Leadership in a linguistically and ethnically diverse upper secondary school

Responding to challenges

FRED CARLO ANDERSEN

Norwegian educational policy has a strong ideological tradition of emphasising the role of the educational institutions in preparing students to play constructive roles in a democratic society. With increased immigration, diversity creates new challenges and opportunities for schools and has a meaningful impact on the work of school leaders in particular (Goodard, Billot & Cranston, 2006; Tolo & Lillejord, 2006; Vedøy & Møller, 2007). The tradition of viewing schools as representations of democratic political ideals means that equitable educational opportunities are a national goal, and that overriding principle applies to all areas of education.

Providing students with differentiated teaching that supports both individual adaptation and inclusion raises the expectation levels for schools. In a Norwegian educational context, inclusive
Education refers to the fact that the system must adapt to each individual and group (UFD, 2008). Adapted education focuses on the individual student’s learning, while bearing in mind the consequences for the community as a whole (UFD, 2008). In this article, I argue that putting inclusive and adapted education into place for minority students poses specific challenges for school leadership.

This study analyses the role of school leadership in creating collective strategies in response to educational issues of ethnic and linguistic diversity. Based on semi-structured interviews with school leaders and staff in one upper secondary school, I investigate how school leaders contribute to helping minority students acquire knowledge, values and skills in order to become full participants in society. The following questions guide the study:

- What do school leaders perceive the main challenges of linguistic and ethnic diversity to be?
- What do school leaders report the responses to these challenges to be?

Pihl (2001) argues that the assumption of total inclusion is paradoxical, since inclusion presupposes exclusion, i.e. adapted teaching and materials for minority students may presuppose segregation. Formal juridical rights exist for all students in a comprehensive school system. In Norway all students who complete elementary education have a legal right of access to upper secondary school without prior selection based on grades. In this sense, education in Norway is formally inclusive. However, there are indications which are disturbing in relation to the educational system’s primary objective, which is qualification and democratic inclusion. Data on dropout in upper secondary school shows that minority students (of non-Western background) have an average dropout rate of 45% compared to majority students, whose dropout rate is 26% (Byrhagen, Falch & Strom, 2006).

One explicit task for school leaders is to influence teachers to ensure minority students’ recognition and right to participate in school as equals as well as to develop self-confidence and dignity (Straume, 2011). Discussions in this article address questions related to whether schools are adequately prepared to respond to linguistic and ethnic diversity, and whether they have the basic understanding, structures and programs to meet the needs of this group of students (Opheim, 2004; Pihl, 2010).

Internationally, challenges with regard to school leadership in linguistically and ethnically diverse schools are widely addressed. For instance, in an American context, Shields (2004) critically examines some ways in which the status quo marginalises large numbers of students, excluding them from equitable learning conditions. The status quo also marginalises their families, preventing them from being heard or even acknowledged. She suggests that school leaders engage in a moral dialogue that will facilitate the development of strong relationships, challenge existing beliefs and practices as well as ground school leadership in social justice.

Likewise, Theoharis (2007) describes how principals have promoted social justice, the resistance they have faced from staff when changing practices, as well as the toll the resistance had on those principals. The strategies the principals developed to sustain their social justice practices were also provided in detail. He specifically focuses on implications for school leader preparation programs, because they may have a significant impact on the development and cultivation of social justice leaders in education. Preparation programs committed to developing social justice leaders may allow school leaders to both
advance social justice and educate all students.

Moreover, Ryan and Rottmann (2009) explore efforts to promote democratic practices in a diverse school context. Their study documents school leadership endeavours to include members of the school community in various school processes by encouraging inclusive communication practices. Their findings indicate that school leaders attempt to achieve such ends by establishing relationships with members of their school community that will enable dialogue. In addition, the school leaders do their best to display their caring nature, vulnerability and sense of humour. They also make themselves visible and approachable, greet students and staff, and attempt to understand them and dismantle the hierarchies that exclude people.

In short, there is a focus on equitable educational opportunities as a democratic ideal and the challenges ethnic and linguistic diversity pose to this ideal. These challenges seem to be perceived as a contradiction between formal juridical rights for students as equals on the one hand, and differentiated teaching adapted to the individual student on the other, with an aim to include the student. In turn this raises the question of how to understand the terms inclusion and exclusion in relation to each other, thus serving as the problem on which the current study is based.

In Norway, Vedøy (2008) explored how leadership may be understood in elementary schools within a democratic leadership perspective. She emphasises that understanding leadership in multicultural schools is based on the fact that all people are unique in one way or another. Thus, recognising difference as a core value is crucial for all practices and leadership in schools. Moreover, Pihl (2010) identifies that exclusive practices in schools take place within a formal framework of equal access to education in multicultural schools. Her research also provides insights into how schools manage ethnic diversity and why minority students are overrepresented in special education. She also identifies the need to focus on school leaders’ roles in contributing to the development of schools based on ethnic diversity.

In a recent publication (Andersen & Ottesen, 2011), school leaders’ responses to the challenges of inclusion in two upper secondary schools are explored. The results show that while school leaders recognised challenges of inclusion of minority students, they did not become a driving force in their strategic work. The study reveals that the two schools have different approaches to supporting Norwegian and English for minority students. It has the same focus as the current study, but is to a larger extent theory based, testing out Banks’ (2006b) dimensions of multicultural education. The current article is to a greater extent empirically based, and also includes interviews with the school’s principal.

In fact, research on leadership in multicultural schools in Norway is still in its infancy, and there is a need for more empirical evidence regarding the challenges posed by linguistic and ethnic diversity in schools. Whereas there is research in the area of school leadership (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004; Møller & Fuglestad, 2006; Spillane & Diamond, 2007) and in the area of multicultural education (Banks & Banks, 2004; Nieto, 2002; Sleeter & Grant, 2007), there is an absence of studies that specifically address the ways in which leaders promote inclusion, the challenges they face and the perceptions they have when working for the inclusion of linguistic and ethnic minority students.

Each of the two theoretical frameworks, inclusive leadership and multicultural education focuses on certain elements of education. In this study, I integrate knowledge
from each and let the two theoretical frameworks supplement one another to develop new knowledge about school leadership in a globalised world. There is an absence of studies within a Scandinavian context that specifically address the ways in which leaders enact inclusion regarding linguistic and ethnic diversity, the challenges they face and the perceptions they have when working for inclusion of linguistic and ethnic minority students. Thus, the article, not least as it is based on empirical fieldwork, contributes to creating knowledge within an important but under-researched field.

Theoretical framework

In their review of the literature on successful school leadership, Leithwood and Riehl (2005) highlighted the fact that almost all leaders draw on the same repertoire of basic leadership practices, including (a) providing direction; (b) developing people; (c) redesigning the organisation; and (c) managing the instructional programme. Nieto (2004) argues that multicultural education is a basic component of education and that it is pervasive and important for all students. School leadership must, therefore, embrace multicultural education as a complex set of approaches. In order to focus particularly on linguistic and ethnic diversity, I draw on the theoretical repertoire developed by Ryan (2003), Banks (2006b) and Sleeter and Grant (2007).

The theoretical frameworks have their origin in a research tradition rooted in theories of social justice. They are aimed at changing schools’ processes so that they will better support the concerns, abilities and perspectives of linguistic and ethnic minorities (Sleeter, 1996). A particular task for leadership is to enable others to recognise injustices and work together to change them through inclusive practices (Ryan, 2006b).

In order to understand leadership in a linguistically and ethnically diverse school, it is necessary to use frameworks developed both in the field of leadership and in the field of multicultural education. The two approaches complement one another, and their combination provides a useful framework for exploring and understanding the school leaders’ challenges and perceptions with regard to linguistic and ethnic diversity in their school.

Inclusive leadership

Inclusion is increasingly being seen as an integral part of leadership (Ryan, 2007b). Exclusion, lack of equity education and racism are as significant and pertinent now as they ever were, surfacing in ever more subtle guises in an increasingly diverse world. Inclusive leadership draws on Ryan’s (2003; 2006a) research. The framework analyses how inclusive leadership may be put into practice. When putting inclusive leadership into practice, one must consider how leadership should be perceived; advocate inclusion; educate participants in school development; develop critical consciousness; promote dialogue; emphasise student learning and classroom practice; adopt decision-making and policy-making practices; incorporate whole-school approaches; and practice meaningful inclusion (Ryan, 2006b).

Although school leadership can be understood as a network of relationships between people and as a structure and culture, rather than merely a role-based function assigned to one person, leadership is also about power. School principals are vested with formal powers that encompass a range of means, such as coercion and reward, including economic and structural sanctions. Moreover, the power of the principal is derived from outside the school, because it is delegated by the state (Møller & Presthus, 2006). From this position of formal authority, school
leaders have considerable influence on how diversity is dealt with and on how inclusive practices are carried out (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005).

However, in conceptualising leadership in relation to social justice, an important point is that leadership practices occur in a context that is, in many ways, exclusive, and therefore school leaders must be prepared to transcend contextually exclusive reproductive processes (Ryan & Rottman, 2009). First, school may be frustrating, unsatisfying and exploitative, because it routinely provides advantages for some and penalises others. Second, there may be structural and cultural patterns associated with, for example, ethnicity, which are embedded in the fabric of everyday life in schools. Such structures generate a framework for practices that both compel and entice students, teachers and leaders to act in ways that privilege some and disadvantage others. Third, these patterns may be so ingrained that they are not easily recognisable. Hence, this may entail a critical approach to social justice.

This theoretical framework outlines the rationale for framing leadership in such a way that it consists of many voices and, at the same time, prioritises inclusion. Additionally, it provides critical concepts for understanding school leaders’ perceptions of the challenges of linguistic and ethnic diversity and their responses to these challenges. If the intrinsic power dimensions of schools as social institutions – and not only the externally delegated power on school leaders – are not taken into consideration, there will be a lack of critical concepts for understanding and critiquing school leaders’ perceptions of the challenges of linguistic and ethnic diversity and their responses to these challenges; it is this that is explored in this article.

On the one hand, I draw upon a theory developed in order to frame leadership. On the other hand, I draw upon theoretical perspectives for studying multicultural schools. In the following section, I describe multicultural education as a way to frame perceptions of challenges and responses to linguistic and ethnic diversity.

Multicultural Education

As noted above, in addition to the theory developed to frame leadership, this article also draws on literature within the field of multicultural education (Banks, 2006b; Sleeter & Grant, 2007). *Multicultural education* is a concept that is often used as a synonym for *intercultural education* (Holm & Zilliacus, 2009), but sometimes the manner in which multicultural education is defined is quite distinct. Moreover, in the last few decades, multiple terms have sometimes been used interchangeably to refer to the same approach, as well as to quite different approaches (Gundara & Portera, 2008). It is beyond the scope of this article to compare and broadly discuss the two concepts.1

Hence, in this article, I use multicultural education synonymously with intercultural education. The questions addressed in this study relate to the school leaders’ desires to explicitly address principles of equity and inclusion as well as addressing equal access to educational resources and outcomes. In short, it asks the following: Do the school leaders’ visions, suggestions and initiatives properly meet the requirements for addressing the needs of minority students? Multicultural education may well be the most comprehensive approach; it also addresses the assumptions and questions mentioned here. This approach addresses questions pertaining to how linguistic and ethnic diversity is dealt with in schools. It also takes into account interactions with other significant variables, both in formal and informal educational settings (Udir, 2009), such as training centres for two-year vocational training programs.
Most multicultural theorists, researchers and practitioners agree on the broad goals of multicultural education along with its conceptions and goals, these being, «[r]estructuring schools so that all students acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to function in ethnically and racially diverse communities and nations, and in the world.» (Banks, 2009a, p. 14) The perspective of multicultural education I adopt here is that of a process designed to develop the awareness of students, parents and communities about socioeconomic conditions, in order to enable them to engage in social actions based on a critical understanding of reality (Javier & Pulido-Mayano, 1997). Likewise, the claim that multicultural education is only for minority students or for «the others» is a pernicious and damaging misconception (Banks, 1993).

In this study, I consider multicultural education to be basic education, which is important for all students. It is also anti-racist education and education for social justice (Nieto, 2004). Social justice interrelates with inclusive leadership, because social justice will be achieved when changes to the system allow for the meaningful inclusion of everyone (Ryan, 2006b). However, it is not always easy to promote social justice, equity and inclusion in schools. School leaders work in hierarchical systems that make them legally responsible for enforcing practices that may be unfair.

Moreover, even with the best of intentions, school leaders may find themselves in the course of carrying out their jobs unwittingly supporting (in both subtle and not so subtle ways) various forms of racism and exclusion (Ryan, 2003, 2007a). Thus, for example, it is crucial to involve all in critical thinking and in developing knowledge. Banks’ (2006a, p. 143) social action approach emphasises helping students acquire what they need to participate in social change, such as knowledge, values and skills; so that marginalised and excluded racial, ethnic and cultural groups can become full participants in society. Similarly, Sleeter and Grant (2007) emphasise education that is multiculturally and socially reconstructionist, advocating that students learn social action skills by actively working for social change. These approaches are compatible and interrelate.

To summarise, the inclusive leadership and multicultural education approaches are viewed as appropriate analytical tools for investigating school leaders’ perceptions, as both of these approaches aim to critically explore in-depth differential power relationships. The methodological approach will be discussed in the next section.

Methods

The questions addressed regard what school leaders perceive to be the main challenges of linguistic and ethnic diversity, and their responses to those challenges. This article builds on a case study in an upper secondary school. The study features Lia Upper Secondary School (please note, the school name here is a pseudonym), located in a medium-sized town in South-Eastern Norway, with a rapidly growing immigrant population. The school predominantly offers general studies. There are approximately 1,200 students in more than 30 classes and 120 staff, consisting of teachers, school advisers and school leaders. This is a large school by Norwegian standards. The school has chosen a formal leadership structure, consisting of a principal, one assistant principal and five deputy principals, all but one are male.

Leadership may in fact be assumed to be a set of direction-setting and influence practices potentially enacted by people at all levels rather than a set of personal characteristics and attributes located in people at the
top» (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003, p. 22). Thus, in this study, a contact teacher, social adviser and special education coordinator also represent important sources of information about leadership, with regard to linguistic and ethnic diversity, as they all work closely with teaching and learning for minority students. Likewise, although they were not defined as part of the formal leadership group at the school, they were recommended as potentially important informants by the principal, because they have a great level of influence on decisions that affect minority students and were accordingly incorporated into the study.

All informants are of Scandinavian origin. The teachers are organised in teams according to the subjects they teach. The school did not have precise statistics on the students’ linguistic or ethnic origins. However, according to the social adviser, the biggest groups were of students with Iraqi, Kurdish, Somali and Albanian origins, comprising 10% of the total number of students. Within this group, there was a great variety of minority students. Some may have lived in Norway most of their lives and speak Norwegian very well, while others may experience difficulties because they have only lived in Norway for a few years. The school has an introductory class composed of thirteen minority students who are considered to lack the required level of Norwegian linguistic proficiency. In the interviews, there was a common understanding regarding the great amount of diversity among the minority students, in time spent living in Norway, linguistic levels and so on. However, both when answering the questions and during the interview, the interviewees did not reference to the number of years students had lived in Norway when talking about minority students.

As the understanding of leadership in this article predicates, persons occupying various roles in a school who may execute leadership activities, other than formally designated school leaders, are also included as informants. They represent important sources of information in the study, as they have all worked closely with minority students. Nevertheless, due to their formal positions, it is school leader team members who are expected to ensure an inclusive social and equity community of learning that respects diversity. All participants were informed about the research focus before the interviews. As such, in terms of the findings’ reliability (Golafshani, 2003), indeed there is a risk of presenting the best possible picture of how the school dealt with the challenges. However, the head teacher seemed to mirror the perceptions and attitudes of the school, in realising that there are many challenges concerning social justice, equity and inclusion for linguistic and ethnic minority students.

I primarily collected data through semi-structured interviews in December 2007 (see Table 1). In addition, I accompanied the principal on his occasional walks through the school. Hence, I was able to make an intimate, detailed observation of the principal’s and the school leaders’ «natural world» (Yin, 2003, p. 14). Some of the time spent with the principal was planned a day or two in advance, while other meetings were initiated in the morning or during the day. The field notes from these meetings were made over a total period of almost 12 hours and provided me with insights into what questions the school leaders considered to be the most important; what school leaders perceive to be the main challenges of linguistic and ethnic diversity; and what they report to be the school’s responses to these challenges.
Based on the text from the field notes, the interview guide was further developed for use in semi-structured interviews. During the interviews, I asked questions regarding the challenges of educating minority students; the organisation and development of education for minority students in particular; opinions about the school’s capacity and ability to manage what it considers to be specific challenges related to minority students; and the leadership’s functions and roles. All interviews lasted roughly half an hour and one and a half hours. The principal was interviewed several times, with each interview lasting from 10 to 45 minutes.

The interviews were recorded digitally, with the permission of the interviewees, and later transcribed. To help ensure the internal validity or dependability of the results (Lincoln & Guba, 2000), I formed the following guidelines:

- Using one school, in order to focus on one site rather than several;
- Triangulation of data from several individual and group interviews, as well as field notes from meetings;
- Interviewees reading the transcribed text;
- Presentation of verbatim quotes.

As the purpose of the study was to explore the school leaders’ perceptions of challenges related to linguistic and ethnic diversity, my attention was directed to certain data in particular, in line with this and certain themes emerged through the interviews (Yin, 2003). I shall now present the findings that arose from analysis of the data collected.

### Results

The main findings can be summarised as follows: the weak participation of minority students; poor linguistic proficiency in the language of instruction; and lack of collective responses from the school leaders and staff. I shall now deal with each of these in turn.

#### Weak participation of minority students

One major challenge was the lack of interaction between majority and minority students. For example, the principal described the division between minority and majority students as a challenge that he did not know how to handle: «[w]e get a divided school, the minority students and the rest.» Likewise, a deputy principal reported her observations regarding recess and activities outside the classrooms: «That’s where we struggle the most with inclusion.» She contrasted it with exclusion, emphasising that the latter is about not being noticed and avoiding contact, adding, «That is probably also what is happening in the classes; nobody wants to be on the same team with minority students in physical education classes.» Also, the social adviser refers to the same challenge:

<table>
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<th></th>
<th>Principal</th>
<th>Deputy Principal/s</th>
<th>Co-ordinating teacher</th>
<th>Social adviser and special needs coordinator</th>
<th>Classroom teacher</th>
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<tr>
<td>Individual interview</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>66</td>
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<td>35</td>
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<td>Group interview</td>
<td>0</td>
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This year, I have had many students in my office, crying and feeling bad about not being comfortable in their classes, because there are constellations and fractions of people, and minority students feel as if they are in the middle of a no-man’s-land. However, they are very happy to talk with other minority students, and they have a good life, I believe. However, they say that they very seldom co-operate with the majority students.

When asked about the school’s responses to weak participation, all the interviewees mentioned Multicultural Day, which was arranged every year in the school library. On that day, the minority students bring food, dress in their national costumes and dance folk dances. They also present posters illustrating the traits of their countries of origin, such as political systems, history and traditions. Many minority students spend a week or so preparing for Multicultural Day. The arrangement was reported to have goals “beyond integrating the few minority students with poor Norwegian linguistic proficiency. The main purpose of Multicultural Day was, according to the principal, to give the minority students an opportunity to present their cultural heritage.”

However, he also emphasised that, although he considered it a great opportunity to showcase content from a variety of cultures and groups, he observed that there were hardly any majority students present, summarising “[i]t may have happened that some drop in, but to a great extent, it is an arrangement for the minority students, which was not quite what was intended, since it was intended to enhance integration.” Therefore, as some of the deputy principals reported in the group interview, he believes that the arrangement probably has only a limited effect on inclusion and interaction between minority and majority students. The social adviser and the special needs coordinator suggested that there should be more involvement by the school leadership in providing direction with regard to multicultural education. “The school leadership should give a clear message about classroom practices”, she declared. Multicultural Day may represent a dilemma with regard to multicultural education for all students versus an integration strategy for minority students. Another challenge that was frequently discussed in the interviews was the minority students’ level of linguistic proficiency.

Poor linguistic proficiency

With regard to their linguistic proficiency, the principal stated that “a simple exchange of information does not seem to be a problem, but communicating beyond that may be a bit problematic.” Likewise, several others were quite specific about linguistic challenges. For example, two of the deputy principals pointed out the lack of a “deeper understanding of the Norwegian language.” They emphasised the students’ difficulties in understanding the curriculum through books, teaching and group work. One stated that it was also problematic for minority students with poor Norwegian and who did not understand English well either. In fact, the poor level of understanding of the curriculum was emphasised as being perhaps the most serious challenge in providing for the needs of language minorities. Testing methods to discover which teaching materials, methods and structures should be used were also reported to be problematic. It was particularly difficult to learn whether problems were related to a lack of reading and writing skills due to special educational needs, or if they were simply due to a lack of Norwegian language skills, such as basic vocabulary or a basic understanding of syntax.

An introductory class had been established two years previously for students who
were considered to lack sufficient Norwegian linguistic proficiency. There were ten classroom teachers involved, all teaching different school subjects to thirteen minority students. After one year, the students from the introductory class were meant to apply for one of the educational programmes at either the same school or another upper secondary school in the county. The contact teacher reported that nobody from the formal leadership team had been directly involved in the process of establishing the group, and that there had been little or no contact between the teachers and the school leaders concerning the group thus far.

However, in the upcoming school year, she expected to cooperate with a deputy principal who had previous experience in working with minority students in an upper secondary school. Field notes from a meeting in which five of the ten teachers of the introductory class discussed teaching and learning strategies indicate that some complex issues were on the agenda. Several key questions were raised, such as making use of the students’ first language in teaching and learning practices. One of the teachers, who was particularly skilled in contrastive language analysis (Robinet & Schachter, 1983), shared her ideas and included her colleagues in discussions of linguistic issues. The teachers also discussed disciplinary issues and how to handle students and parents who, in their opinion, had unrealistic expectations of learning progression, essay translations, reading materials and career plans.

The segregation of minority students from the majority students may present a dilemma with regard to an inclusive ideal versus an exclusive practice. The introductory class may be interpreted both as part of the challenge and as a response to it. One challenge relates to the poor Norwegian and English linguistic proficiencies of the students, hence the need for more precise language-testing methods. Furthermore, there is a lack of presence from the principal or deputy principals in planning and executing the learning activities for the introductory class. However, the co-operation among the teachers involved in the group, their discussions about teaching and learning strategies and their sharing of knowledge indicate a collectively grounded response to the linguistic proficiency challenges. Co-operation is also a key element in the following challenge.

**Lack of collective responses**

The challenges related to collective efforts to respond to linguistic and ethnic diversity were among the various topics of discussion for the deputy principals. One deputy principal felt convinced that the school shared a commitment to improve the achievements of minority students. Another deputy principal, who had worked at the school for only a few months asked his colleagues whether they had ever had a discussion about inclusion. The response from one was: «[n]o, we have not. I do not think we have spent much time on that, but I believe that we will, when it is raised as an issue. However, we have not been good at putting it on the agenda.» The deputy principal who had posed the question continued:

Hence, we have not had the ideological discussion, which has to do with questions such as these: Do we have basic values? Do we have a goal behind inclusion? Are we conscious about which strategies and solutions we choose? That discussion I do not think we have had.²

A third deputy principal assumed that there was a relevant discussion among the classroom teachers about the inclusion of minority students; «[a]lthough I do not know,» she added.

During the discussion, the deputy principals continued to focus on the challenges
caused by the lack of opportunity to discuss topics relating to inclusion, such as how to arrange group work and how to highlight topics reflecting the diverse cultures and groups within the classroom and society at large. A third deputy principal argued that the school had indeed held relevant discussions, at least among the school’s advisers. He concluded that the school needed a common approach regarding how to address challenges related to minority students: «[w]e do not have that, do we?» he asked.

The assistant principal suggested that issues specifically related to minority students should be included in the school’s plan of action that was currently being developed. In summary, this reveals a dilemma concerning individual versus collective pedagogical strategies. The lack of a collective strategy and the failure to involve more than just a few staff members in the work of prioritising inclusion, probably represent the biggest challenges in terms of leadership.

Discussion

The preceding questions have focused on perceptions of the main challenges of linguistic and ethnic diversity and reported responses to these challenges. The following discussion focuses on the practices of inclusive leadership and multicultural education and how school leadership contributes to helping minority students acquire knowledge, values and skills in order to become full participants in society.

Providing Directions and Developing Inclusive Practices

Inclusion and creating a school that fosters greater unity between minority students and majority students were reported to be the most difficult challenges for school leaders. Multicultural Day was the only explicitly mentioned method used to enhance the inclusion of minority students. What was found at Lia resonates with research in other Western countries, which shows that the lack of interaction between minority and majority students and the exclusion of minority students that occurs across ethnic lines (Andersen, 2001; Gruber, 2006; Parszyk, 1999; Ryan, 2006a).

In the Swedish context, it was found that subtle resistance on the part of the majority students was a significant reason for the lack of interaction between minority and majority students (Gruber, 2006; Parszyk, 1999). As long as attitudes, even though they are only held by a few, indicate that not everyone in the school community is in favour of including all of its members, leadership activities to advocate inclusion must be organised (Ryan, 2006a). There were few responses from the school leaders addressing majority students’ rejection and avoidance of minority students. From an inclusive leadership perspective, initiatives created by school leaders are indeed crucial. It is necessary for school leaders to provide an atmosphere of trust, which makes it possible to have critical conversations about practices that may impede inclusion.

This may be particularly important with regard to the construction of minority students’ identities and actualising, discussing and advocating minority inclusion among both staff and students. As an example, Troyna and Hatcher (1992) and Gillborn (1995) demonstrate in their research that school leaders can have a decisive effect on racist and anti-racist practices in their schools. In order to create better relationships and more interaction between minority and majority students, it is important both to acknowledge the presence of exclusive practices and to find constructive responses to them. Although the interviewees were conscious of the limited effect of Multicultural Day, it could nevertheless be considered a good op-
portunity to develop knowledge about ethnic-cultural diversity and to discuss, for example, processes of change and communication. In addition, Multicultural Day has the potential to heighten the focus on multicultural education for all students, not only for minority students. However, there are several problems associated with the event, one of these being that the teachers and students pay too much attention to social and cultural differences. The indications of exclusive practices displayed by majority students should be considered a school leadership responsibility that goes beyond arranging a Multicultural Day.

Possibilities for combining Multicultural Day activities with classroom activities include pedagogical approaches, such as cooperative learning or dealing with differences among students (Leeman, 2007).

Multicultural Day was initiated in order to give minority students the opportunity to share their experiences with their peer majority students through activities in which educators and students could learn about, and perhaps also adopt, new or different approaches (Banks, 2006a; Ryan, 2006b). However, as Finkel and Bolin (1996) report, because learning new things and adopting new or different attitudes is not always easy, attempts to nurture inclusive ideals have yielded mixed results. Another problem is that the event did not relate well to student learning and classroom practices because only a few majority students and teachers participated. Additionally, as it is a one-day event, it cannot be seen as a day-to-day activity or included as a routine part of education practice (Ryan, 2006a). Instead, it focuses on heroes/heroines or holidays. In other words, it displays the approach sometimes sarcastically described as the festivals, foods and dance approach, while usually avoiding difficult and complex issues, for example, of racism and poverty (Banks, 2009a).

Thus, it may be characterised as superficial or cosmetic.

**Student Learning and Classroom Practices**

School leaders emphasised the challenge of the students’ difficulties in understanding the curriculum and the difficulties of having a first language other than Norwegian. The establishment of an introductory class was one initiative to better ensure that the minority students receive an equal education.

Necessary academic language skills will not develop sufficiently through minority students’ everyday interaction with their counterparts in school alone (Skutnabb-Kangas & Cummins, 1988; Thomas & Collier, 2002). It takes several years to develop a new language sufficiently for learning purposes. Minority students are put at risk of lacking optimal learning conditions in school (Cummins, 2001). Although the establishment of an introductory class ensured a safe learning environment for a group of minority students, as well as adapted teaching with particularly committed teachers, these students were still separated from the regular groups. This relates to the paradox of inclusion. Accordingly, the opportunity to learn by collaborating with majority students or with minority students with a higher level of Norwegian linguistic proficiency was limited. On the other hand, the establishment of an introductory class may be linked to teaching culturally different students so that they can fit into the existing school system and achieve at a higher level (Sleeter & Grant, 2007). The students in the introductory class were given an opportunity to participate in modified teaching or an equity pedagogy (Banks, 2006a:205), which in turn may help develop their knowledge, skills and attitudes, as well as facilitate their academic achievement.

Challenges in terms of linguistic proficiency were specifically related to ensuring...
that minority students learned the curriculum. Research also emphasizes that reading progresses at slower speeds in a second language and generally results in a lower degree of understanding when compared to reading in one’s first language (Kulbrandstad, 1996). Results from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2000, 2003 and 2006 show that minority students in Norway perform at a lower level in reading, maths and science than majority students (Hvistendahl & Roe, 2009). These results have helped shape a new consensus among school authorities and politicians that a stronger focus on academic learning is needed (Engen, 2009). For this reason, measures have been taken that focus heavily on basic skills, especially in reading, writing and mathematics (UFD, 2003).

This implies that new knowledge and understanding must be acquired in order to meet the challenges associated with inclusion. Ryan (2006a) suggests educating participants both through formally designed programs and informally in the workplace, with the help of colleagues, dialogue and critical reflections on the experience of teaching and learning. In the introductory class, heavy emphasis was placed on classroom teaching and student learning by establishing clear goals, collaboration and monitoring progress (Ryan, 2006a). However, the teachers and their activities with the introductory class were not strongly connected to the formal leadership team.

This is in contrast to the indications of recent research, which found that not only the leadership’s promotion of teacher learning and development, but also the active participation of school leaders in this activity had the greatest effect on students’ results (Robinson, Claire, Rowe & Rowe, 2008). The introductory class, consisting of minority students only, also probably had very little effect on interaction. However, the teachers’ positive work when it came to linguistic proficiency and their collective efforts to address the needs of the introductory class could provide their colleagues and the school’s leadership with good examples of teaching minority students. The discussion among the teachers, both in the introductory class and in the school leadership group, demonstrates the ability to critically analyse the school’s culture and commits them to ensuring that minority students are not marginalised. This is accomplished in the introductory class by involving many players in creative solutions that deal with issues of inclusion and equity.

Developing a Shared Set of Values

The findings show that there is a lack of collective strategies, and that there are only a few staff members who invest time in putting strategy into practice in order to enhance inclusive activities for minority students. It therefore remains a responsibility of the school leadership to initiate and develop shared sets of values (Ryan, 2006a).

This resonates with a study of upper secondary schools (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001), which concluded that principals set conditions for teaching communities regarding the ways in which they managed school resources; related to teachers and students; supported or inhibited social interaction and leadership; and responded to the broader policy context. Likewise, international research also suggests that progress in educational reform depends on teachers’ individual and collective capacities as well as their link with the school’s capability to promote student learning (Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace & Thomas, 2006). This means that developing professional learning communities depends heavily on leadership commitment (Mulford & Silins, 2003).

The development and improvement of multicultural education has predominantly
taken place via the actions of a few enthusiastic teachers and staff, exemplified in this study by the introductory class teacher, other teachers, the social adviser, the special needs coordinator and one deputy principal in particular, who all held regular discussions. To date, however, little has been done in terms of whole-school approaches and professional teacher development with respect to minority student issues. Despite good intentions and knowledge of the challenges, certain significant issues demand the attention of the formal school leaders.

Developing a professional learning community that focuses on equity implies the establishment of a school-wide culture that requires collaboration. It should be inclusive, genuine, ongoing and focused on critically examining current practices to improve student outcomes (Seashore, Anderson & Riedel, 2003). As already indicated, although such processes may have been occurring among a few teachers at the school, they were not collectively grounded. The school thereby exemplifies what Ryan (2006a) warns about: a case of laissez-faire leadership, which entails the avoidance or absence of formal leadership, hesitation in taking action or being absent when needed (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). A clearer focus on a whole-school approach (Ryan, 2006a) and collaborative learning between staff are therefore needed.

Discussions about issues related to inclusion, equity and adapted teaching approaches were rare at Lia, and there was no common strategy regarding how to address such challenges. In this way, the school reflects Vedøy’s (2008) findings concerning two different approaches to the development of diversity in schools. In one school, the leadership focused on deficits and the preservation of the status quo. At a second school, the leadership secured the development of diversity by making all teachers responsible for the minority students’ education and letting the whole school be responsible for the common good and the development of a diverse society. The latter approach enthroning shared responsibility was shown to be the most effective.

The school leaders at Lia assumed that the teachers discussed inclusion in their classes. Vedøy and Møller (2007) argue that the principal plays a pivotal role in the inclusion of all teachers in working towards democratic schooling. In this case, the principal did not ensure that both teachers and school leaders were engaged in discussions of important challenges. For schools to establish whole-school practices that are consistent with inclusion, it is necessary to ensure that more than just a few members of the school community understand the practices in similar ways (Ryan, 2006a). An inclusive approach to leadership demands that the efforts of the staff promote everyone’s interest, not just those of the majority, and that everyone shares some form of common understanding about what it means to develop an inclusive school.

To summarise, the discussion illustrates some dilemmas. One relates to an inclusive ideal versus an exclusive practice, shown by the segregation of minority students from majority students. A second raises questions between individually-grounded and collectively-grounded pedagogical strategies, as illustrated by independent initiatives from only one or a few teachers or school leaders. The third is concerned with multicultural education for both majority and minority students versus multicultural education as a strategy for the integration of minority students alone.

**Conclusion**

Three major dilemmas are identified: ideals versus practice; individuality versus collectivity; and majority versus minority. In the
light of the theoretical frameworks and discussion outlined above, I suggest some leadership implications. First, due to the lack of interaction between minority and majority students, and indications of negative attitudes toward minority students, school leaders must establish initiatives to advocate inclusive strategies and involve all staff members. Second, in order to provide minority students with the same access to knowledge and skill development as majority students, school leaders must set the direction for classroom activities and highlight issues regarding minority students’ teaching and learning on a regular basis. Third, to ensure that student learning is a priority, collective strategies must be developed, and a common understanding of what it means to develop an inclusive school for minority students must be formed.

According to the Norwegian Education Act, education shall be adapted to the abilities and aptitudes of the individual pupil, apprentice or training candidate. This implies, for instance, that school leaders have a particular responsibility to ensure that staff gives students who have a first language other than Norwegian the right to adapted education in Norwegian, until they are sufficiently proficient in Norwegian to follow the normal curriculum of the school. Likewise, if necessary, such students are also entitled to first language instruction, bilingual subject teaching or both. Thus, students may strengthen the case for enduring situation of poor proficiency in Norwegian. Moreover, it is expected that school leaders take explicit responsibility for guiding and supporting classroom teachers, particularly with regard to minority students who have low linguistic proficiency (NOU, 2010).

Ryan (2006a) provides practical suggestions for promoting and implementing inclusive leadership. I have used these as a flexible analytical tool for approaching school leaders’ perceptions of challenges and ways to meet these challenges, with regard to linguistic and ethnic diversity. Inclusive leadership has much in common with multicultural education, because a crucial purpose of both approaches is to reveal and bring forward elements that obstruct and prevent equity and inclusive education and, at the same time, to find emancipatory solutions. Likewise, for both approaches, social issues in school and wider society are at the forefront (Holm & Zilliacus, 2009). Exploring the challenges and responses provided me with useful insights into, and knowledge of, both school leadership, in particular, and multicultural pedagogy, in general. While an inclusive leadership framework provided me with the opportunity to focus exclusively on leadership issues, the multicultural education dimensions created a broad analytical tool for discussing leadership implications.

In this article, I have discussed the relationship between inclusion as an ideal and practices that are challenged by linguistic and ethnic diversity. While this study contributes to new knowledge about how school leaders in a Scandinavian country respond to challenges related to linguistic and ethnic diversity, further studies about school leadership in diverse linguistic and ethnic contexts are needed. In this case, the study consisted of a school with a relatively small number of minority students. Due to the different contexts in Norwegian upper secondary schools, knowledge about school leadership in schools with large numbers of minority students is also needed. In addition, there is a need for knowledge about how school leadership may vary with regard to linguistic and ethnic diversity across different districts in Norway. Moreover, the inclusion of several schools could potentiate a comparative research design.
Notes

1 For a discussion, see (Gundara & Portera, 2008).
2 The interviews with the principal lasted from 10 to 45 minutes, depending on the time he could spare.
3 Act relating to Primary and Secondary Education, last amended 15 September 2010.

References


NORDIC STUDIES IN EDUCATION 1/2013 ——————————— LEADERSHIP IN UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL

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