RESEARCH ARTICLE

Phytoplankton Productivity in an Arctic Fjord (West Greenland): Estimating Electron Requirements for Carbon Fixation and Oxygen Production

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Abstract

Accurate quantification of pelagic primary production is essential for quantifying the marine carbon turnover and the energy supply to the food web. Knowing the electron requirement (K) for carbon (C) fixation (K_C) and oxygen (O_2) production (K_O_2), variable fluorescence has the potential to quantify primary production in microalgae, and thereby increasing spatial and temporal resolution of measurements compared to traditional methods. Here we quantify K_C and K_O_2 through measures of Pulse Amplitude Modulated (PAM) fluorometry, C fixation and O_2 production in an Arctic fjord (Godthåbsfjorden, W Greenland). Through short- (2h) and long-term (24h) experiments, rates of electron transfer (ETR_PSII) and/or O_2 production were quantified and compared. Absolute rates of ETR were derived by accounting for Photosystem II light absorption and spectral light composition. Two-hour incubations revealed a linear relationship between ETR_PSII and gross ^14C fixation (R^2 = 0.81) during light-limited photosynthesis, giving a K_C of 7.6 ± 0.6 (mean ± S.E.) mol é (mol C)^{-1}. Diel net rates also demonstrated a linear relationship between ETR_PSII and C fixation giving a K_C of 11.2 ± 1.3 mol é (mol C)^{-1} (R^2 = 0.86). For net O_2 production the electron requirement was lower than for net C fixation giving 6.5 ± 0.9 mol é (mol O_2)^{-1} (R^2 = 0.94). This, however, still is an electron requirement 1.6 times higher than the theoretical minimum for O_2 production [i.e. 4 mol é (mol O_2)^{-1}]. The discrepancy is explained by respiratory activity and non-photochemical electron requirements and the variability is discussed. In conclusion, the bio-optical method and derived electron requirement support conversion of ETR to units of C or O_2, paving the road for improved spatial and temporal resolution of primary production estimates.
**Introduction**

Photosynthesis is the fundamental biological process that converts inorganic carbon into living biomass from solar radiant energy. Through photosynthesis, microalgae primary production fuels the marine food web and its efficiency and dynamics influence the energy supply to higher-trophic levels [1]. Understanding the conversion of the photon flux energy from solar radiation towards fixation of inorganic carbon (CO$_2$) and/or production of oxygen (O$_2$), forms the basis for quantifying the primary production.

Conventionally, O$_2$ production, $^{14}$C and $^{13}$C fixation, techniques have been used to quantify either gross (GPP) or net (NPP) primary production [2–4]. It is, however, still debated what the methods really measures and how to arrive at accurate gross or net primary production rates [5–8]. Traditionally, GPP refers to the fixation of inorganic $^{14}$CO$_2$ without accounting for any carbon (C) losses to respiration, while NPP refers to the $^{14}$CO$_2$ fixation after subtracting the respiratory CO$_2$ ‘lost’ by phytoplankton over a diel cycle [2,9]. Conventionally, it is assumed that short time (1–2h) incubations yield estimates of GPP while NPP is obtained over 24h incubations [10]. However, Williams et al. [7] convincingly showed that 2h incubations can produce NPP estimates, a conclusion supported by Pei and Laws [5].

Productivity can also be measured from a net change in O$_2$ concentration over a diel cycle (24h). This way the measure includes the respiratory O$_2$ consumption of the heterotrophic community of the sample including phytoplankton itself and is defined as the Net Community Production (NCP) [10]. In many marine systems, including the Arctic, low phytoplankton biomass limits the application of $^{14}$C and ΔO$_2$ techniques to longer incubation times, i.e. 24 hours. And as of today, marine primary production estimates are primarily based on discrete bottle measurements of GPP or NPP with a limited spatial and temporal resolution, with an unquantified degree of uncertainty and the risk of bottle effects [6,11].

Pulse Amplitude Modulated (PAM) fluorescence [12] or Fast Repetition Rate fluorometry (FRRf) [13,14] provide a non-invasive and fast assessment of the conversion of the photon flux to a rate of electron transfer (ETR) in Photosystem II (PSII). Such variable fluorometry methods can be applied in situ and represent an alternative measuring approach for photosynthetic activity in phytoplankton. Variable fluorescence can provide a high temporal (seconds) and spatial resolutions compared to traditional bottle incubations. Thus, if ETR can be converted to GPP or NPP based on an adequate understanding of the intermediate processes and on empirical evidence, variable fluorescence can be applied for primary production estimates in absolute terms [15]. Such knowledge enables the assessment of primary productivity with a high temporal resolution, and potentially enables the use of moorings and glider platforms for efficient and large-scale assessment of marine primary productivity.

Conversion of ETR to C fixation or O$_2$ production is, however, still challenging [15–17]. The relationship between ETR and C fixation/O$_2$ production has been compared in a range of studies on algal cultures and pelagic ecosystems and generally linear correlations are documented between ETR and gross C fixation and/or O$_2$ production [18–21]. Deviations are reported under extreme conditions as for instance very high or low light conditions [22,23], extreme temperature [22,24], or nutrient stress [25,26]. Discrepancies have been proposed to be caused by changes in O$_2$ consumption in the light, cyclic electron transport around PSII and I, Mehler-type reactions, and electron requirements for nutrient uptake and cellular maintenance. In some studies the interrelations between ETR and C fixation/O$_2$ production have also been shown to be species-specific [20,24,26].

Lately, focus has been increasingly directed towards deriving the electron requirement for photosynthesis [15,17,20,21]. Lawrenz et al. [15] compiled a large amount of ETR data obtained using FRRf instruments and compared them to available $^{14}$C uptake rates across
different regions. They arrived at a mean electron requirement for carbon fixation of 10.9 ± 6.9 mol e (mol C)⁻¹, overall ranging from 1.2 to 54.2 mol e (mol C)⁻¹. The large variability partly originates from the multiple experimental approaches included in the study and the varying accuracy in the assessment of the light absorption by PSII. Still only few studies have focused on deriving the electron requirement for carbon fixation and oxygen production applying PAM fluorescence [21], none including both short and long term incubations. Comparisons of PAM versus FRRf measurements have shown a close relationship between the two, but with FRRf overestimating primary production relative to PAM measurements [21]. Essential for the conversion of ETR to absolute rates of primary production is an accurate assessment of the PSII-specific light absorption and of the available spectral irradiance. Only few studies have sufficiently included this when PAM derived quantum yields are converted to absolute units of ETR [17,21].

In the present study, we investigated the relationship between photosynthetic electron transport rate, ¹⁴C and ¹³C fixation, and O₂ production of the natural phytoplankton community in the inner and outer part of an Arctic fjord. The aim was to quantify the electron requirement for gross and net carbon fixation and NCP in a natural low-biomass pelagic ecosystem. Through careful assessment of the PSII-specific light absorption and incubator spectral irradiance, absolute rates of ETR were derived and compared to measured rates of C fixation and O₂ production. Variability of the electron requirement and photosynthetic efficiency is discussed along with the potential for applying PAM fluorescence for assessing in situ productivity in marine systems.

Theory

In this section, we present how ETR and GPP can be calculated in absolute terms from PAM measurements when combined with knowledge of the absolute rate of photons absorbed by photosystem II.

Gross photosynthesis from variable fluorescence (PPₜₜ) can be quantified in absolute units of C (PPₜₜₐₜ, mmol C L⁻¹ s⁻¹) or O₂ (PPₜₜₐ₂, mmol O₂ L⁻¹ s⁻¹) from the knowledge of the quantum yield of charge separation in PSII (Φₚₛᵢᵢ), the spectrally-weighted specific absorption of photons in PSII (aₚₛᵢᵢ, m⁻¹), the integrated incident irradiance (Eₚₐᵣᵢ), and the electron requirement for C or O₂ (Kₓ), respectively (Eq 1)[27,28].

\[
P_{ₜₜ,X} = \Phi_{ₚₛᵢᵢ} \times a_{ₚₛᵢᵢ} \times E_{ₚₐᵣᵢ} \times \frac{1}{K_X}
\]

Where Eₚₐᵣᵢ is the integrated Photosynthetic Available Radiation between 400 and 700 nm, and Kₓ is the electron requirement for carbon fixation (Kₐ) or oxygen production (Kₒ₂), respectively, in units mol electrons (mol C fixed or O₂ produced)⁻¹. Note, that the spectral distribution of Eₚₐᵣᵢ, i.e. E(λ), is here included in aₚₛᵢᵢ (see below, Fig 1). By normalizing aₚₛᵢᵢ to the Chlorophyll a (chl a) concentration [denoted aₚₛᵢᵢ] productivity is given in units per chl a, which is convenient for comparing rates across different environments and biomass abundances (Eq 2).

\[
P'_{ₜₜ,X} = \Phi_{ₚₛᵢᵢ} \times a'_{ₚₛᵢᵢ} \times E_{ₚₐᵣᵢ} \times \frac{1}{K_X}
\]

Here we introduce the symbol K (Greek Capital letter Kappa) for the electron requirement for C fixation (Kₐ) or O₂ production (Kₒ₂), respectively. Previously in the literature, the symbol Φₑₙₑ has been used for the electron requirement for carbon fixation [15,21]. However, in
photosynthetic research most often \( \Phi \) refers to a quantum yield of a process \([\text{mol product} \ (\text{mol photons absorbed})^{-1}]\), being the reciprocal of the quantum requirement \([\text{mol photons} \ (\text{mol product})^{-1}]\). Thus, we consider using \( \Phi \) to be counterintuitive and instead prefer applying the symbol \( \mathcal{K} \) to describe the electron requirement for photosynthetic carbon fixation or \( \text{O}_2 \) production.

The quantum yield of charge separation in PSII \( (\Phi_{\text{PSII}}) \), also often named the quantum efficiency of photosynthesis, can be measured from variable fluorescence, e.g. using a Pulse-Amplitude-Modulated (PAM) fluorometer that measures the conversion efficiency of photons to electrons in PSII [12]. Measurements of the quantum efficiency rely on measuring the ratio between the minimum and maximum PSII fluorescence before and after a saturation pulse, which is why the quantum efficiency arrives on a biomass independent scale between zero and one; one being the theoretical maximum value given that all photons absorbed by PSII yields an electron transport. Typically the maximum quantum yield for marine algae is 0.5 to 0.8 and species dependent [24,29].

The absorption of photons in PSII \( [\bar{a}^*_{\text{PSII}}, \text{m}^2 \ (\text{mg chl} a)^{-1}] \) can be quantified using a spectrally-resolved bio-optical approach, combining information of the phytoplankton absorption spectrum \( [a(\lambda)] \), the chl \( a \) concentration \( [\text{chl} a, \text{mg} \text{m}^{-3}] \), the spectral light quality \( [E(\lambda)/E_{\text{PAR}}, \text{dimensionless}] \), and the absorption ratio of PSII to the total absorption \( [a^*_{\text{PSII}}: a^*, \text{dimensionless}] \) (Fig 1) [27].

First, \( a(\lambda)/\text{chl} a \) can be determined using standard spectrophotometric methods [30,31]. After normalization to chl \( a \), \( a^*(\lambda) \) is spectrally weighted to the spectrum of the light source \( [E(\lambda)/E_{\text{PAR}}] \) according to Eq 3 [32,33].

\[
\bar{a}^* = \frac{\sum_{400}^{700} a^* (\lambda) \times E(\lambda) d\lambda}{E_{\text{PAR}}}
\]

Secondly, the ratio of absorbed quanta in PSII \( (a^*_{\text{PSII}}: a^*) \) can be obtained from measuring the fluorescence excitation spectrum [34] and scale it to \( a^*(\lambda) \), by applying the ‘non-overshoot’ procedure [27,35]. This procedure quantifies the spectral absorption in PSII, which includes the light absorption by light-harvesting pigments associated with PSII but excluding photo-protective carotenoids and light-harvesting pigments associate with PSI. Obtaining the phytoplankton fluorescence excitation spectrum is, however, cumbersome and requires a scanning
spectro-fluorometer with is not available to most research laboratories. A simple alternative to
determining the PSII-specific absorption is to multiply $\tilde{a}^*$ with the fraction of quanta absorbed
in PSII to the total absorption ($a^*_{\text{PSII}} \cdot \tilde{a}^*$) (Fig 1). This procedure is applied here. It requires
the knowledge of the ratio $a^*_{\text{PSII}} / C_{22}$, which is specific to phytoplankton pigment-classes, but can be
found in a comprehensive investigation of 33 species of phytoplankton representing 12 pig-
ment classes [36].

Finally, the PSII-specific absorption coefficient ($a^*_{\text{PSII}}$) is calculated from Eq 4.

$$a^*_{\text{PSII}} = \tilde{a}^* \cdot (a^*_{\text{PSII}} / a^*)$$

(4)

If excluding $K_X$ from Eq 2 the equation calculates the electron transfer rate through PSII in
absolute units (Eq 5, $ETR_{\text{PSII}}$, mol $\epsilon$ (mg chl $a$)$^{-1}$ time$^{-1}$).

$$ETR^*_{\text{PSII}} = \Phi_{\text{PSII}} \times a^*_{\text{PSII}} \times F_{\text{PAR}}$$

(5)

Here we aim to quantify $K_C$ and $K_{O2}$ from measures of $P^*_{\text{PSII,C}}$ and $P^*_{\text{PSII,O2}}$. Thus reorgan-
izing Eq 2 and 5, the electron requirement can be calculated (Eq 6):

$$K_X = \frac{ETR^*_{\text{PSII}}}{F^*_{\text{PSII,X}}}$$

(6)

In the following, we estimate $ETR^*_{\text{PSII}}$ in absolute units [mmol $\epsilon$ (mg chl $a$)$^{-1}$ h$^{-1}$] and the
rates of O$_2$ production and C fixation to derive the electron requirement for O$_2$ production
and C fixation, respectively.

**Materials and Methods**

**Study area and experimental setup**

Water was sampled in the Arctic Godthåbsfjord in West Greenland, during August-September
2013. Samples were taken at two stations, GF3 and GF7 representing the outer and inner part
of the fjord system, respectively. The two stations are part of the marine monitoring program
MARINBÁSIS maintained by the Greenland Institute of Natural Resources and the University
of Aarhus (www.nuuk-basic.dk). Water was sampled in the euphotic zone at 5 and 20m depth
with a 5L Niskin water sampler, screened through a > 280 um mesh to remove large zooplank-
ton and transported to the laboratory within 1 to 2 hours. In total ~120L of water was sampled
at each station.

In situ profiles of conductivity, temperature, depth (CTD), chl $a$ fluorescence,
optical turbidity and downwelling spectral irradiance were obtained at each station using
a free-falling Optical Profiler II (Satlantic, Halifax, Canada). Geographical position, sampling
date, in situ water temperature, salinity and light availability are given in Table 1.

The concentration of NO$_3^−$+NO$_2^−$, collectively termed NO$_3^−$, was determined as NO on a
NOx analyzer (Model 42C, Thermo Environmental Instruments Inc.) after reduction to NO in
hot Vanadium Chloride [37]. PO$_4^{3−}$ and NH$_4^+$ were determined by standard colorimetric
methods [38] on a Shimadzu UV-1800 spectrophotometer. Concentrations are given in
Table 1.

In the laboratory water samples were incubated at light-limited (~40 μmol photons m$^{-2}$ s$^{-1}$)
and light-saturated (~500 μmol photons m$^{-2}$ s$^{-1}$) conditions in two large water bath incubators
(100 x 100 x 15cm) kept close to in situ temperature (6°C) by a thermostat controlled heater,
both installed inside a cooling container (~2°C). The large surface area of the incubator ensured
a homogeneous illumination by halogen light sources of incubated bottles for $^{13}$C and $^{14}$C fixa-
tion, O$_2$ production and ETR$_{\text{PSII}}$. The specific scalar irradiance ($E_{\text{PAR}}$) of each incubated bottle
was measured using a small $4\pi$ scalar irradiance sensor connected to a light meter (ULM-500,
Walz). The spectral composition of the incubator light was measured using the surface unit from the Satlantic Optical Profiler II. The specific irradiance and the spectral composition of the incubator light were used for further calculations of the light absorption by phytoplankton, see below. Twenty-four hour incubations were performed under an 8:8:8 hour light:dark:light regime to mimic the natural light conditions with a day length of ~16 hours (and an ~8 hours night period), as incubations were started around noon. In addition, the approach avoided light exposure times of >8 hours (discussed below).

### Bio-optics, chl a and light microscopy

Optical densities of total particulate matter (ODt, 300–800 nm) was measured from 1 liter of sea water filtered onto GF/F glass fiber filters (Whatman Inc., Florham Park, NJ, USA) in a spectrophotometer (Shimadzu UV-2401PC UV-Vis) equipped with an integrating sphere (ISR-240A) as described by Staehr and Markager [39]. Triplicate filters were used and each filter was measured three times in order to minimize noise. Values above 750 nm were subtracted. Total spectral absorption of suspended particles was obtained by the scattering correction method [40].

\[
a_t(\lambda) = 2.303 \times S \times OD_{flt}(\lambda) \times [0.378 + 0.523 \times OD_{flt}(\lambda)]/V
\]

where \(a_t\) is the total absorption coefficient of particles, \(S\) is the clearance area of the GF/F filter (m²), \(V\) is the filtered volume (m³) and \([0.378 + 0.523 \times OD_{flt}(\lambda)]\) is the beta-factor correcting for a longer path length in the filter compared to suspension. The in vivo phytoplankton absorption spectrum \([a_{ph}(\lambda), \text{m}^{-1}]\) was then determined according to [30]:

\[
a_{ph}(\lambda) = a_t(\lambda) - a_{NAP}(\lambda)
\]

Where \(a_{NAP}\) is the absorption coefficient of non-algae particles, i.e. detritus and the non-pigmented parts of phytoplankton, after extraction in methanol. The chl a-specific absorption was then calculated from [31]:

\[
a^{*}(\lambda) = a_{ph}(\lambda)/[\text{chl } a]
\]

The spectrally weighted chl a-specific absorption \((a^{*}, \text{m}^2 (\text{mg chl } a)^{-1})\), and the spectrally weighted PSII-specific absorption \((a^{*}_{PSII})\) were calculated from Eqs 3 and 4, respectively. The Chl a concentration (mg m\(^{-3}\)) was measured from 300 mL of sea water filtered onto GF/F glass fiber filters (Whatman) extracted in 10 mL 96% ethanol during 24h (dark, 4°C). The concentration was determined in triplets using a pre-calibrated fluorometer (Turner Designs TD-700).
Water samples were collected for phytoplankton cell count and species identification, and were fixed with LUGOL (neutral, 1% final solution). The samples were analyzed in a light microscope using a Palmer Maloney chamber (0.1 mL) and after filtering through a 0.45 um polycarbonate filter (50 mL).

PAM fluorescence

The quantum yield of charge separation in PSII (ΦPSII) was measured using a PhytoPAM variable fluorometer (System I, Walz, Effeltrich, Germany, Schreiber et al. [12]), equipped with a sensitive Photomultiplier-Detector (PM-101P, Walz). Minimum (F₀) and steady state (Fₛ) fluorescence excitation was obtained using a weak and non-actinic modulated light supplied by a LED (light emitting diode, Array-Cone PHYTO-ML, Walz, Germany) during darkness or at the incubation irradiance, respectively. The maximum fluorescence (Fₘₐₓ) was obtained during a red saturating light pulse (0.8s >1800 μmol m⁻² s⁻¹, Actinic LED-Array-Cone PHYTO-AL, Walz) ensuring that all PSII reaction centers were closed. The instrument excites fluorescence at four different wavelengths; however, in the present study we used data only from the red light excitation (665 nm), to exclude potential inter-sample differences in the light-harvesting pigments to chl a ratio. We use the nomenclature by van Kooten and Snel [41]. The maximum quantum yield of charge separation (ΦPSII_max) was calculated according to Eq 10 [42] after subtraction of the blank fluorescence, measured from a 0.2 μm filtered water sample:

\[
Φ_{PSII_{max}} = \frac{F_m - F_o}{F_m} 
\]

Under actinic illumination, the operational quantum yield (ΦPSII) was calculated from the steady-state fluorescence (Fₛ) and the maximum fluorescence after a saturation pulse (Fₘₐₓ), by replacing F₀ and Fᵢ with Fₛ and Fₘₐₓ, respectively in Eq 10. When ΦPSII was quantified in samples incubated in the water bath a subsample was transferred to the PAM cuvette and measured within a few seconds. PAR inside the PAM cuvette was adjusted to match PAR of the incubator for each step of the light gradient after measuring the irradiance with a 4π scalar irradiance sensor and light meter (ULM-500, Walz). The spectral composition of the PAM cuvette incubation light was measured using the surface unit of the Satlantic Optical Profiler II.

ETR versus irradiance (P-E) curves were calculated from the instantaneous quantum yield in samples after 2 hours of incubation in 100 mL Winkler bottles, in a light gradient. The quantum yield was measured in the exact same bottles from which ¹⁴C fixation was measured (see below). The P-E curves were fitted from Eq 11 [43], as no photoinhibition was observed. The maximum photosynthetic rate (Pₘₐₓ), the light utilization coefficient (α) and the light saturation index (Eₛ) was calculated; Eₛ = Pₘₐₓ/α. Curve fitting was carried out using ordinary least-squares criterion in Origin 8.5 (OriginLab).

\[
P = P_{max} \times [1 - \exp(-α×E_{PAR}/P_{max})] 
\]
(UltimaGold+) the samples were measured on a PerkinElmer scintillation counter. The dissolved fraction of fixed $^{14}$C was measured by collecting two duplicate 5 mL samples of filtrate from each Winkler bottle following the protocol by Moran et al. (2001). The dissolved $^{14}$C fixation was finally added to the particulate pool. The dark bottle activity was subtracted from the light bottles.

$^{13}$C fixation

Diel rates of carbon fixation was measured from the $^{13}$C incorporation over a 24h time period according to Yun et al. [45], and normalized to the chl $a$ concentration ($P/C_{3}$). Briefly, $^{13}$C bicarbonate was added to the sea water before incubation to a concentration of 200 μM in triplicate 500 mL square Nalgene polycarbonate bottles and incubated as described above. The initial DIC concentration was assumed to be 2 mM (see above). After the incubation the algae were filtered onto pre-combusted GF/F filters (Whatman). Filters were dried at 50°C for 48 hours before analysed for the content of $^{13}$C on a Thermo Elemental Analyser Flash EA 1112HT in line with a Thermo Delta Plus V isotope ratio mass spectrometer.

$O_2$ production

Diel rates of the net community production ($P_{O_2}$, equal to NCP) were measured from the change of $O_2$ concentration over a 24h time period under an 8:8:8 hour light:dark:light regime in the incubator. Incubations were done in five 100 mL glass Winkler bottles for each treatment (high and low light). For each incubation, five Winkler bottles were preserved with 1 mL 7 M ZnCl$_2$ at the start and the incubated bottles were preserved after 24 hours incubation. The preserved bottles were stored in a water bath at ca. 5°C until analysis which was done within 24 hours of ZnCl$_2$ addition.

Oxygen concentration was determined using a Clark type $O_2$ microsensor [46] with a micro flow cell mounted on the tip. Water was drawn through the flow cell by gravity by keeping the surface of the source water 45 cm above the outlet. Once the flow path was filled with sample water the difference in pressure between inlet and outlet maintained a steady flow of 4 mL/min. The sample temperature was adjusted before entering the flow cell by passing through a 75cm coil of 1/16” steel tubing, that was positioned with the sensor and flow cell in a temperature controlled water bath (5.0°C ± 0.1°C). The $O_2$ sensor was calibrated before and after the analysis of each sample. The calibration water was prepared as follows: Two liter of tap water was adjusted to within 50 μM of the expected sample $O_2$ concentration and transferred to a gas-tight plastic bag [47], where after all bubbles were removed and 20 mL 7 M ZnCl$_2$ was added to stop biological activity. The bag water was mixed and placed in the water bath to secure a stable temperature. The plastic bag was connected via a three way valve to the flow path upstream from the steel tubing coil. Tygon tubing was used throughout this setup. During analysis the three way valve was turned every 120 seconds, alternating between drawing sample and calibration water though the flow cell on the $O_2$ sensor, and the signal was read as the average of the last five seconds of each interval. The microsensor was connected to a Unisense PA2000 picoammeter and the signal was recorded using Unisense Sensortrace Basic and a Unisense ADC-216USB A/D converter.

Results

Algae composition and bio-optics

Light-microscopic analyses showed that the outer fjord station, GF3, was dominated by diatoms (Chaetoceros sp.) and smaller flagellates (Cryptophyceae sp. <15μm). The distributions between the two were 75:25% diatoms:flagellates in the surface (5m), and 15:85% in the lower
Table 2. Bio-optical input parameters.

| Station | Depth | Chl a | a* | a*PSII/a* | a*PSII | a*PSII | a*PSII | a*PSII | a*PSII | a*PSII |
|---------|-------|-------|----|-----------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| #       | M     | mg m⁻³ | m² (mg Chl a)⁻¹ | ratio | m² (mg Chl a)⁻¹ | m² (mg Chl a)⁻¹ | m² (mg Chl a)⁻¹ | m² (mg Chl a)⁻¹ | m² (mg Chl a)⁻¹ |
| GF3     | 5     | 1.2 ± 0.4 | 0.0150 | 0.68 | 0.0108 | 0.0127 | 0.0158 | 0.0073 | 0.0086 | 0.0107 |
| GF3     | 20    | 1.8 ± 0.1 | 0.0144 | 0.67 | 0.0099 | 0.0110 | 0.0149 | 0.0067 | 0.0074 | 0.0101 |
| GF7     | 5     | 1.9 ± 0.1 | 0.0143 | 0.74 | 0.0097 | 0.0106 | 0.0146 | 0.0072 | 0.0079 | 0.0108 |
| GF7     | 20    | 2.4 ± 0.1 | 0.0104 | 0.76 | 0.0068 | 0.0074 | 0.0106 | 0.0052 | 0.0057 | 0.0081 |

Chlorophyll a (chl a) concentrations (mean ± S.D.), chl a-specific absorption coefficient (a*), ratio of absorbed quanta in PSII (a*PSII/a*), spectrally weighted absorption coefficients (a*), and the PSII-specific weighted absorption coefficient (a*PSII) for the incubated samples and applied incubators (i.e. the water bath incubator and internal cuvette of the PAM instrument).

a High Light
b Low Light
doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0133275.t002

Euphotic zone (20m). The inner fjord station, GF7, was by far dominated by diatoms (>99%, Chaetoceros sp. and Thalassiosira sp.) with a minor presence of dinoflagellates (<1%, Gymnodinium sp. and Scripsiella sp.) at both 5 and 20 m. By classifying the phytoplankton in pigment groups based on their light-harvesting pigment signature, the fraction of absorbed quanta in PSII (a*PSII/a*) was derived, using the work by Johnsen and Sakshaug [36].

For diatoms, a*PSII/a* equals 0.76 and 0.74 for low and high light growth, respectively, whereas cryptophytes have a a*PSII/a* of 0.66 and 0.45 under low and high light, respectively [36]. Using these ratios we quantified a*PSII/a* for the sampled phytoplankton population (Table 2). The calculated a*PSII/a* ranged from 0.67 to 0.76 (dimensionless) and was used in the calculation of the PSII-specific light absorption (Eq 4).

Phytoplankton chl a-specific in vivo absorption coefficients (a*) ranged from 0.0104 to 0.0150 m² (mg chl a)⁻¹ demonstrating the natural variability of the light harvesting properties of the algae community, with chl a concentrations ranging from 1.2 to 2.4 mg m⁻³ (Table 2). The in vivo absorption spectra, along with the spectral scalar irradiance of the incubator light source (E(\lambda)/E_PAM), and the derived spectrally weighted absorption spectra [\bar{a} (\lambda)] are shown in Fig 2. Irradiance and weighted-absorption spectra are shown for both the incubator light source and the internal actinic light source of the PhytoPAM instrument (Fig 2B+2C). The absorption weighted to the internal PAM light source was used to calculate PPSII, while the weighted absorption from the incubator light was used to correct production rates comparing PPSII with P_C and P_O2. The weighted PSII-specific absorption coefficients (\bar{a}PSII) ranged from 0.0052 and 0.0108 m² (mg chl a)⁻¹ between samples and incubator light sources and are given in Table 2.

Short-term incubations (2h)

The electron requirement for gross ¹⁴C fixation was measured from simultaneous rates of gross electron transfer (ETRPSII, mmol e⁻ (mg chl a)⁻¹ h⁻¹) and gross ¹⁴C fixation (mmol C (mg chl a)⁻¹ h⁻¹) from the same bottles, incubated with surface water (5m) for 2 hours in an irradiance gradient (0 to 600 μmol photons m⁻² s⁻¹, Fig 3). The experiment was repeated two times for each of the two stations (no replicates). The P-E curves demonstrated minor differences between stations, but a somewhat different curvature of the relationship between methods, with a relatively steeper α for ¹⁴C fixation. The difference in curvature resulted in 2–3 times higher E_k for ETRPSII than for ¹⁴C fixation. The photosynthetic parameters E_k, P_max, and α are given in Table 3.
The short-term (2h) incubations revealed a significant linear relationship between C fixation and ETRPSII during light-limited condition (EPAR < Ek, corresponding to an ETRPSII < 2 mmol é (mg chl a)⁻¹ h⁻¹), giving a slope coefficient of 0.13 ± 0.014 mol C (mol é)⁻¹. This corresponded to an electron requirement for gross carbon fixation of 7.6 ± 0.6 mol é (mol C)⁻¹ (R² = 0.85, P < 0.001, Fig 4). Inclusion of light-saturated samples lead to a non-linear relationship with ETRPSII exceeding the 14C fixation under high light conditions (E > Ek), that could be described applying a simple inverted exponential decay function (Fig 4). The equation parameters are given in the figure. The dissolved fraction of fixed 14C amounted to 18 ± 26% (data not shown) of the total and is accounted for in the assessments of the gross 14C fixation. In the following section we apply the electron requirement for the light-limited carbon fixation (i.e. 7.6 mol é (mol C)⁻¹) to investigate the relationship between P⁺PSII, P⁺C and P⁺O₂ during 24h incubations.

**Fig 2. Variability in phytoplankton absorption spectra, incubator light quality and spectrally-weighted absorption.** A) Chl a-specific in vivo absorption spectra [a*(λ)] at sampled stations and depths, B) spectral irradiance of the incubator light sources [E(λ)], and C) the spectrally-weighted chl a-specific absorption of phytoplankton at GF7 (5m), corrected for E(λ) in the water bath (green) and for the internal light source of the PhytoPAM (blue). Integrated values for a* and a’ are given in Table 2.

doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0133275.g002
Variability of $\Phi_{\text{PSII}}$ and diel primary production (24h)

Electron requirement for net C fixation and NCP was investigated by applying long-term (24h) incubation experiments with a natural light-dark cycle. Triplicate samples from surface water...
From the lower euphotic zone (20m) were incubated simultaneously, the former under light-saturated (EPAR ~500 \( \mu \text{mol m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1} \)) conditions, and the latter under light-saturated and light-limited (EPAR = 40 \( \mu \text{mol m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1} \)) conditions. These incubator irradiances correspond to the natural light intensities of a clear-sky day at the sampled depths (Table 1).

**Table 3. Fitting parameters for gross photosynthesis.**

| Station | Depth | Method | Pmax* | S.E. | alpha* | S.E. | R²  | Ek* |
|---------|-------|--------|-------|------|--------|------|-----|-----|
| GF3     | 5     | ETR    | 3.20  | 0.17 | 0.0215 | 0.003| 0.95| 149.2|
| GF7     | 5     | ETR    | 3.98  | 0.26 | 0.0224 | 0.003| 0.96| 177.9|
| GF3     | 5     | 14C    | 0.17  | 0.02 | 0.0035 | 0.001| 0.83| 47.8 |
| GF7     | 5     | 14C    | 0.23  | 0.02 | 0.0038 | 0.001| 0.76| 59.9 |

Photosynthesis versus irradiance (PE) parameters for 2h simultaneous measurements of ETR\(_{\text{PSII}}\) and \(^{14}\text{C}\) fixation, derived from least square regression of the Webb equation (data in Fig 3, Eq 11).

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\(\text{ETR}^*_{\text{PSII}}\) in mmol \(\text{é (mg chl a)}^{-1} \text{ h}^{-1}\) and of \(^{14}\text{C}\) fixation in mmol \(\text{C (mg chl a)}^{-1} \text{ h}^{-1}\)

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\(\alpha\) units of ETR\(_{\text{PSII}}^*\) in mmol \(\text{é (mg chl a)}^{-1} \text{ h}^{-1} \text{ (µmol photon m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1})^{-1}\) and of \(^{14}\text{C}\) in mmol \(\text{C (mg chl a)}^{-1} \text{ h}^{-1} \text{ (µmol photon m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1})^{-1}\)

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\(\text{Ek}\) units in \(\mu\text{mol photon m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}\).
First, the temporal variability of \( \Phi_{\text{PSII}} \) with incubation time was investigated over the light-dark cycle. The dark acclimated maximum \( \Phi_{\text{PSII}} \) ranged from 0.55 to 0.65 while \( \Phi_{\text{PSII}} \) was ~0.3 under high-light conditions (Fig 5A). Under low-light conditions (40 \( \mu \text{mol photons m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1} \)) \( \Phi_{\text{PSII}} \) was ~0.6 and the maximum \( \Phi_{\text{PSII}} \) was similar to the values at high-light (data not shown). Thus, \( \Phi_{\text{PSII}} \) show the same trend and temporal variability during high and low light conditions. The response of \( \Phi_{\text{PSII}} \) to a change from darkness to light, and verse versa, showed a fast acclimation response (<0.5h) and little variability during light hours (8h). The corresponding relative ETR (rETR) showed a steady electron generation in the light and obviously none during darkness (Fig 5B). The result demonstrated a stable ETR over time within the incubation period. As bottles for ETR, C fixation and \( \text{O}_2 \) production were incubated simultaneously under the same conditions, it is reasonable to assume a linear relationship also for C fixation and \( \text{O}_2 \) production rates during incubations [6,48].

Diel primary production rates (\( \mu \text{mol L}^{-1} \text{d}^{-1} \)) derived using the three methods are shown in Fig 6. The methods agreed well with one another at both 5 and 20m depths under both light-saturated and light-limited conditions, and between stations, with a minor suppression of \( \text{P}_C \) relative to \( \text{P}_{\text{PSII}} \) and \( \text{P}_{\text{O2}} \) at the 20m_HL treatment. The difference between methods was tested using two-sided paired t-tests between each method, and showed no significant difference between \( \text{P}_{\text{PSII}}, \text{P}^\text{C} \) nor \( \text{P}_{\text{O2}} \) (\( P > 0.05 \), performed using the build-in statistical routines in Origin 8.5, OriginLab). In detail, the difference between \( \text{P}_{\text{PSII}} \) and \( \text{P}_C \) were not significantly related to neither light intensity (\( P = 0.42 \), two-side t-test), water depth (\( P = 0.08 \)) or station (\( P = 0.20 \)). Neither was the difference between \( \text{P}_{\text{PSII}} \) and \( \text{P}_{\text{O2}} \) significantly related to light intensity (\( P = 0.21 \), two-side t-test), water depth (\( P = 0.45 \)) or station (\( P = 0.20 \)). Consequently, data were pooled across light intensity, depth and stations in order to quantify the relationship between \( \text{P}^*_{\text{PSII}}, \text{P}^*_{\text{C}} \) and \( \text{P}^*_{\text{O2}} \) (Fig 7). For this application the productivity was normalized to \( \text{chl} \) to correct for the difference in biomass between depths and stations.

Fig 7A shows a linear regression between \( \text{P}^*_{\text{PSII}} \) and \( \text{P}^*_{\text{C}} \) with a slope coefficient of 1.4 ± 0.15 (mean ± SE, \( R^2 = 0.86, P < 0.001 \)), which demonstrated a 1.4 times higher electron requirement for net carbon fixation than for gross carbon fixation. This implies a mean electron requirement for net C fixation of 10.9 ± 1 mol é (mol C)\(^{-1} \). Comparing \( \text{P}^*_{\text{PSII}} \) and \( \text{P}^*_{\text{O2}} \) demonstrated a slope coefficient of 0.86 ± 0.12 (mean ± SE, \( R^2 = 0.94, P < 0.001 \)) corresponding to an electron requirement for net \( \text{O}_2 \) production of 6.5 ± 0.9 mol é (mol \( \text{O}_2 \))\(^{-1} \) (Fig 7B). This is an electron requirement ~14% lower than for the gross C fixation

Plotting \( \text{P}^*_{\text{O2}} \) versus \( \text{P}^*_{\text{C}} \) yielded a slope coefficient of 1.6 ± 0.53 (mean ± SE, \( R^2 = 0.75, P = 0.02 \)) that demonstrated higher net \( \text{O}_2 \) production rates than net carbon fixation rates across all samples (Fig 7C), i.e. the Photosynthetic Quotient (PQ).

**Discussion**

In this paper, we estimate the electron requirement for C fixation and \( \text{O}_2 \) production in phytoplankton in an Arctic fjord under post bloom conditions. Crucial to the calculation of ETR\(_{\text{PSII}} \) in absolute units is to quantify the amount of photons absorbed in PSII accurately. Hancke et al. [27] demonstrated a bio-optical approach to correct standard phytoplankton absorption measurements for the fraction of absorbed quanta in PSII \( \alpha_{\text{PSII}}/\alpha \). By weighting the absorption spectrum to the spectral quality of the incubator light source [35] they furthermore calculated and accounted for the PSII-specific absorption. Here we apply a simplified approach without using a sophisticated spectrophotometer, but by applying published values for the fraction of PSII absorption determined for representative taxonomic groups [36]. By accounting for the phytoplankton light absorption and spectral irradiance of the incubator light (both of the waterbath incubator and inside the PAM cuvette), we calculate the PSII-specific
Fig 5. Variability of the photosynthetic efficiency during the 24h laboratory incubations. An example of (A) \( \Phi_{\text{PSII}} \) as a function of incubation time during the 8:8:8 hour light:dark:light regime, and the (B) corresponding relative electron transfer rate (rETR = \( \Phi_{\text{PSII}} \times E_{\text{PAR}} \)). Data are from GF7 5m incubated in the bath water (closed symbols, mean ± standard deviation, \( n = 3 \)). Open symbols represent continuous measurements (every 15 min) of a subsample incubated inside the PAM fluorometer and shows the variability of \( \Phi_{\text{PSII}} \) under stable conditions. The latter was stable over time and the slope coefficient was not statistically different from zero, ANOVA \( P >> 0.05 \).

doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0133275.g005
Electron requirement for gross carbon fixation

Empirical evidence from a range of aquatic systems demonstrates a linear relation relationship between ETR and rates of C fixation and/or O₂ production [20,21,49], however, deviation from linearity have also been reported [17]. The derived electron requirement for primary production seem to express considerable variability and there still is considerable uncertainty about what causes this variability and how it relates to ‘true’ rates of primary production.

We found a consistent relationship between ETRₚₛᵢᵢ and gross C fixation (Fig 4) yielding an electron requirement for gross C fixation of 7.6 ± 0.6 (mean ± SE, mol e⁻ (mol C⁻¹) under light-limited conditions (E_Pₐᵦ < E₀). There exists no exact theoretically defined requirement of electrons for C fixation. However, absolute ETRₚₛᵢᵢ is considered a proxy for the gross photosynthetic rate, and the electrons generated at PSII are closely coupled to the gross O₂ evolution rate from the water splitting complex in PSII [28]. Thus, it is theoretically given that the minimum electron requirement for gross O₂ production, according to the standard Z-scheme of photosynthesis, is 4 electrons per O₂ produced [28,49]. By multiplying this with a PQ of 1.4 produced O₂ per fixed C [50], the minimum electron requirement for gross C fixation accounts.
Fig 7. Relationships between diel rates of primary production derived from ΦPSII, 13C fixation, and O2 production. A) Gross carbon fixation from ΦPSII (P*PSII) versus 13C fixation (P*C), B) P*PSII versus net O2 production (P*O2), and C) P*O2 versus P*C derived from 24h incubations with 16 hours of light (Fig 5). Data are pooled across depth, light intensity and stations (Fig 6). Rates are normalized to chl a and dashed lines are linear regressions, with A) forced through origo.

doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0133275.g007
to 5.6 mol ħ (mol C)^{-1}. Here we found an electron requirement 1.4 times higher than this, which indicate an offset between ETR and C fixation. We speculate that this discrepancy is caused by alternative electron ‘requirements’ along the pathway from PSII to the fixation of carbon in the Calvin Cycle. Likely, these electrons are utilized to cover the energy requirement for nutrient uptake and cellular maintenance, and in Mehler-type reactions, especially at high light conditions [22,49].

Further, it is still debated whether short-term 14C fixation measurements represent NPP or GPP. Current consensus is that short term incubations (1 to 3h) quantify something intermediary to the strictly defined GPP and NPP. The uncertainties are mainly related to respiration of photosynthetically fixed 14C, recycling of respired 14CO2 and its preferential use over external CO2, but also growth rates have shown to impact the balance of NPP versus GPP [5–8]. Longer incubation periods and lower growth rates seem to bias short-term 14C fixation measurements towards representing NPP rather than GPP. For instance, rates measured during 2 hour incubations have shown to underestimate rates obtained during 60 min, and even more during 30 min [51,52]. In the current study we included the dissolved fraction of 14C labeled carbon to the gross C fixation measure, thus it is included in KC for the gross C fixation. The fraction of dissolved to particular 14C uptake we here report are typical for pelagic C fixation [53,54].

For comparison to studies excluding a spectral correction for the incubator light spectrum, we recalculated the data of the present study excluding the spectral correction, which gave a mean KC for gross C fixation of 11.2 mol ħ (mol C)^{-1}, relative to 7.6 mol ħ (mol C)^{-1} when spectrally corrected (Table 4). This gave an overestimation of KC by 1.5 times and a 2-fold increase in the standard error, when excluding the spectral correction. The determined error imposed on KC depends obviously on the spectral quality of the incubator light source and thus varies between studies. The closer the incubator light source is to a ‘perfect white light’ spectrum (also named a ‘flat’ spectrum) the lower is the error introduced in KC. In a field study, Kromkamp et al. [21] derived an electron requirement of 16.8 mol ħ (mol C)^{-1} across seasons from fresh water lakes (Table 4). In this estimate, they included the light absorption jointly for both PSII and PSI but did not correct for the spectral quality of the incubation irradiance. Assuming an equal distribution of the light absorption between PSII and PSI the comparable number to this study would be (16.8 × 0.5) 8.4 mol ħ (mol C)^{-1}. This number is in close agreement with what found here, however theoretically it is overestimating KC by the ratio of [aPSII/aPSI] to 0.5. Kromkamp et al. estimated that correcting for the spectra difference between the red LEDs of the waterPAM actinic light and the natural underwater light field would reduce the estimated C fixation rate by 35%. Thus, the non-spectral corrected electron requirement [8.4 mol ħ (mol C)^{-1}] would be overestimated by 35%.

Comparing KC to previous studies is hampered by difference in measuring procedures and protocols that are used to quantify the absorption of photons in PSII (Eq 1). Table 4 provides values of KC for the minimum electron requirement for C fixation and O2 production derived from the current literature. The table includes only studies that account for the PSII specific absorption, and attempt to express ETR in absolute units. Hancke et al. [24] found a mean KC ranging from 3.9 to 6.2 mol ħ (mol C)^{-1} in mono cultures of different phytoplankton species, while accounting for the applied spectral irradiance and [aPSII/aPSI] (Table 4). Somewhat higher values of KC, ranging from 9.2 to 32.3 mol ħ (mol C)^{-1} are derived from a similar study of Napoleon et al. [26], that accounted for [aPSII/aPSI] but ignored the spectral quality of the incubator light.

Under high light intensities (E >> Ek), we observed a non-linear relationship between ETRP, PSII and the C fixation, (Fig 4). Even though many studies demonstrate a linear relationship, Napoleon and Claquin [17] report of a similar non-linear relationship between C and ETR at EPAR >> Ek, in a field study from the English Channel. They ascribed the non-linear relationship
### Table 4. Mean values of the minimum electron requirement for primary production.

| Method | Region/culture | Species | \(K_{O2}\) | \(K_C\) | Reference |
|--------|----------------|---------|-------------|---------|-----------|
| Same bottle, light gradient, PAM vs ¹³C (2h) | Arctic fjord | Natural phytoplankton community (diatom dominated, flagellates) | - | 7.6+/−0.6 (3.5–11.7) | present study |
| Separate bottles, low and high light, PAM vs O₂ and ¹³C (24h) | Arctic fjord | Natural phytoplankton community (diatom dominated, flagellates) | 6.5+/−0.9 (4.4–10.5) | 10.9+/−1.1 (7.6–15.2) | present study |
| Separate bottles, PAM RLC (55s steps) vs. ¹³C in light gradient (4h) | Pure culture | *Pseudo-nitzschia pungens* | - | 15.5 a,b (11.3–20) | Napoleon et al. (2013)[26] |
| | | *Asterionellopsis glacialis* | - | 19.2 (16.7–40.0) | |
| | | *Heterocapsa sp* | - | 9.2 (6.2–18.2) | |
| | | *Karenia mikimotoi* | - | 32.3 (25.0–46.2) | |
| Separate bottles, PAM RLC (55s steps) vs. ¹³C in light gradient (3h) | English Channel | Natural phytoplankton community (dominated by Diatoms and Dinophytes) | - | 7.2 a (0.4–48.8) | Napoléon and Ciaquin (2012)[17] |
| Separate bottle, PAM PE (5min steps) vs. O₂+¹⁴C PE light gradient (1h) | Pure culture | *Prorocentrum minimum* | 4.5 (3.3–6.4) | 6.2 a (3.8–7.6) | Handke et al. (2008)[24] |
| | | *Pyrrhomonas panum* | 8.8 (5.5–11.8) | 6.1 (4.8–8.2) | |
| | | *Phaeodactylum tricornutum* | 4.9 (3.6–6.3) | 3.9 (3.3–4.8) | |
| Separate bottle, PE curve (10min steps) | Pure culture | *Prorocentrum minimum* | 3.3 (1.7–4.2) | - | Handke et al. (2008)[27] |
| | | *Pyrrhomonas panum* | 7.3 (3.2–11.0) | - | |
| Separate bottles, PAM RLC (60s steps) vs. ¹⁴C light gradient (2h) | Freshwater lake | Cyanobacteria, chlorophytes | - | 8.4 a (4.1–13.2) | Kromkamp et al. (2008)[21] |
| Same bottle, light gradient (4min steps) | Pure culture | *Chlorella vulgaris* | 8.3 (8.1–8.4) | - | Wagner et al. (2006)[64] |
| Separate bottle, PE curve (3min steps) | Pure culture | *Phaeodactylum tricornutum* | 5.4 (4.5–6.3) | - | |
| Separate bottles, PAM RLC (90s steps) vs. ¹⁴C in situ (3h) | Freshwater reservoir | Diatoms, Chlorophytes, Cryptophytes | - | 11.7 (5.1–19.8) | Gilbert et al. (2000)[66] |
| Same bottle, PE curve (10min steps) | Pure culture | *Chlorella vulgaris* | 4.7 a (4.0–5.1) | - | Gilbert et al. (2000)[49] |
| | | *Cryptomonas ovalis* | 3.7 a (3.5–4.3) | - | |
| | | *Cyclotella meneghiniana* | 3.8 a (3.5–4.0) | - | |
| | | *Synechococcus leopoldii* | 4.4 a (3.0–5.3) | - | |

Values (including the range) are derived for C fixation (\(K_C\)) and O₂ production (\(K_{O2}\)) from the present study and current literature by comparing corresponding rates of ETR, and C fixation or O₂ production, respectively. The table includes only studies that estimate ETR\textsubscript{PSII} from PAM measurements in absolute units thus considering the PSII specific absorption.  
\(a\) at \(E<E_k\)  
\(b\) only nutrient repleted cultures  
\(c\) across a temperature gradient (0–30°C). No trend with temperature  
\(d\) derived from 16.8 (8.2–26.4) times 0.5, assuming an equal distribution of the absorbed quanta between PSII and PSI  
\(e\) data from Suggest et al 2011[16]
to alternative electron sinks caused by high irradiance, photo inhibition, Mehler-type reactions and nutrient uptake. In fact, Napoleon and Claquin [17] proposed an empirical algorithm to compensate for this. While the derived parameters apply well ($R^2 = 0.77$) and the study appear thoroughly performed the derived parameterization has little theoretical foundation and cannot \textit{a priori} be assumed to apply across seasons or regions.

**Electron requirement for net carbon fixation and O$_2$ production**

A challenge when comparing rates of ETR$_{PSII}$ and NPP/NCP is to constrain the temporal variations in ETR during the incubation, as ETR is sampled instantaneously and C fixation or O$_2$ production are integrated over the entire incubation. From monitoring ETR (or really $Φ_{PSII}$) during a diel cycle with an 8:8:8 hour light:dark:light period we documented that ETR was stable under constant light, both at high and low light (Fig 5). This suggests that a single measurement after 1 to 2 hours under the desired light regime is sufficient to calculate the productivity for a 24h time period, under laboratory steady state incubations. Consequently, NPP and NCP can be assessed for any desired day-length and irradiance from single $Φ_{PSII}$ measurements (assuming state-state conditions of the cellular light- acclimation processes). This conclusion is in accordance with current understanding of the light acclimation in microalgae, which is categorized in sequential ‘time windows’. The initial light acclimation processes happens within seconds to minutes (e.g. photochemical and non-photochemical quenching), whereas protein synthesis and pigment metabolism occurs on time scales of hours, while metabolic changes occurs on the time scales of generations [7,12,55]. Nymark et al. [55] have shown that despite complex short-term changes on levels of gene transcription, protein synthesis, and pigment metabolism, microalgae are able to secure a relative stable electron transfer rate through the PSII reaction centre for time period $< 12$ hours. This has been explained as an evolutionary mechanism to secure an efficient photosynthetic capacity even under fluctuating light conditions. Changes in ETR, however, occurred after prolonged exposure to high light of $>12$ hours [51,55], which is why we recommend that light:dark shift incubations spanning 24 hours are carried out in a way to avoid light periods longer than 12h. It is beyond the scope of this work to elaborate on the photo acclimation processes in microalgae.

Comparing diel integrated rates of NPP showed a linear relationship between $P^{*}_{PSII}$ and $P^{*}_C$ with a slope coefficient of 1.4 (Fig 7A). Here we have applied the electron requirement for gross C fixation [7.6 mol é (mol C)$^{-1}$] in the calculation of $P^{*}_{PSII}$ to compare with net C fixation rates. The resulting electron requirement for net C fixation of 1.4 times that of gross C fixation [$K_C = 10.9 \pm 1.1$ mol é (mol C)$^{-1}$ ($R^2 = 0.86$)] accounts for the ‘costs’ for metabolic activity and cell maintenance, and includes the fraction of labeled $^{14}$C that recirculates between states of fixed (biomass) and respired (CO$_2$) carbon. Estimates of NPP using variable fluorescence rely on the precision and the potential variability of $K_C$. Here we estimated $P_{PSII}$ from triplicated bottles; and in each bottle $Φ_{PSII}$ was measured 4 to 6 times over the 24h incubation. Across the entire data set the coefficient of variance was 4.2 and 16.3% for low and high light, respectively. The 4 times higher variance at high light is related to the inherent decrease in the signal to noise ratio of $Φ_{PSII}$ with increasing irradiance. The variability of $a^{*}_{PSII}$ is on the same order, while the precision of the irradiance measurements are much better ($<1\%$) assuming careful measurements with a calibrated sensor. Thus, we conclude that at the applied settings the NPP was estimated from absolute PAM ($Φ_{PSII}$) measurements with a $\sim 20\%$ accuracy.

As for the 2 hour incubation we recalculated $K_C$ for the NPP without a spectral correction. This resulted in a value of $15.9 \pm 1.6$ mol é (mol C)$^{-1}$, which corresponds to an overestimation of a factor 1.5 (Table 4). To our knowledge, no previous studies have compared rates of ETR$_{PSII}$...
and NPP obtained over 24h, thus the result has to be evaluated in context of the studies listed in Table 4.

Nutrients were not limiting in the current study (N > 1 μM in all samples, Table 1) and we rule out Φ_{PSII} to be depressed by nutrient limitations. The effect of nutrient limitations on Φ_{PSII} is, nevertheless, not consistent, but evidence of Φ_{PSII} depression due to N limitation seem convincing in some cases [56], however many studies point to only limited depressing of Φ_{PSII} during nutrient starvation, partly due to acclimation processes [22,26,57–59].

Like C fixation, NCP in O2 units (P_{O2}/C3_{O2}) resulted in a linear relationship with P_{PSII}/C3_{O2}, with a slope coefficient corresponding to an electron requirement of 6.5 ± 0.9 mol é (mol O2)^{-1}. This was ~40% lower than for C fixation during 24 hours and supports the assumption of an considerable electron consumption related to the ‘dark’ reactions of C fixation, including cell maintenance and nutrient uptake. The respiratory O2 consumption explain the majority of the discrepancy between the empirical K_C and the theoretical one [4 é (mol O2)^{-1}], and accounted to 10.1 ± 5.2% and 44.9 ± 19.3% of the NPP during high and low light, respectively. The rates of respiration are consistent with typical ratios published for pelagic ecosystems [60,61]. The slope coefficient of P_{O2} versus P_C was 1.6 ± 0.5, which complies with the resolved PQ of 1.4 in the current study [50].

The Arctic marine environment is experiencing dramatic changes in sea ice cover, terrestrial run-off and light attenuation [62]. It is expected that these changes will affect primary production. Yet most routine monitoring programs of marine ecosystems are limited to few measurements of primary production, as the benchmark 14C method is time consuming and expensive. Application of variable fluorescence techniques has the potential to expand routine measurements to larger regions and with higher temporal resolution. This, however, will require detailed and reproducible assessment of the electron requirement for carbon fixation under natural variable conditions [16,63]. Not least in the under-sampled Arctic [62]. Future studies should ideally compare in situ measured variable fluorescence with in situ bottle incubations of C fixation and O2 production to preserve the natural optical properties of phytoplankton absorption and available spectral irradiance.

Acknowledgments

We thank Greenland Institute of Natural Resources and Greenland Climate Research Center (GCRC) in Nuuk for providing laboratory facilities, technical assistance and access to boats for sample collection on the Godthåbsfjord. We sincerely thank Jeanette Pedersen (Centre for Geomicrobiology, Aarhus University) for stable isotope analysis, Mona Kleiven (Institute of Marine Research, Flødevigen, Norway) for light-microscopic analyses of the phytoplankton abundance and composition, and the boat drivers at GCRC for assistance in the field. Lars C. Lund-Hansen (Aarhus University) is acknowledged for providing the PhytoPAM, Niels Peter Revsbech (Aarhus University) for supplying oxygen microsensors, and David Suggett (University of Technology, Sydney) for a constructive discussion on the use of symbols for the photosynthetic electron requirement. We appreciate constructive comments by Jacco Kromkamp and an anonymous reviewer that improved the manuscript. This work is a contribution to the Arctic Research Centre (ARC, Aarhus University) and the Arctic Science Partnership (ASP) asp-net.org.

Author Contributions

Conceived and designed the experiments: KH TD MKS. Performed the experiments: KH TD MKS. Analyzed the data: KH TD MKS SM. Contributed reagents/materials/analysis tools: KH TD MKS. Wrote the paper: KH RNG TD MKS.
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