Being-Disrupted and Being-Disruptive: Coping Students in Uncertain Times

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Abstract
In the light of Martin Heidegger and Hubert Dreyfus’s concepts of being-in-the-world and skillful coping, this article addresses disruptions students face in modern society. Such disruptions involve pressure for achievement and lack of belonging to communities. In the discussion, the article presents the terms being-disrupted and being-disruptive. These terms outline ways students could cope with disruptions in their everyday practices. These practices include students’ relations to society and other people. Further elements addressed in the discussion are students’ interrelatedness with the world, their moods, and willingness to take risks. The article is part of the research project “A Comparative Study of Disruptive Behavior Between Schools in Norway and the United States.”

Keywords
being-in-the-world, skillful coping, moods, skill model, disruptive behavior

“I am restless, I do not know why. Maybe it is a side effect—of being who I am.”
—Skårderud (1999, p. 17).

Introduction
Noncompliant, defiant, aggressive, and undisciplined are common ways of perceiving students who behave disruptively during class (Axelrod & Zank, 2012; Folino, Ducharme, & Greenwald, 2014). This kind of behavior is one of the most prevalent problems in schools and presents a challenge for students’ social, emotional, and academic development (Duesund, 2014; Hogan & Quay, 1999; Jessor, Donovan, & Costa, 1991). A continuum, ranging from occasionally talking in class to violence and bullying is often used to describe disruptive behaviors (Charles, 2011; Levin & Nolan, 2009; Reed & Kirkpatrick, 1998; Sørlie & Nordahl, 1998; Zions, Zions, & Simpson, 2002). All kinds of disruptive behavior threaten students’ social, emotional, and academic development (Duesund, Stray, & Bjornestad, 2014). Disruptive behavior does not only affect the students who are being disruptive in class. It also affects the classroom environment, leading to impairment of other students’ learning and the quality of teachers’ teaching (Duesund & Ødegård, 2018). Disruptive behavior is often attributed to individual and environmental risk factors. Cognitive impairment, mental disorders, and difficult temper are some examples of individual risk factors. Environmental risk factors could be chaotic homes (conflicts, abuse, neglect) and/or difficulties at school (insecurity, lack of relations and difficulties in adapting; Befring & Duesund, 2012; Jaffee, Hanscombe, Haworth, Davis, & Plomin, 2012).

Outlining disruptive behavior based on their observable characteristics could be useful in many cases. However, it says little about how students cope with everyday disruptions. I will apply Martin Heidegger’s being-in-the-world and Hubert Dreyfus’s skillful coping and discuss how they can contribute to analyzing disruptive behavior in schools. These terms will be discussed in relation to Zygmunt Bauman’s thoughts about how society has become fast-paced, uncertain, and competitive.

The Norwegian name of the current study applies the term *uro*. This term is challenging to translate to English, but some suggestions are “unrest” and “restlessness.” This is not just a visible behavior, but also a state of mind and a way of relating to the world. It signifies difficulties with standing still and constantly experiencing that one does not have enough time to do what one wishes (Skårderud, 1999). For the purpose of this article, “disruption” is treated as part of the Norwegian *uro*. Disruptions are part of modern times, characterized by a fast pace, uncertainty and few possibilities to rest (Bauman, 2000a; Skårderud, 1999). Building on Heidegger’s being-in-the-world, I have created the terms being-disrupted and being-disruptive. Being-disrupted refers to the world and being-disruptive to the disruption.
to a state of mind, while being-disruptive is a way of coping with being-disrupted. The idea is that disruptions are not only observable but also includes mental states and pressure from society, culture, and peers.

Based on Dreyfus’s skillful coping, I discuss how students could cope with disruptions in their everyday lives. The purpose of the article is to explore the concept of disruptions not only in schools, but also in society that could affect students. By “students,” I refer to adolescents (ages 15-17 years). The rationale for doing so is that the article is part of a larger research project, focusing on students in these ages. The project is named “A Comparative Study of Disruptive Behavior Between Schools in Norway and the United States.” The project is a collaboration between Norwegian and American researchers. Being-disrupted and being-disruptive are interrelated. In Heidegger’s magnum opus Being and Time (Sein und Zeit), written in 1927, he embarked on the project of understanding the human way of being. This article aims to understand everyday disruptions that students could face and how these could influence their coping practices. Based on these terms, the article takes a perspective on education that involves regarding students as active agents who influence (and gets influenced by) their surroundings as supposed to them solely being conditioned and/or captivated (Freire, 2000; Ødegård, 2014, 2017).

The discussion will take form in two sections. In the first section (certain and uncertain), I address how modern times are fast-paced and uncertain. Students meet an abundance of possibilities for what they are to do with their lives, while also being pressured to achieve both socially and academically (Bauman, 2000a; Bauman & Mazzeo, 2012). Based on these aspects, I discuss how an overload of possibilities could serve as disruptions to social, emotional, and academic aspects of students’ lives.

The second section addresses the issue of being alone and together. In modern times, communities are dissolved and students are experiencing increased degrees of loneliness (Bauman, 2000b; NOVA, 2014; Putnam, 2000). With this as the baseline, I argue how a sense of belonging to a community could be beneficial in a world with increased pressure for individual achievement.

**Theoretical Framework**

The following illustrates the theoretical framework of this article by presenting the terms being-in-the-world, skillful coping, mood, being-disrupted, and being-disruptive.

**Being-in-the-World**

Like many phenomenological projects, Heidegger viewed our relation to the world as direct and unmediated (Kelly, 1999). **Being-in-the-world** is the essence of the human way of being, indicating that people always have an active relation to the world and continuously try to interpret and make sense of their surroundings (Heidegger, 2008). Heidegger presented **everyday intelligibility**, referring to public and everyday practices like having a conversation or driving a car (H. L. Dreyfus, 2004). For students, such an everyday activity is being-in-school. It is a place where they find themselves several hours each day. School is where a great deal of our initiation to shared intelligibility takes place as students in schools influence the school as a whole, other students and themselves, both socially and academically.

**Skillful Coping**

Heidegger outlined that people have skills for coping with equipment, other people, and themselves. Coping with equipment is exemplified by a carpenter’s use of a hammer. Before being able to practice carpentry, the aspiring carpenter needs to know what a hammer looks like, how to use it, and contexts in which a hammer is a useful tool (H. L. Dreyfus, 1991). To link this to a student learning to write, he or she needs to know what a pencil looks like, how to use it, and in which situations it makes sense doing so.

The focus of this article is not on how people cope with equipment, but on how students cope with other people and themselves. Shared everyday coping practices also conform to public norms. This is part of a whole that lays the foundation for everyday intelligibility (H. L. Dreyfus, 2004, p. 266). With being-in-the-world as a foundation, H. L. Dreyfus (2004) presents the **skillful coping** as the basis of being-in-the-world. Skillful coping refers to an everyday understanding of how we are able to find our way in the world, without necessarily reflecting upon it (H. L. Dreyfus, 1991; H. L. Dreyfus, 2004; Heidegger, 2008). Such intuitive responses to one’s surroundings characterize an expert in everydayness. Dreyfus’s conception of expertise stems from his model of skill acquisition, illustrating five stages of skill development (novice, advanced beginner, competence, proficient, and expert). The novice follows rules and principles for action. With practice and experience, the performer gradually goes through the stages and could eventually reach expertise. This level of skill is characterized by a high degree of emotional involvement in the task. Within expertise, the performer has learned how to respond to situations and distinguish what is important, as well as how to act (H. L. Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986, 2014). The expert responds intuitively to a situation and/or performs a task successfully and without consciously thinking about what he or she is doing (H. L. Dreyfus, 1991).

In a conventional sense, expertise involves responding intuitively and appropriately in a certain context. A more radical form of expertise is to respond intuitively in a certain context and at the same time develop a further understanding of the world (H. L. Dreyfus & Wrathall, 2014). **Everyday practices.** People can perform a wide variety of everyday activities like driving a car and holding a conversation, without thinking about rationales and rules about how
to do so. They are done intuitively, efficiently, and successfully (H. L. Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986). Making the world intelligible involves utilizing a wide array of skills. These skills interlock and engage with the intelligibility of the world, or the way the world “makes sense” to us. Everyday skills of a student involve simple things like learning to find the way to school, learning the alphabet before being able to read, and learning how to behave appropriately in classrooms. With practice, it is possible to progress in a certain skill and be able to use them intuitively and successfully (H. L. Dreyfus, 2004; H. L. Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986). A student who is able to read and comprehend text, no longer need to look up every letter in the alphabet but is sufficiently skilled to connect letters and words and make sense of them.

Students, who always behave in accordance with rules in school, already know the rules, have experience with following them, and understand that disturbing other students and the teacher are undesirable. He or she does not need reminders of the rule “raise your hand before talking” or “be nice to other people.” With practice, most students develop a flexibility of understanding when, and how, to behave in a certain way (H. L. Dreyfus, 2004). Many students display disruptive behavior regardless. Not necessarily because they do not know the rules of school but as a way of coping with the world. Students might be bored, may not understand the curriculum, find rules in the classroom unfair, be poorly motivated for schoolwork, and more focused on things outside of the classroom.

Taking risks. Taking risks and acting without knowing whether the action is wrong is a prerequisite for progress in skill acquisition. H. L. Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) refer to this as an “emotional roller-coaster” as the risk of being wrong can have strong emotional consequences. It is a balance between risk and involvement. Students could be strongly emotionally affected by being wrong if they try to do something. In turn, this can affect motivation, interest, and general well-being. As an example, students might choose not to raise their hands to answer a question given by the teacher during class in the fear of providing the wrong answer. If the student is being quiet and not raising his or her hand, the student is not doing anything wrong according to the rules in the classroom. However, the student might be doing something wrong in the sense of making himself or herself as unsusceptible to feedback that might be positive, rewarding, and beneficial for learning of both social and academic skills.

Not taking risks can have severe consequences as a risk-averse person can experience regression due to not experiencing progress and acquiring new knowledge (S. E. Dreyfus, 2004; H. L. Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986). Not daring to act even though the action could prove to be wrong can actually make a person worse at a certain skill rather than getting better. This may be in contrast to what the Ministry of Education and Research (2007) sets as one of their primary goals provided in the following citation:

The pupils and apprentices shall develop knowledge, skills and attitudes so that they can master their lives and can take part in working life and society. (p. 5)

Moods

Entities and activities are disclosed as available to human beings through their interrelatedness with the world and human beings are “thrown” into a preexisting world (Borgman, 2005; Heidegger, 1949, 2008). Another way of putting this is that we are thrown into a “there,” which is a situation where one exists and acts (Heidegger, 1949). A way of revealing our way of being in the “there” are our moods (German: Stimmung). Moods can be things like happiness and depression, and they affect relations to all aspects of human existence (H. L. Dreyfus, 1991; Heidegger, 1949; Ødegård, 2014). Moods are not the same as emotions as they are in general and color our entire way of relating to the world, while emotions can be more specific like anger directed toward a specific person or situation.

Moods, for example, are always total. When one is in an elated mood, everything is encountered as colorful and challenging, and conversely, in depression everything shows up as drab and uninteresting. (H. L. Dreyfus & Wakefield, 2014, p. 173)

Students’ moods affect how they perceive the world as they determine what matters to us. For example, a fearful person will tend to give importance to situations that provide threat or safety (Wrathall, 2011). It is likely that a generally elated student will be more likely to be motivated for school and perceive it positively as compared with a depressed student.

Being-Disrupted and Being-Disruptive

In the introduction, I presented the term disruption. Disruptions can take many forms and be anything from minor distractions like students talking with each other, to more severe issues like unhappiness and depression. Included in the term disruptions, we therefore find anything from a certain behavior to emotion, mood, and pressures from society.

I outline the terms being-disrupted and being-disruptive. The terms aim to illuminate that the “there” where students find themselves, will affect how they relate to the world. Being-disrupted and being-disruptive are not only about something that happens from the “outside” or is “displayed.” Students are affected by, and affect, the world through their active relationship with it. Disruptions, and disruptive behavior, always happen in some kind of context and toward a background of shared practices (like going to school).
question worth asking could be what students try to accomplish by behaving disruptively during class. It could be that tasks are too hard, or that they do not find the curriculum interesting (Ødegård, 2017). A core idea of this article, however, is that disruptive behavior is not always a “willed” action (H. L. Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 2014). It could also be a prereflective response to an uncomfortable situation like school or societal pressures (Being-disrupted is regarded as a mood student might find themselves in). One way of coping with this is conforming to social norms and pressure. This involves a degree of passivity, meaning that students react to their surroundings by not challenging them to make them more understandable and/or comfortable. When a student gets disturbed during class or experiences pressure and uncertainty from society, he or she stays that way instead of trying to change, or makes their existence more comfortable and/or understandable. The student stays distracted from the disruptive behavior of others instead of accepting the risk it might involve by trying to stop or reduce it.

Being-disruptive is a way of coping where students do not conform to social norms and pressure. By being-disruptive, students try to cope with an uncomfortable situation by moving toward another alternative that may provide more comfort and/or change the situation the students find themselves.

Being-disrupted and being-disruptive are part of everyday intelligibility. Being—They are interrelated as students always face disruptions of varying intensity and seriousness. These affect their moods and present situations that they need to cope with.

Zygmunt Bauman (2008) presented and discussed the term Liquid Modernity. Liquid modernity refers to modern times as becoming uncertain, fast-paced, competitive, and individualistic. People are competing and searching for self-identification rather than cooperation and solidarity. Everyone is striving to be “the best.” Linking this to Dreyfus, one could say that everyone should be experts in every aspect of life. Bauman (2000a) claims that modern society contains an excess of opportunity for what people can do. With increased opportunities for possible actions, one could imagine increasing difficulties in coping with these. The following citation illustrates how easily other possibilities may disrupt skillful coping of a certain task:

All it takes to disrupt a fluid immersion in skillful activity is to consider and assess other possibilities for action. (H. L. Dreyfus & Wakefield, 2014, p. 3)

Discussion

The following presents a discussion of everyday disruptions in light of the theoretical framework consisting of being-in-the-world, skillful coping, and the terms being-disrupted and being-disruptive. The discussion is structured in two parts, addressing interrelated phenomena. They are (a) certain and uncertain and (b) alone and together.

Certain and Uncertain

Being modern came to mean, as it means today, being unable to stop and even less able to stand still. (Bauman, 2000a, p. 28)

Heidegger’s concept the One describes how people unreflectively act according to social norms, without knowing why. Acting according to shared social norms, standard, or rules of behavior is a built-in feature of human beings (Cialdini, 2009; H. L. Dreyfus, 1991; Rousse, 2016). Embedded in this includes changing attitudes and views to those of the majority of other people (Cialdini, 2009; Heidegger, 1949, 2008). Norms are also changeable and dependent on the people present. A classroom dominated by students displaying disruptive behavior can turn to display disruptive behavior into the norm rather than following the rules of the classroom (Ødegård, 2011, 2014).

Modern society provides people with a greater set of possibilities than before when it comes to finding and choosing rewarding and fulfilling activities. Examples of such activities are which education to choose and which career to pursue. Nothing is certain and final; everything is changeable and in an infinite state of improvement with no end-station containing perfection and finitude (Bauman, 2000a). This can involve that there is no final goal, providing students with certainty. Elementary school, middle school, and high school are means toward higher education. Higher education is a pathway to a job; a job is a pathway to a better job, with income and a social position of status to follow. Bauman emphasizes that a young American with a moderate education expects to change jobs at least 11 times during a working career. One goal seems to facilitate another, with nothing carved in stone.

Students are in need of stability and certainty in their lives (Befring, Frønes, & Sørlie, 2010; Kirp, 2011). This is important for academic learning, social relations, and mental well-being. If nothing (or very little) is guaranteed and certain, students could experience confusion, conflicting ideas and life may seem illogical or incomprehensible (Festinger, 1957). This is difficult for students as they need to know and understand what is going on around them (Kirp, 2011). Students are being-disrupted from acquiring knowledge in the sense that the everyday life of students is one of uncertainty. When students think about future plans and what they are to make of themselves in life, they may experience hopelessness as the possibilities are so many that there is no end-station in their lives that will provide the stability and certainty they need. Students’ concerns about the abundance of possibilities are documented in the Norwegian report “Ungdata” from Norwegian Social Research (Bakken, 2016; NOVA, 2014). The report describes that an increased number of Norwegian children and adolescents are experiencing mental health issues. Among the things they are struggling with, are feelings of everything being a struggle, worrying, sleeping difficulties and feelings of loneliness,
unhappiness, and hopelessness regarding the future. The never-ending pressure for progress serves as a disruption for learning as there is too much students need to cope with and too many possibilities for action to consider. This can involve that students are not able to engage themselves in skillful coping of different activities, as they do not know which ones are important for their future. As such, they might struggle to find their way of coping with their everydayness.

Students not trying to make sense of their situation, and influence it, might not get out of the experience of hopelessness. They uphold their uncomfortable state. The paradox is that by doing so, they might be more likely to develop serious mental health problems (Macklem, 2013).

One of the most important areas for facilitating certainty and stability is school (Bauman & Mazzeo, 2012). According to the Norwegian National Curriculum, the school system should provide knowledge about man, culture, society, and nature. This is supposed to develop overview and coherence of both academic and social lives of students (The Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training, 2014). It can be seen as a contrast to the ideas of Bauman (2000a) regarding the uncertainty of our modern society. However, it does not mean that students actually experience overview and coherence. Bauman and Mazzeo (2012, p. 32) outline a “dishartening belittlement of school,” where the teaching profession is held in much less regard than before. In addition, university graduates in modern times are not guaranteed a relevant job and often need to take part-time jobs for which they are overqualified. Many university graduates in modern times have been forced to put their degrees aside and accept jobs that require different skills than those they have obtained in their education (Bauman, 2000a, 2008). If this is correct, it is no mystery that young people in our society worry and experience hopelessness regarding their future. As all students are part of society, they cannot avoid its influence. As such, the norms of modern society can be a part of how some students find themselves as being-disrupted. They may not see a clear pathway or plan with what they are to do with their lives. Furthermore, they see no positive outcomes or do not know which skills they need and which goals they want to pursue. A prerequisite for skill acquisition is to know the skills needed for a task. With so many possibilities for action, knowing which skills to develop can be challenging in itself.

A way of coping with being-disrupted is conforming to social norms of current times. Conforming to the social norm, or “the One,” that involves striving for the conventional sense of success is something Dreyfus refers to as the conventional expert (H. L. Dreyfus & Wrathall, 2014). Such an expert acts intuitively according to what he or she perceives as appropriate actions within a cultural and social context. These actions make a person succeed by conventional standards. If we are to believe that uncertainty and competing for being “the best” is now the social norm, constantly progressing by earning more money, getting a job with social status, and having respect from peers equal success in the conventional sense. This may involve that students need to achieve the best grades, are the most popular, and have the most desirable material objects. Worth noting here is that to be an expert in the conventional sense is not necessarily something negative. It can provide satisfaction and pleasure. However, it can be important to raise the question if they are really experts, or if they are just following the norm. They might not be experts as they rather follow rules provided to them by modern society in the sense that everyone should be successful, achieve status, and become “the best,” something Bauman (2000a) claims to be unhealthy.

Not everyone has the opportunity to become a conventional expert. Bauman (2008) emphasizes that although self-identification is the task shared by all, it is performed under vastly different conditions. Not all students have the same opportunities (e.g., socially, economically, mentally, and physically). Bauman advocates that searching for self-identification includes disruptive side effects. This is a brutal competition rather than searching safety in solidarity and cooperation with each other. As mentioned earlier, students are under pressure for being “the best.” As students have vastly different resources and opportunities, some may more easily achieve a status of conventional expertise and success. Students who do not get the best grades, do not possess the newest material things, and are not popular among their peers can be regarded as inferior to others if the conventional sense of expertise equals success.

Occasional feelings of inferiority might not be problematic as students have different talents and abilities. If students perceive that they are inferior to others in general, we are addressing a more problematic issue. We then address inferiority as a mood, rather than an emotion. Moods are more general than emotions and color our entire perception of the world and, unlike emotions, they are not directed toward a specific entity like a person or concrete domain (Ødegård, 2014; H. L. Dreyfus, 1991; Heidegger, 1949). A mood of inferiority may close the world, rather than open it up. Feelings of inferiority could be part of being-disrupted. A person struggling with the feeling of inferiority is at risk of perceiving to be inferior in all situations and in relation to all other people, as illustrated in the following citation:

. . . I have committed myself to inferiority, that I have made it my abode, that this past, though not a fate, has at least a specific weight and is not a set of events over there, at a distance from me, but the atmosphere of my present. (H. L. Dreyfus & Wakefield, 2014, p. 148)

If “the atmosphere of my present” is regarded as similar to Heidegger’s thinking about moods, an interpretation of this citation is that students are assailed by the pressures of becoming “the best” by being-disrupted and letting an uncomfortable state dominate their existence. Related to this we find the Heideggerian term Befindlichkeit, translating to “attunement.” This involves that human beings relate to the
world through certain states of mind and that these may affect their way of being and how people and situations could be engaging (H. L. Dreyfus & Kelly, 2007, 2011; H. L. Dreyfus & Wakefield, 2014; Heidegger, 2008).

Dreyfus outlines another form of expertise that does not involve “becoming the best.” This begs the question whether experts are part of the elite in the sense that they are elite athletes, college professors, or famous philosophers. The latter assumption conforms to the conventional sense of expertise. Expertise can also involve not being integrated with traditional practices of society (H. L. Dreyfus & Wrathall, 2014). Students who refuse to accept the uncertain, fast-paced, and competitive times could cope with this by being-disruptive. By not striving to become “the best,” a person is doing something else. One is not doing “as one does.” A common way of understanding disruptive behavior is that it breaches rules and norms. In this case, displaying disruptive behavior is not “doing as one does.” By displaying disruptive behavior, students breach norms of the classroom and disturb other students and the teachers’ teaching. In a classroom context, this is a negative way of coping as it interferes with the work of both themselves and other students and not appropriate in classrooms. Those who display disruptive behavior may put themselves in an uncomfortable position by other students and teachers perceiving them negatively.

Coping by being-disruptive could produce positive outcomes. H. L. Dreyfus and Wrathall (2014) do not necessarily support expertise in the conventional sense. They move away from the conventional understanding of expertise by presenting the world-discloser or radical innovator. The radical innovator is not necessarily “the best” at something, but has an attitude of expertise. The radical innovator has the ability to respond to the world in a way that provides a new experience and understanding of the world, feeling drawn toward behaving in a way that opens up new forms of intelligibility.

Being-disruptive could be breaching of norms and rules. A student who is coping with the demands of school and in the classroom by being-disruptive does not conform to the pressure of getting the best grades and being more popular than his or her peers. If we understand students who cope by being-disruptive as radical innovators, the reasons for them displaying an observable disruptive behavior may not be lack of motivation or chaotic home environment. They could desire to retain control of their lives and change their negative mood. It could be a healthy response to an unhealthy situation. A healthy response to the world is allowing anomalies to be revealed. After they have been revealed, they can become possibilities that may change old theories into new ones (H. L. Dreyfus & Wakefield, 2014). A student trying to retain control of his or her life in an era of uncertainty may try to find genuine meaning in life experiences. He or she would not only compete with others. This kind of student is coping by being-disruptive to resist pressure from society. In an ontological sense, this kind of resistance is not denial or a way of not relating to the world, but a way of opening up the world to new possibilities. H. L. Dreyfus and Wakefield (2014) outline this kind of resistance as a form of integrity.

Alone and Together

Once the herd moves, it is really hard to turn it and you find yourself just galloping along. (Dan Rather in Sabato, 1991, p. 59)

The uncertainty and competitive nature of modern society is one of the main threats to certainty, stability, and the comfort that a community can provide (Bauman, 2008). I do not interpret this paragraph’s introductory quote as a herd moving forward as a fellowship or community. In modern times, communities are dissolved and no longer a comfortable place where people can stand still and feel safe. The “herd” seems to be moving forward as disrupted individuals competing and searching for self-identification.

A sense of belonging to a community is no longer one of the norms of society (Bauman, 2008). Fulfilling personal ambitions seems to be doing “as one does.” As discussed in the previous paragraph, this can have disruptive side effects. A way of coping with the self-identifying nature of society can be by being-disruptive and turn to a sense of community. Community includes as a feeling of safety and security and is protective against outside pressures. Bauman (2008) describes a community in the following way:

It is like a roof under which we shelter in heavy rain, like a fireplace at which we warm our hands on a frosty day. (p. 1)

If we are to believe that communities protect people from brutal competition and uncertainties of society, students searching for a sense of community can be seen as coping with the uncertainty of modern times by being-disruptive and breaking out of the quest for self-identification. One could think that school itself could be a community that protects students from outside pressures of competition, self-identification, and uncertainty (Bauman & Mazzeo, 2012). Current educational policy in Norway and the United States does not seem to advocate such views. In the last decades, standardized testing, comparison, and ranking of schools is emphasized heavily in both American and Norwegian schools. For example, the National tests in Norway measure students’ skills in reading, math, and partially English at schools across the country (The Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training, 2015). The U.S. Department of Education (2015) bears similarities, advocating that “high standards” and “measurable goals” can be used to improve education. One effect of such tests is that they hold schools accountable for success or failure. Results from measures of literacy are publicly available both on a national and international level. Such results are often supposed to measure something compared with a norm but are now applied to say something about the extent schools and students have mastered the content in
different subjects (Wilian, 2010). By making results public, parents, students, and teachers can see which schools are superior and inferior. In addition to a strong competition on the individual level, the institutions that are supposed to make students feel certain, comfortable, and safe, also seem to compete with each other. Moods are not always private. For example, we can talk about the mood of a nation or the mood of a party (H. L. Dreyfus & Wrathall, 2007). As such, the school system itself is coping with the uncertainty of society, is being-disrupted, and copes by “doing as one does.” They follow what seems to be the norm of current society.

Schools also play an important part in turning the uncertainty of society around or at least provide the “shelter from the rain,” Bauman (2008, p. 1) mentions. A school coping with modern society by being-disruptive can be able to do so. Challenging the widespread comparisons and competitions could involve nurturing a sense of community, belonging, and assistance. The following citation can serve to illustrate how a sense of community could be important for students:

Most of all they need to feel connected to and part of a larger community and need to be aware of their options for finding their place in it as workers and citizens. (Kirp, 2011, p. x)

A school nurturing community and safety could be a radical innovator. In the United States, community schools are becoming increasingly frequent. The idea of community schools is to create blurred lines between school and the rest of the day. They are to ensure that the social and emotional well-being of the students comes first and that the curriculum contains real-world issues related to the place the students live (Kirp, 2011). Community schools represent an approach involving schools engaging in partnerships with organizations in the broader community where the school is placed. This occurs both during and after the school day (Houser, 2014). In traditional schools, schooling extracurricular activities are not necessarily connected and integrated in the same way (Kirp, 2011). A community school promotes integration between curricula, health and social services, youth and community engagement and development. They do not primarily focus on scores on standardized tests and comparison with others. Given that they have a solid academic foundation, Kirp (2011) writes, community schools can be successful in fulfilling the diverse needs of students. They focus on ensuring that students’ well-being comes before results. Interestingly, community schools in the United States do quite well on standardized tests. As such, putting emphasis on well-being and community can pave the way for academic achievement.

The eastern part of Norway’s capital, Oslo, has an increasing rate of diversity in the form of immigrants and cultures. The socioeconomic situation in parts of this area is significantly different than it is in western Oslo, where the demography is more homogeneous and there are more economic resources. Such schools could benefit from different approaches when it comes to curriculum—goals to achieve and which results are regarded as satisfactory. However, the Norwegian National Curriculum could seem to advocate that every student should achieve the same goals and is rated by the same criteria for success. Kirp (2013) provides an example of how schools can be adapted to their community. He presents a school district that radically changed their curriculum and approach to education. By changing the curriculum and approach to teaching to fit the local demography, they made one of the “worst” school districts into one where students thrived both socially and academically. The approach of this school can be regarded as similar to the argumentation of Freire (2000), who advocates that it is important to question and challenge dominating practices to achieve a better situation for students in schools. The school studied by Kirp coped with its issues of bad results by being-disruptive as they did not conform to the dominating policy of measurement and competition. They changed their situation into something good by not accepting their situation and doing something radically different from what they, and others, had done before.

Research studies on community schools are rarely replicable, but have produced consistently positive results (Kirp, 2011). It is not difficult to understand the lack of replicability in this research. Community schools’ demography and student-body are different from one place to the next. This does not mean that their approach is wrong. That the approach of one community school is not epistemologically true to the outside world does not mean that it should be discarded. It is most important that students feel well and experience skillful coping in these community schools. Maybe one of the things that make these schools work is that they do not put too much emphasis on literacy. Many activities and skills in school do not relate directly to literacy and competence within subjects. Moods, emotions, and well-being of the students could be of equal importance. Students need to cope with their everyday existence in schools not only in relation to subjects but also in relation to other students and teachers. By nurturing these ontological elements of the students’ being-in-the-world, they can provide students with the “shelter from the rain,” (Bauman, 2008, p. 16) mentions. A core argument here is that while a high degree of literacy within subjects might contribute positively toward well-being, well-being might just as well be a contributor toward a high degree of literacy.

The Norwegian Education Act’s §1-3 outlines one of the most important goals of the Norwegian school system. The section says,

Education shall be adapted to the abilities and aptitudes of the individual pupil, apprentice and learning candidate. (Ministry of Education and Research, 2007, p. 6)

The approach of community schools can seem to be coping with this by being-disruptive and taking the risk of thinking differently. If the community school approach is
preferable to traditional schooling, I propose that the section could be changed as follows:

Education should be adapted to the abilities and aptitudes of the community in which the student is a member.

Although community schools may indeed be useful, it could be important to point out that this article does not suggest a complete transition from traditional schooling to the approach of community schools. The idea is that some of the principles of community schools could be fruitful to adopt in traditional schools. It is doubtful that competition and standardized testing will be completely eradicated. Students might always meet some kind of competition (both while in school and after graduation). Regardless, it could be of great importance that they perceive themselves as part of a community while experiencing some competition. In this way, one could say that they have a safe place to fall back on if the demands of competition get too challenging. In addition to adopting some principles from community schools, a more student-centered approach could also be useful. Seligman (2006) presents the term “learned optimism,” a term meant to illustrate that optimism could be learned and nourished. By doing so, the world of students could open up and help them acquire deeper knowledge while at the same time facilitating motivation and desire to learn (also when tasks are challenging). I will not explore this topic in-depth, but it could be connected to the notion of “moods.” If we are to believe that optimism is a mood, optimistic students could develop an increased resilience to pressures from school and society.

Conclusion

In this article, I have discussed how the everyday lives of students are full of uncertainty and competition and that students no longer have the security they need to develop social and academic skills. Disruptions can be both internal and external. Disruptions are not only displayed, but they are also experienced. The norm of uncertainty and competition can have serious consequences for students’ learning and social skills. Being-disrupted and coping by conforming to the norm is understandable. Being-disruptive and taking risks require an amount of bravery. I do not argue that disruptive behavior is positive, but that coping by being-disrupted/being-disruptive involves more than what we can observe and react toward as students and educators. As a final remark, I hope that this article can add to an understanding that disruptive behavior is not only an issue that we can deal with by implementing new rules and recipes. I hope that the interdisciplinary approach applied in this article can serve as a contribution to understanding the complicated issue of disruptive behavior in schools.

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Notes

1. As my German is limited, the article will refer to the English translation of Being and Time, published in 2008.
2. Ungdata includes surveys at the municipal level in Norway. The surveys address adolescent health and well-being.

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