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Spaces of student support – Comparing educational environments from two time periods

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Abstract

This article sets out to explore how and whether the physical, social and conceived conditions in schools facilitate or disrupt support work aimed at improving student learning and preventing social exclusion. This is accomplished by comparing student support practices in the common areas of two newly renovated secondary schools built in two different time periods. The focus is on the student support staff's (exemplified by student welfare officers and school hosts) enactment of support for students' learning and well-being. This enactment takes place in a designed school environment, where teachers and support staff appropriate spaces for educational purposes in different ways. The interview and observational data come from two qualitative case studies. A spatial analysis perspective is used to investigate the physical, social and conceived aspects of space. The case schools, located in two municipalities, were originally built in the 1910s (Maple Grove) and the 1960s (Pine Bay). Both schools serve mixed to low SES (socio-economic status) communities and have organized student support functions in the schools' corridors, cafeterias, recreation areas and other common spaces. These functions include the school host, the student coach and the student welfare officer. The ways in which the support staff claim the locales show that they transcend the initial design functionality by appropriating spaces for their everyday practices. Their task perception thus delineates a certain *professional territory*, a task perception that is taking place, so to speak. The results show that this professional territory can vary, even among those in the same profession. The support functions expand their professional territory by being mobile in the school building and thereby creating more and larger surfaces for social interactions with students and other support functions.

Keywords

Case study, compensatory task, educational environment, school design, school improvement, spatial theory, student support staff, task perception

Introduction

This article sets out to explore how and whether the physical, social and conceived conditions in schools invite or constrain support work aimed at improving student learning and preventing social exclusion in a designed school environment, and how support staff appropriate spaces for educational purposes in different ways (cf. Frelin & Grannäs, 2013; Stables, 2015). This is accomplished by comparing *student support practices* in the common areas of two newly renovated secondary schools built in two different time periods. The focus is on part of the student support staff's enactment of support for students' learning and well-being. In earlier projects we applied and developed a spatial perspective (cf. Frelin & Grannäs, 2014a, 2014b, 2015; Rönnlund & Tollefsen, 2016), under the sociomaterial umbrella, which showed *where, when, about what, how* and *which* support functions cooperated. This included mapping the task perception of different professions, how areas of cooperation were interwoven, and how practices, technologies and other actors and influences supported or restricted the educational environment.

Sweden is no exception when it comes to exposure to the PISA shock (cf. Waldow, 2009). Like other countries, Sweden is affected by global influences where the OECD is a major one. Many OECD countries have responded to these influences, for which international comparisons such as PISA constitute important forces, by putting more focus on reforms aimed at increasing testing and other control features (Forsberg & Pettersson, 2014; Hopmann, 2008; Taubman, 2009). Over time, the deteriorating results in national and international comparisons have led to increased demands for improved academic performances among Swedish students. Against this background, recent investments in support staff have not only improved student care, but are also an important tool in order to improve students' academic performances.

The Swedish National Agency for Education states that schools have a special responsibility for students who, for various reasons, struggle to reach the set goals (NAfE, 2011). A good education requires a supportive educational environment that takes both academic and social dimensions into account (Lingard & Keddie, 2013). A

positive school culture, a common ethos and staff cooperation all benefit the educational environment (Conway & Abawi, 2013; Frelin & Grannäs, 2015; Michail, 2011). It has been shown that the active participation of all staff categories contributes to fulfilling the mission of the school both inside and outside the classroom (Hardy & Grootenboer, 2016; Hemmings, 2012). Moreover, inter-professional collaboration has been highlighted as creating a positive educational environment (Conway & Abawi, 2013; Mulcahy, Cleveland, & Aberton, 2015), especially for preventive work with at-risk students (Edwards, Daniels, Gallagher, Leadbetter, & Warmington, 2008; Riley, Ellis, Weinstock, Tarrant, & Hallmond, 2006).

The significance of school environments

Schools are products of their time (Bengtsson, 2011). Architectural and pedagogical ideals have also changed in terms of what constitutes knowledge and the kind of adults and society that schools want to shape. As physical structures are hard to rebuild, their users need to negotiate and compromise their environments (Alerby, Bengtsson, Bjurström, Hörnqvist, & Kroksmark, 2006; Mulcahy et al., 2015; Tse, Learoyd-Smith, Stables, & Daniels, 2015). According to Stables (2015), there is a need to regard the school environment as “part of the life story of its users”. School environments are appropriated by their users, who respond to them in different ways. Mainstream research has not sufficiently taken this into account. Rather, the focus has been more on design practices than implementation and transition practices (Blackmore, Bateman, Loughlin, O’Mara, & Aranda, 2011).

There is consensus within the research area that educational practices are affected by a complex interaction between different factors at different levels (Blackmore et al., 2011; Woolner, 2015). According to Gislason (2015), this complexity means that physical spaces, how the teaching is organized, school cultures and student environments are connected, and that there is therefore a need to understand the relationships between them. The research area of educational environments is also undertheorized (Mulcahy et al., 2015). Johnson (2009) identifies a lack of studies addressing: a) stable environments and relationships in schools that can improve trust and cohesiveness, b) the school’s

physical environment and its role in school violence and c) the interaction of the physical and social aspects of school environments.

Theoretical framework

In discussions about educational practices, cognitive, social and cultural concepts tend to dominate. These concepts are often based on notions about humans using various kinds of tools and that social interaction is played out in a context. Notions like this can easily obscure the significance of material objects (Fenwick, Edwards, & Sawchuk, 2011). A sociomaterial perspective entails viewing interactions in school as more than social processes, but materializing processes in and with material objects. This involves envisioning, enacting and experiencing education in relation to its material, social and discursive aspects (Mulcahy et al., 2015). What separates the sociomaterial from other theoretical approaches is its attention to how spatial and material entities are involved as actors in the educational environment, in processes where human and non-human entities are connected in nodes and networks that produce coordinated actions and things (Fenwick et al., 2011) and how schools as complex and open systems (cf. Osberg & Biesta, 2010) interact with the environment and can change dynamically in unpredictable ways. According to Fenwick et. al. (2011), education is “centrally material – its energies, processes, motives and outcomes are fully entangled with material practice, nature, time, space, technologies and objects of all kinds” (2011, p. 7). It can thus be said that human existence is entangled with things that both literally and metaphorically take place in their actions and relations and that individuals and groups respond differently to the same physical environment and use it in a variety of ways (Stables, 2015).

In this article, a spatial perspective on educational environments (Frelin & Grannäs, 2014a, 2014b, 2015) is used, which has been analytically fruitful in the past for deepening our understanding of how various factors, such as school buildings, artefacts, staff and students, interact in the everyday business of schooling. Here, space is perceived by seeing, smelling, hearing, moving and attending to the everyday practices that shape patterns, routines and people’s behaviour. The way in which we relate to time/space is of crucial importance to how education and learning take place and can take place (Stables,

2015). Further, we suggest an approach that differs from a Euclidian understanding of space and time, in which the room is considered as a fixed container for human activity (Gruenewald, 2003; Gulson & Symes, 2007; Alex Kostogriz, 2006). By transcending the idea of space as a fixed container, and refraining from reducing space to a point on a grid, a different view of educational settings is opened up.

The temporal dimension is tool that shapes social and organizational life. Time constitutes for us humans a way in which we create and order our world. However, despite this, we often take time, and the way we make use of time, for granted. According to Slattery (2006), educational organization continues to build on the modern conception of time as something that can be controlled and handled; a Newtonian model or mechanical system. In other words, it is regarded as a linear, objective, time management model that controls our thinking and contributes to a notion of time as an independent metaphysical reality that can be dealt with and organized for maximum efficiency (Adam, 2003; Frelin & Grannäs, 2011; Stables, 2015).

Individuals interpret the world temporally. This temporal structuring (e.g. through schedules) facilitates certain processes and restrict others (Popkewitz, 2002). The temporal framework is crucial for understanding the rationality of different institutions and, in the sense of rational flows of time, temporal positions and schedules, is a political, administrative product of individuals situated in a social space who are entitled to voice acknowledged by the discourse. The logic of the time frame also has a structuring function (a rationality) that creates structured subjects (Giddens, 1984; Hargreaves, 1994). In the following section three spatial aspects (the physical, conceived and social) are presented (cf. Lefebvre, 1991):

Physical space

The school building forms a backdrop against which assumptions are expressed about how teaching and learning are organized and expected to take place. In a school, the physical space consists of spatial practices that place work, play and leisure in pre-established classrooms, cafeterias, hallways, playgrounds etc. The school building as a physical space is regarded as a consequence of social practices and is therefore a social

construct. The physical space has compelling but not predetermined properties, which means that school buildings and their surroundings are mainly designed with a view to certain activities taking place there, albeit allowing for some degree of flexibility. We argue that this is made possible by the social interaction that gives the physical space meaning (Frelin & Grannäs, 2014a). As Stables puts it: “When we respond to a building, we do so in two ways: in terms of its design, or coming to be, and in terms of its use, or appropriation” (Stables, 2015, p. 118). According to Biesta (2006), we should understand the architectural room/space and the event in tandem, i.e. the physical space exists because of the occurring event.

The ways in which physical and social spaces are organized in school shape the routines and structures that produce particular social relations (Gordon & Holland, 2003; McGregor, 2004; Thomson, 2007). For example, a school building consisting of rooms on several floors with corridors linked by staircases (physical space), where the different floors and corridors are only accessible to the group of teachers and students designated to be there (social space), is reminiscent of the architecture and social interaction of prisons. Schools with such architecture, and with activities that are organized in such a way, thereby produce specific social relations that do not necessarily enhance teacher-student relationships or lead to good learning environments (Frelin & Grannäs, 2014a). The interaction that occurs in a physical space, or rather the frequency of human behaviour, creates meaning in that space. Further, the actions that take place there are linked to the involved individuals’ constructions of meaning in that particular space (cf. Stables, 2015). However, when a corridor or space is designed or planned, it is not always certain that its intended purpose will coincide with the students’ construction of meaning in the school.

Conceived space

The second aspect of the triad refers to the notion of education and schooling and the forms and content that structure ideas about teaching and learning (Gordon & Holland, 2003). Conceived spaces are expressed in e.g. policy documents, dominating discourses, school cultures etc (cf. Stables, 2003). Conceived space is also the intersubjective creation of meaning, where the individual is related to material and symbolic factors. The

ways in which education – and schools in particular – are imagined and conceived are directly related to the construction of workplace philosophies, ideologies, practices and regimes. This means that there is always a normative, ideological and ethical dimension to an individual's interpretation of the given task and function (Abawi, 2013; Popkewitz, 1998, 2009). Task perception influences an individual's actions in the everyday school context (cf. Kelchtermans, 1993). As an overarching perspective, the conceived space is vital for how task perception is formed and expressed. Individual task perceptions are expressed in interactions with people and artefacts, which is where the relational dimension emerges, in what we term *social space*.

Social space

The third aspect, social space, is where lived experience takes place and meaning is created – both individually and communally (intersubjectively). Social space is defined by lived experience and occurs at times when everything comes together in interaction. The dynamics of the ongoing creation and re-creation of social spaces are expressed through processes of differentiation, categorization and discrimination (Frelin & Grannäs, 2014a; Gordon, Holland, & Lahelma, 2000). The structuring ideas, the imaginary and the abstract all have an impact on social practices (cf. Stables, 2003).

In the school as a social practice, various policies regulate the activities and people by so-called “time-space-trajectories”, of which the school timetable is perhaps the most vivid example (Giddens, 1984; Thomson, 2007). This routinization of the social space is described by Gordon and Holland (2003) as a means of limiting students' opportunities to make decisions in everyday practices. The same authors describe the expected “time-space-trajectories” as expressions of power relations in school activities. The school timetable profoundly regulates the everyday life of school practice. There is, for example a difference between how students and teachers interact during lessons and breaks (Frelin & Grannäs, 2014a).

Kostogriz & Peeler (2007) sum things up nicely by suggesting that: “the production of teacher workplaces embodies a close association with how professional space is perceived as a set of appropriate practices and professional attributes; how the representations of professional knowledge and professionalism are constructed and

standardized by educational authorities and bureaucrats; how this space is lived in the daily reality of local, routine and situated events of the classroom and how the local is informed by the life of teachers outside the classrooms and staffrooms” (p. 108).

The spatial perspective on educational environments is that place and space are created through social networks and relationships (T. Fenwick & Edwards, 2016). Mulcahy et. al. (2015) describe two different approaches – real and relational – to the interaction between space and humans. In the former a sharp line is drawn between the two, whereas the latter views space as something that is produced through interaction. In short, the space has a performative effect on the individuals who inhabit it and the social order that prevails there (Mcgregor, 2004).

Method

The interview and observational data come from two qualitative case studies (Yin, 2003): Pine Bay and Maple Grove (the names of the two schools are fictitious). The former research project (Pine Bay, 2012-14) is complete and the latter (Maple Grove, 2015-16), a pilot project, will soon come to an end. The case schools, located in two municipalities, were originally built in the 1910s (Maple Grove) and the 1960s (Pine Bay). Both schools serve mixed to low SES communities and organize student support functions in the schools’ corridors, cafeterias, recreation areas and other common spaces. The physical layout of the schools differs and represents the pedagogical and architectural ideas of the periods in which they were built.

Table 1: Information about the two case schools

School alias	Maple Grove	Pine Bay
Built/renovated	1910s (added to in the 1990s and renovated 2014-15)	1960s (renovated 2009-10)
Opened/renovated	2015/2015 (previously an adult education centre)	1962/2009
Student population	Mixed to low SES (mixed in Years 6-7, low in Years 8-9)	Mixed to low SES

**Migrant
proportion of
student
population**

High

Low

The first case school, Pine Bay, is a secondary school located in a small industrial town in Sweden. The ages of the students attending the school range from 12-15 years (Years 6-9). Each year level has two or three classes consisting of about 20-30 students. The school was built in the 1960s and was modernised at the beginning of 2009. The renovations were completed in the summer of 2010. In the planning stage of the renovations, the school management, teachers and other staff were given the opportunity to influence the design of the buildings and the equipment. Pine Bay was the only secondary school in the municipality until ten years ago, when a charter school was opened, thereby leaving the school with a lower SES population than before.

Image 1: Type of building at Pine Bay (the photograph is of another school)¹

The second case school, Maple Grove, is a newly opened secondary school (Years 7-9, students from 13-15 years of age). The school, built in the 1910s as a teacher education centre and centrally placed in a larger Swedish municipality, was modernised and opened as a secondary school in 2015 (Grannäs & Frelin, 2016). At the same time, three other secondary schools in the town were closed and the uptake areas of the municipal schools

¹ https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:M%C3%A4larh%C3%B6jdens_skola_h%C3%B6gstadiesbyggnaden_01.JPG [Retrieved: Jan 10 2017]

partly rezoned in order to prevent segregation. In the planning stage of the renovations the school management were given the opportunity to influence the design of the buildings and the equipment. The staff were involved at a late stage in the planning.

Image 2: Type of building at Maple Grove (the photograph is of another school)²

Data collection

The fieldwork in both case schools was conducted over the course of one school year (Yin, 2003). Initially, the case was contextualized using media analyses, statistics, blueprints and other document analyses, which served to familiarize the researchers with the case (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). The schools were visited at the beginning, middle and end of the school year for observations and interviews. The main data used in this article consists of interviews, with observational and documented data (e.g. blueprints) as a complement.

Although the organization of the support functions at the two schools is not identical, some of the job descriptions are very similar, which made it possible to compare the accounts of the principals, student welfare officers and hosts at each school. The function of host is explained below, in the results section. A total of six people were interviewed, some twice during the school year. The interviews were conducted at the schools using an interview guide, but with openness to the themes shared by the informants. On average the interviews lasted about one hour, but varied between 30-90 minutes, depending on the availability of the informants.

² https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gustav_Adolfs_skola,_Helsingborg.JPG

Data analysis

The data, mainly interview transcripts, was analyzed (Maple Grove) and re-analyzed (Pine Bay) using the software NVivo, with spatial analytical tools. The physical, social and conceived aspects of space were considered (Frelin & Grannäs, 2014a, 2014b, 2015). Observation data and documents, such as blueprints, provided basic information about the buildings' layouts and also helped to validate the interview accounts.

Results

The layout and support organization of each school is described in brief in Table 2:

Table 2: Overview of organization and layout of the two case schools

School alias	Maple Grove	Pine Bay
Layout	2 joined buildings, 5 floors (main)/2 floors (addition), closed environment, 1 central entrance	4 buildings (one main), 2 floors, transparent environment, 4 entrances (one main)
Student common areas	In corridors on floors 3 and 4, café (seating in canteen), occasional activities in basement room	Each team (3) has one recreational area, library, central café, pool table in entrance lounge
Support staff (*=visible in common areas) Aliases in bold for staff described below	Student welfare officer Tor*, student coach Moe*, nurse, library assistant, student assistant*, café host Carina*, receptionist*	Student welfare officer Anna, school host Inger*, nurse, career guidance counsellor/at hand person*, library assistant*, café host*

School buildings

As the case schools were built in different time periods, the design and how the buildings are utilized in everyday practice are also different.

Pine Bay

In the major renovations of the school in 2009 the long dark corridors were changed.

Now, a one-storey glass addition runs along the first floor, where walls were either knocked down or replaced by interior and exterior glass panels. The main entrance lobby,

aptly named ‘Central Station’ by a member of staff, is an important part of the school. This open area houses the staff offices and facilitates the reception of visitors, and provides a continuous overview of this part of the school. The support functions are all clustered around this central point. There is also a pool table in the main entrance lobby, which is one of the two common areas for all the students in the school. The other common area includes the library and the café, which are centrally located among the classrooms. When the school was renovated, it was sectioned off into three areas for “teams” - groups of 70-100 students - with their classrooms, lockers and common room situated in one two-story area. Each area was connected to an entrance.

Maple Grove

The school’s main building is 100 years old, with an addition that houses a canteen, science laboratories and a shop. The walls are thick and the design of the building is less open, resulting in a more limited student access to teachers than Pine Bay. The renovations of the school were mainly internal, with only minor changes being made to the structure. The school’s one central entrance leads to a reception area with a central staircase, an adjoining small library and a café. The café is located in the passageway that connects the main building to the canteen, with floating boundaries and a frequent stream of people passing to and from the classrooms in the second building. This traditional design creates a greater flow of students and staff and results in more noise in the reception area than was originally anticipated, not least because students choose to spend their breaks there. In order to direct students to the floors housing the classrooms, furniture was installed in the corridors, which has led to crowded passages. This has resulted in students being forced to hunt for other areas for retreat, such as the side staircases, which are not in daily use and therefore quiet.

Organization

A brief overview of the organization of the support functions represented in this paper is presented in order to put the cases into context.

Table 3: Support staff in examples below

Staff	Function	Education
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School host	Helps students in the common areas with practical issues, monitors student interactions, works against bullying and co-responsible for the café	Background in social work (Inger, Pine Bay); folk university, mediator education (Carina, Maple Grove)
Student welfare officer	Responsible for health promotion (psychosocial), consultations and treatment.	Social work degree (Anna, Pine Bay; Tor, Maple Grove)
Student coach	Guidance and support of social relations among students, some pedagogical support.	Youth recreation leader education (Moe, Maple Grove)

At the case schools, the principals have overall responsibility for the support functions, even though the school itself does not employ every member of the support staff. For example, the student welfare officers are employed centrally by the municipal organization. Principals are also responsible for the collaboration between the functions. For example, they led so-called “equal treatment” teams (formerly known as anti-bullying teams) and student health teams have been created; both teams catering for individual students’ needs for various forms of support. In both schools, and in most Swedish secondary schools, teachers are responsible for groups of about 30 students who take most classes together and form a “class”. Those teachers have so-called mentorship as part of their assignment and take on some of the pastoral care of their class. In addition, at Pine Bay each team has a “study mentor”, under the supervision of a remedial pedagogue, who is responsible for students experiencing difficulties.

Both schools have student welfare officers who spend some of their time at the school, but also have responsibility for at least one other school. Both schools also have so-called “hosts”. The functions of the student welfare officers and the hosts in both schools, whose tasks are comparable, are analysed in more detail below. Other support functions are also found in the common areas, such as the library assistant (both schools), study mentors (Pine Bay), student coach and receptionist (Maple Grove). At least at Maple Grove, the mix of competencies, experiences and personalities is deliberate in an attempt to create a diverse school ecology that meets the needs of different students.

Moe, the student coach at Maple Grove, moves between several stations during the school day. In the morning, he greets students gathering outside the school entrance waiting for the doors to open. When the entrance doors are opened he then moves to the front desk to meet and greet students for a new school day. He also makes sure that the students' passage through the stairwell in the main building is smooth. Then he moves between the different floors to ensure that the school day starts as planned and that students do not dally for too long in the stairwells or hallways. At lunch time the student coach positions himself at the entrance to the canteen to ensure that students follow the timetable and that there is order in the canteen. During the day he moves around both outside and inside, interacting with the students, building relationships and ensuring that the rules are kept. He makes sure that students attend class, or, if they misbehave, takes them out of the classroom. In this sense, he has a relational overview of the students and is able to nip potential conflicts in the bud. At Pine Bay, this task is largely performed by the host, Inger.

Physical space

In the following, the functions of the host and student welfare officer are analyzed and compared in order to determine how they relate to their physical environments.

Hosts

Both hosts have overall responsibility for the school areas, even though they both have a "home base"; in Inger's case this is her office, a small room adjacent to the main entrance lobby with views of both the school playground and the lobby. In interviews with the students, they indicate that her office is one of the places they like to visit. Carina, on the other hand, spends most of her time in the café, which in one direction overlooks the main entrance, reception and recreational area and the school canteen in the other. Inger is more mobile than Carina, in that the school has two general areas where students spend their time between classes, namely the main entrance lobby and the school café area, where an assistant sees to most of the daily business. By walking the length of the main corridor and passing the café area in the middle of the building, she has a very good overview of most of the areas in which students spend time between lessons.

Carina, who works in a team with the more mobile student coach Moe, views her stationary position as important, in that the students know where to find her. This highlights the link between task perception and physical environment, in combination with the life stories of the users of school buildings. In the secondary school that Carina worked at before Maple Grove opened, she ran the café in a large classroom with a small cubicle kitchen. There the boundaries were well defined and she had a good overview of the students' interactions and relationships, as well as opportunities for private conversations in the cubicle. This overview was facilitated by the enclosed room and stationary conditions, where she could easily spot someone sitting alone or watch the changed groupings of the students. However, as the students often move around in her new workplace, relational conditions like this are much harder to assess. This was a major concern for Carina at the beginning of the school year, although at the time of the second interview, around Christmas-time, she had found ways of working around the limitations, such as being more mobile herself in the areas she overlooked. Nevertheless, she views these physical conditions as less favourable than the previous ones. Both hosts describe a need for private spaces in which to have conversations with students. For example, given the more challenging physical conditions of her new workplace, Carina sometimes makes use of a nearby office for private conversations with students. However, during our observations we often saw her trying to console tearful students against a wall in the midst of the hustle and bustle.

Student welfare officers

The student welfare officers at both schools have their offices as a home base. At Pine Bay Anna spends about half her time at the school, while Tor spends 75 per cent of his time at Maple Grove. Anna feels limited by the location of her office at the far end of the main building and would like to be more centrally placed, as she was in her former workplace. Tor's office is also at the end of the building, but he spends a lot of time in the corridors with students. He says that in the morning; "I try to stand in the entrance area as often as I can and say 'good morning' when they arrive. If they've had a lousy morning, they can at least have the chance of a fresh start." When moving around the school he pays attention to how the students interact and actively tries to approach and get to know them. He acknowledges his role as part of the team that tries to make the

common spaces at the school safe. Anna, on the other hand, only walks to and from the canteen and in that short distance does not have much contact with students, although she has observed that the physical environment has been designed with student safety in mind. Tor has a more detailed understanding of the environment, such as noticing which places students create and use for retreat. He says that it is a dynamic process and that new students find and appropriate their own spaces every year.

Conceived space

In this section the task perceptions of the functions of host and student welfare officer are analyzed and compared. Task perception can be viewed as a specific conceived space in the organization that is linked to the function.

Hosts

Both hosts perceive their work as being mainly directed towards the students and their concerns. Not being perceived as an official authority figure is considered to be important. Not being hampered by schedules so that there is time to develop relationships with students and listen to those who need to talk is also regarded as important. Carina describes her role as that of “Big Mamma”: “My job is to check up on them, to be there for them, tend to them, a shoulder to cry on and what have you.” Her job is to get students inside the classroom, and once this has been accomplished her role is over, unless a teacher specifically asks for her help. Both hosts point to the value of developing relationships over time, both to students and other staff members.

The spaces in the schools are connected to learning and performance. Both hosts describe trying to provide spaces in which other types of demands were put, and other, sometimes more positive, identities were possible within the school area. These are sometimes regarded as places for retreat from other people and also from unbearable demands. Inger invites students or groups of students to sit and do their homework with her after school. She argues that students perceive her as different from teachers in a way that helps them to work, perhaps because she cannot grade their work and does not exert any pressure. Inger describes it as “not being burdened with a title”. Both hosts talk about giving extra care to students who lack attention at home, by perhaps offering fruit or giving them a

hug. In an earlier article (Frelin & Grannäs, 2014b) we describe these practices as borderland work.

Student welfare officers

Anna at Pine Bay perceives her task as helping students to help themselves, although she does not deliberately seek out students or contact them. She listens and gives advice and acts on signals from other adults, such as teachers or other support staff. When she is given an assignment she does it, or alternatively gives assignments to others. In such cases, she does not receive feedback and does not seem to expect it either. Tor at Maple Grove has a more ecological view of his task, viewing himself as part of a team responsible for students' well-being in general. He also views their well-being as a prerequisite for learning.

Social space

In this section the two functions are analyzed and compared in terms of how they relate to their social environment.

Hosts

Both hosts describe an ongoing relational attention to student interaction. Inger has different goals for different student relationships, depending on the perceived value for the educational environment. These include students in the same school respecting each other, students in the same team knowing each other and students in the same class forming a community. These different types of relationships are in turn connected to the school spaces in which the students interact: the common areas, the team areas and the classrooms.

Carina takes it upon herself to make sure that no student is alone unless s/he wants to be. If a student is alone, she sits down beside him or her and invites a conversation or a game of cards, in which other students can join. In this sense, she describes herself as kind of a student-magnet in whose company all are welcome. She thus creates a node - by her presence and the café's offerings of activities, company, snacks and drinks. Here, it is important to be stationary so that she can contact and invite students into the café, which she actually finds more difficult in this new workplace due to the absence of an entrance and the constant movement of people, which blurs the boundaries and makes it harder for

her to have an overview of students' interactions. The café is a public space where students view each other and where the younger ones look up to the older students. According to Carina, the previously formed relationships with older students is of help when building new ones, especially as public displays of affection on the part of the older students are noted by the younger ones. Relational ripple effects like this also make students trust her, she argues.

Students physically occupy space and use their bodies and voices for this purpose. Some students are more visible and vocal than others and the hosts perceive it as their task to intervene in these practices when they become unsafe for others. For example, a group of boys at Maple Grove repeatedly blocked the way for girls and asked for their phone numbers in a way that the girls felt very uncomfortable about. The blockage was facilitated by new furniture in the corridor that made the passage narrower. The interventions included reprimands from the host and the refurnishing of the space.

Student welfare officers

As indicated above, Anna does not relate to students unless she is asked to do so by a parent or teacher, partly out of a fear that the students she meets in her office would feel stigmatized. Tor, on the other hand, actively relates to many students in order to lower the threshold for seeking help. Again, his appearance as an “ordinary adult”, rather than an authority figure, was a conscious deviation for that purpose.

Tor argues that his already established relationships with students and staff at his former workplace, one of the closed down secondary schools, was one of the reasons why he was employed. These relationships are also considered valuable by those higher up in the organization. He views these relationships as valuable assets that facilitate his work. Tor thinks that when it comes to staff collaboration, communication and a certain amount of overlap and linkage improve the quality of the support work.

At Pine Bay, the position of student welfare officer has recently been reinstated. This work was previously carried out by other functions. Anna has thus felt the need to work her way into the school. When she started to spend more time there, the teachers also started to provide her with more work, e.g. by informing her about students who they believed needed help.

Discussion

In this article we have explored how and whether the physical, social and conceived conditions in school facilitate or disrupt support work aimed at improving student learning and preventing social exclusion (cf. Frelin & Grannäs, 2013). This has been done by comparing student support practices in the common areas of two newly renovated secondary schools built in two different time periods.

Professional territory

The results from the case studies show that the design of the school buildings both enables and limits what, how, when and where the support staff conduct their work. The actions of the support staff are the outcome of the relations between the locales (school environment) and their task perceptions. The ways in which the support staff claim the locales shows that they transcend the initial designed functionality by appropriating the space in their everyday practices (Stables, 2015). Their task perceptions thus delineate a certain *professional territory*, a task perception that is taking place, so to speak. This territory is physical, in that it determines where and when professionals operate, e.g. in their offices, in corridors or in classrooms, during breaks, during class or after school. It is also conceived in terms of what they believe comes under their professional jurisdiction and what should be done by another profession. It is social in terms of who the professional interacts with in order to achieve what s/he sets out to achieve. The results show that this professional territory can vary, even amongst those in the same profession. In addition, it would appear that in the absence of one professional category, another steps in to serve the needs of students. For example, the student welfare officer claims that she has had to work her way into the school (see also Frelin & Grannäs, 2015). Time/space is also present in the stories of Anna and Carina, who perceive their professional territory in relation to their former workplaces (cf. Stables, 2015).

Stationary/mobile

By being mobile in the school building the support functions are able to expand their professional territory and create more and larger surfaces for social interactions with students and other support functions. This presumably increases their opportunities to

work proactively to create a safe educational environment that provides better care and academic results (cf. Conway & Abawi, 2013; Edwards et al., 2008; Mulcahy et al., 2015). On the other hand, this created professional territorial overlap could also lead to conflict as well as collaboration, although in the main the results show that professional negotiations result in the latter.

We argue that it is possible to make a distinction between *temporarily stationary* and *spatially stationary* approaches. One example of this is Anna, the student welfare officer at Pine Bay, who feels limited by the location of her office, which in turn makes her spatially stationary. On the other hand, Tor, the student welfare officer at Maple Grove, has a temporarily stationary approach in that he is mobile throughout the school day according to a certain pattern, adjusting to the student flows regulated by the timetables. Anna's spatially stationary approach does not only limit her daily interactions with students, but also the possibilities for a deeper experience and knowledge about how other support functions work in the everyday practices. This could emanate from a narrower, reactive task perception, in contrast to Tor's, which is wider and more proactive. The results show that the support staff members' task perceptions take place as different readings of and movements in the environment.

The stationary or mobile positions of students are regarded as providing professional opportunities for the support staff. For example, the activities and relationships that the hosts provide create a certain pull, or inflow of students. Pool tables and decks of cards are examples of material pull factors. There are also ripple effects amongst the students, which means that the establishment of one relation can create more. When students are stationary the ways in which they position themselves provide clues about the relational dynamics, for example whether someone is alone or feeling lonely.

Public and secluded spaces

As presented above, the design of the schools differs and creates different physical conditions for the support staff. At Pine Bay the design allows both the support staff and students to find secluded spaces for purposes of retreat. At Maple Grove the building's design is less flexible, which means that finding a quiet space is difficult. However, the results from the interviews and observations show that the students and support staff at

Maple Grove do manage to find and/or create secluded spaces which in the design (blueprints) were intended for other purposes.

We have shown how student support staff negotiate and compromise (cf. Alerby et al., 2006; Mulcahy et al., 2015; Tse et al., 2015) invitations and restraints that the designed school environments offer in everyday practice. Hopefully, this article offers a theoretical contribution to research on educational environments.

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