The significance of place and pedagogy in an urban multicultural school in Sweden

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Abstract
This article presents research from a school in a multicultural suburb on the outskirts of a large Swedish conurbation that used a particular pedagogy with strong classification and framing to address an identified problem of academic failure amongst its pupils. The analysis shows that the pedagogy was chosen based on an assumption that pupils needed to be ‘saved’ from their backgrounds and assumed characteristics of their neighbourhood and that its inhabitants were lacking positive pedagogical resources. The article indicates a disparity between these assumptions and statements made by the pupils. Moreover, it shows how the chosen pedagogy positions the pupils between two discourses that strongly affect the possibilities they have to develop as learners and participate equally in education and society in the future.

Keywords: ethnography, youth, marginalisation, saviour pedagogy, Bernstein

Introduction
A large body of international research on issues of place and pupil performances explores the challenges and options for youth in marginalised, urban settings (e.g. Clayton 2012; Gannon 2009; Hollingworth and Archer 2010; Rambla and Veger 2009). Swedish researchers have also been active in this research field (e.g. Bunar 2011; Johansson and Hammarén 2011; Runfors 2003; Öhrn 2012). The present article shares this research interest. It focuses on pupils’ comments about their education and educational experiences in a school that is located on the outskirts of one of Sweden’s major cities. The majority of pupils in the school are of foreign descent.

The studied school has adopted a particular pedagogical approach based on Monroe pedagogy to further academic achievement (see Monroe 1998). Monroe pedagogy has been used in different forms in Sweden since 1999 and it is therefore not only in the studied school that Monroe pedagogy is appropriated (Berhanu 2003). Other schools, through their homepages, and the National School Inspectorate, also highlight and refer to Monroe pedagogy as a solution the problem of educational performance3. It has also generally been highlighted as successful.
Monroe pedagogy emphasises the need to place high expectations on pupils and rewarding those who show the right attitude and strong commitment to their work. All pupils are said to have the opportunity to succeed. Strong leadership, high expectations, strong motivation, hard work and effort are said to be what counts for successful school performances (Berhanu 2003; Höög and Johansson, 2009; Tomlin and Olusola 2012). Christine Sleeter (2012) suggests this emphasis on strong leadership has been a global tendency in the past two decades for solving problems of under-performance in school (Tomlin and Olusola 2012). Gewirtz (2002) contends it may exemplify some of the effects of a global neoliberal performativity turn in Western education systems.

In this article, I focus on different voices regarding why certain pupils are felt to need this pedagogy, particularly ones born outside Europe (de los Reyes and Wingborg 2002; Lunneblad 2010). The voices that are focussed on are mainly those of the pupils themselves, but there are also extracts in the article of statements by members of staff at the school and others that give voice to understandings of the pupils’ educational needs. Also of interest is how the pupils respond to the pedagogy and a further concern is for its possible implications for the development of pupils as learners and future citizens. This has led to an analysis that has concentrated on contrasting different statements regarding educational needs and treatments for pupils, as expressed by pupils, members of staff and others.

In this analysis, which is based on the principles of juxtaposition, a number of powerful and important contrasts appear. Most fundamentally, these differences correspond to an idea about the uniformity of difficulties, needs, treatments, limitations and so on expressed by people from outside the neighbourhood (including teachers) in contrast to the descriptions of differences, resources, desires and capabilities as expressed from within by the pupils. From the outside, and also through the adoption of Monroe pedagogy as a uniform response to the performance needs of pupils in the suburbs, the pupils of the suburb are broadly seen as underperforming and underachieving due to a homogenous background of common urban problems and shared histories.

**Method**

Ethnography was the method chosen for the research behind the article. Ethnography involves engaging in research settings and taking heed of and centring data production on actor perspectives in order to identify key meanings and potentially hidden variables for further investigation. When using it, I therefore followed the pupils and teachers in their classroom and in other areas at school, observed and made field notes about the pedagogy, its routines and the responses to these routines. I also followed visitors to the school who were interested in learning about Monroe pedagogy in practice. In other words, I took part in the daily life of the
school, observed and documented the activities taking place there, and talked with those present about their views (Larsson 2006; Hammersley and Atkinson 2007).

More specifically, the study belongs to a critical ethnographic approach to education research that has developed at the Faculty of Education at Gothenburg University in recent years (see e.g. Beach 2010; Beach and Lunneblad 2011; Schwartz and Öhrn 2012). It is strongly influenced by the ethnography developed at the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies. Paul Willis’ 1977 book *Learning to Labour* is perhaps the best known example in education research circles. Outlines and methodological descriptions can be found in Willis’ (2000) book entitled *The Ethnographic Imagination* and Willis and Trondman’s inaugural article (2000) in the research journal *Ethnography* (Sage).

As described by Adam Kuper (1996), this tradition of ethnography combines Frankfurt School critical theory with cultural sociological concepts developed from the work of Raymond Williams (see e.g. Williams 1961; Held 1980). It helps to identify connections between individual problems and experiences and the social contexts in which they are embedded and provides a means to move beyond first opinions, impressions, myths and clichés of official positions when making interpretations and trying to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology and broader consequences of individual actions and choices. The approach recognises that individuals actively make their own future, as also suggested by Gewirtz and Cribb (2008), but also that they rarely do so in conditions they have chosen for themselves or that they have full control over. Consequently, the human subject is viewed as an active and reflective agent but a dialectic relationship is assumed to exist between individual agency and a broader social structure of which this agency forms a part.

The ethnographic fieldwork was carried out on the basis of selective intermittent research principles (Jeffrey and Troman 2004) between 2007 and 2008. This meant the research was long term but involved specifically chosen intermittent and intensive participant observation periods. Interviews with both pupils and members of staff at the school were also conducted. There were 24 pupil interviews. Some of these interviews were group interviews involving two to five participants. However, most of them (15) were individual. In addition, five semi-structured interviews were carried out with staff members, mainly teachers at the school, called Riverdale School based on the fictive name given to the region in which the school is situated.

When preparing for and carrying out the interviews, I followed standard procedures for informed consent and identity protection as per the ethical principles of the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet 2002). The quest to protect identities meant that the gender and ethnicity of a pupil is not always given in conjunction with the presentation of quoted excerpts in the article and that all the names used have been anonymised. Video recording was not used and on two
occasions the interviews could not be digitally sound recorded as the pupils expressed opposition to this.

In the interviews I addressed questions to the pupils such as: How would you describe your school? How do the pedagogical routines affect your school day? What do you think about your future? What can you tell me about your family? Do you have help from them with school and life outside school? When talking to the teachers, I asked questions like: What do you see as meaningful and valuable in Monroe pedagogy for the pupils and their needs now and in the future? What do you find most rewarding about working with the pedagogy? What do you think about the media interest in the Monroe method? What effects does it have, if any? In the analysis of these materials the main objects and referents used were identified and coded. Comparisons were then made between these codes and the categories of research participants making them. Differences and similarities were identified regarding the respective codes that were characteristic for each category of participant (i.e. teachers, pupils, official policy, other actors). These are discussed later in the article.

**Theoretical point of departure**

In addition to the critical theories of the Frankfurt and Birmingham schools as described above, theories of urban space have also informed the article. Like in work by Gulson and Webb (2013), Shim (2012) and Clayton (2012), the investigation has taken an approach to urban space, including the geographical spaces of the suburban reach, as subjective, politically interactive and discursively inscribed as opposed to being simply objective and material. The spaces of the suburban reach are, in other words, subject to the effects of labeling, social power and of the discourses that ‘construct’ them. They become subject to practices of territorial stigmatisation and segregation and these things have been seen to have had significant effects and consequences in relation to schooling policies and the processes and practices of education that follow on from these policies. As suggested by Gulson and Webb (op cit.), these currently spatially influenced and interactive policies seem to have enabled a pervasive middle-class re-imagining of city areas, in the present case a multicultural suburb on the edge of a major conurbation, to develop and to affect educational practices in important ways.

This is in effect what is investigated in the present article. That is, how migration, territorial stigmatisation and education policy and practice interact and contribute to the construction of particular kinds of education agency and possibilities. A number of subheadings are used to organise the presentation. These subheadings emerged from the theoretically informed analysis of the ethnographic data. They relate to the main themes of the analysis of pedagogy, place and performance. The first of them relates to expressions about the characteristics of the suburban research setting in question, i.e. Riverdale, and ideas about difference, similarity, identity and education needs that have been produced with different research subjects there.
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Characteristics of the setting: heterogeneity, homogeneity and a collective identity

Riverdale School is located in an area where 60 percent of adult residents were born outside of Sweden, and often outside Europe (Borelius, 2010). However, there is a proportionally bigger representation of pupils with a foreign background in the school compared to the neighbourhood as a whole. Ninety percent of the pupils in the researched classes had at least one parent, usually both, born outside Sweden. This is most likely to be due to selection effects and the availability of independent schools in or close by the neighbourhood in question (Bunar, 2008), something that in international research has been seen to assist in both “bright-flight” and “white-flight” effects (Crozier et al. 2008). Such selection effects are well known. They are connected to understandings of the characteristics that are ascribed to multi-ethnic neighbourhoods and the schools in them (Kallstenius 2010).

The pupils in the school came from very different places and nationalities and their backgrounds were also therefore very mixed. However, despite this, the pupils are dealt with in school as a homogeneous group. This again seems to be quite common in suburban, immigrant schools in Sweden and is again connected to concepts of urban identity and urban spaces (Runfors 2003; Schwartz and Öhrn 2012). In Riverdale School it is shown in the consistent uniform treatment of pupils and in the classification and framing of instruction in the classroom. Lessons in all classes followed a particular and consistent pattern of clearly introduced and examined, tightly classified and framed instruction in the sense of Bernstein (1990). This was because the pupils needed stability and security according to the staff, which consistency of this kind was also said to provide. Every lesson started and ended in the same way. Homework was also regularly set and followed a particular form. Tests were common. These details are described in the teachers’ handbooks at the school and captured in field notes from the research.

What is referred to here is a consistent lesson structure due to expectations of Monroe pedagogy being a ‘neutral’ method not subject to the influence of gender, class or ethnicity (see Schwartz 2010). The structure is said to connect to pupils’ needs but the only evidence of the different individual treatment of pupils is that they are sometimes placed in separate groups based on their performance in Mathematics and English. These lessons were in different rooms but the presentation of the content was still the same.

Every lesson starts with a blackboard presentation that outlines what is to be done and what the aims are. This is said to save time, “up to 4 to 5 minutes each lesson” as one deputy principal expressed it . . . The pupils speak positively about this firm structure and like to know what they are going to do when entering class . . . As another deputy principal put it: “It helps them know both where they are (and) what is expected of them” (Field notes, February 2007).
Organising classroom activities along familiar lines in a consistent manner helps pupils navigate and organise their school work in an optimal way according to the staff and is conducive to improving pupils’ performance and creating possibilities for their successful learning. Such success is, as the Principal says, “purely an individual matter of adaptation to school and commitment to hard work”.

The pupils at Riverdale School often agreed with this aim but they did not always agree with the chosen means. For instance, the recommendations of Monroe pedagogy (Monroe 1998) state that, in order to learn things that are important from the formal curriculum as effectively as possible, pupils should leave their background at the school gate (Schwartz 2010). However, this was never among the main reasons the pupils gave in the interviews about why they enjoyed their school life and how they learned best. Quite the opposite, they said that their background and out-of-school experiences were important and interesting and that cultural difference and diversity are valuable resources for their learning, not hindrances:

One day, it’s kind of Christmas, the next day Ramadan or whatever it may be . . . for the Chinese people something else . . . You are told how it is in the home of one another. Mixed is more fun. We are not only Kurds or Arabs . . . We learn about the others so we get interested and want to know how it goes for each other . . . It would be fun to talk more about the differences in the classroom and teachers would also get to know a little bit more about us and learn (Girl, 15 years).

It is mixed in but still fits together sort of . . . if you think about it . . . It’s sort of people from Asia who have moved here, or Africa . . . And that’s good . . . And then when you have to work together it’s good too . . . So you like stick together and help each other . . . and get different ideas . . . (Boy, 15 years).

Thus, whilst the pedagogy and the school authorities emphasise a common, positive school identity of a pupil whose success is one “without a background” (Teacher), the pupils say that their different backgrounds meeting in a shared space is what is most interesting about their school life. So whilst the pupils agree that they should try to be successful learners by working hard and listening to their teachers, they do not agree that their background and diversity is a problem in this respect.3

In the coming pages I will attempt to illustrate these differences in more detail. I will do so under two further sections concerning the pedagogy used at the school and its associated assumptions. The sub-headings of these sections connect to ideas expressed about education and school needs for “these kinds of schools . . . and the pupils in them” (Principal) “in these kinds of areas” (Teacher), as the research subjects put it. Deriving from anticipations and representations of “places like these” (Principal) by the research subjects they link to the issue of what knowledge is viewed as being most valuable for the pupils. The sub-headings were produced through the analysis to represent key issues of education policy in the school.
They are based on and also reflect emic expressions about the pupils, their neighbourhood and its limitations and consequences for how to help pupils improve. They juxtapose ‘inside’ accounts by pupils and ‘outside’ accounts by others about the qualities of the neighbourhood and what this means for the pupils’ education.

“These kinds of pupils”

Riverdale School is a school in a poor part of town, in an area of the kind described in Alinia (2006), Kamali (2006) and Borelius (2010) as a multi-ethnic and under-resourced suburban area characterised by multi-dimensional poverty. These representations of the school abound in the media at present and are well known. As one pupil put it:

There are rumours about this school. They say it is a bad school and that we ... come from a bad area and can’t behave and so on ... (Girl, 14 years).

However, the pupils in the study do not readily agree with the descriptions of their area in the media and elsewhere as a bad area (Schwartz 2010). Nor do they see themselves as sullied by this background. Instead, as suggested above, they like the area they live in and express great value in the knowledge of traditions and cultures possessed by their peers. They returned to this value in the interviews. They repeatedly pointed out that, although they see themselves ‘as different from each other’, they also recognise that they are sharing a history and the ‘experience of growing up in the same place’. Coming from ‘different cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds ... with different languages and traditions’ is however a richness and not a weakness, as they emphatically highlight. But it is not recognised in this way in the school. As the pupils put it, instead it is ‘this common place’ and its commonly understood characteristics as seen from the outside by outsiders that define them and their educational strengths, weaknesses and needs. They have a space-bound identity (Clayton 2012). They are seen and described as non-Swedish and as a separate category and it is this that ultimately seems to do most to shape the education policies and school practices that have been developed in order to help them (Beach and Sernhede 2011; Öhrn 2012).

We are from out here ... We come from these suburbs ... But we are still individuals ... We are all from here (and) that gives us common experiences ... We are not all the same though ... and we are not all criminals like the newspapers write and definitely not like they, in the city, think (Boy, 15 years).

You feel at home because here there are so many immigrants like us and immigrants living with other immigrants and here are not many Swedes ... Swedes always think badly about immigrants or immigrants think that Swedes think badly about them and vice versa ... (Girl, 14 years).
This view of the neighbourhood as a place where pupils feel at home and experience a sense of belonging without being robbed of their individuality contrasts with the general stigmatised understanding of their neighbourhood places and the official message from the school through its adopted pedagogy and the motivation for the choice of this specific pedagogy. It is here that ‘place’, ‘pedagogy’ and ‘performance’ are discursively linked. What is claimed is that, because of their deficiencies, pupils should leave their background (perhaps even aspects of their ‘selves’) outside the school gate in order to be able to ‘buckle down’ to serious work in school and do well in their education (see Schwartz 2010). In other words, the understandings of place help constitute a particular kind of pedagogic discourse which from the outset is fraught with tensions. One of them is that this official pedagogical discourse is one where the place and its population are blamed for education failure. This is a discourse that constructs the pupils as basically deficient and in need of special support before then re-constructing them as able to overcome these limitations and shortcomings through hard work, effort and guidance from the school and its teachers and the use of a particular pedagogy. It is thus a discourse that expresses that the school is a project that can help pupils become a success, but that being a success also means becoming someone very different to the person you presently are (Hållgren 2005). The leadership at the studied school explained the situation (both in the media, in interviews and during presentations of the school) as follows:

These pupils … these kinds of pupils … those who live here … are in need of clear, disciplinary procedures, expectations and rules designed to achieve successful school performance … For pupils who live in this area, it is perhaps even more important with this kind of education because many have difficult and complex situations here … (Principal 2007, newspaper interview).

Earlier when people talked about this school and the pupils they had nothing good to say because they thought it was a very trashy area with lot of trouble connected with the school … Older ones robbed younger, they smoked and destroyed people’s cars outside the school … (Principal 2006, initial meeting with the project team).

This way of talking about poor places and their inhabitants is by no means unique to this particular school or Sweden alone (Gannon 2009; Ricucci 2012). Young people from poor suburbs and their forms of knowledge are often described using these kinds of negative statements (Andersson 2003; Clayton 2012) as destroyed by the places they come from (Öhrn 2011). In this sense, the suburb is not only a geographic place but it is also a social position (Beach and Sernhede 2011; Shim 2012). In the discourse of school success it appears as a non-Swedish place full of immigrants, poverty, exclusion, segregation and marginalisation (cf. Alinia 2006). One teacher explained how this affected the pupils’ possibilities to succeed in school as follows:
If you look at it, this place is like a social-democratic Polish ghetto… It is precisely this; it is a concentrated ghetto that affects the pupils… (Teacher interview, 2008).

These understandings of the constructions of place are couched in material histories (Clayton 2012; Gulson and Webb 2013). They are linked to real situations in this sense that mean different things to different people. “To some of us (these places are) home” (Ali). To others, “frightful (and) frightening areas… on the edge of the city” (Kim) and the pupils are coloured accordingly by these imag(in)eries (Tesfahuney 1998) of a place-based identity and the way it is used in the construction of “effective treatment” (Tomlin and Olusola 2012).

Thus, there are different ways of presenting the suburb. Yet the school authorities subscribe to a discourse of the inferiority of the neighbourhood as a place. They ascribe an identity of an unfocussed pupil from a troubled background. But again, according to the data, there are tensions and inaccuracies in this discourse. First, according to the data, the identity of an inferior and unmotivated pupil actually does not exist. Indeed, quite the opposite, my data suggest that the pupils are curious, motivated to meet the demands of their teachers, committed to their education, focused and highly aware of many things. The deficit identity is not really present according to the student data. But it is discursively placed there by the school, and it seems needed for the school to justify its chosen pedagogy. It is what the pedagogy ‘trades off’ in fact, as without it what would there be to correct ‘or leave outside the school gate’ that could otherwise interfere with school success?

In this perspective, the solution offered by the school in its use of Monroe pedagogy becomes a part of the problem of educational and social inequalities rather than a means of overcoming these problems. It ascribes the pupils a negative and passive or resistant pedagogic identity as unmotivated and in need of discipline, but it also prescribes that they can be productive and high achievers in the right circumstances and with the right kind of effort, challenge and support: the metaphors of “a sinking ship” and becoming a “success story” are often used by the school principal to describe this process. In my understanding however, the pupils continually present themselves as both active and highly motivated and they also act in these ways. 4

The neighbourhood as a resource for school success

As suggested earlier in the article, the pupils do not agree with representations of them as poor prospects from a socially and culturally ruined place. As one pupil put it, “we are not unmotivated. We have educational aspirations and see educational possibilities and values in the places we come from”. Researchers have also noted this commitment. They have identified that so-called failing pupils have aspirations for success and ideas about how to achieve it (Öhrn 2012).
What the pupils from the neighbourhood (or place) in the present investigation say is important for being successful in school is clear in both the field note extracts and interviews. They often highlight the value of cooperation and support and reflect on how people from the neighbourhood, such as parents, siblings, neighbours and friends, encourage them to get good grades in school and help them with school and to continue school. This is to some degree in contrast with the official view of the pupil who lacks support at home and resources in their surroundings that can be of help to them. Moreover, the pupils also describe that they like their school and their teachers, want to do well, and can use knowledge from their own life and experiences in a positive way when given the chance. As some of them stated:

Yes and we like to work in school . . . We . . . if you work together it (i.e. the school work) might be hard, but we work together and help each other . . . talk to each other . . . to get on . . . We want to get on . . . And if you need help it’s not hard to ask . . . People (your friends) want to help . . . Sometimes if you’re sat alone someone will even come up (to you) and ask you if you might need some help or if you’re OK sort of . . . It’s not hard to get help . . . I’ve gone up to people myself and asked if they need any help (Two girls, 15 years).

I like my teachers and I want to get good grades to enter high school, to learn things and get a good future . . . my parents are very caring. We help each other a lot at home. / . . . / Your friends are important. The teachers want you to feel comfortable. Things are looking bright, it is going well for me in school, I look after myself and I want school to go well for me (Girl, 14 years).

What the pupils state here is in one way fully in line with what is suggested in national and European Green Paper texts such as the EU Green Paper “Migration & mobility: challenges and opportunities for EU education systems”, namely that an important role in the development of positive learning outcomes and effective learning is played by good teachers, family support and help from people in one’s neighbourhood and peer group. However, other things the pupils say are not in agreement with these texts. One is of course, as stated already, the access they describe to these resources in the home and their neighbourhood, which are said to be absent or restricted there, according to official texts. However, this is an issue of official recognition of neighbourhood resources, not of the presence or absence of such resources. Another is the value of competition between pupils over grades from individual performances. Competition is emphasised as invaluable to improving and maintaining high standards in school according to official texts, but at Riverdale School pupils point to the value of cooperation instead.

These things are emphasised by the following extracts that illustrate the kind of motivation shown by the majority of pupils and the support that many said they had for their schoolwork. They again suggest that the lack of motivation and support was not the problem. A lot of the pupils wanted to study at advanced levels after school in areas like medicine and engineering and they had relatives who had a higher education from
their home country who could help them. They were also motivated “even before coming to Riverdale School . . . even if the school encourages this high motivation” (Girl, 14 years). The pupils talked about their neighbourhood as a resource and the described cooperation as a way of utilising these neighbourhood resources.

I learn when we help each other in school. I have eight brothers and sisters and there is always someone who can help me . . . but it also plays a role if you want or not want to cope with school (Boy, 15 years) / . . ./ My future is to become a psychologist. I want to help other people and it is my only plan . . . I will contribute to improve the world and help young people. I want to do so much (Girl, 15 years).

This initial motivation and good attitude to school is the opposite of how attitudes and interests in the academic work of pupils from these neighbourhoods are generally described and anticipated by the proponents and supporters of pedagogical solutions such as Monroe pedagogy. It applies even though half the pupils did not obtain grades that helped them reach their goals and continue their academic career.

Parents do not always have the possibility to be the ‘key factors’ the various policy texts describe as important, but this does not necessarily imply that the parents are not interested in their children’s schooling and do not help their children. As Dahlstedt and Hertzberg (2011) suggest, the interaction between schools and parents of pupils living in the suburbs is not without problems. Language is one of these. Swedish simply is not spoken extensively outside of the formal institutions in the neighbourhood in question, in places like the school. On top of this, there is an issue of the class position and education levels of parents in the neighbourhood:

My mother and father don’t really understand Swedish. My mother is not so good. Perhaps it would have been easier with the school if they could have helped more . . . There were many words I did not understand . . . But I learn both at home and at school . . . if I learn to wash up or take care of children . . . when you marry you know how to do it. That is learning too . . . (Girl, 15 years).

This applies both in general and in terms of individual variations between members of this group (Dahlstedt and Hertzberg 2011).

Discussion
The Swedish National Agency of Education Report (2012) shows that being born abroad in a non-European country and coming from a poor urban area affects pupil performance and that living in the suburbs is significant for whether pupils will be successful at school. Schools in these areas are aware of this and have quite often devised ways of trying to deal with and ‘repair’ the problem. The present investigation has been carried out in such a school. It is a school that uses a pedagogy that is fully in line with recent European Commission Green Papers on how to improve immigrant pupils’ school performance.
There is a regular flow of outside visitors to the school to see first-hand the successes it is said to have attained and a special scheme of school visits has been developed to deal with this flow. In it, the school’s history is mentioned using the metaphors of a *sinking ship* and a *success story*, respectively. The sinking ship is a metaphor for the pupil and the school before Monroe pedagogy was introduced, while the success story is the outcome of its introduction and what the pupils can become because of it. This contrast is part of an important message about how a radical change was identified as needed in order to save the school and its pupils from impending failure (Lunneblad 2010; Schwartz 2010) and how these changes then led to successes that were reported in the media. The article presented data related to this.

Use of the metaphor of a sinking ship is somewhat contradictory according to the data and analyses here. On one hand, it represents an attempt by management to promote a positive image of the school yet, on the other, it does so by first describing how bad the place was before, and that any measure of success should be seen as a victory in relation to these ‘ruins’ of the original school and its pupils. People generally have little, if any, first-hand knowledge of the actual places in question but they often seem to accept the representations they are provided with about them.

Being able to rescue the school and its pupils is the positive sense in which the metaphors of a sinking ship and success story are meant to work. They conjure up an identity of a pupil in trouble and in need of saving from her- or himself, her or his area and the attitudes of those around her/him and of a pedagogy that can accomplish this. However, other dimensions are also important in this use of metaphors. One is that in addition to explaining school success in this particular way, the comparison and use of the metaphors, at the same time, locate the blame for failure in a specific way as well. Instead of identifying society and its inequalities, segregation, dominant discourses, institutions, ideologies, media representations, myths and power relations (i.e. its circuits of culture in the sense of the CCCS research group) as the problem, it is the pupils, their families and cultures and places they come from (today and originally) that are given the blame.

The metaphors thus provide a success story about the organisation. But this success story is made at the expense of other schools, their pupils, the pupils’ parents and their backgrounds, traditions and beliefs. Moreover, the findings of national evaluations (see National School Agency 2012) show that the metaphors are also objectively misleading. For instance, only half of the pupils at Riverdale School managed to matriculate for upper-secondary study programmes despite the pedagogy and consequently did not do better than other pupils in similar neighbourhoods from very different kinds of schools. The metaphor is misleading and perhaps the pedagogical solution for ‘pupils in school difficulty’ that it is meant to describe is not a solution at all, at least not for the pupils it is being used for. So for whom or for what is this pedagogy a solution and what does it really do?
The results have several things to say about this. First, they point out that the application of Monroe pedagogy at Riverdale School ascribes a particular and collective identity to the pupils who, in order to be successful in their education, in effect need to become someone else. Second, they point out that this leads to two different but related discursive ‘positionings’. The first is one where the pupils are collectively positioned in terms of being a poor educational prospect and in need of salvation. The second is as a group who are given access to a special pedagogy that can help them, provided they are made of the right stuff and can lift themselves by their bootstraps.

Häggren’s (2005) study about everyday racism makes a similar statement. Häggren concludes that, for reasons of ascribed identity and social expectations in school, pupils with an immigrant suburban youth identity need to work harder to attain success compared to others (also see Molina 2006). However, she added that the young men and women in her study also showed a variety of ways of challenging everyday racism. For them, their suburbs were not places full of dangerous criminals or hopeless individuals (Sernhede 2007; Johansson and Hammarén 2011), but full of aunts, uncles, cousins, friends and neighbours who make up supportive social networks. They therefore resisted their identity ascribed by the media which denigrated them by reference to the spaces and places they live in (Clayton 2012; Öhrn 2011). The same has also applied at Riverdale.

We therefore have a highly contradictory situation. The pupils at Riverdale School identify themselves strongly as suburban children and youth (Andersson 2003). They identified with each other and their common backgrounds. But they also recognised each other as individuals and as different. Individually, they were different from each other. Collectively, they were different from people living outside the suburb. Yet, at the same time, for the pupils themselves it is just this experience of mixed background and difference that they valued and that delights them the most.

The pupils at Riverdale School are thus the targets of specific policies that recommend forms of treatment and pedagogy that are inferred to be in their best interests. However, according to the present investigation they clearly may not be since through them pupils can only be successful at school if they first appear to lack motivation and then change by accommodating to the school’s demands and by becoming something other than who they were understood as.

The main message of this article is hence that policymakers, school leaders, teachers and parents are all part of a system in which norms, structures and interests affect the future of pupils in suburban schools (Gewirtz and Cribb 2008). This is visible in terms of the way Riverdale School has responded to the problem of educational performance amongst immigrant pupils there by introducing a specific pedagogy. This pedagogy is imbued with high expectations of pupils’ academic achievements and distinct leadership styles from adults and is in line with the various success factors that are currently considered to be effective in official policy.
However, the article suggests that the stigma of belonging to or coming from a particular place is one of many explanations of how structures can discriminate immigrants, especially those born outside Europe (see de los Reyes and Wingborg 2002), and that the pedagogy actually represents a form of discrimination that is, at one and the same time, both subtle, hidden and unintentional, but can still seriously affect minority groups in society (Kamali 2006; Alinia 2006; Beach and Sernhede 2011). The identity politics embedded in current suggestions and practices for how to deal with the problems of school performance among suburban immigrant pupils – not only in Sweden and at schools like Riverdale, but also in Europe as a whole – may therefore be part of unintentional, subtle discrimination.

Conclusion
The present article has described how the self-representations of pupils in a multicultural suburban neighbourhood differ from the official/media/teacher discourse about the places they come from and their implications for the needs of pupils in terms of education and schooling. It also shows that the uniform and compensatory pedagogical methods that are often officially recommended and locally adapted for dealing with the officially described problems do not work. Several reasons have been suggested for why this is the case. One of them has to do with how the official measures are entirely top-down and also basically misinterpret and misrepresent the educational problem as related to individual differences between the suburban pupil group in terms of discipline and motivation compared to other groups when the problem is instead culture- and power-related (migration, global relations, stigmatisation, segregation). A second reason is therefore that the measures are basically also both discriminatory and socially and culturally reproductive. The spatial territorial stigmatisation effects of segregation have thus had significant consequences in relation to the processes and practices of schooling policy. They have enabled middle-class re-imaginings of multicultural suburban neighbourhoods to affect educational policies, practices and opportunities adversely for the pupils there based on ideological and possibly discriminatory assumptions.
Notes

1 http://vansbro.se/invanare/utbildningsforskolor/grundskola/smedbergsskolans-7-9, downloaded 2012-07-23. Research on effective schools emphasises the importance of teachers having high expectations of pupils. (Excerpt from an appendix to the Schools Inspectorate report from Vallaskolan in Sala, Dnr 40-2009:2037, 2010-04-27: my translation).

2 The focus is on how the pupils are positioned. The suggestion is, as stated in the abstract, that they are positioned interdiscursively, between discourses of failure and success. In the comments of school authorities, the conditions of place (the suburb in which the school is situated) and of the products of place (pupil knowledge and identity) are lifted up in a way that constructs the pupils as being in need of saving and correction. The article explores how this can affect the possibilities the pupils have to develop as learners and participate equally in education and society.

3 Because of the way they are represented and treated at Riverdale School, the pupils become unable to develop their individuality as a learner within the school, which instead individuates their performances against a set standard. In this process, school knowledge is distanced from their personal life and does not refer to their location, environment or parents, except in terms of being corrective towards their negative effects. The ritualism of good classroom order and a clear structure of instruction forms the school’s expectations regarding the pupils and they are forced to live up to these demands. They have to become the good, disciplined pupil.

4 There is a desire in Sweden to ensure that everyone is treated equally. But the suggestions here are that when inequality becomes so strongly equated with a specific kind of place-identity, such as being a foreign pupil from a particular area, and a specific education strategy is designed and assumed to be needed so that everyone is really treated equally and have similar conditions to succeed, then in practice things risk becoming even more unequal than they were to start with (Molina 2006).
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