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**What limits of legitimate discourse? : the case of elite sport as “thinkable”
official knowledge in the Norwegian national curriculum**

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Abstract

In 2006, elite sport was introduced into the Norwegian national curriculum as an elective subject in the pre-tertiary school. Grades achieved in this 5 hours-a-week subject count towards school leavers' overall attainment grades. Prior to 2006, this subject was only offered as a specially adapted, alternative pedagogy in private schools. The paper analyzes how ideas about elite performance have become mainstream, particularly in light of the seeming lack of public policy supporting such a development. By using Bernstein's conceptual tools it analyzes the few existing policy statements about elite sport in the pre-tertiary education sector and builds upon interview data with key policy players in the Norwegian parliament in order to shed light on this seemingly market-driven development. It asks which discourses have legitimated the transformation of elite sport skills, knowledge and values from an exclusive private school niche to national curricular knowledge to meet the physically, most-able and ambitious athlete- students in the pre-tertiary schools, and in so doing, include the development of sport athletes as an educational task of the comprehensive school system. Finally, it addresses whether agencies outside education policy circles may have affected the legitimation of elite sport as elective curricular knowledge to a certain group of students.

Key words

Education policy discourses, Elite sport subject, Pre-tertiary school national curriculum, Market- driven development, Interview data analysis, Distributive rules, Recontextualization of policy

Introduction: official knowledge, national curriculum and surrounding texts

Much policy research in education reveals the contested nature of school knowledge and curriculum content (Young, 1971, 2008; Goodson, 1994; Bernstein, 2000; Apple, 2003).

What counts as knowledge in the field of physical education (PE) and sport is no exception (Evans, 1986; Tinning, 2010; Penney, 2012). Framed by policy developments and changing 'surrounding texts' PE policy, curriculum development and practice are characterized by complexities and tensions, and PE's legitimacy as a core subject has shifted (Kirk, 2010).

During the last decades the subject has been extended beyond core PE for all students in the school system to include different kind of sport activity electives in the school's curriculum and specialist sport schools for talented young people. In general, educational constructions for talented students in sports are discursively and organizationally different from practices of extra-curricular PE and sport provided by the local schools. As revealed by Penney (2012) the development within the system of education to specially care about and meet talented young people in sports contributes to an illumination of how policy developments, 'presents opportunities and "spaces for action" through creative interpretation, selective adoption and adaptation of discourses'(p.1). In this context of policy development in Norway, the 2006 'Knowledge promotion' curriculum reform (UFD, 2003-2004; UFD, 2006) introduced a new 'elite sport' subject in the national curriculum exclusively available as a 5 hours per week elective subject to students and "wannabe" athletes at the academic pre- tertiary school level. Generally, these academic programs contain subject structures Young (2008, 2013) describes as 'powerful knowledge' and what Winter (2012) noted as 'that kind of specialist, context-

independent, theoretical knowledge which give access to traditional high status higher education and social mobility' (p.307).

As a symbol of equality, social justice and an egalitarian society during the last 60 years, the national curriculum has been a corner stone in the Norwegian comprehensive school system. The national curriculum portrays certain values, categories of knowledge and practices as legitimate and valid at the different levels of schooling. In this context a reform of the national curriculum traditionally is a public affair. However, in Norway as elsewhere the national curriculum has never been a neutral assemblage of knowledge. Apple (1993, p.9) reminds us that 'The national curriculum is a mechanism for the political control of knowledge'. Despite contexts of cultural and national differences Bernstein (2000) analytically illuminates ways in which the selection, classification and transmitting of knowledge, and admission to it within the education system, reflect social control and distribution of power. Moreover, Apple (2000) emphasizes that the structuring and organization of official knowledge, and the ways in which it is framed and communicated, involves conflicts and compromises related to complex cultural, political and social issues embedded in the national education policy. In this context the introduction of elite sport as official curricular knowledge stands politically as an interesting case study because neither the classification of elite sport as official knowledge nor as an educational task of the comprehensive school system are traceable in policy documents or 'conflicts and compromises' in the reform process. Consequently, 'the elite sport process' is not in keeping with national school reform traditions.

As in other countries affected by globalization (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010) the Norwegian 'Knowledge promotion' curriculum reform (UFD, 2003-2004; UFD, 2006) discursively forms

part of the national response to the global neoliberal policy of education. In this policy context exploring the political arguments that have legitimated the implementation of elite sport in the national curriculum it is significant that the hallmarks of the education processes affected by neoliberalism are the ways in which power relations and the changing of values are disregarded or omitted (Giroux, 2002, 2008). Bauman (1999) elaborates, it 'is precisely the absence of questioning; its surrender to what is seen the implacable and irreversible logic of social reality' that make neoliberalism 'sharply different from other ideologies' (p.127). These hallmarks of neoliberal education policy processes form the backcloth of this case study.

From a contemporary comparative perspective the introduction of elite sport as an issue in the Norwegian policy of education significantly differs from the political processes that have legitimated specialized sport programs for talented youth in the system of schooling elsewhere. In Norway elite sport in the school system has never been transformed into a significant political issue like in the UK where governmental emphasis was on the school system's contribution to national elite sport ambitions (Penney and Evans 1997; Houlihan 2009; Phillpots, 2013) nor like the reports and the national certification of elite school sport programs in the Swedish policy of education (Lund, 2014). From this perspective exploring the legitimation and organization of elite sport as new official knowledge in the Norwegian school system, it is crucial to acknowledge that possibilities for policy and pedagogical action in systems of education generally, as well as in the changing fields of PE and sport inherent in curriculum development and official education texts, always need to be considered in relation to surrounding texts and national contexts of provision (Penney and Evans, 1999; Ball, 2007; Penney, 2012).

Emphasizing hallmarks of education policy processes affected by neoliberalism and the need to consider the national context of provision in this case study, in what follows I provide a critical analysis of the ways in which education policy discourses and their surrounding texts may have affected the arguments applied to legitimate the configuration of elite sport as official knowledge. In exploring ‘the absence of questioning’ and the educational, ‘social logic of social reality’ argued by Bauman (1999, p. 127) in my citation above, it is necessary to shed light on the organization of the national school system, the discourses of alternative pedagogies, special education and school choice in the regulated education (quasi-)market, and their surrounding text.

Private schools’ pedagogical alternative and specially adapted education as surrounding texts

The Norwegian education system regulated by the ‘Education Act’ (EA, 1998) is based upon an education free of charge at all education levels, provided by tax revenues and generally available to all. A comprehensive school system regulated by the national curriculum guidelines are the core of EA. However, illustrating the multi-layered democratic and pedagogic discourses within the national education system, there is a ‘Private Education Act’ (PEA, 2003) located under the EA that legitimates a relatively small number of private schools (‘independent schools’ or ‘public schools’ in the UK) as alternatives to the state schools. In Norway the private schools are either denominational or offer pedagogical alternatives to the state schools. Approved according to the PEA these schools receive financial support from the state, a school capitation allowance (Whitty *et al.*, 1998), to the tune the 85 per cent of the operating costs of state owned schools (KD, 2013a).

Consequently, ‘independent schools’ in the Norwegian education system both benefit from

and are dependent on public funding which implies that the teaching and national exams provided by the private schools have to follow the national curriculum and guidelines.

According to figures from 2006-2007 (KD, 2013a) about 14 000 students attended the private school alternatives while 180 000 students attended the state pre tertiary schools. Although exposure to competition has characterized the public sector nationally for a considerable number of years, the figures indicate that the private alternatives of schooling in Norway are not yet a widespread phenomenon.

However, the PEA 'allows for the approval of upper secondary schools offering special and adapted education combined with top-level sports' (KD, 2013b, p.2). After an illumination of what elite sport as alternative pedagogy is about in the approved private schools, I will return to the concept 'elite sport' versus 'top-level-sport'. The 'special and adapted education' legitimated as the pedagogical alternative schooling in the PEA consists of three years of specialist training and an active, athlete lifestyle in combination with the pre-tertiary school academic baccalaureate national curriculum. The ways in which the schools structurally and pedagogically organize (elite) sport as 'special and adapted education', the selection of sports and students, the school fee and the maximum versus the curricular minimum of teaching hours allocated to the locally selected content knowledge, training and targeted elite sport practices, are left to the local schools to decide as long as the national curriculum objectives and guidelines are followed. The first and trendsetting private school in this education niche was 'The Norwegian College of Elite Sport' ('NCES), a non-profit, private foundation with the objective to 'support the athletes sports career and promote their academic education. According to the marketing of their school the students should be capable of winning medals in international championships, qualifying for university and academic education and developing excellent ethical principles' (Norwegian College of Elite Sport, 2013, p.1).

Further, NCES on their web site (ibid.) informs the readers that ‘A very high amount of training is a key factor to enable the students to reach a high international level’ and by ‘high-level quantitative and qualitative training’ ...NCES takes excellently care of the first link in the elite sport chain’ (p.1). The school provides their students external expertise which includes World- and Olympic Champions, national team coaches, lectures from private companies and the Norwegian Olympic Committee and Confederation of Sport. Several Norwegian winners from the (winter) Olympics and World Cups are former NCES students, and over the last decade several private elite sport schools have benefited from an increasing popularity. However, despite the fact that since the mid -1980s the private elite sport schools have provided students and families willing to pay for special and adapted programs that practically mirror the principles of talent development strategy promoted by the Norwegian Olympic and Paralympic Committee and Confederation of Sports, there has never been any elite sport subject in the national curriculum before it was introduced in the 2006 ‘Knowledge promotion’ reform. Correspondingly, even if elite sport ambitions in combination with academic programs are governmentally conceptualized as a pedagogical alternative in special and adapted combinations with traditional academic school programs, neither ‘*elite sport*’ nor ‘*top-level sport*’ have been concepts used in education policy guidelines defining tasks, official knowledge or subjects in the national school system before the 2006 curriculum reform. The concept ‘elite sport’ has only been part of the private elite sport schools branding of their ‘pedagogical alternative’ discursively communicating relations to the national Olympic organization’s elite athlete development program. As the concept ‘elite sport’ more clearly than ‘top-level sport’ discursively communicates what both the concepts are about, an elite/elitist, exclusive and excluding sport discourse focusing upon a high (international) performance level including the lifestyles and behaviors of elite sport athletes, in this case study I use the concept ‘elite sport’.

In what follows, after presenting the applied analytical framework and methodology of my case study, I firstly will present an analysis of what knowledge and education values the elite sport subject in the written curriculum are about. Thereafter, I ask, ‘which discourses in the reform policy have legitimated the transformation of elite sport skills, knowledge and values from a private school pedagogical alternative niche in the school system to official knowledge framed as an elective subject in the national curriculum to meet the physically most able and ambitious “wannabe” athlete- students in the pre-tertiary schools?’ In so doing I include formally the development of elite sport athletes as an educational task of the comprehensive school system. Finally, I ask if agencies outside the policy of education and the school system in some way or another may have affected the legitimation of elite sport as curricular knowledge to a certain group of students in the school system.

Analytical framework and methodology

By the analytical framework of ‘pedagogic device’ Bernstein (2000) operationalizes production, reproduction and transformation of culture providing three interrelated rules as the intrinsic grammar of pedagogic discourse: distributive rules, recontextualization rules and evaluative rules. The distributive rules ‘mark and distribute who may transmit what to whom and under what conditions’ (p. 31) and in so doing, as Tinning (2010) argues ‘they endeavor to set the inner and outer limits of legitimate discourse’ (p. 160). Elaborated by Bernstein (2000) the distributive rules distribute ‘access to the ‘unthinkable’, that is, to the possibility of new knowledge, and access to the ‘thinkable, that is to official knowledge’ (p.114). In the first part of my analysis I will focus upon the education values and specialized forms of ‘thinkable’ official knowledge and forms of educational practice communicated by the elite sport national

curriculum as written education policy text (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2013). The recontextualization of the exclusive elite sport alternative pedagogic discourse in the PEA reconfigured in the 2006 curriculum reform as legitimate ‘thinkable’ official knowledge in the comprehensive school system, implies a structural deregulation of the ‘specialized rules of access and specialized power controls’ (Bernstein, 2000, p.31) of the distributive rules. This deregulation exemplifies official recontextualization of pedagogic discourse created and controlled by the state within which politicians in the Parliament’s Committee for Education and Research, the Ministry of Education and the Directorate of Education are regulatory agencies. I therefore consider Bernstein’s (2000) concepts of recontextualization, recontextualization rules and fields to be significant in the analysis of the surrounding texts and the discursive changes in the curriculum reform policy. Bernstein argues ‘that pedagogic discourse is generated by a recontextualising discourse, in the same way that we said distributive rules translate, in sociological terms, into fields of production of knowledge with their own rules of access’ (p.33). Then, recontextualization refers to the process of selection and organization of knowledge within curricula by serving as a rule (or principle) that selectively appropriates, relocates and refocuses discourses to constitute its own order of pedagogic discourse. In this case study analyzing the discourses in the recontextualization of school knowledge, I have emphasized that recontextualization, as pointed out by Stavrou (2011, p.143) drawing upon Bernstein’s concept, ‘relates to the structuring of the transmission systems, of forms of knowledge, and of power and control relations concerning knowledge, generated by the recontextualizing principle...Recontextualization enables an examination of the transmission of knowledge, in its material and pragmatic dimension, as a social phenomenon’.

Emphasizing that both the reform policy process and the recontextualization field contains different meanings and values affected by different surrounding texts, in the second part of this paper I have analyzed data generated by in-depth interviews with major education policy players in the Norwegian Parliament. As suggested by Young (1971, p.31), ‘consideration of the assumptions underlying the selection and the organization of knowledge by those in position of power may be a fruitful perspective for raising sociological questions about curricula’. Decades later Maguire and Ball (1994) referred to ‘elite studies’ as one of the key methods in qualitative approaches in education policy analysis. In Rizvi and Lingard’s (2010, p.58) view ‘(e)lite studies usually involve interviews with the major policy players as a way of understanding policy texts and policy processes across the policy circle, with a particular focus on the politics of policy text production’, and in so doing ‘recognize the politics of relationships between politicians and policymakers and the politics involved inside the actual site of policy production itself’. In this study ‘researching the powerful’ to ‘thereby understand actions and motives from inside’ (Selwyn, 2012, p.2) data is generated by in-depth interviews with four national elite education policy players that lasted between 75-100 minutes. These Members of Parliament (MPs) are former or current members of the Parliament’s Committee of Education and Research which at the national level has been the major education policy agency in the ‘Knowledge promotion’ reform policy process. I will anonymously make reference to them as ‘MP’ or ‘interviewee’. The interviews were taped and took place either in the interviewees’ office with no other persons present, in a quiet room in the Parliament or at their home address. I did not experience any refusals to answer my questions. On the contrary, they were committed and reflected openly on what I had predefined as matters of substance. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and sent to the interviewees for further comments. Their responses provided me few additional reflections or comments relevant for the data analyses.

A specialized form of knowledge and educational practice: the elite sport national curriculum

Despite discursive, organizational and material differences between the state schools and the private schools, as a regulating education policy text the 2006 elite sport curriculum gives the aims, content knowledge, the number of teaching hours allocated and exams provided students at the academic baccalaureat programs in both the private schools as ‘special and adapted alternative pedagogy’, and in the state comprehensive schools as an elective subject. As Arnott and Ozga (2010) argue ‘policy texts carry definitions of problems, reference particular kinds of evidence and argument, and produce ‘knowledge’ of particular kinds to guide implementation of policy solutions’ (p.339), and according to MacLure (2003) the ‘texts assemble and deploy the objects and phenomena to which they seem to refer, so as to invest them with particular moral and epistemological significances’ (p.80). As an authorized governmental policy text invested with particular moral and epistemological significances to guide the implementation of elite sport as a policy solution, the elite sport national curriculum (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2013) informs the readers that

The last few decades, top-level sport has found increasing acceptance in Norway, being given *social value and status*. Learning in the elite sport subject program can contribute to Norway obtaining conscientious athletes who are able *to achieve good results on regional, national and international levels....*

Young athletes who want to follow purposeful (‘targeted’ directly translated) and systematic training within competitive sports shall be given that opportunity. By learning in the programme subject Top-level sports young people shall be given *the opportunity to combine upper secondary education and training with sports at a high*

performance level on a regional, national and international level. Learning in the subject Top-level sports shall give challenges, excitement, enjoyment and a sense of mastery, and can contribute to development of individual self-confidence...

...All sporting activity shall have a basis in the values of sports, and learning in the elite sport program shall uphold the ethical and moral values of sport. Systematic and purposeful (targeted) training to increase performance levels also involves being more aware of values and attitudes and to what demands are placed on the lifestyles and behaviors of elite sport athletes (p.15, my italics).

Significantly different from the epistemological significances and education values which traditionally have underpinned the national curriculum and the national concept of general education, the elite sport curriculum text cited above deploys the populist ‘acceptance, social value and status’ of elite sport to invest *the opportunity to combine upper secondary education and training with sports at a high performance level on a regional, national and international level* with curricular significance. Playing on the social value and status of elite sport among many Norwegians, the development of athletes who are able *to achieve good results on regional, national and international levels* in the curriculum text discursively guide the implementation of a populist policy solution evading educational arguments of ‘particular moral and epistemological significances’. In the cultural and social contexts of continual and well known moral, ethical and economic challenges within the international elite sport in general, the paragraph emphasizing that the elite sport as national curricular knowledge *‘shall uphold the ethical and moral values of sport’* appears more like the sport organizations’ own rhetoric disconnected from contemporary cultural, economic and political contexts than ambitions and values in general education authorized by a written national curriculum.

Drawing upon Arnot and Ozga (2010) cited above, the text seems to carry difficult definitions of problems and not necessarily plausible moral references or educational arguments to underpin a contemporary national curriculum. Consequently, within the Official Recontextualizing Field ‘created and dominated by the state’ (Bernstein, 2000, p. 115), the elite sport curriculum text represents a recontextualization of the distributive rules of ‘epistemological significances’ which traditionally legitimate and regulate knowledge and education values in the state pedagogic discourse, and thus, in the school subjects provided by the pre-tertiary school’s academic programs.

The ‘Main subject areas’ of the elite sport syllabus (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2013) concretize what elite sport as official knowledge and curricular content knowledge created by the state is about: ‘*planning training ... based on a specialized sporting activity’s demands ...*’, ‘*basic training ... covers training of important qualities of performance development and prevention of injuries ...*’ and finally ‘*skill development ... covers systematic and purposeful training of skills that are central to performance development ...*’ (p.15-16). These subject areas continue to be the same during the three years of pre- tertiary schooling, although the syllabus language indicates progressions from year one to year three like ‘- *develop further* the basic qualities that are central to performance development within their own specialized sport’ (Subject area ‘Basic training’, third year), and ‘- *develop skills further to a higher level of performance* within their own specialized sport” (subject area ‘Skill development, third year) (p.17). The main subject area texts communicate as particular curricular knowledge the development of the individual student’s physical performance, understanding of how to adapt to the specific elite sport athlete values, attitudes and lifestyle significant to achieve good results in national and international sport competitions. This elitist configuration of a subject in the national curriculum pedagogic discourse represents education values and social privileges reflecting a

significant change within the national school system made possible by an ideological drift in the ways of thinking aims and values in the policy of education. No other leisure or cultural activities among students in the age group 16-19 are configured and provided as curricular knowledge or privileged in the national curriculum in any similar ways as (elite) sport interests. When, in this context the most physically able students in the whole school system are provided extended, specific opportunities to pursue their elite sport interests and develop their abilities, the introduction of a new elite sport subject indicates how performativity and segregation discourses work when it comes to the field of sport and physical education (PE) in the school system.

In Norway, as elsewhere (Fitzgerald, 2006), for decades there have been ongoing education debates focusing upon the general need to develop and extend compulsory PE in schools to include and promote learning for all students and not only the most able and active students in sport activities. Such advocacy has also asked for adapted PE to include the less physically able students and students with disabilities and special needs. Berg Svendby and Dowling (2012) recently illuminated how a ‘deep culture of schooling and hegemonic “truths” of PE, not least performativity, in the Norwegian school system often result in segregated and alienating experiences, in which the disabled student is defined as malfunctioning and lacking “ability” ‘ (p.1). Compared to the documented and acknowledged barriers and difficulties in providing for students with disabilities and special needs adapted PE, which is a right according to the EA, the introduction of an elite sport subject for the most physically able students exemplifies how powerful discourses of sport and political populism might have underpinned the elite sport interests in the policy of education. In the UK, Solvason (2010) points at similar characteristics in the wake of ‘A sporting future for all’ in 2000, claiming that ‘there has been a subtle but significant shift in emphasis away from inclusion and towards

elitism in sports, which has run parallel to the marketization of education... Equality of educational provision became overshadowed by a rather more selective drive towards excellence' (p.122). In the Norwegian case of elite sport and the drive towards excellence and elitism the traditional rhetoric of equity and equality in the EA, in the 2006 education policy reform process seems reduced to silence. Since the elite sport curriculum is an option only to the students at the academic pre- tertiary programs, which is the group of students characterized by the significantly lowest drop- out rate in the whole school system (Statistics Norway, 2013), the new curriculum provides this group of students the opportunity to maximize their learning and social support, and thus, exemplifies how neoliberal education reforms, observed years ago by Popkewitz (1991), tend to provide opportunities for some students 'to develop the appropriate traits they possess innately to use them for their own social betterment' (p.142).

Ways of talking and seeing elite sport in the recontextualization field

I posed the following question to the four major education policy players in the Norwegian Parliament:

Related to the 'Knowledge Promotion' reform process, from your point of view which arguments can explain why elite sport was justified and developed as a new school subject in its own right, albeit an elective subject, in the pre- tertiary school national curriculum?

In the interview data generated in this case study I have analyzed discourses embedded in the way in which the politicians argued particular meanings and values by emphasizing their

‘ways of talking’ and ‘ways of seeing’ (Fairclough, 1995). Hesitating at nothing one of the major policy players frankly responded to my question:

I don’t think the political arguments are other than saying that *the people want Norway to do well in sport, and within the political circles it’s been recognized that talented youngsters need to have support structures if they’re to compete at the top. And we love to count gold medals (laughter)... I really think we’re a country of sport idiots, yes, a nation hooked on sport...and the national mind blowing effect when we do well, right?*

This quote from the interview transcripts exemplifies why I in my discourse analysis have emphasized the significance of the ways of talking and seeing elite sport as legitimate curricular knowledge and the surrounding text by Parliament politicians as a state agency in the official recontextualization field. However, in my open minded dialogs with the MPs focusing upon the legitimate elite sport discourse in the 2006 curriculum reform, the ways of talking and seeing reflected more complex education policy arguments than the arguments presented above. Generally, responding to my question the MPs explained that the introduction of elite sport as new curricular knowledge was a political move to regulate competitions and ‘market shares’ between state schools and private elite sport schools in the quasi-market.

To contextualize the questions and answers which have generated my interview data, and to illuminate how the interactions in the interview situations ‘shape how people contribute and interpret the contribution of others’ (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999, 55) in the communication of arguments, I will present sequences of the dialogs between the

interviewees (IO) and me (I). After posing my question the dialog with one of the MPs continued:

IO: ... there was *a lot of discussion about these private, pre-tertiary sport schools, you know, the debate about whether students shall be able to choose between private schools or state schools...* I'm not quite sure about the context here, but I can at least imagine that many politicians wanted to provide this type of schooling in the public sector.

I: 'Then, to me it seems that you're providing political, as opposed to knowledge - or pedagogically based reasons. Is that correct?'

IO: Yes, *this is politics- school is about politics and nothing else...* In earlier reforms, sport and schooling was influenced by social democratic consensus about broad participation as opposed to elitism, and the idea that wide participation would lead to elite performance, but a lot occurred during the 1990s and by 2000. There was much more *acceptance for the idea that if you want talent then you have to provide structures to support them. So it's a natural consequence of today's society.*

In this interview the MP frequently underpinned his way of seeing elite sport in the national curriculum as 'a natural consequence of today's society'. By repeatedly making the case that this ideological drift within the policy of education is a "natural consequence", he argues the need to rethink the legitimate limits in the distributive rules. Positioning himself within a pragmatic policy discourse this MP stresses that in the new millennium the politicians have to relate themselves to the post –social democratic era and discourse. Thus, 'as a natural consequence of today's society' the MP strongly argues the legitimation of elite sport in the curriculum to support talent development as a necessary change of education values –

although significantly this changing of education values have been disregarded or omitted in the reform policy reports available. This major policy player according to Bernstein (2000, p.33) illuminates that '(T)he recontextualising principle creates recontextualising fields, it creates agents with recontextualising functions... recontextualising fields with agents with practicing ideologies'.

In the discursive context of 'natural consequences' another dialogue in my data transcripts elaborates ways in which the politicians in the recontextualizing field seemingly without reservations accept that the school system ought to privilege the young, ambitious "wannabe" top - level sport athlete:

I: ...Talking about the policy circles and political arguments, did you in the policy circles discuss whether or not the elite sport curriculum actually could privilege a group of 'wannabe elite athletes – students' to students in need of acknowledged pedagogical or special support in other subjects or programs?

IO: I think it's become more legitimate for some talented young people to develop further, and I think the existence of *these (private) elite sports schools has done something with the way we think*. And we recognize that *there's no room for all those who are interested in the private elite sports schools* in the pre-tertiary sector...If today's students have ambitions to be elite sport athletes then it's *important that we provide them with support structures, and that the state school system can provide them with what they need*.

The way of going round questions about whether or not the elite sport curriculum imply educational or social privileges as reflected in this dialogue, is characteristic in my interview data. The educational problems and challenges reflected upon by the politicians are of a

economical, structural and technical nature: unfair opportunities for state schools in the market place, few ‘rooms available’ in the private schools to meet notions of (all the) elite sport talents standing in a queue for special programs to support them in the state schools. In this context discourses of equality, equity and fairness are related to the dynamics and competitions in the education market and not framed as pedagogical challenges or dilemmas in a wider perspective. When the education policy players’ in the interviews argue the ways in which popularities and trends in the marketplace have ‘done something with the way they (we) think’, discourses of equality, equity and fairness seem disregarded or omitted in elite sport pedagogical discourse. ‘The way we think – as ‘a natural consequence of today’s society’ - explains the recontextualization of the private school elite sport ‘pedagogical alternative’ as a matter of structural and economic quasi-market regulation.

Another MP, who has been a major policy player in the development of the pre-tertiary system of schooling during the last 20 years, listened to my question, stared into space, took a sip of coffee and responded:

IO: Actually, I don't know if the establishment of elite sport in the curriculum has been anchored in any educational idea at all. The way I remember the talks in the policy process, to introduce elite sport in the state school system was a political response to the private sport pre tertiary schools... in a way the concept ‘elite sport’ (‘toppidrett’) was legitimated as a matter of education policy to fight against the growth of private elite sport schools...and, I know that many of us wanted that the state schools should have the chance to promote themselves by elite sport programs to compete with the private sport schools in the market ...

I: ‘Sorry for interrupting, but from your position as one of the highly profiled education policy players during several periods in the Parliament, what notions of pedagogy or school knowledge politically legitimated elite sport as a new school subject in the ‘Knowledge promotion’ national curriculum?’

IO: (a short laugh) A good question, but: none! *The crucial things were recruitment to state schools versus private schools and money.* Remember, the private sport schools received a lot of *money* (school capitation allowance) while the state schools were not allowed to compete in this market!...The way I see it, *it was all about choices available in the market and market dynamics* – about many parents willing to pay for private alternatives– *quite simply, capitalism .. marketization of schooling...* and the fact that the students and their parents also wanted local schools in the state school system to provide them special opportunities to meet their ambitions and involvement in sport, *I think gradually changed the focus of schooling from the mid- 1990s.. to a large degree a kind of bottom-up policy* affected by the changes wanted at many local state schools, and not, the way I see it, a top- down policy totally initiated by the Parliament or by the government.

In this dialogue the major policy player provides me two different arguments reflecting a multi-layered education policy discourse, although without specifically arguing any epistemological or pedagogical value of elite sport as curricular knowledge and practice. Firstly, in relation to the education market the MP espouses an egalitarian ethic in claiming that all schools, the state schools and not only the private schools, should have the opportunity to provide their students an elite sport program. By arguing the legitimation of the new elite sport curriculum as issues of social justice and ‘a kind of bottom-up policy’, the MP

emphasizes that the state schools are the corner stones both in the national comprehensive school system and in the local communities. Consequently, within this argumentation the state schools have to be attractive to the students in the market place nationally and locally.

Secondly, the MP pragmatically acknowledges how the competitions in the deregulated education market work and, although he dislikes the development, he pragmatically argues that the state schools must be given the opportunity to play by the rules of the market to compete with the private schools, and 'earn money'. Embedded in the way of talking marketization as 'quite simply capitalism' it is pertinent to observe that usually the MP ideologically represents the politicians who traditionally 'fight against' the approval of private schools and the neoliberal deregulations and exposure to competition within the public sector in general. However, the MP's pragmatic ways of arguing the legitimation of the elite sport national curriculum to deal with dilemmas and challenges in the neoliberal policy, 'bringing choice into play as a competitive force' (Ball, 2008, p.119), illuminates the elite sport national curriculum as a market -driven pragmatic reform policy discourse within the Official Recontextualizing Field (Bernstein, 2000). In this field of recontextualization the private schools providing an elite sport program approved in the PEA as an alternative pedagogy, similar to private providers within state education services elsewhere seem to have 'contributed to a change in the possibilities of policy, making the unthinkable possible, and eventually obvious and necessary' (Ball and Junemann, 2012, p.24).

Finally, in this case study the interview data reveal how competition, choice and political leadership framed within a pragmatic and populist policy of education 'bring into play new roles and relationships, those of client/consumer and competitor...and they exclude or marginalize previous roles, loyalties and subjectivities. They change what is important and valuable and necessary' (Ball, 2008, p.43). Trying better to understand how 'new roles and

relationships' and 'loyalties and subjectivities' might have formed part of the reform policy surrounding text in the case of the new elite sport curriculum, the major policy players were asked if anyone outside the school system and the education policy circles in one way or another had affected ways in which they considered the legitimacy of introducing elite sport as official knowledge and educational practice. In my in-depth interviews the MPs explicitly pointed at the national sports organization (Norwegian Olympic and Paralympic Committee and Confederation of Sports), such as in this dialog with one of them:

IO: You know it's no secret that *the sport organization is the most powerful of all the voluntary organizations, and indeed, they are professional to their fingertips – they have large policy networks – and they use them... So yes, that can be an explanation to why groups within the sport succeed ...* And as we all know, they have had great success in World Cups and the Olympic games the last two-three decades – *I think we just have to admire what they have achieved.*

I: Actually, yes, I think many Norwegians do...but listening to you talking the way you do, I simply have to ask: if the elite sport organization's representatives lobbying or in meetings with you and other major education policy players argue their needs and suggest how the school system best could support the nation's sport interests – are you saying there is no resistance?

IO: Yes, *I think there is no resistance...we are proud of our elite sport traditions and not afraid to support them.*

Relating powerful networks to the national system within which MPs are elected by popular votes, another of the education policy players reflected in the following way of talking and seeing:

..the organization of sport is listened to by the politicians since sport is loved by every Norwegian, thus, trying not to listen to the sports organization, actually, is a political liability and that, I think all our politicians are aware of .. Then, yes.., the organization of sport has the ear of the politicians.

The ways in which experienced and influential MPs express their admiration for the Norwegian Olympic and Paralympic Committee and Confederation of Sports, and the ways in which they make mention of the politicians' behavior towards the organization, generally illuminates the power and position of sport and sport athletes in the Norwegian society and that neither the approval of elite sport as 'pedagogical alternative' in the PEA nor the introduction of elite sport as official knowledge in the national curriculum decades later are not coincidences – but rather politics 'all our politicians are aware of '. However, none of my interviewees argued or specifically confirmed that the organization of sport had been an active part in the introduction of the elite sport national curriculum or actively affected the focus of schooling and education values in the reform policy process. But in this case study the major education policy players by their ways of talking and seeing seem fully aware that the policy legitimating elite sport comply with the elite sport network strategies and many of the citizens in 'a nation hooked on sport' entitled to vote when politicians stand for re-election as MPs. In this context the politicians' ways of talking and seeing the impact of the powerful elite sport networks seem crucial in trying to understand the untraditional lack of policy reports and contestation which have characterized the legitimation and implementation of elite sport as knowledge and practice in the school system, and exemplify, as noted by Ball and Junemann (2012), how networks can reduce the need for open democratic debate. In this context the Norwegian case of elite sport as official knowledge reflects a kind of democratic deficit in a national policy of education which traditionally celebrates transparent and democratic anchorage.

Concluding remarks

In the Norwegian education context of neoliberalism, marketization and competition between private schools and state schools in the quasi-market this case study reveals that the legitimation and configuration of elite sport as a new pre-tertiary school subject in the 2006 'Knowledge promotion' curriculum reform is underpinned by a pragmatic political drift explained as 'a natural consequence of today's society'. The pragmatic, "natural consequence" discourse is driven by the market. The major education policy players in this case study pragmatically argue that the introduction of elite sport knowledge and practice in the national curriculum will help the state schools in the competition with popular private elite sport schools in the market. Consequently, the distributive rules of the private school exclusive elite sport alternative pedagogic discourse, exclusively regulated by the PEA in the 2006 curriculum reform is recontextualized and relocated as legitimate, 'thinkable' official knowledge in the comprehensive school system. Following Bernstein's (2000) analytical framework of recontextualization and recontextualization fields, this relocation exemplifies official recontextualization of pedagogic discourse created and controlled by the state within which politicians in the Parliament's Committee for Education and Research, the Ministry of Education and the Directorate of Education are regulatory agencies.

The analyses of the written national elite sport curriculum and the in-depth interviews with four major education reform policy players in the Norwegian Parliament's Committee for Education and Research, critically illuminate how a small number of Norwegian private schools providing a specially adapted pedagogical alternative to a certain group of students, politically and organizationally have affected what is legitimate curricular knowledge and

pedagogical practice in the comprehensive school system. However, in this new configuration of curricular knowledge to help the state schools in their adjustment to challenges caused by the national configuration of a neoliberal education policy ‘as a natural consequence of today’s society’ the significant changing of education values in the national curriculum seem disregarded and omitted. Consequently, the recontextualization of elite sport distributive rules embedded in the education policy players’ ways of talking’ and ways of seeing’ in this Norwegian case study illuminate hallmarks of education reform processes affected by neoliberalism concurrent with Bauman (1999) cited in the introduction of this paper: it ‘is precisely the absence of questioning; its surrender to what is seen the implacable and irreversible logic of social reality’ (p.127).

In Norway the Confederation of Sports in terms of members is the largest voluntary organization which generally reflects the Norwegians involvement and interest in sport and, thus, for decades culturally and politically a central area in the Norwegian society. In this case study this is discursively contextualized and strengthened by the major education policy players’ arguing that ‘the sport organization is the most powerful of all the voluntary organizations’ and ‘have large policy networks –and they use them’ and since ‘sport is loved by every Norwegian - the organization of sport has the ear of the politicians’. Although, none of the interviewees in this case study confirmed that agencies outside the policy of education have affected the introduction of the new elite sport school subject, the politicians’ ways of talking and seeing the power and social position of the elite sport networks seem relevant in trying to understand the untraditional lack of policy reports and public contestation which have characterized the legitimation and implementation of elite sport values, knowledge and practice in the comprehensive school system.

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