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Highlighting education support professionals' indirect contributions to the educational environment

Jan Grannäs and Anneli Frelin, University of Gävle, Sweden

Abstract

This article contributes to the discussion about educational environments. Drawing on Dewey's and Hansen's work, the point of departure is that the educational environment is dynamic and connected to educational purposes, and that educational relationships can be both *direct* and *indirect* and connected to norms, values and subject matter. In a case study, using interviews and observations, the *periphery* of educational environments is explored. Distinctions between the *intended* and *actual* functions, and between *environment* and *surroundings* in different parts of the municipal administration, and the resulting shortcomings of using an *atomistic* rather than an *ecological* perspective in education, are also discussed.

Keywords: Dewey, Educational environment, New Public Management, School Ecology, School staff

Introduction

In this article, the aim is to contribute to the discussion about the ecology of educational environments, both empirically and theoretically. Here, *educational* environments should not be confused with *learning* environments, which have a narrower focus (cf. Biesta, 2011). The topic comes as a response to a long-standing discussion about the current trends of educational reform and policy using market-oriented language and governance and the widespread impact they have on educational practices in different countries (cf. Lundahl et al., 2013).

We begin by elaborating on Dewey's and Hansen's work on educational environments and the distinction between the *environment* and the *surroundings*. Our point of departure is that the environment is dynamic and connected to educational purposes and that educational relationships can be both *direct* and *indirect* and connected to norms, values and subject matter (cf Frelin & Grannäs, 2015). This elaboration directs our focus to the non-teaching staff in schools, such as cleaners, caretakers (*vaktmästare*) and canteen staff, whose work is not usually included in the educational enterprise. What potential contributions to the educational environments can they make?

In a case study, what the present authors term the *periphery* of educational environments is explored. Using interviews and observations, the roles of those who are furthest from the educational processes in school are analysed. Particular attention is paid to the conditions under which they work and interact with others. The results illustrate the ecology of the educational environment empirically.

In the discussion, the empirical results of the case study are connected to a theoretical discussion about educational environments. Using Dewey's notion of a dynamic educational environment, the distinction between the *intended* and *actual* functions of education support professionals are illustrated. The conflicting distinctions between *environment* and

surroundings displayed in different parts of the municipal administration, and the resulting shortcomings of using an *atomistic* rather than an *ecological* perspective in education, are also discussed.

Dewey's notion of an educational environment

In his work, Dewey argues that everyone involved in education is conditioned by other people's actions in multiple continuous processes. Education is essentially a social process that involves individuals in a community. In order for the school to be regarded as a community, a sense of ownership, participation and responsibility on the part of those involved is necessary (Dewey, 1958). From an *ecological perspective*, different parts of the educational environment are viewed as being in constant relationship (Biesta and Tedder, 2007; Doyle, 2006, 2009). If one part fails, the others will also be affected. The environment affects individuals in the sense that they perceive and feel certain things and then plan and execute their actions on this ecological basis.

In Dewey's writings about educational environments, the deliberate design of the environment is crucial:

The only way in which adults consciously control the kind of education which the immature get is by controlling the environment in which they act, and hence think and feel. We never educate directly, but indirectly by means of the environment. Whether we permit chance environments to do the work, or whether we design environments for the purpose makes a great difference. And any environment is a chance environment so far as its educative influence is concerned unless it has been deliberately regulated with reference to its educative effect (Dewey, 1959 [1916], p. 15).

Thus, an environment that is designed for education differs from a chance environment.

However, one can never design an environment and then claim that it is educational -- all it

can do is create conditions that enable interactions that can become educational by focusing on the common good of a democratic society (Dewey, 1959 [1916]; 1991[1927]). Dewey makes it clear that one of the purposes of education is to contribute to the common good, and that this should ideally be based on a holistic approach to education. Later in this article, the consequences of a shift towards a more atomistic view of education are discussed.

Drawing on Dewey's notion of a designed environment, Hansen claims that it is neither possible nor desirable to prescribe or blueprint what might happen in a school's daily activities. It is not a question of making the school a total institution (cf. Goffman, 1961), or of trying to teach, and getting students to acquire, pure morality (Hansen, 2002). In other words, design implies an intention, but is not the same as control. What directs the deliberate design of educational environments is the notion of an educational purpose. According to Dewey:

The formation of purposes is, then, a rather complex intellectual operation. It involves (1) observation of surrounding conditions; (2) knowledge of what has happened in similar situations in the past, a knowledge obtained partly by recollection and partly from the information, advice, and warning of those who have had a wider experience; and (3) judgment which puts together what is observed and what is recalled to see what they signify. A purpose differs from an original impulse and desire through its translation into a plan and method of action based upon foresight of the consequences of action under given observed conditions in a certain way (Dewey 1938, pp. 68-69).

Education can be viewed of as a number of initiating processes. However, it is really about constantly changing the direction of courses of action that are already ongoing (Dewey, 1959 [1916], p. 15). Hansen draws on this important observation by showing that even on their way to school, staff and students experience a variety of impressions and actions. In this sense,

social interaction as part of the school's activities is already in play before the school day begins. The same applies to the school day itself, in that everyone's interactions, even during the breaks, have some kind of impact on what happens in the classroom (Hansen, 2002).

Dewey makes a distinction between what can be viewed as the educational environment and what cannot. He calls the latter *surroundings*, and regards them as including features that do not make a difference to education in any given situation. In contrast, he regards the environment as including everything that makes a difference to education. This is a dynamic concept of environment that changes depending on the activities that are taking place there.

For Dewey: "the environment constitutes the intermediary, the medium, the means of educative influence" (Hansen, 2002, p. 270). The fact that the educational environment is fundamental to Dewey becomes apparent in the first introductory chapters of "Democracy and Education", where he takes the environment and human living conditions as starting points and emphasises their importance for education (Dewey, 1959 [1916]). This means that in order to conduct and understand education, the educational environment should not be limited to interactions between teachers and students in the classroom.

Indirect contributions to the educational environment

In discussions about educational environments, teachers, students and content often take centre stage. Hansen's (2002) examination of Dewey's educative environment focuses on the classroom and the encounter between the individual student and his or her teacher. However, Dewey argues that teachers "should become intimately acquainted with the conditions of the local community, physical, historical, economic, occupational, and so on, in order to utilise them as educational resources" (Dewey, 1938, p. 40). Thus, both recognising and utilising the context, in terms of the physical and social conditions in the educational environment, shape the experience among students and contribute to their growth. Different categories of staff work in school. What they all have in common is that they are there to promote the education

of young people in one way or another. Given Dewey's definition, they can all be regarded as part of the educational environment to the extent that they make a difference to and affect students' educational experiences.

Bradshaw et al. (2011) distinguish between *teachers*, meaning teachers, special educators, counsellors and librarians, and *education support professionals*, meaning staff with responsibility for the food service, school transportation, and the health and student services. Although the active contribution of all school staff is important in order to help students to succeed (Heineke et al., 2012; Hemmings 2012), very little research has been conducted on this aspect of school. It has been shown that educational support professionals who feel connected to the school are more likely to intervene to stop bullying (Bradshaw et al., 2011; Thapa et al., 2013). According to Conley, Gould and Levine (2010) and the educational and policy literature, support staff are often treated as "task environment", that is, as part of the physical plant, and not part of the educational core. In most cases, when school caretakers are included in studies they are often marginalised, in the sense that their work is often carried on in the background. From an ecological perspective, the support staff plays a vital role in the school's organisation and activity (Conley, et.al, 2010). School caretakers are also often expected to provide student behavioural support (Taylor-Greene, 1997), and to assist with various projects, such as keeping the premises in good order, assembling material, and so on (Maxwell, 2004). The maintenance of a functional school building and infrastructure is essential, in that an environment that is well cared for helps to improve student attendance (Branham, 2004).

Frelin and Grannäs (2015) have suggested a typology for school relationships between students and school staff based on: a) the staff category's assigned functions, b) the places in which students encounter them, and c) the different staff categories' relations to educational

content and educational norms and values.¹ Distinguishing between *direct* and *indirect* educational relationships, the relationships between students and educators (such as teachers) are categorised as directly connected to the subject matter, whereas those between students and *educational professionals* (such as the school nurse and school welfare officer) are either directly or indirectly linked to subject matter, norms and values. For a more theoretical approach on the distinction between direct and indirect educational relationships, see Saeverot (2013) and Biesta (2009). *Education support professionals* (such as cleaners, caretakers and canteen staff) are only indirectly connected to the school's norms and values in that they are responsible for providing a clean, safe physical environment and attending to students' nutritional needs. Highlighting indirect educational relationships and their significance has revealed the benefits of using a broader perspective and including indirect contributions to the educational environment by staff other than teachers. However, in order to gain a better understanding of the educational environment, it is important to consider the impact of the societal shift that has taken place in Sweden on the public and education sectors.

Ecological and atomistic views of education

In line with Dewey's writings about taking the context into account, we turn our attention to the neoliberal shift in Sweden that has had a major impact on society as a whole by moving policy and everyday practices towards New Public Management. The current trend in educational policy is to measure performance, such as improvements in management, market and performativity, all of which are encoded in government legislation and policy documents (Ball et al., 2012). The dominant trend is for educational systems to be increasingly governed by "managerialism", which implies a kind of one-size-fits-all, efficiency-oriented

¹ It is generally understood that Swedish schools and all the activities that take place in them should be based upon a democratic foundation. This democratic value foundation is stated in relation to fundamental human rights, the National Education Act, and the National Curriculum for the compulsory school system (Skollagen, 2010; Skolverket, 2011).

methodology (Locke, 2009). During the latter part of the 1980s, Swedish society entered a period of transformation that also had consequences for Swedish schools. A consequence of this ideological turn has been the creation of a discursive reframing, where public and collective solutions are regarded as anachronistic, inefficient, and so on, and where collective solutions in society give way to individual solutions and initiatives, and freedom of choice (Blomqvist & Rothstein, 2000).

The restructuring reforms that were carried out during the first half of the 1990s led to a change in the Swedish education system -- from one of the western world's most homogenous and public school systems to one of the most liberal. Decentralisation at the municipal level, the introduction of student vouchers (*skolpeng*) in 1992, and the establishment of independent schools, created new conditions in the education market (Blomqvist & Rothstein, 2008; Utbildningsdepartementet, 2014). The shift from collective to private paved the way for an extensive establishment of private and independent schools. It also led to a new market for school support functions, and a tendering procedure for the provision of different support functions in school, such as the distribution of school meals, cleaning and caretaking services. Gewirtz and Ball (2000) identify two discourses of school headship, and describe them as “new managerialism” and “welfarism”. The latter is connected to values such as social justice and compensatory practices, while the former connects to instrumental values and a market logic. The aspiration to produce a more efficient educational system by a surge of reforms reflects a managerial form of government with a view of global competition that is not always compatible with the public purposes of education, such as fostering democratic citizenship. This shift can be described as moving from an educational system that serves the public good to one serving the private good (cf. Englund, 1994). Given these developments, Dewey's writings appear much more radical than they did a couple of decades ago. For Dewey, a

strong community is a precondition for individual growth (cf. Dewey, 1954; 1959/1916), whereas new managerialism is not particularly concerned about the community.

In this section, the notion of educational environments has been discussed using Dewey's work. In his writings, educational environments are dynamic, contextualised and designed, that is, connected to educational purposes. By contrast, Dewey calls the features that in a given situation do *not* make a difference to educational purposes *surroundings*. Educational relationships are both direct and indirect, in that those who work in school but not in the classroom can still influence educational processes. This ecological view is challenged by atomistic forms of government that have gained ground in public management in many countries, including Sweden, where the case study was conducted.

Research context

The data used to illustrate the above argument was collected as part of a research project aimed at exploring the relational interplay between school staff and students and its function and complexity in the secondary school context (e.g. Frelin & Grannäs, 2013, 2014, 2015; Grannäs & Frelin, 2017). The study was explorative and generative. Studying a complex phenomenon requires an open approach that can account for a number of variables. The case study method was chosen in order to facilitate an understanding of the complex relational processes that can develop over time (Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2003). In Sweden, students aged 13-15 years attend compulsory secondary school, after which most apply to take part in a non-compulsory upper secondary school programme, some of which are academic and some of which are vocational. Secondary schools are thus the last educational institution in which students are placed in heterogeneous groups. The focus of the project was the relationships between students and staff, and how these were negotiated in informal spaces and places

within the school. This article reports on the results relating to education support professionals.

A case study was conducted by two university researchers during the 2012-13 school year at a secondary school that had recently been renovated and was working to improve its school environment. Multiple data sources were used, including document analysis, mapping, contextual observations and interviews. Official statistics, newspaper articles and school quality reports were used to contextualise the case (Creswell, 2009). A total of thirty interviews were conducted. The main data used in this article is from semi-structured interviews with two canteen staff, two caretakers, one cleaner and the principal, which are supported by interviews with other staff and contextual observations during three weeks of fieldwork. The questions in the interview guide focused on employees' perceptions and accounts of their working environments, task perceptions, interprofessional cooperation, and safety. The analysis was based on thematic analyses of each interview transcript, which involved repeated readings of the material from beginning to end (vertically) and then comparison of each question in relation to other interviews carried out in the research study (horizontally). The data was coded by two researchers for reasons of reliability and was labelled, separated, collected and organised to show the explicit and implicit phenomena of value in relation to the research questions (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). The actual work of processing, analysing and interpreting was done using the software Atlas.ti through coding, linkages and memos.

The case school

The secondary school of Tallvik is located in the small industrial town of Bruksta, in Sweden, and is one of two secondary schools in the municipality. Students attend Years 6-9 (12-15 years of age) and each year level has two or three classes consisting of about twenty to thirty students. The school was built in the 1960s, and underwent major renovations in 2009. As a

former student of the school, the current principal is well acquainted with the local community. The members of staff are experienced, and the staff has remained more or less stable over time. The school has several long-standing traditions, including the staging of Christmas shows and a well-respected and influential student council. About ten years ago, an independent school was established in the municipality, which attracted large numbers of high socioeconomic status (SES) students, for the most part in line with national trends (Skolverket, 2012). This led to a reduction in the number of students at Tallvik, which originally had twice as many students as it does today. The education support professionals interviewed were two canteen staff, two cleaners and two caretakers. In this article, the main focus is on the cleaners and caretakers and their functions in the educational environment. The canteen staff and the caretakers were employed by the municipality (the caretakers with wage subsidies) and were interviewed together, whereas the cleaning was outsourced to a larger cleaning service company and one of the cleaners was interviewed. The results of the case study are presented in the next section.

Education support professionals and the educational environment

The role of education support professionals in the school environment is often overlooked. It is only when these services are not performed well that it becomes apparent how essential they are. As stated above, a clean and orderly school environment contributes to the well-being and learning of everyone in it. For example, if students do not have enough to eat they will find it difficult to concentrate and learn. The results illustrate the conditions under which the education support professionals work and interact with others and the emergent character of practice. In addition, they show how their *actual functions* go beyond the *intended functions* due to their interactions in the educational environment.

Taking responsibility for students' educational environment

Although the job descriptions of education support professionals do not include interactions with students, with the exception of the canteen staff who serve food to the students, the fact that they occupy the same spaces as the students means that interaction inevitably happens.

The cleaner, here called “Linn”, describes how students seek out contact with her and how she learns about their personalities, for example whether they are inquisitive, cheerful and so on. She also describes her practice of creating a rapport with them by offering help and choosing her battles wisely. Linn knew of another cleaner who had been very abrupt with the students, which had led to them retaliating.

The caretakers, here called “Per” and “Inge”, said that they actively sought contact with the students while walking along the corridors or in the school yard. They also described their relation-building practices, for example by asking students about mutual acquaintances, their relatives or their future plans. Several of the staff talked about their longstanding relationship with the community and the school, their length of service or their days as former students at the school. One of the canteen staff, Helen, also said that conditions outside school, such as her daughter being the handball coach for several girls in the school, facilitated interaction.

Despite the encounters between the canteen staff and the students being restricted in terms of time and space, they took it upon themselves to attend to students, for example to see whether anyone was sitting on their own. Both the cleaners and the caretakers covered large areas of the school premises and were often present in places and at times when other staff, such as teachers, were absent. They thus had a good overview of students' break-time interactions and at times intervened in conflicts. Linn explained that in such a situation they typically told students to stop and go away. However, at times they reported on trouble, because the cleaners recognised themselves as having more of a mandate to deal with student-related issues. One such incident was when a group of boys gathered around the changing room and

teased one of the girls inside. The cleaners reported this to the boys' class teacher and later followed up the case.

Linn: Still, you feel somewhat responsible when you are there. You have a lot of contact with them [the students].

Interviewer A: Do you know what happened in that particular case?

Linn: They talked to the girl and apparently this had happened before as well. Then they talked to [a boy] and I think it worked out well.

Interviewer A: But you felt that they took you seriously and that it was dealt with?

Linn: Yes, very seriously.

The role of the caretakers is to take care of the school's physical environment. They were visible in and around the school during the day and made a point of frequenting the same places as the students, mending anything that was broken. During their daily rounds, they helped the teachers to deal with lighting or ventilation problems or delivered material. In the past there have been periods of fighting among students and some areas of the school had been vandalised, and the caretakers claimed that they were able to witness things that the teachers never saw. They also allowed students to help them, which had resulted in a higher degree of connectedness and responsibility among the students.

Inge: Well, you talk to the students, and many listen /.../ When they were allowed to help out and do the repairs themselves -- whatever they did, mend cracks, paint or build something -- it made a difference to them. They said that if they'd made it then it shouldn't get broken. They acted like guards, which spread and that was terrific.

Some of the students sought contact with the caretakers and the relationships that formed had a positive impact on students' behaviour and experiences of school.

Conditions for interprofessional cooperation

Something that became apparent in the interviews with all the staff categories at Tallvik was the interconnectedness across the professions. Informal encounters such as those described above were regarded as positive, both for the individuals concerned and for the school as a whole. The caretakers gave an example:

Interviewer J: What about contacts with teachers and the principal? Do you participate in staff meetings?

Per: No, we don't take part in those things -- never! But our principal is great, so we chat with her almost daily.

Interviewer A: When you chat with the principal, what do you chat about?

Per: This and that (laughs), nothing in particular. A bit of general talk.

Inge: You can say anything to her.

Per: She's great. Terrific, she is.

Inge: Some teachers are easy to talk to.

On their daily rounds, the caretakers often passed the principal's office, which meant that they could easily pass on information about their observations and tasks during the day, and report any incidents. The guidance counsellor had her lunch with the canteen staff after the students had left, and the cleaners and canteen staff regularly received information from the school management, after staff meetings and from the student council, and were kept informed about events at the school. One such example related to the sports hall, which was in need of

renovation. The shower areas were experienced by the students as unhygienic, and a decision was made to clean these facilities thoroughly in an attempt to improve the situation.

Linn: We get reports when they have had meetings and know if a cleaning issue has been raised. They thought that the cleaning was good, but wanted soap, but that's not something we can fix.

Interviewer A: Is that something that is decided higher up in the organisation, the supplies?

Linn: I work for [cleaning company], we are not employed by the school really. So it is the landlord or the school that provides soap and things like that.

Interviewer A: Do they provide the supplies?

Linn: Precisely, we only perform the services that they pay for.

Like many others, the municipality had outsourced a number of services, including the cleaning of the school. Several categories of staff said that having two different employers impeded their cooperation with the cleaners. Despite this, the cleaners tried to find ways of cooperating:

Interviewer A: Do you have regular meetings with the management for example?
Or is that only when something special happens?

Linn: Not here at the school, we do have a lot of contact with the teachers. We have lunch with them and we see them all the time.

Interviewer A: How do things work between you?

Linn: Well. We are rather new: I came this autumn and my colleague three months ago. It took a while for them to get used to us... Everyone works in their own way,

but now things are fine. The teachers come to us if there is an issue 99% of the time and we chat in the staff room about work and... You feel welcome anyway. There is a nice, relaxed atmosphere.

Having a common staff lounge was a positive condition for cooperation, although one of the teachers said that they were careful about what they talked about when cleaners were present, due to them having different employers and being governed by stricter rules of confidentiality.

Challenges at the central municipal level

Examples of centralisation, deregulation and privatisation were found in the municipality, which followed the national trend. In the latter part of 2013, the municipal management made severe cut backs on its caretaking services and, despite protests from the principal, instigated a weekly service visit organised centrally. When we revisited the school six months later, the principal told us that she was upset about the way in which the municipality had dealt with the caretakers.

Interviewer A: What happened since last time, besides the caretakers no longer being here?

Marianne: Well, it is such a shame that they are not. We had a management information meeting with the Chief Municipal Officer and all the other managers. They wanted me to dismiss the caretakers. Per and Inge have been here for THREE years, they have been cruelly EXPLOITED I think. They took care of the school as they would their own child. Indeed, they have looked after every nook and cranny and if there was a crack they fixed it immediately. Right, they made sure that the school was spick and span. /.../ A few years ago, the entire caretaker organisation was moved to a separate local municipal holding company. When the local

(municipal) authority recently renewed the contract for caretaking services, this company was not given the contract. It was awarded to...

Interviewer A: Somebody else?

Marianne: Yes exactly. Then there was a gap here. So the local municipal holding company appealed, as you always do nowadays, which meant that everything got dragged out.

She was obliged to release the caretakers, in spite of her arguments about the contributions they had made to the school through their work and presence. At a management meeting in the municipality in which she criticised this action, she was invited to hire someone else, which she refused, because she argued that people were not interchangeable, and that well-functioning cooperation was much more important than a function.

Marianne: *No way*, I said I won't take on anyone else, you're on your own with this.

So the technical manager came and argued. I said you can do *whatever* you want. I refuse to hire *anyone* else.

This is one example of the differing views between the school and the municipal organisation.

Other areas were also affected by the budgetary restraints.

For example, the canteen staff were frustrated because they could no longer serve the food they thought was best. Due to the centralisation of food preparation services in the municipality, the canteen staff simply heated and served food that had been cooked elsewhere. The food deliveries were sometimes delayed, which caused a stir among the students. Their experience was also that the atmosphere was calmer on the days when students enjoyed their food.

These examples show the effects of the deregulation and centralisation of support functions, and how different parts of the administration in the municipal organisation use conflicting

logics for their decisions in a way can make the conditions in the educational environment worse. In the interview with the municipality's Chief Education Officer, indirect functions such as caretakers were not mentioned. Another example of the economic logic was that, according to the principal, the municipal school board viewed the renovations of the school as an investment that was immediately expected to yield results in terms of raised merit scores. After the renovation of the school, the educational environment improved, as did the students' merit scores, although the latter not to the extent that political decision-makers and officials at management level expected.

Discussion

In the empirical exploration of the periphery of the educational environment, ways have been indicated in which the school staff who are only indirectly involved in educational processes can make contributions to the educational environment. In the first part of the discussion, Dewey's ecological notion of an educational environment is used to add analytical layers to the results, thereby highlighting the dynamic interaction of the various processes in school. In the second part, the consequences of ecological versus atomistic views of education are discussed. Here it is argued that applying atomistic views that disregard the periphery of the educational environment could produce environments that are less educational and more like chance environments.

Potential contributions to the educational environment

The results show that in addition to their intended functions, education support professionals were able to contribute to the educational environment by: a) their presence as adults in different parts of the school, b) collaboration with other professions and c) exceeding their intended functions in the best interests of the students (cf. Johnson, 2009). The caretakers took some of the students under their wing and asked them to help mend things that were broken,

thus creating meaningful relationships with them that strengthen their connectedness to the educational environment (cf. Johnson, 2008).

The support staff had a task perception that made students' emotional well-being their responsibility. For instance, they reported exclusion and bullying to the professionals who were more directly involved in students' relationships. There also seemed to be well functioning informal information channels between the different categories of staff. The communication between staff was also facilitated by a common staff lounge.

It is suggested that interprofessional staff interaction, coordination and collaboration increase education support professionals' connection to the school, a connection that Bradshaw et al. (2011) regard as benefitting the educational environment. However, in the case school, these practices were impeded by having different employers and by differences in confidentiality rules.

In addition, in the case of the caretakers, the principal connected with them on a daily basis and with the other staff by putting information about events in their pigeonholes (cf. Harris, 2006). These examples show that the principal viewed their roles as part of and important for the educational environment, and not as surroundings, even though their contributions were indirect rather than direct (cf. Frelin & Grannäs, 2014). In this respect, it is important to take the *relations* of the education support professionals into account and not just their *functions* (cf. Frelin & Grannäs, 2015).

It should be noted that the presence of the education support professionals did not by default enhance the educational environment. Indeed, the former cleaner who shouted at students and created conflicts may have impeded it. However, their presence did generate conditions for actions and interactions with students in the school environment, which in turn created opportunities for making educational contributions (cf. Frelin & Grannäs, 2013). Thanks to their sense of connectedness to the school and a wide *task perception* (Kelchtermans, 2009),

they took advantage of such opportunities even if it is not part of their intended function (cf. Riley, 2008).

Hence, the distinction between *intended* and *actual* function in terms of static and dynamic views of educational environments become illustrative of the added relational value that staff presence and dynamic interactions of different categories of staff may generate, a value that is not easily captured in atomistic and managerial terms. Dewey's notion of an educational environment allows for such actual functions like this to be accounted for and highlights both the social nature of education and the indirect contributions that people can make to educational environments.

An environment designed for education

The way in which Hansen (2002) describes Dewey's concept of an environment designed for education, unlike a chance environment, shows the importance of a considered, open and dynamic educational environment. A basic feature of this is the *educational purpose* that justifies all the considerations made, and also generates the direction of the educational environment. A designed educational environment requires a clear governance from the school management of the school staff and a task perception that is in line with the current policy documents.

However, as a consequence of centralisation and privatisation at the municipal level, people tend to be viewed as interchangeable and not as parts of the educational environment. In terms of the educational environment of a specific school, support services are viewed as separate from the school environment and only as part of the municipal organisation, which means that from an educational perspective these are viewed as surroundings. This view tends to only take *functions* into account and may lead to the environment becoming less educational and more of a chance environment. Drawing on Dewey (1938; 1959[1916]), and taking the importance of *relations* and presence into account, which presupposes social processes over

time that are not as interchangeable as functions, enables taking support services into account as a potentially vital part of the educational environment.

Further, the demands for measurability and predictability prevent dynamics from becoming part of the educational environment (Frelin & Grannäs, 2013). The actions of the educational support professionals show that they become, or act to become, part of the educational environment by the way they act. This means that they, based on their task perception but also to better perform their task, take these steps which include establishing meaningful relationships with staff and students. From an ecological perspective, conscious or unconscious interactions in an educational environment make everyone a potential direction changer (cf. Hansen, 2002). In this case it had consequences for both students and staff. Hence, omitting potential contributions on the periphery of the educational environment can have a damaging effect, far beyond what is visible from an atomistic perspective driven by a New Public Management logic.

This article has highlighted the dynamics of “the interstices of school” and the indirect functions of educational environments (Frelin & Grannäs, 2015). Dewey (1959[1916]) wrote that all teaching is indirect. In discussions about students’ educational experiences and environments, these dimensions deserve more attention in both research and practice.

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