months, and that he actually has a substantially lower level of reading skills compared to the other children in the class.

Lower class

Imagine a boy in the second grade. You are his class teacher. His name is Mike, and he is eight years old. The mother is 40 and a nursing assistant, and the father is 43 and a truck driver. The mother is temporarily unemployed, and the father is on sick leave with a back injury.

Mike is a popular boy in the class, and he often takes a rather dominating role both in class and in the breaks. During breaks it is often Mike who decides on the teams that will play football, just as he acts as a referee and solves conflict. In class, there is always a lot of disturbances around Mike, and sometimes he will state, very loudly, that the activities started by the teachers are “boring” and that he doesn’t want to participate. But sometimes he will be a very active participant in class discussions.

Parents tell, that during the last six months they have had difficulties getting Mike to do his homework. Even though the homework is not much (typically it will be reading fifteen minutes a day, and some small math assignments), they often end up in conflict. The parents have also told you that Mike describes the homework and the activities in schools as boring, and often he ends up being allowed to play the computer. The parents think that Mike lacks sufficient challenges.

While preparing for a regular meeting with the parents, the Danish teacher has presented the results of the last reading test. The Danish teacher explains that the test confirms her suspicion, namely that Mike’s level has dropped severely in the last six months, and that he actually has a substantially lower level of reading skills compared to the other children in the class.

Vignettes used for teachers in American interviews

Middle class

Imagine a boy in the second grade. His name is Jacob and he is 8 years old. He started in your class 3 months ago (in early November), at the same time as he moved here with his family. The mother is 32 years old and works as a nurse at the local hospital. The father is 35 and works as a teacher at a local middle school.

Jacob has had a fine start in the class. He is a funny boy, and he has gotten a lot of attention from the other boys by telling (sometimes inappropriate) jokes. Most of the jokes are from stand-up comedy shows that he watches online with his father. In the classroom this creates some disturbance, and some of the specialists have mentioned that they have difficulties getting Jacob to focus on what he is supposed to be doing.

During the last month, the parents have told you that Jacob has described having difficulties making friends in school, and often he does not have anybody to sit with during lunch or to play with during recess. The mother tells you that the family has moved to the community only a year ago. As a consequence, she has been separated from her own family (her mother and older sister), and the family has not yet made many friends in the community. Also, Jacob has not shown any interest in after school activities.

In relation to a routine parent/guardian/teacher/student conference, you have prepared to talk about how Jacob is somewhat behind in math compared to the rest of the class. Jacob lacks basic number concepts and he is struggling with one- and two-digit addition and subtraction. The parents have told you that they have stopped doing math homework together with Jacob, because he often gets very upset. Due to the moving and Jacob starting in a new class, they have wanted to avoid putting too much pressure on him.

Upper class

Imagine another boy in the second grade. His name is Ethan, and he is eight years old. His mother is 39 and she works as an oncologist at a nearby hospital. The father is 42 and works as a civil engineer at a private company in a nearby city. Ethan is an only child.

Ethan is a popular boy in school, and he often takes a rather dominant role both in class and in at lunch. At lunch, Ethan is the one who dominates conversation at the table, and he often acts as mediator in conflicts between the other children in the lunchroom and on the playground. In class, there is always a lot of motion around Ethan, and sometimes he will state, very loudly, that the activities started by the teachers are “boring” and that he refuses to participate. At other times, he will be a very active participant in class discussions and activities, which he has decided are not boring.

The parents have told you that during the last six months they have had difficulties getting Ethan to do his homework. Even though the homework load is not excessive, they often end up in discussions and conflict. The parents have also told you that Ethan describes the homework and activities in schools as boring and stupid. Typically, he ends up being allowed to play on the iPad instead of doing his homework. The parents think that Ethan lacks sufficient challenges, and they want the school to meet his needs.

While preparing for a routine parent/guardian/teacher/student conference, you have looked at Ethan’s most recent reading assessment. This confirms your suspicion that Ethan’s reading comprehension level has decreased in the last six months, and that he actually has a substantially lower level of reading compared to the other children in the class.

Lower class

Imagine another boy in your class. His name is Mike, and he is eight years old. His mother is 29 and is a certified nursing assistant (CNA), although she is currently unemployed. His father is 32 and has previously worked as an over the road truck driver, but right now he is on disability due to a work injury. Mike is an only child.

Mike is a popular boy in school, and he often takes a rather dominant role both in class and in at lunch. At lunch, Mike is the one who dominates conversation at the table, and he often acts as mediator in conflicts between the other children in the lunchroom and on the playground. In class, there is always a lot of motion around Mike, and sometimes he will state, very loudly, that the activities started by the teachers are “boring” and that he refuses to participate. At other times, he will be a very active participant in class discussions and activities, which he has decided are not boring.

The parents have told you that during the last six months they have had difficulties getting Mike to do his homework. Even though the homework load is not excessive, they often end up in discussions and conflict. The parents have also told you that Mike describes the homework and activities in schools as boring and stupid. Typically, he ends up being allowed to play on the iPad instead of doing his homework. The parents think that Mike lacks sufficient challenges, and they want the school to meet his needs.

While preparing for a routine parent/guardian/teacher/student conference, you have looked at Mike’s most recent reading assessment. This confirms your suspicion that Mike’s reading comprehension level has decreased in the last six months, and that he actually has a substantially lower level of reading compared to the other children in the class.

Vignettes for pre-school teachers used in Danish interviews

Middle class

Imagine a boy in your day care center. You are his contact person. His name is Mads, he is four years old, and he started in the day care only five months ago, when his family moved to the town. The mother is 33 and pedagogue, and the father is 40 and teacher, and they both work at the local school. Mads is the mother's only child, while the father has two children from a previous marriage.

Mads has had a fine start in the day care, and it seems as if he has adapted quickly. For example, he says goodbye to his mother very fine in the morning. Within the last month, though, you have experienced that Mads has been in some difficult conflicts with the other children. The conflicts have been of different character, but typically it centers around who gets to decide, and on problems sharing toys. Especially the problem has been that Mads is very aggressive. He shouts very loud, and in a couple of instances he has hit another boy. Also, you have experienced that Mads will not eat together with the other children, and that he goes out into the locker room when the lunch is served.

The parents are very upset about the situation, and they tell that Mads has difficulties finding friends. The mother tells that the family has moved to the area only a year ago. As a consequence, she has been separated from her mother and older sister, and the family has not yet made many friends in the area yet.

While preparing for a routine meeting with the parents (which is usually placed half a year after the child's start in the day care), you have discussed with your colleagues that Mads might have some motor skill problems. For example, he has difficulties catching and throwing a ball. Also, the parents have told the manager of the day care that they have tried getting Mads to play football in the afternoon, so that he could get to know some other children. But Mads doesn't want to play football, and therefore they have stopped.

Upper class

Imagine a boy in your day care center. You are his contact person. His name is Vitus and he is three and a half years old and is started in the day care half a year ago. The mother is 36 and a MD, and the father is 39 and engineer. The mother works on a hospital nearby and the father is employed in a private company.

Vitus has had a rough start in the day care center. He has difficulties saying goodbye to his mother in the morning, and she seldom has the time to stay very long. You experience Vitus as rather whining during the day. He is a quiet child, keeping a bit to himself, and it is difficult for him to establish contact to the other children. Also, he has difficulties concentrating on collective activities, and often he leaves the room, when a collective activity begins. During the last six months that Vitus has been in the day care, he has several times refused to eat the food served in the day care in the collective lunch arrangement, which has been democratically decided by the parents in the day care.

The parents have asked if they can bring their own lunch-package, because they find the food served in the day care of too low quality, and they think that this is why Vitus will not eat it.

While preparing for a routine meeting with the parents (which is usually placed half a year after the child's start in the day care), you have discussed with your colleagues that Vitus may have some difficulties with language development, especially with pronunciation. The parents have told the manager in the day care that they are worried about Vitus' language, and that their old day care center did not do nearly enough to support the children's language development.

Lower class

Imagine a boy in your day care center. You are his contact person. His name is Mike, and he is three and a half years old and is started in the day care half a year ago. The mother is 36 and a nursing assistant, and the father is 39 and truck driver. The mother is temporarily unemployed, and the father is on sick leave with a back injury.

Mike has had a rough start in the day care center. He has difficulties saying goodbye to his mother in the morning, and she seldom has the time to stay very long. You experience Mike as rather whining during the day. He is a quiet child, keeping a bit to himself, and it is difficult for him to establish contact to the other children. Also, he has difficulties concentrating on collective activities, and often he leaves the room, when a collective activity begins. During the last six months that Mike has been in the day care, he has several times refused to eat the food served in the day care in the collective lunch arrangement, which has been democratically decided by the parents in the day care.

The parents have asked if they can bring their own lunch-package, because they think that it is too expensive now that Mike does not eat the food.

While preparing for a routine meeting with the parents (which is usually placed half a year after the child's start in the day care), you have discussed with your colleagues that Mike may have some difficulties with language development, especially with pronunciation. The parents have told the manager in the day care that they can't see anything wrong with Mike's language.

Vignettes for kindergarten and pre-school teachers used in American interviews

Middle class

Imagine a boy in a Kindergarten class in a school nearby. His name is Jacob, and he is five years old. He started in the class 3 months ago (in early November), at the same time as he moved to the school-district with his family. The mother is 29 years old and works as a nurse at the local hospital. The father is 32 and a teacher at a local middle school.

Jacob has had a fine first few months in the class, and it seems as if he has adapted quickly. Within the last month, though, the teacher has noticed that he has had some severe conflicts with some of the other children. The conflicts have been of different character, but typically it centers around who gets to decide what they will play, and on problems with taking turns and sharing the iPad. The problem has been that Jacob can be quite loud towards the other children. He sometimes shouts, and in a couple of instances he has pushed another child.

Upon hearing this, the parents were quite upset, and they have told the teacher that Jacob has difficulties finding friends. The mother explains that the family has moved to the community recently. As a consequence, she has been separated from her own family (her mother and older sister), and the family has not yet made many friends in the community.

While preparing for a routine parent/guardian/teacher/student conference, the teacher has discussed with her colleagues that Jacob might have some motor skill problems. For example, he has difficulties catching and throwing a (soccer) ball. Also, the parents have told the teacher that they have tried getting Jacob to play soccer with the neighborhood children, so that he can get to know other children in the community. Jacob doesn't want to play soccer, and therefore they have stopped trying.

Upper class

Imagine another boy in a Kindergarten class in a nearby school. His name is Ethan, and he is five and a half years old. His mother is 36 and she works as an oncologist at a nearby hospital. The father is 39 and works as a civil engineer at a private company in a nearby city. Ethan is an only child.

Ethan has had a rough start in the class, and he talks a lot during the day about missing his mother. The teacher also sees Ethan as a somewhat fragile child. He is quiet, he often keeps to himself during the day, and it seems difficult for him to establish contact with the other children. Also, he has difficulties concentrating when in a whole group setting, and he often gets distracted when instruction for an activity begins.

While preparing for a routine parent/guardian/teacher/student conference, the teacher has discussed with her colleagues that Ethan may have some difficulties with his language, especially with pronunciation of specific sounds and with understanding abstract concepts. The parents have told the school administrator that they are also worried about Ethan's language development, and that the private pre-school, which he attended previously, did not do enough to support and challenge Ethan's language development.

Lower class

Imagine another boy in a Kindergarten class in a nearby school. His name is Mike, and he is five and a half years old. His mother is 26 and is a certified nursing assistant (CNA), although she is currently unemployed. His father is 29 and has previously worked as an over the road truck driver, but right now he is on disability due to a work injury. Mike is an only child.

Mike has had a rough start in the class, and he talks a lot during the day about missing his mother. The teacher also sees Mike as a somewhat fragile child. He is quiet, he often keeps to himself during the day, and it seems difficult for him to establish contact with the other children. Also, he has difficulties concentrating when in a whole group setting, and he often gets distracted when instruction for an activity begins.

While preparing for a routine parent/guardian/teacher/student conference, the teacher has discussed with her colleagues that Mike may have some difficulties with his language, especially with pronunciation of specific sounds and with understanding abstract concepts. The parents have told the school administrator that they don't think anything is wrong with Mike's language.

Table A1: Coding frame, Categories constructed for spontaneous descriptions

	T DK Sour	T DK Ref	PS DK Sour	PS DK Ref	DK Sour	T US Sour	T US Ref	PS US Sour	PS US Ref	US Sour
Categories referring to professional context	22	158	20	163	100,00%	17	215	2	15	67,86%
Skills and development	16	26	17	37	78,57%	16	91	2	9	64,29%
Special needs tier groups	-	-	-	-		15	46	0	0	53,57%
Behavior	17	38	17	47	80,95%	17	65	2	5	67,86%
Diagnoses	15	25	11	17	61,90%	12	36	2	4	50,00%
Abuse	12	26	9	19	50,00%	0	0	1	1	3,57%
Relationships to other children	15	30	17	37	76,19%	6	10	2	2	28,57%
Relationship parents and children	10	20	11	23	50,00%	-	-	-	-	
Categories referring to social and symbolic context	21	135	20	154	97,62%	17	120	11	60	100,00%
Categories referring to social context	20	61	19	66	92,86%	17	95	11	51	100,00%
Resources in general	17	36	16	40	78,57%	15	51	10	28	89,29%
Economic resources	4	6	3	4	16,67%	16	37	8	25	85,71%
Education cultural resources	5	6	6	11	26,19%	2	2	1	1	10,71%
Race ethnic minorities	4	5	6	6	23,81%	12	29	8	18	71,43%
Mental resources and abilities	9	14	5	9	33,33%	-	-	-	-	
Categories referring to symbolic context	20	87	20	98	95,24%	15	35	8	16	82,14%
Behavioral norms and parenting	10	20	8	10	42,86%	13	22	7	9	71,43%
Collaboration with parents	14	24	16	42	71,43%	2	4	3	3	17,86%
Lifestyle food hygiene	15	33	13	33	66,67%	9	10	4	5	46,43%
Rhythm time and planning	12	22	10	24	52,38%	3	3	0	0	10,71%

Table A2: Coding frame, Categorization of vignettes

To be made. Will include codes for of content of categories (similar to categories above) and codes for degrees of worry.

Table A3: Display, categorization of children in vignette stories

	IP	Worry 1st story	Class 2nd story	Worry 2nd story		IP	Worry 1st story	Class 2nd story	Worry 2nd story
Teachers DK	TA01	(+)	Lower class	(+)	Pre-School Teachers DK	PSA01	(+)	Lower class	+
	TA03	(+)		(+)		PSA03	(+)		+
	TA06	+		(+)		PSB08	(+)		+
	TB09	(+)		-		PSB09	(+)		+
	TC12	(+)		+		PSC10	(+)		+
	TC14	(+)		+		PSC12	(+)		(+)
	TC15	(+)		+		PSC13	(+)		+
	TC17	-		(+)		PSC15	(+)		+
	TD20	(+)		(+)		PSD16	-		-
	TD21	-		-		PSD18	+		+
	TA02	(+)	Upper class	+		PSA02	(+)	(+)	
	TA04	(+)		+		PSA04	(+)	+	
	TA05	(+)		+		PSB05	(+)	(+)	
	TB07	(+)		+		PSB06	(+)	(+)	
	TB08	(+)		+		PSB07	(+)	-	
	TB10	(+)		(+)		PSC11	-	-	
	TB11	(+)		(+)		PSC14	-	(+)	
	TB13	-		(+)		PSD17	-	-	
	TC16	(+)		(+)		PSD19	(+)	+	
	TC18	(+)		(+)		PSD20	-	(+)	
	TD19	(+)		-					
	TD22	(+)		+					

	IP	Worry 1st story	Class 2nd story	Worry 2nd story		IP	Worry 1st story	Class 2nd story	Worry 2nd story
Teachers US	TA01	(+)	Lower class	+	Pre-School and Kindergarten Teachers US	KA01	+	Lower class	+
	TA03	(+)		(+)		KA02	(+)		(+)
	TA05	(+)		+		KA03	-		+
	TA07	-		(+)		PA01	(+)		(+)
	TA08	(+)		+		PA02	(+)		+
	TB10	(+)		+					
	TB11	-		-					
	TD15	-	(+)						
	TE16	(+)	+						
	TA02	(+)	-						
	TA04	(+)	+						
	TA06	-	+						
	TB09	(+)	(+)						
	TC12	-	(+)						
	TC13	(+)	(+)						
	TD14	(+)	(+)						
	TE17	+	+						

Note: The categorization of worry for each of interviewees is based on an analysis of the interviews using the coding of degrees of worry, cf. table A2 above.