5 The Students' Role in Standards-Based Education

Critical Reflections on Pedagogical Implications

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In a wider sense, this chapter is about the pedagogical implications of a standards-based curriculum for the equity task of education. More concretely, the students' role will be in focus in this chapter and how their role can be understood when the standards-based curriculum is enacted in different kinds of classrooms. By this, the chapter intends to shed light on those groups of actors in the school system who are at the centre of all educational efforts and whose broad intellectual, personal and social development the curriculum ultimately addresses. In the research literature, the student's role in teaching processes is often associated with concepts such as 'student voice' or 'student agency.' In sum, these two interrelated concepts can be said to refer to the ethical and equity dimensions of students' unique perspectives on their education and on their real possibilities of exerting influence over the conditions, limitations and ways in which their education takes shape (Arnot & Reay, 2007; Cook-Sather, 2006, 2020; Manyukhina & Wyse, 2019). However, in this chapter, the question of the students' role will be approached from a somewhat different angle and will be critically explored by integrating perspectives from critical curriculum studies, pedagogy and General *Didaktik*. Consequently, the purpose of the chapter is to contribute with theoretically relevant conceptualisations regarding the students' role in teaching processes, which is the ways in which the pedagogical relation in the didactical triad of student, teacher and content can be understood when the students' role is the prime focus. However, before diving deeper into this, some introductory remarks on curriculum standardisation and classroom practices are necessary to contextually frame the chapter.

Curricular Standardisation and Classroom Practices

For quite some time, the curricular standardisation of education has profoundly changed the ways in which education is not only governed and organised but also perceived and realised. Although standards-based curricula can look different in different contexts, there are common denominators, such as the stipulation of externally set standards that concretise knowledge expectations and the alignment of different curriculum elements, such as content, aims and assessment (Sundberg & Wahlström, 2012). On the one

hand, the usual line of argumentation for legitimising curricular standardisation is that it increases educational equality since it prescribes knowledge expectations that are the same for all students. Moreover, standardisation is seen to be a necessary basis for the ‘efficient’ organisation of teaching and learning processes by also providing reliable data for monitoring and accountability purposes (Bellmann & Waldow, 2012).

On the other hand, the functionalities of educational systems are complex and multi-layered, with many factors mutually influencing each other on the system’s different levels. Based on previous research, we know that standards-based curricula evidently result in various and sometimes unintended side effects. Regarding the Swedish case, the contributions in Wahlström and Sundberg (2018) show that teaching under the standards-based curriculum for compulsory school, with its clear and uniform knowledge expectations, has become more outcome-oriented and promotes whole-class teaching in order to ensure that all students can reach the pre-set performance goals. Moreover, the focus on standards and the constant presence of grading criteria and learning aims also has consequences for students’ well-being and their self-image as learners, with their level of performance becoming a part of who they ‘are’ (Hirsh, 2020; Vogt, 2017). This can be understood as the constant awareness that students have regarding their own capacities in relation to the clear and explicit communication of the externally set expectations of what one is supposed to know and be able to do with that knowledge in order to reach a certain performance level and, thereby, to achieve a certain grade. Taken together, it can be said that curricular standardisation has diverse consequences for the didactical architecture in classrooms in terms of shifts concerning what the central fundamental elements of the work undertaken in the classroom are and how teachers and students position themselves in relation to those elements. Against this background, the question regarding the students’ role and its interdependencies in the social system of the classroom becomes vital. How can the students’ role be understood in teaching processes under the conditions of a standards-based curriculum, and what are the pedagogical implications for students being part of different learning environments?

Students as Co-Authors of Curriculum Events

As the findings from many classroom studies suggest – and here, Philip W. Jackson’s *Life in Classrooms* can be named as a prominent classic example (Jackson, 1968/1991) – the transformation of the curriculum into concrete teaching and learning can be considered as inevitably embedded in a socially situated context. As such, teachers and students are mutually involved in communicative processes when making meaning of the curriculum. Occasions of institutionalised teaching and learning, then, can be seen as the ‘pedagogical transformation of curriculum,’ denoting ‘curriculum events.’ From a discursive point of view, these curriculum events ‘[consist] of written, oral, and behavioral “texts” that must be interpreted and acted

upon [by students, B.V.] toward some purpose' (Doyle, 1992, p. 508). When teaching, teachers 'author' these curriculum events and young people, in the role of students, become 'co-authors' by contributing to these discursive 'texts'.

For the questions in focus in this chapter, this has several implications: first, this denotes a widened understanding of the curriculum concept, where the curriculum as a programme necessarily needs to be transformed into concrete classroom practices. This transformation must not be seen as a top-down process (where the general and predetermined content and aims would simply be applied and put into practice in whatever classroom by whatever individuals involved) but as a communicative, contextually embedded and locally framed process of joint meaning-making. This is, in the present chapter, the specific ways in which the standards-based curriculum is perceived and realised in different learning environments. Second, the notion of the socially and communicatively framed transformation of the curriculum also means that the students do not only 'take part' in teaching in terms of acquiring the curriculum-prescribed knowledge and skills; instead, students' active role in this meaning-making process is emphasised, and students, as actors in explicit and implicit ways, contribute to shaping curriculum events as a sort of social and communicative interplay between themselves, the teacher and the content. Here, it is important to underline that the focus is not on students' learning in and of itself as a sort of cognitive process but on how students participate in creating and making meaning of those events. This theoretical position regarding the students includes them being seen as 'productive processors of reality' (Hurrelmann, 1988), a term that refers to the pedagogical notion of the student as being a subject whose process of individuation (*Selbstwerdung*) is realised in interaction with the 'world.' The school, and especially the classroom, belongs to this 'world,' and it is one of the major arenas for young peoples' enculturation and socialisation. In school, students do not merely acquire units of knowledge in terms of learning content; they also learn something about society and develop an idea of the value that this knowledge has for themselves and for the shared common good, what can be done with that knowledge and how social life in this world can be organised.

From a pedagogical point of view, this implies that in school, as a societal institution, pedagogical opportunities are required through which students experience how the relevance of their role in the joint meaning-making processes of teaching is acknowledged and practically lived and supported.

Pedagogy and General *Didaktik*: A Conceptual Frame of Students' Co-Authorship Role in Teaching Processes

As outlined earlier, regarding its theoretical orientation, the chapter draws upon conceptual formations and ideas from the fields of critical curriculum research and pedagogy, as well as from the tradition of General *Didaktik*. Here, the guiding thought is that a carefully chosen combination of

certain conceptualisations from these three fields allows for a framework that enables the capture of students' co-authorship in its pedagogical and didactical dimensions against the backdrop of critical curriculum theory. Or, stated differently, it is at the point where these three fields converge that students' co-authorship is seen to be situated and where it can be traced in its diverse forms and with the inherent complexity that characterises pedagogical relationships. Below, I will, therefore, first explain what the view of pedagogy applied herein means for the concept of teaching, in relation to which students' co-authorship is seen to take place. In a second step, I will present how a conceptual apparatus related to a critical-constructive *Didaktik* may enable us to trace the specific character of the students' role and how the students' role in standards-based education can be explored and problematised.

Pedagogy: Teaching as an Act and as Discourse

In this chapter, regarding the pedagogical perspective of teaching, inspiration is mainly found in the work of Robin J. Alexander (2001), who suggests that the concept of teaching includes both the act of teaching itself and the discourse that is linked to that act. Hence, classroom teaching involves both social action and meaning-making dimensions; it refers to what teachers do and, ultimately, why they do what they do. Teaching, understood as an act and discourse, is about 'what one needs to know, and the skills one needs to command, in order to make and justify the many different kinds of decisions of which teaching is constituted' (Alexander, 2004, p. 11). From such a framing of the teaching concept, it follows that teaching means more than the mere 'techniques' used in order to direct a learning process towards the acquisition of certain kinds of knowledge content. Teaching, understood from this broader view of what happens in classrooms when teachers and students interact, denotes education (Alexander, 2008), which connects the knowledge and skill aspects of teaching to the pedagogical justifications of the previously mentioned processes regarding the students' subjectification.

These processes are framed by the curriculum, which can by no means be seen to represent a neutral basis for what knowledge – and in which ways that knowledge – should be taught and learnt in classrooms. Rather, the curriculum carries certain and sometimes implicit kinds of assumptions, ideas and values about knowledge and learning, which matter for how the pedagogical task is perceived and realised. By understanding teaching as consisting of 'curriculum events' (Doyle, 1992), the pedagogical transformation processes can be traced when teachers and students jointly 'make' the curriculum with respect to how they make meaning of it and what kinds of meanings they ascribe to it. The process of students' co-authoring of curriculum events must, therefore, not be understood as isolated but as embedded in this joint meaning-making of the curriculum and as framed by the pedagogical context in which it occurs.

General Didaktik and Bildung Orientation

General *Didaktik* can be explained as denoting a general theory of teaching (Rucker, 2020). Institutionalised teaching, as it takes place in schools, is here seen as the complex relationships that occur between the teacher, content and the student, which is usually illustrated in the form of the so-called didactic triangle. In a simplified way, the tradition of General *Didaktik* could be said to address the core questions of teaching, which are the ‘what,’ the ‘how,’ the ‘why,’ the ‘for whom’ and, above all, the ‘what for’ of teaching. The ‘what for’ of teaching, which is what the teaching is fundamentally purposed to lead to for the students and under which conditions it can be pedagogically justified, is superordinated to and ultimately determines the answers regarding the questions of what content to teach to whom and what methods should be employed to teach that content. Due to the complexity of the relationships and the teachers’ necessary critical reflection regarding the purpose of their teaching, teaching also becomes a question of pedagogy (Hudson, 2006). It could be said that teaching refers to different dimensions of a broad range of pedagogically relevant problems that can be related to, for example, instruction, content, learning, methods, aims, purposes, assessment, or sanctions (Klafki, 2007).

However, within General *Didaktik*, different models can be traced, where the *bildungs*-oriented *Didaktik* represents the most influential one, as it has had a lasting impact on the development of Central and North European educational thinking and is continuously modified and refined, also in relation to the curriculum (Gundem & Hopmann, 1998; Krogh et al., 2021; Uljens & Ylimaki, 2017; Westbury et al., 2000). One way of understanding the *bildungs*-oriented General *Didaktik* is that it purposes to ‘[clarify] the basic structure of teaching under the claim of *Bildung*’ (Rucker, 2020, p. 52). Regarding the concept of *Bildung*, one has to be aware that there is no overall, general definition of what is meant by *Bildung*, as the concept is multi-faceted and characterised by more or less different nuances in meaning (Hopmann, 2007). In the following, it is outlined how *Bildung* – as a central educational category – is to be understood in this chapter, what it consists of and what it implies in relation to the students’ role when looking at this category from a certain kind of *Didaktik* model, namely, the critical-constructive *Didaktik* model.

Critical-Constructive Didaktik

Originally developed in a German-speaking context, which is characterised by a long tradition of human-science pedagogy, Wolfgang Klafki (2007) provides a theoretical model of General *Didaktik* that is *bildungs*-oriented, but which goes beyond the hermeneutic *Didaktik* tradition, as Klafki’s (2007) critical-constructive *Didaktik* model is also influenced by the critical works that emerged in light of the Frankfurt School. The conception of a *bildungs*-oriented *Didaktik* that Klafki’s model is based upon refers to

Bildung as the students' abilities (*Fähigkeiten*) in terms of (i) self-determination (*Selbstbestimmung*), which means the ability to make autonomous, well-informed and morally justifiable decisions; (ii) co-determination (*Mitbestimmung*), which means the ability to participate in joint decision-making processes; and (iii) solidarity (Klafki, 1995). Those abilities (or perhaps it would be even more correct to speak of capabilities in this context) are seen as the basic principles that a human and democratic society constitutively rests upon (Klafki, 1995, 2007). The term *critical* in Klafki's model denotes the critical-communicative dimensions of teaching, which either enable or impede the conditions that are necessary for those abilities to be developed. In addition, the model also entails an action-oriented (*handlungsorientierten*) and empirically informed approach to teaching, here described as the 'constructive' part of Klafki's theory, addressing the practical as well as the reflexive aspects of teaching and learning with regard to those abilities. Altogether, what is highlighted in Klafki's (2007) work and what is a recurrent theme in his writing is the issue of how *Didaktik*, as a research framework and as a conceptual background for teachers' professional reflexive orientation, can help us to problematise, illuminate and change societal conditions that lead to, for example, cultural, economic and social inequality. In school, as a societal institution, and in the classroom, as a social unit of the same, these inequalities intentionally or unintentionally risk becoming reproduced to the further disadvantage of those students who already lack different kinds of privileges and opportunities. Therefore, the kind of teaching that takes the ethical responsibilities of the societal and democratic task of education seriously takes students' different backgrounds, potentials and needs into account and enables a learning environment that is rich in offering opportunities for all students to develop their capabilities of self- and co-determination and solidarity. This implies that students need to be given the opportunity to meet and critically examine different kinds of knowledge content and to position themselves clearly and with growing personal autonomy regarding the questions that society poses to each individual, both now and in the future. Hence, the broad *Bildung* of each student denotes a process, as it also stands for the results of those educative processes.

The idea of *Bildung*, understood as outlined earlier, represents the central category for guiding teachers' professional decision-making regarding the concrete teaching content and in which ways to teach that content. The necessity and essential pedagogical relevance of such a central category like *Bildung* is given if

... our pedagogical efforts for the next generation (...) shall not fall apart into a loose vis-à-vis, or even into against each other directed, countless single activities, and if the pedagogical support, the measures, activities and individual efforts to learn shall become or remain justifiable and responsible.

(Klafki, 2007, p. 44¹)

Hence, a superordinated category such as *Bildung* is needed that provides teachers and students with the necessary orientation regarding the overall purposes of education that are able to transcend the here and now of the classroom and the mere learning content, as such. From that follows what Klafki calls the primacy of objectives (*Primat der Zielentscheidung*) (Klafki, 2007). The primacy of objectives means that decisions regarding teaching content and methods always have to be justified in relation to the overall purpose, not in a deductive sense but as a critical-reflective practice that is embedded in discursive negotiation processes regarding the extent to which the offered teaching enables each student's self-determination, co-determination and solidarity under the pedagogical conditions of the specific classroom.

Hereby, the essential pedagogical programme of the critical-constructive view of teaching is contoured so that it can be seen to represent a general action-oriented frame for all students' education. This perspective also has consequences for one of the central aspects in school that relates to the school's socialisation task, namely, to prepare students to live in a performance-based society. From a critical-constructive *Didaktik* angle and when the focus is on the students' role, this includes, for example, reflections on what the students' 'performance' (*Leistung*) is seen to represent, what kinds of demands on student performance are justifiable from a pedagogical and ethical point of view and also what counts as valuable performance in this context. If the students' abilities of critical awareness, creativity, communication and empathetic solidarity are the primary purposes, then, in school, no demands can be made in terms of student performance that hinder

... young people from developing their self- and co-determination abilities, their critical and decision-making abilities – which also includes their ability to validly dissociate from certain societal performance demands.

(Klafki, 2007, p. 228, author's translation)

Consequently, a successful *Bildung* process would also include young people's ability to position themselves, in a well-founded and critical way, as being against the contexts, structures, institutions, people and ideas that enabled their *Bildung*, and to challenge and question them if necessary.

In relation to a critical-constructive approach to teaching, one thus has to differentiate between performance demands that are externally imposed on schools and a pedagogical performance principle (*pädagogisches Leistungsprinzip*). Pointedly, and in light of such a pedagogical performance principle, the focus is not on the student as a kind of supplier of externally and pre-set standardised expectations; instead, the students' role refers to the development of capabilities, which relates to an individual development based on the students' unique starting points and needs. This represents the students' individual performance – an individual performance that is exclusively 'owned' by the students themselves and which teaching can only support and help to initiate.

The Students' Role in Two Different Learning Environments

In the following, these ideas and conceptual frames are related to the analytical observations that could be made in two different classrooms regarding the students' role in the didactical relationships between students, teachers and content, as well as the pedagogical implications that follow from this. Here, the two different classrooms, which are attended by students in year eight in two Swedish compulsory schools, represent different kinds of learning environments in which the students' role takes shape in curriculum events. However, it is important to note that the focus is not on an empirical comparison of the classrooms per se, but on the context-sensitive examination of the previously named aspects in relation to exemplifying excerpts of different pedagogical environments.

The empirical examples² in this chapter are taken from a set of data that was collected during the school year 2018/2019. The data set includes 16 video-filmed classroom observations of science classes in a year eight classroom, as well as eight semi-structured interviews with the science teachers and eight group interviews with the students. Also, fieldnotes and additional materials were collected, such as lesson plans and materials handed out during lessons, and they were analysed through abductive and integrated coding procedures, including a fine-grained coding scheme for the lessons (Wahlström et al., 2019). In relation to this chapter, the guiding initial questions for analysis were about how the character of and the conditions for the students' role could be conceptualised, relating to the didactical relationships that characterised the curriculum events that the students were an active part of.

Introducing the Two Learning Environments

The first classroom is part of *Larch Tree School*, which is located on the outskirts of a medium-sized Swedish city. The school has an international profile, and the majority of the students have a migration background, as well as parents with post-secondary education. There is an explicit pedagogical idea for the school, which is, amongst others, about having high expectations for all the students to succeed with their studies. This aim permeates the work realised in this school on every level and is mirrored in a comprehensive and optimised set of pedagogical and didactical structures for how teaching and learning are organised and for how the results are continuously monitored and, if necessary, adjusted on the group and individual levels. For this school, students' performance, as measured in so-called merit points that are based on students' grades in year nine, is clearly above the national average.

The second classroom is a part of the *Oak Tree School*. The school is located on the outskirts of a bigger Swedish city, with the neighbourhood being characterised by challenging socio-economic conditions and a high degree of cultural diversity. The majority of students in this school come from homes with migration experiences, and most of the students' parents do not have

post-secondary education. According to the principal, the school has struggled with low goal attainment for a long period of time, and it has had to handle a broad variety of social problems besides the school's core task of teaching. In addition, there are also difficulties in finding enough certified and more experienced teachers. In this school, the students' merit points are clearly below the national average, and the majority of students have difficulties in achieving the minimal standards for entering upper secondary school.

The Students' Role in the Larch Tree Classroom

Before the science classes in Larch Tree School start, students have to wait for the teacher to unlock the classroom door while placed in two rows outside the classroom. When entering the classroom, students quickly and quietly move to their seats, standing behind their chairs and waiting for the teacher to welcome them and to allow them to sit down. After this, the teacher always introduces the content and the structure of the day's lesson. Here, the knowledge requirements often play a central role, which are the criteria for different grading levels expressed in the syllabus, and the result expectations of the lesson and the learning task are communicated. In addition, the teaching content in science classes follows the school's detailed plan for what to teach in science in the different years in order to ensure that all of the content prescribed in the syllabi is effectively covered during lessons.

Overall, science classes in Larch Tree School are characterised by a so-called result-oriented knowledge conception (Wahlström et al., 2019), which means that knowledge in this classroom is first and foremost conceptualised in terms of learning outcomes and students' performance. This becomes visible in the classroom discourse for the observed lessons, as well as in the interviews and the additional material collected (see also Vogt, 2021 for a more detailed presentation).

For example, at the beginning of every new task, students are handed out plans for the new working unit, including the learning objectives for each lesson with different levels of difficulty, which are related to different grading levels that can be achieved during this lesson. In a biology class, for example, one lesson was about the cells and organ system, and the students needed to show that they 'could label an animal cell' to get a pass, whereas the highest performance level required the students to 'describe how the organ system works together.' After each lesson, students are supposed to track their learning outcomes of the day by checking off which grade-related level their performance matched with during the lesson, how they would explain the achieved level, and what they needed to do in order to improve their performance regarding the content in question. In the student interviews that were conducted, it became visible that the students were positive towards this kind of learning support. For example, in one interview, a student said:

This helps a lot, because instead of thinking about what we have learnt, you can simply look and check what you know. Well, like, you only have

to look for yourself, checking, and if you know something, then you can skip it. (...) If I am going for a D, I know that this is what I need to know.³

In sum, those local documents can be seen as didactical artefacts that frame the lessons and mirror a kind of result-oriented standardisation of teaching processes, where knowledge and its acquisition are conceptualised and communicated as easily measurable units that can be broken down into fragments of learning and where the value of the learning mainly lies in the grading level achieved. For the students, this implies the effective organisation of their learning processes, with the aim of ensuring that they, at the end of the term, can achieve the desired grade.

For the science teacher, this didactical standardisation equals a sort of necessary pedagogical structure to enable working with the science syllabi in an effective manner. It helps the teacher to cover all of the content prescribed in the syllabi, which are perceived as overcrowded, as well as preparing students for getting the focus right in order to achieve good results in the standardised tests. In the interviews, the teacher often underlines how important it is that the students understand the rules of the classroom, what the expectations are regarding their learning and the requirements for achieving good results. This conception is, for example, mirrored in the following interview excerpt, where the teacher explains how new groups of students are introduced to the teacher's science classroom:

(...) as I am used to saying: You are here to work! You are not here to socialise, but you do this, and you do that. (...) And then, I probably should not do this, but I throw up my year nine results from the national test and say: These people did EXACTLY what I said. And they had Ds in year six and now they got Bs in the national test. And I can show them the analysis that I have done, from the department. (...) And there you go. It's up to you. (...) I guarantee, if you do what I say, you'll get the results.

The result-oriented conception that is illustrated in the quote just cited, and which includes an idea of teacher-structured guidance for effectively directing students' learning towards expected results, also has implications for the teaching repertoires used during lessons. Here, the observed science lessons were mainly characterised by teacher-led whole-class teaching, where rote learning and high-frequency Initiate–Response–Evaluation sequences (so-called I–R–E sequences, where the teacher asks closed questions about facts and concepts that students have to answer and which could be either 'right' or 'wrong') were the dominant forms for teaching. Against the background of the importance of providing students with the possibility of achieving good test results and due to the content overcrowded curriculum, the teacher summarises how teaching science 'is fast food teaching. You're constantly moving from one thing to the next. Fact after fact after fact after

fact.’ This conception leads to the conclusion that the frames and possibilities for deeper learning are limited, where students’ subject-related interests, their own meaning-making and a critical examination of the content could be provided with more space:

That’s not student-led. (...) You know, where I can’t just: oh, you want to learn about this? So, we will spend the next three weeks doing this. I don’t have the time. I have to get these things taught.

Taken together, the ways in which teaching and learning are perceived and jointly realised by the teacher and the students in this environment are characterised by a focus on performance and results. Here, student performance seems to be more about externally defined performance measurements in terms of standards and national tests, rather than it representing a pedagogically informed idea of performance in terms of aiming at the students’ content-related *Bildung*, as well as their social and personal growth. If put pointedly, it could be said that the students’ role is concurrently one of both a consumer and a supplier. On the one hand, students simply consume the pre-structured knowledge units and teaching procedures for efficiency reasons, and, on the other hand, they are supposed to deliver the science facts, the concepts and the evidence of having the ability to operate with those facts in a prescribed and quite instrumental manner, which is required for achieving the expected high results. Thereby, the didactical space for and the pedagogical value of learning and discovering something that deepens one’s understanding of the world and how one can position and locate oneself in relation to this – in ways that allow for a critical and moral examination – becomes constrained.

The Students’ Role in the Oak Tree Classroom

In the Oak Tree science classroom, the door is often still open when lessons begin, with students going in and out of the classroom. When the teacher starts talking, some of the students sit down and listen, while others are moving around in the room, talking to their friends or checking their mobile phones. Then the teacher introduces the lesson topic, sometimes followed by a short repetition of the last lesson’s science concepts. Lessons are mainly held in a teacher-led whole-class setting, with rote teaching and I–R–E sequences as the dominant teaching repertoires. The structure of the lessons is quite repetitive, mostly consisting of rote teaching at the whiteboard, watching short films and then answering questions on copied papers. In addition, there are many disruptions due to classroom management issues and when students leave the classroom during teaching and come back again.

Overall, science lessons in the Oak Tree classroom are characterised by a focus on theoretical concepts and facts, and there are almost no references made to any of the formulations in the syllabi during lessons. The dominating knowledge conception that comes to the fore in the analysed lessons is

an essentialistic one, meaning that the lessons are mainly characterised by a vertical knowledge approach emphasising the discipline-oriented dimensions of the subject (see also the chapter by Schmidt in this book; Wahlström et al., 2019). This essentialistic approach to knowledge also becomes visible in the teacher interviews, where the teacher underlines that it is the subject-specific concepts that build students' knowledge, for example, including content such as 'What is motion, what is acceleration? What is energy, what is force? That's the most important.' The teacher's pedagogical idea behind the teaching is to prepare students for their future lives and the standards they will have to meet later on in upper secondary school. Hence, what students have to learn today is what is formulated in the performance standards that point out what is to be mastered in the future:

INTERVIEWER: If you reflect on what students need to know, what is important, how do you choose?

TEACHER: Knowledge requirements. In some way, these are the frames. Because I have worked at the upper secondary level, I know what it is about and about their future.

For the teacher, the purpose of the students' science learning is about learning the basics of the sciences and getting the facts and concepts right for their future learning path. The teacher's conception of the basic character of what is to be learnt is also communicated to students during lessons. In one chemistry lesson, for example, which was about photosynthesis, the teacher talked about the written test, which the lesson was intended to prepare the students for. As was the case for all the other working units, the teacher handed out copied papers with the most important facts and concepts that the students had to learn:

TEACHER: Everybody got those? This is very simple. It's only these that will come up in the test. It's not so many pages. It's only ten pages (...). You receive this. This is enough for passing the test. It's not so many pages when you think about it. (...)

STUDENT: Are we not supposed to have a book?

TEACHER: We will not have a book at all. It's only this [holding up the papers] we will use. If you received a book, then you can return it. (...)

The teacher's conception regarding the content's simplicity that is exemplified in the excerpt just cited also implies that the content is reduced with regard to its material amount ('only ten pages') as well as its content-related character and extent ('We will not have a book at all. It's only this we will use'). What is communicated to the students here is that this reduction in content corresponds to a didactical adjustment to the teacher's expectations about what they are supposed to achieve ('This is enough for passing the test').

However, the teacher's intention of preparing students for upper secondary level in a basic way is challenged on an everyday basis due to classroom

management issues and students' difficulties in understanding the content in the way they are taught, which, for example, becomes visible in a lesson about Ohm's law:

The teacher asks one of the students to read a question aloud from one of the copied papers. Students in the back of the classroom are not listening and are talking with each other.

TEACHER: Listen, do you want to participate in the lesson?

STUDENT A: No one has said anything! [upset]

TEACHER: You are supposed to participate.

STUDENT A: I do participate! [upset]

TEACHER: What do you mean student B?

STUDENT B: I don't have it.

TEACHER: Well, you have it in front of you. The question.

STUDENT B: Which question?

TEACHER: Question eight.

STUDENT B: I cannot answer the question.

TEACHER: Yes well, you cannot/. You do not know/. You cannot solve this equation?

STUDENT B: Well (...). I don't understand anything. I have not understood anything!

TEACHER: Ehm. No, you don't understand anything/. You might study at home. [The teacher turns towards a student in the front row and poses the question to this student instead.]

From a student's perspective, situations such as the one here have to do with classroom management issues that often make ordinary teaching difficult. However, besides those vital pedagogical aspects, the most important point for the students is that they perceive the teaching to be carried out in a way that 'is much like university' and not like the teaching they 'have been used to over the years.' That makes it hard for them to really understand and to engage with the content that the teacher offers to them, as explained by one student during an interview: 'The teacher uses very/. The teacher does not explain that well. Most of us do not understand during the lessons, and others just ignore the teacher.'

Taken together, also in the Oak Tree science classroom, teaching and learning the sciences is mostly perceived and realised as the teacher-led instruction about facts and concepts, where the subject-related concepts that are offered to the students appear as a given body of basic knowledge, with a limited didactical space for students' own meaning-making based on their starting points for learning. Here, the focus does not lie so much on the results in the here and now in terms of the highest possible grades but on equipping students with the basic knowledge needed for coping with the standards for upper secondary school. However, the teaching that takes place does not engage the students, and there is, if at all, only a loose didactical relationship

between the teacher and the content, on the one hand, and the students, on the other hand. Since the students have difficulties in understanding the content and the teaching offered does not succeed in engaging them, in the end, they do not get in touch with the content in a way that could be supportive of their personal and social capabilities and their opportunities for a critical and autonomous examination of the world.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, the focus has been on the students' role in teaching processes and, thereby, explicit attention has been paid to the group of actors that are at the very centre of all educational efforts. The students' role in teaching processes has been addressed in relation to differing learning environments in times when the answer on the questions regarding the purposes of education and educational equity often seems to be about the stipulation of coherent and measurable standards and equal opportunities for all students to achieve those standards. By approaching the students' role from an integrated perspective of pedagogy, critical curriculum theory and *Didaktik*, this role can be explored as embedded in the didactical relationships between teachers, content and students that constitute teaching in relation to its communicative and educational dimensions. Essentially, teaching is understood as the pedagogical act of the joint meaning-making of teachers and students regarding a certain content, which reaches beyond mere instruction, learning and measurable outcomes and in which the students' role becomes vital with regard to the students' broader educational opportunities that are either enabled or limited.

In the two different learning environments that provided the empirical examples for this chapter, the same patterns of pedagogical implications can be traced but which appear in different ways. It could be said that teaching, if its overlying purpose becomes limited to, for example, learning outcomes and the achievement of standards, has consequences for the didactical relationships between the student, the teacher and the content, and thereby also for the kind of student role that becomes possible in the classroom. If the teaching content, prescribed in the syllabi and translated into concrete teaching in different classrooms under different conditions, does not transcend itself – beyond its short-term and direct utility – and if students are not given opportunities to position themselves towards the teaching they are a part of in a truly meaningful way, then the didactical space in which the students' critical and autonomous approach to the world can flourish is critically narrowed. A too one-sided understanding of performance, in terms of the achievement of externally prescribed standards and the absence of a clear pedagogically justifiable idea of performance, risks to affect education for both high-performing and lower performing groups of students. Here, both groups of students are refused adequate opportunities to develop their capabilities of self-determination, co-determination and solidarity, which then also implies a wide range of conceivable consequences for the school's

democratic task. Overall, and from an equity perspective, this is particularly serious for students in low-performing classrooms, since they are not only disadvantaged with regards to their opportunities to achieve high grades in relation to prescribed performance standards and thereby to benefit from the formal chances that are related to the access to further educational tracks. On top of that, they are also refused a pedagogical classroom environment that would allow the students to take a role in their education in which their broad personal and social capabilities, as well as their academic potential, can become visible and grow. Against this background, thus, it can indeed be questioned to which extent and in which ways a performance-oriented standardisation of education that comes along with a plethora of unintended challenges for teaching and learning, and of which only a few could be outlined in this chapter, will be of help for solving the profound pedagogical and societal problématiques that characterise today's classroom realities in many different learning environments.

Notes

- 1 All translations in this chapter are the author's.
- 2 In the excerpts, pseudonyms are used and personal pronouns are replaced by neutral pronouns, for example, the teacher, the student et cetera.
- 3 In Sweden, the grading scale consists of six grading levels from A to F, with A being the highest grade and F standing for a not-passed grade.

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