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Collaboration and identity work: A linguistic discourse analysis of immigrant students' presentations concerning different teachers' roles in a school context

Kaisa Björk, Eva Danielsson, and Goran Basic

In 2015, approximately 70,000 children and young people immigrated to Sweden, including 35,000 unaccompanied minors who arrived without any legal guardian (Swedish Migration Agency, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c; Basic, 2018d, pp. 7–8). The huge influx of young people has been a challenge for the Swedish school system. In the years that have followed, various initiatives have been implemented to make it easier for schools to cope with the education of this new demographic, including materials to help map the prior knowledge of newly arrived immigrant students (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2016) and a compilation of useful and positive examples (Swedish Association of Local Authorities & Regions, 2016).

Newly arrived immigrant students are a diverse group, and their educational backgrounds vary (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2016). Those actively involved in Sweden’s educational practices seem to agree that local authorities and schools must increase their knowledge and their employees’ expertise to provide newly arrived immigrant students with a good education (Swedish Association of Local Authorities & Regions, 2016; Swedish National Agency for Education, 2016).

The aim of this study was to provide new understanding concerning teachers’ and immigrant students’ collaboration and identity work in a school context. The analysis revolves around the issue of how immigrant students present teachers’ different roles in a school context. Qualitative methods (Flick, 2013; Silverman, 2015) were used to analyze empirical sequences from previously published qualitative analyses (Cederberg, 2006) to investigate the phenomenon of collaboration and identity work in a Swedish school context. The study’s analysis is based on secondary empirical material (Basic, 2013; Corti, 2007; Corti & Bishop, 2005; Fielding & Fielding, 2008; Medjedović, 2011; Wästerfors, Åkerström, & Jacobsson, 2013).

Riessman (1993, p. 22) proposed that narratives are interpretive because they attempt to explain social phenomena that produce interpersonal
interactions and are reproduced within that context. The empirical material in Cederberg (2006) does not speak for itself; it must be reanalyzed. Notably, the analysis and reanalysis are always incomplete and essentially unfinished (De Fina, 2017; Gubrium & Holstein, 1997; Potter, 1996/2007; Riessman, 1993, pp. 21–23, 64–67; Riessman, 2008; Silverman, 2015).

The study’s general starting point has its foundations in the linguistic discursive traditions of sociology, pedagogy, and educational sciences, in which narratives are considered to be both experience-based and narrative (De Fina, 2017; Gubrium & Holstein, 1997; Potter, 1996/2007; Riessman, 1993, pp. 21–23, 64–67; Riessman, 2008; Sacks, 1992/1998; Silverman, 2015). In light of this perspective, the reanalysis of immigrant students’ narratives may be regarded as a series of meaning-making activities that can be applied to the development and improvement of pedagogical practice. The study’s analytical findings are presented within the following themes: (a) discursive presentation of disinterested and disrespected teachers, and (b) discursive presentation of active and strategic teachers. The analyses of the narratives presented in this study should not be taken as a definitive representation of reality. As noted by the researchers mentioned above, reality can be seen as multifaceted, and every analysis is incomplete and essentially unfinished.

**Linguistic discourse analysis**

Harvey Sacks (1992/1998, pp. 716–721, Vol. I) is one of the researchers who laid the analytical foundations for an interactionist method of understanding interpersonal conversation. His studies are based on recorded telephone calls that he played, meticulously transcribed, and analyzed several times over. Through his work, Sacks showed that the speech of the individual cannot be understood as a collection of isolated utterances, but as sequences of utterances. What Sacks demonstrates is that our replies are not floating freely but are in fact interlinked—we tie our utterances to the previous one and give implicit indications of the next. According to Sacks, if we do not change the subject randomly, we instead make a connection to something that has already been said, or we mark the absence of such a connection. In addition to analyzing conversations, Sacks also devoted himself to analyzing how categories are used in conversation and how the conversation generates categories. Through categorizing, people create meaning in what they see and do. These meaning-creating activities make it possible for people to engage in, develop, and end a conversation. The present analysis looks at categories brought up by actors in Cederberg (2006) and which are loaded with particular significance during analysis work in the present study. These include the categories: “disinterested teacher,”
“disrespected teacher,” “active teacher,” and “strategic teachers” (see further information on the categorization in section Reanalysis of qualitative secondary empirical material).

The term discourse analysis is often associated with Michel Foucault’s analysis of the relationship between power and knowledge, in which the concept refers to broad and stable historical processes. Another focus of discourse analysis is known as linguistic discourse analysis. This line of thinking is represented by researchers such as Jonathan Potter (1996/2007), Catherine Kohler Riessman (1993, 2008) and Anna De Fina (2017). The idea behind linguistic discourse analysis is to conduct a detailed analysis of conversations in which the actors’ local and specific understandings of an interaction are presented in relation to the context under studied (Basic, 2012, pp. 54–55; Jacobsson, 2000, pp. 28–43).

The primary characteristic of linguistic discourse analysis is that researchers take into account the possibility that a single event may be recounted in multiple different ways. People do not merely interpret different experiences and events differently, but are also participants in their own individual realities, which cause them to expect certain things from their environments, and their environments, in turn, expect something from them (Basic, 2012, pp. 54–55; Cameron, 2001/2007; Jacobsson, 2000, pp. 28–43; Potter, 1996/2007, pp. 97–98).

The question that certain researchers perceive to be most relevant is whether a single event that can be described in different ways leads to an intrinsic problem when it comes to deciding whether a given description is “true.” Linguistic discourse analysts regard a narrative as a freestanding piece of reality (De Fina, 2017; Gubrium & Holstein, 1997; Riessman, 1993, 2008; Silverman, 2015). Rather than assessing whether a narrative is “true,” it is assumed that the narrator constructs a reality within their narrative (Basic, 2012, pp. 54–55; Cameron, 2001/2007, pp. 15–18; Jacobsson, 2000, pp. 28–43; Potter, 1996/2007, pp. 97–98). According to this approach, researchers should not question whether what is said is true or false; instead, they should ask how the actor comes up with their description. What do they do with their narrative? What is the actor’s objective in doing what they do (De Fina, 2017; Gubrium & Holstein, 1997; Riessman, 1993, 2008; Silverman, 2015)?

Linguistic discourse analysts perceive human reality as a socially constructed reality in which the reality of the establishment is often “obvious.” Therefore, it is important to study the processes by which a given reality is constructed. This can be accomplished by studying social interactions, particularly those that are language-based (De Fina, 2017; Gubrium & Holstein, 1997; Potter, 1996/2007, p. 105; Riessman, 1993, 2008; Silverman, 2015). According to this approach, linguistic definitions of reality are

In social interactions, language is not merely a tool by which to describe and construct reality, but is also used to accomplish certain aims. Linguistic descriptions of reality are seldom mere descriptions of reality; they fulfill other practical functions for the person giving the description (De Fina, 2017; Potter, 1996/2007, pp. 106–108; Riessman, 2008). For example, presentations of reality include rhetorical activities carried out by the social actors, which can result in certain “facts” or “truths” being maintained, or modified when other facts are subsequently presented (Basic, 2012, pp. 54–55; De Fina, 2017; Jacobsson, 2000, pp. 28–43; Potter, 1996/2007, pp. 106–108; Riessman, 2008).

De Fina (2017), Riessman (2008), and Potter (1996/2007) asserted that concretizations are important rhetorical tools. The inclusion of specific details is a way to make a description convincing as a factual report of reality. According to Wästerfors and Holsanova (2004, p. 38), concretizations sometimes consist of exemplifications of illustrative examples:

The functions of examples are numerous. They specify things but restrict them at the same time. They may serve as objectifications of an argument, providing a rhetorically powerful quality of “out-there-ness.” They may also be used to mobilise association, display attitudes, or indicate “types” of persons or items. Some examples are “virtual”; they exemplify what could happen, or what never happened.

Through the use of examples, such conversations provide a sort of concise induction in which one derives generalizations from the individual cases that are presented. Examples can be applied in relation to something that is general, vague, or abstract, and can serve as tools for clarification. Rhetorically speaking, the example can be used to summarize and illustrate a selected aspect of an opinion (Basic, 2012, pp. 54–55; Wästerfors & Holsanova, 2004). In a given context, the rhetoric used when an illustrative example is described may be indicative of both conflict and consensus. The point here is that, by claiming detailed knowledge and insight, the narrators demonstrate the effectiveness of rhetorical weapons in the verbal struggle while implementing a form of strategy in terms of how they present themselves to persuade their audience.

**Individual needs, dilemmas, and cooperation**

Torpsten (2008) suggested that students from various non-Swedish ethnic backgrounds are regarded as a homogeneous group of immigrants. As a result, when teaching these students, schools fail to take individual needs and
circumstances into account. Schools do not base their approach on an investigation of each individual student’s need for support, and newly arrived immigrant students are often excluded from a school’s normal plan for special support (Swedish Schools Inspectorate, 2014), despite teachers in Sweden being required to abide by the Swedish Education Act of 2010, which stipulates that all students should be provided with the guidance and stimulation that their learning and personal development require (Swedish Education Act, 2010:800).

Bunar (2010) found no common guidelines that can effectively identify educational needs, allocate responsibilities and resources, and allow monitoring, evaluation, and development of new arrivals to Sweden at reception. He argued that, regardless of their particular circumstances, newcomers’ needs are often lumped together with the children in need of other types of support. Bunar pointed to studies showing that native language teachers are important and must be given greater latitude, even in preparation classes. He noted that collaboration between different professional categories is important to the successful reception of newly arrived immigrant students.

Basic (2012) referred to earlier collaborative research and analyses of extensive empirical data to demonstrate that government officials occasionally push for their own personal professional interests. In this particular context, their own ambitions may affect those they are meant to serve. Basic highlighted how actors belonging to a given organization typically view themselves as being more cooperative than actors belonging to another organization. The actors from the other organization are often accused of making collaboration more difficult (Basic, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2018d). Bunar (2010) also stressed that the way in which school organizations are structured may present obstacles to successful collaboration. Different categories of school teachers failing to cooperate effectively poses a serious risk to the student. Newly arrived immigrant students may be negatively impacted by such insufficient collaboration.

Cederberg (2006) summarized the difficulties that newly arrived immigrant students face in school by emphasizing the concept of “structural impediments.” One of the impediments highlighted by Cederberg is the lack of communication between school and home; such communication is crucial to students’ success in school. The school’s mission, in collaboration with the home, is to promote students’ overall development and provide support for families regarding their responsibility for nurturing their children and encouraging their development (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2011/2016a). Many researchers draw attention to the importance of cooperating with parents, noting that it is an important precondition for preventing collaboration difficulties in many different contexts involving children. For example, Willumsen (2007, pp. 192–197) stressed the importance that
education professionals regard children and their families as a whole, even if the objectives of the organization’s efforts are primarily focused on the children. Willumsen opined that the participation of children and their parents constitute key aspects of a successful collaboration.

Schools at which teachers and other professionals collaborate well are characterized by a holistic approach to student learning (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2016). Torpsten (2008) advocated for the creation of opportunities for teachers of immigrant students’ native languages, Swedish as a Second Language teachers, and teachers of other subjects to develop cross-subject collaborations. Hyltenstam (2010) emphasized the importance of such a collaboration. The collaborative actors within the school context in Sweden are expected to participate in cooperative efforts involved in the language development of immigrant students who are learning a new language in a school context. These actors are usually the Swedish as a Second Language teacher, the student’s native language teacher, the special education teacher, the special pedagog, and the student’s legal guardian(s). The first four categories are part of the school, which is a bureaucratic organization. The fifth category, legal guardians, are actors external to the bureaucratic organization, as are the students themselves.

In the context of Sweden’s school system, what are the daily activities and responsibilities of the four professional categories? Swedish as a Second Language teachers teach Swedish students whose first language is not Swedish. Native language teachers in Sweden teach students in a native language other than Swedish. In the Swedish pedagogical context, special education teachers teach in a more individually focused way, tutoring individual children in subjects such as Swedish, English, or mathematics. In the Swedish context, the professional practice of special pedagogues focuses on three areas of work. The first area comprises collaborative efforts that involve a general, helicopter overview of numerous preschools, kindergartens, and schools in the municipality. The second is the task of highlighting and reviewing the pedagogical situations within the learning environment, together with work teams and teachers. This includes practical supervision work with other professional categories within the pedagogical context. The third area is the task of working with children on an individualized basis through different sorts of conversations (Special Education, 2018a, 2018b). This third responsibility of the special pedagogue seems to coincide with the job description of the special education teacher, whose task it is to focus their practical efforts on working with the child on an individualized basis. These four professional categories are expected to work together to help immigrant students in the school context. Furthermore, they are dependent on the participation of both the student and the student’s legal guardian(s) (Bunar, 2010; Cederberg, 2006; Hyltenstam, 2010; Torpsten, 2008).
The important discursive representations of the importance of collaborators in teachers’ work to help immigrant students learn a new language in a school context vary greatly (Bunar, 2010; Cederberg, 2006; Hyltenstam, 2010; Torpsten, 2008). One Swedish as a Second Language teacher emphasized in Björk and Danielsson (2016) that collaboration between different categories of school teachers is the most important factor in learning a new language in a school context. Moreover, the importance of collaboration with native language teachers was emphasized; they are portrayed as possessing a special understanding of cultural differences (Björk & Danielsson, 2016).

Parents constitute yet another category of participants highlighted as playing an important role in successful collaborative efforts to help immigrant students in the school context (Bunar, 2010; Cederberg, 2006; Hyltenstam, 2010; Torpsten, 2008). One Swedish as a Second Language teacher in Björk and Danielsson (2016) asserted that collaboration with a student’s legal guardian(s) is important to obtain information about the student’s background. Cederberg (2006, p. 125) highlighted the fact that the empirical material from the study indicates that it is a common pattern for the parents not to appear in representations with regard to cooperation with the school.

Reanalysis of qualitative secondary empirical material

This study is based on a qualitative method (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997; Flick, 2013; Silverman, 2015). The empirical material that has been reanalyzed is of a secondary nature. Wästerfors et al. (2013) presented several ways in which to conduct the reanalysis of secondary empirical material: (a) the researcher reanalyzes their own collected empirical material; (b) the researcher reanalyzes the empirical material collected by other researchers by using the material available through archives and databases; (c) the researcher reanalyzes the empirical material of other researchers by using the material available in published works; and (d) the researcher combines the above methods to reanalyze secondary empirical material.

Wästerfors et al. (2013) also presented a variety of justifications for the reanalysis of secondary empirical material. A common justification is that, in the long-term, the researcher feels drawn to certain empirical material, that the material arouses interest and helps create and recreate ideas for new analysis. Another justification is that the researcher realizes the opportunity to contribute to analytical, theoretical, and/or methodological development, without the need to collect new empirical evidence (Basic, 2013; Corti, 2007; Corti & Bishop, 2005; Fielding & Fielding, 2008; Medjedović, 2011). Silverman (2015) noted that the collection and preparation of new
empirical material is a time-consuming exercise and, from a financial perspective, it is beneficial for both the researcher and the study to be able to use the time spent directly on the collection of empirical data on the analysis of materials that are already available. Wästerfors et al. (2013) presented the analytical drive of researchers to explore phenomena through history and/or to conduct comparative studies as further justification. Wästerfors et al. (2013, p. 467) stated the following on the “reanalysis of qualitative data”:

Reanalysis of qualitative data should be at the core of qualitative research. It facilitates dialogue, debate, and progression in qualitative research, not only between various researchers and studies (Fielding & Fielding, 2008), but also between works from the same researcher at different times (Riessman, 2003; Roulston, 2001). Reanalysis slows down analysis to a point at which new findings, theories, and methodologies can more easily crystallise. Using reanalysis, researchers may disentangle data from preceding perspectives and zeitgeists, make comparisons across time and cases, and frame data in a new way.

The reanalysis of qualitative secondary empirical material has both strengths and weaknesses (Wästerfors et al., 2013). One strength is that secondary empirical material is relatively free from the perspective of the previous study, and the theory in the analysis has analytical space in which to advance. A second strength is the economization of time for the collection of new empirical material, enabling the time to be used instead for the reanalysis. Thirdly, fundamental traditions and principles in qualitative research (Flick, 2013; Silverman, 2015) are reinforced through reanalysis of qualitative secondary empirical material. However, weaknesses include the distance between empiricism and the researcher that characterizes some reanalyzes. The original context and empirical material as a whole, which formed the empirical basis for the previous study, is wholly or partially unknown to researchers who work with reanalysis of qualitative secondary empirical material (Wästerfors et al., 2013). This dictates the content of the reanalysis and limits it to relatively few empirical sequences. At the same time, an isolated empirical sequence is a separate piece of reality that can be reanalyzed again and again (Potter, 1996/2007, pp. 97–98).

In the present study, published empirical sequences from Cederberg (2006) are reanalyzed. Cederberg (2006) wrote a doctoral thesis in Educational Sciences published at Malmö University in Sweden. The focal area of the thesis is the meeting of Swedish schools and 12 young women who fled to Sweden at the beginning of or during their teens and developed successful school careers, despite only a short stay in Sweden. The overarching purpose of the thesis is to describe and analyze the school careers of the women and their encounter with the Swedish school from the retrospective perspective of the interviewees (Cederberg, 2006, p. 42). Issues are
(a) how the pathway the women describe through the school, from the school in their country of origin to their migration into and through the Swedish senior high school system, is considered a school career; (b) which processes, events, or factors at the individual, institution, and structural levels have contributed to the women being able to develop their school careers (i.e., complete their high school studies and start college studies); (c) what difficulties the women encountered at similar levels that have hindered their school careers; (d) whether it is possible to identify turning points during their careers that have been important and have both mobilized and limited their school careers; and (e) the common patterns found in the descriptions given by the women of their experiences and school careers, and what differences emerge (Cederberg, 2006, pp. 42–43).

To obtain answers to these questions, Cederberg (2006, pp. 44–95) used an interaction analytical approach as a methodological basis for the study. The empirical material was collected using qualitative interviews with 12 young women who fled to Sweden at the start of or during their teens and developed successful school careers, despite a short stay in Sweden. The interviews regarding Swedish elementary and high public school were conducted when the women were between 20 and 30 years of age. The women were from countries around the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East. The study takes ethical guidelines into account. For example, the actual names of the women, cities, and schools are not used in the publication of the empirical sequences in the study. The given names are fictitious.

To analyze the empirical material of the study, Cederberg (2006, pp. 44–70) created a theoretical basis in symbolic interactionism. In addition, the empiricism of the study was analyzed using the concepts of “communication,” “culture,” “visible and invisible pedagogy,” “adaptation,” “identities,” “ethnicity,” “sex and gender,” “class and socioeconomic background,” and “career and turning point.” The analysis in Cederberg (2006, pp. 96–200) is presented in six chapters entitled, “Being a refugee,” “From talented pupil to categorization as pupils with foreign backgrounds,” “Meeting with a different school culture,” “Interaction with classmates,” “Turning points,” and “Mobilising and restrictive patterns and strategies.” The study indicates that common collaborative, complex patterns at the individual, institutional, and structural levels emerge in the analyzed interviews. An overarching adaptation and integration process into Swedish schools emerges from these complex patterns. Conditions at the institutional level that mobilized and restricted the women’s school careers were analyzed in the adaptation and integration process and three success-promoting concepts identified: motivation, teacher confirmation, and modified adaptation. Although the women conducted successful studies, their paths through the Swedish school system have been problematic. Both the
Swedish language and a different and invisible pedagogy has restricted and made it more difficult for the women to develop their school careers (Cederberg, 2006, pp. 96–200).

Cederberg (2006) is used in the present study as both a source of important empirical sequences that are reanalyzed, and as relevant previous research and an important aid for future analysis. Björk and Danielsson, students on the second cycle at Linnaeus University, with Basic as their supervisor, have come into contact with the abovementioned study through their previous work. In combination with our earlier experiences, the study has created an interest and fascination with the field and the context. Wästerfors et al. (2013) believed that empirical material from published analyses can be analyzed again and again, even if the analyst did not participate in the collection of the primary empirical material. The new analysis with the same or different analytical method implies that earlier analyses, theories, and methods develop. In this sense, reanalysis of qualitative secondary empirical material always adds something new to future analyses.

The present study analyzes empirical sequences that are already presented and analyzed in Cederberg (2006) and which include interview quotes from interviewees Isabelle, Tanja, Sally, Laila and Mira. In Cederberg’s (2006, pp. 92–93) presentation of the interviewees, we can read that (a) Isabelle is from Kosovo and had finished Year 6 before fleeing to Sweden at the age of 13. Her mother had worked as a nurse and her father as a salesperson. Before fleeing, they had been dismissed for reasons of ethnicity. She attended the Nursing Program in Sweden. (b) Tanja is from Bosnia and had been attending an economic upper secondary school for one year before fleeing to Sweden at the age of 16. In Bosnia, her mother had worked as a shop owner and her father as a mechanic. She attended the Child and Recreation Program in Sweden. (c) Sally is from Bulgaria and had finished Year 6 before fleeing to Sweden at the age of 13. Her mother had worked within media and her father as a technician. She attended the Nursing Program in Sweden. (d) Laila is from Iran and had been attending upper secondary school with a focus on humanities before fleeing to Sweden at the age of 17. Her mother was a housewife and her father had been a shop owner. In Sweden, she attended a two-year social services program, which she then supplemented with a third upper secondary school year in Social Sciences. (e) Mira is from Bosnia and had started an upper secondary program in humanities before fleeing to Sweden at the age of 15. Her parents had worked as teachers. She attended a Social Sciences program in Sweden (Cederberg, 2006, pp. 92–93).

In the present study, the authors do not have access to all empirical material collected during the field work and prior to publication by Cederberg (2006). This has made it more difficult to analyze important
aspects of the school context, such as new arrivals’ perceptions of other students, new arrivals’ perceptions of the importance of learning a new language, new arrivals’ perceptions of the importance of possible traumatic experiences relating to conflict and war prior to arrival to the new country, as well as new arrivals’ perceptions of the importance of class, gender and ethnicity within interpersonal relationships between actors in a school context (more on these phenomena in the section Collaboration and identity work in a school context). The empirical material that has already been analyzed and published in Cederberg (2006) provides a solid basis for achieving the aim of the present study, which is to provide new understanding of the collaboration and identity work of teachers and immigrant students.

The review of Cederberg (2006), with a particular focus on published empirical sequences (quotes), provided good conditions for documenting and commenting on details in the published empirical sequences. By commenting on the empiricism in Cederberg (2006), a recategorization of empirical data was achieved (see also “data analysis” in Silverman 2015; “thematic analysis” in Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012). Empirical sequences that are reanalyzed in the present study are categorized in the present study as “disinterested teacher,” “disrespected teacher,” “active teacher,” and “strategic teachers.” By reanalyzing empirical sequences from Cederberg (2006), markers are identified for collaboration and identity work in a school context, in the relationship between teachers and immigrant students.

The reanalysis of empirical material from Cederberg (2006) makes evident several dimensions of collaboration and identity work in the school context. The following section analyzes two of these dimensions: discursive presentation of disinterested and disrespected teachers and discursive presentation of active and strategic teachers.

**Discursive presentation of disinterested and disrespected teachers**

The narratives analyzed in Cederberg (2006) paint a rhetorically charged picture of major challenges involved in teachers’ practical work with newly arrived immigrant students. The narratives construct a reality in which deficiencies in the collaboration between different collaborators can lead to problems and dilemmas (Basic 2012, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2018d; Bunar 2010; Hyltenstam 2010; Torpsten 2008).

Isabelle, one of the interviewees in Cederberg (2006, pp. 14–15) was 13 years old and had just finished sixth grade when she and her family came to Sweden. Isabelle talked about the transition from elementary school (Grades 1–9) to upper secondary school in Sweden:

I finished ninth grade but didn’t have grades in all subjects. Of course, I hadn’t finished seventh and eighth grade and hadn’t read all the subjects. It felt terrible not
to be the best in the class. I was used to being that. I hung out with a girl who was from Bulgaria, but she was born in Sweden. We met at school and in our free time. It was almost only immigrants at the school I went to in ninth grade. Then I applied to high school … I thought it was unnecessary for me to go there. I didn’t like the Swedish teacher at all and was scared of her. It felt like she didn’t want to teach us. If I asked her anything, she would say, “Don’t you understand it?” Of course I didn’t, otherwise I wouldn’t have asked her. She said it’s easy. We played truant from her classes. I also didn’t like that everyone else had to go to school in regular classes, but we had to stay in the basement at the school. The lessons were so boring. I liked my classmates and went out and partied with them. I didn’t understand why I had to be in that class before I could go to regular high school. I didn’t care at all and played truant a lot, but I always went to school when there were tests and I passed all the tests.

Tanja talked about senior high school, teacher respect, and grades (Cederberg, 2006, pp. 135–136):

When I started at high school, it felt like I had gone to another planet. Pupils and teachers socialised in a different way. You didn’t have to stand up when the teacher entered the classroom and you could say you to the teacher. You didn’t need to be polite and civil. It felt terrible the first time. In Bosnia, you had to be quiet in the classroom. It wasn’t like that in Sweden. In the beginning, I didn’t understand what this courses thing meant. I didn’t understand that they were completed and a new one was started. We had a test at the start and I got a Good Pass on the test and so I thought that it would be the grade that I would be given. But I didn’t get that and was given a Pass instead and the teacher said that I hadn’t been active in class. Then I realised that I had to ignore that I was speaking strangely and start saying something during the lessons like the others. It was really difficult to say something out loud at the beginning. Afterwards, I realised that there wasn’t anyone in the classroom who was bothered by the fact that I spoke with an accent. The most important thing was that they understood me and that I understood them. I started to be active and raised my hand every lesson. After the second, I had a Good Pass grade in most subjects. You also have to study a lot more in Bosnia than in Sweden and prepare yourself. In Bosnia, it wasn’t possible to say that you couldn’t take the test today, but that you want to take it on another day. I stopped preparing before lessons because it wasn’t necessary. In Sweden, you could raise your hand and say something and ask a question and show interest, then you were active.

Isabelle, an interviewee in Cederberg (2006, p. 139), talks about senior high school, teacher respect, and the dichotomy between the categories “us” and “them”:

I was surprised when a Swedish girl told the teacher to be quiet, which I thought was really stupid, because in our country we have a lot of respect for the teachers. I would never tell my teacher to shut up, you just can’t, because then I’ll leave, but that girl just said it to the teacher, just said it to her. She said, “but you can keep quiet”, to her, to the teacher then because she was talking all the time, so she just said it to her. So then she just told her to be quiet. Then she said, “get out.” “No, I don’t want to.” And then nothing happened. The lesson then continued and I was really surprised because that would absolutely never have happened in my home
country. Because she had said shut up and then she had left. There was a lot of
whispering all the time and it was mostly the Swedes who were talking, but when
they were asked about it, they then blamed us. It was obvious that the teacher had
seen who it was … but they thought that it was only to say to them that the
teachers should be quiet. I was surprised by that because I thought, like only God
could say that to the teacher. You just don’t say that to a teacher.

Discursive representations of immigrant students’ presentations concerning
teachers’ practical work paint a picture of major challenges when it comes to this effort. In their narratives, study participants present hyperbolic examples that are intended to persuade and convince the reader (and interviewer) to adopt their perspective. It seems that these more emphatic descriptions can be linked to the previously reported collaboration challenges, establishing a new reality with successful collaboration requires enhancement of the argumentation (De Fina, 2017; Gubrium & Holstein, 1997; Potter, 1996/2007; Riessman, 1993, 2008; Silverman, 2015).

The immigrant students’ rhetorical representations create two distinct realities concerning collaboration in practical work in the school context. The first is the reality of the teachers, whereas the second is the reality of the students. The former reality is shaped within the context of stable bureaucratic forms within the school context in which the various categories of teachers work and collaborate. The latter reality is portrayed as unstable and difficult to control. This reality is characterized by the participation of actors external to the pedagogical bureaucratic field.

The teachers’ reality is portrayed as a reality that is fraught with dilemmas. Teachers are portrayed as being disinterested and disrespected—as incompetent. Willumsen (2007) and Basic (2012, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2018d) emphasize that collaborators occasionally fight to serve their own personal and professional interests, and that, in this particular context, their own ambitions may affect those they are meant to serve. This may mean that deficiencies in the collaboration between different collaborators can lead to difficulties in the practical work in a school context. The position of education professionals in pedagogical practice in the empirical sequences above is not regarded as endowing them with the power to freely bias their work.

The students’ reality is portrayed as a reality of powerfulness. Students are portrayed as both competent and active actors in a school context. Students are portrayed as collaborative actors within the context in question, but they are not considered to be key players (on the same level as the other, professional actors in Cederberg, 2006). Moreover, students are portrayed as actors who occasionally deliberately hamper collaboration in an effort to help implement practical activities in a school context.
Discursive presentation of active and strategic teachers

Various collaborators involved in the practice of school education are presented as both facilitating and hindering collaboration (Bunar 2010; Hyltenstam 2010; Torpsten 2008). Active and strategic teachers are assiduously included in these discursive representations. Active and strategic teachers are portrayed as important players in the practical work in the school context. Implicit in these discursive representations is the portrayal of active and strategic school teachers as competent actors who build upon their own skills through active participation in pedagogical practice. Active and strategic teachers pay attention to immigrant students through implicit comparisons to the other categories in the school context. In this way, descriptions in pedagogical discursive practice become a fundamental dimension in the creation and recreation of students’ personal identities and school teachers’ professional identities.

Sally, an interviewee in Cederberg (2006, p. 125), started in a preparatory class in Solgården, where the family had moved. Solgården is a typically Swedish, sparsely populated area with many students of Swedish backgrounds attending the elementary schools in the area. Sally said that she had attended a small class of 15–17 newly arrived pupils of different ages. At the same time that she was learning Swedish, she was also studying other subjects, such as mathematics, in a regular ninth grade class. Sally talked about having had two teachers of Swedish, who she described as wonderful (Cederberg, 2006, p. 125):

They respected us. Even if you didn’t speak Swedish well, they listened to us and gave us time to explain. Even if we didn’t speak so well, they listened to us and didn’t give up so easily. They praised us a lot. I think that’s what did it for me, because I wasn’t used to the praise. They never did that in Bulgaria. It was very rare for a teacher to praise you, even if you were really smart.

Two other interviewees in Cederberg (2006, p. 125), Laila and Tanja, highlighted the significance of native language teachers, noted that the native language teacher was an important person who taught her to use different dictionaries to understand concepts in Swedish. Tanja pointed out that the native language teacher helped her with Swedish history, which was a subject with which the teacher really shouldn’t be dealing. Mira, another interviewee in Cederberg (2006, p. 143), talked about a teacher who she said was a good teacher:

But as a student, I can, like, you can always understand it a lot better if you first hear teachers talking about whatever, like explaining and simplifying and so on, and then you read it in a book, so you have context, and then you get it. But if a teacher never holds a lesson and never talks about it like it says in the book, or something like that, then, when you read it in the book, then it’s not real, e.g., so the social studies teacher explained it really well, so when he explains and you listen to him in
lessons and then come home and read it in the book, then you can already get quite a lot of it. Learning in this way, I think was like the teacher could explain about it and then the pupil could.

Sally, Laila, Tanja, and Mira portray collaboration with active and strategic teachers—competent teachers in the school context. Laila talked about expectations for the interaction between her and the teacher (Cederberg, 2006, p. 138).

Because I liked him (my teacher, note), then I wanted to, and I also said that to him at the start of the course, so I said “Yes, Karl.” But then I didn’t put my hand up because I wasn’t used to it, as we also had another tradition in my home country where the teacher would call out your last name, but yes, if you give me time to get used to it, you can start by calling out my last name and then I can put my hand up.

Cederberg (2006, p. 139) believes that Laila developed a strategy to teach herself to put her hand up during a teacher’s lesson. It was only in this particular teacher’s lessons that Laila used this strategy. Cederberg pointed out that it is important to Laila to not disappoint the teacher. Laila recounted that she understood that the teacher wanted the pupils to put their hands up and speak during his lessons. She said that the teacher cared and listened to what the pupils thought, which she did not think the other teachers at the school did. Therefore, it was only in that teacher’s lessons that Laila asked the teacher to “call out my name so I can put my hand up” (Cederberg, 2006, p. 139).

Interviewees in Cederberg (2006) tended to implement illustrative examples when they exemplify the other actors’ collaborative actions that either hinder or facilitate collaboration (De Fina, 2017; Gubrium & Holstein, 1997; Potter, 1996/2007; Riessman, 1993, 2008; Silverman, 2015; Wästerfors & Holsanova, 2004). In the participants’ rhetorical representations, both the success of the collaboration and concrete collaboration problems are exemplified. In this way, two distinct collaboration realities are created and recreated in regards to collaboration with teachers. In the first reality, active and strategic teachers are portrayed as a resource and as being helpful to the collaboration. In the second reality, disinterested and disrespected teachers are portrayed as hindrances to collaboration.

In the discourse, active and strategic teachers are portrayed as important players in efforts to work with the students on an individualized basis (Bunar, 2010; Cederberg, 2006; Hyltenstam, 2010; Torpsten, 2008). The participation of active and strategic teachers in the collaborative process is presented as a way to bridge the cultural differences that can otherwise hamper collaboration. Discursive representations concerning active and strategic teachers as pertains to collaboration in the practical work with immigrant students have two notable dimensions. The first dimension is characterized by an implicit invitation to immigrant students to collaborate within the pedagogical context. The
second dimension is characterized by actors in the study presenting a picture of teachers as pedagogically competent actors. Discursive representations paint the picture of active and strategic participants in pedagogical practice who emphasize the importance of successful collaboration in the effort to help immigrant students. Thus, the study’s participants portray themselves as active and skilled participants in pedagogical practice. Through their representations of their own competencies, the study’s participants stress the importance of participation in pedagogical discursive practice.

**Collaboration and identity work in a school context**

The aim of the study was to provide new understanding concerning teachers’ and immigrant students’ collaboration and identity work in a school context. The analytical findings of the study are presented in discursive presentations of disinterested and disrespected teachers, and active and strategic teachers, painting a rhetorically charged picture of major challenges involved in teachers’ practical work with immigrant students. Implicit in these linguistic discursive representations is the portrayal of school teachers as both competent and incompetent actors, and students as just competent actors.

Collaborators within the school context are portrayed in the linguistic discourse as actors who both complicate and facilitate collaborative efforts in the practical work with immigrant students in Sweden. Active and strategic teachers are portrayed as important and competent players in the practical work with immigrant students. The representations analyzed in this study portray different categories of teachers as competent actors (e.g., teachers of Swedish and native language teachers). On one hand, these actors are portrayed as building up their own skills through active participation in pedagogical practice. On the other hand, they build up their skills by distancing themselves from the other categories in the school context. The study’s conclusion is that student and school teacher participation in pedagogical discursive practice is a fundamental dimension in the creation and recreation of their personal and professional identities.

By portraying themselves as competent, conscientious, active, and driven in their narratives about the practical situations in school, immigrant students present personal and relatively strong discursive representations that seem important for gaining the confidence of students, teachers, and other professional actors, and for achieving success in their collaborative efforts. The study’s participants portray collaboration within the pedagogical context as an important aspect of carrying out one’s work, which in turn can affect the execution of everyday individual and professional tasks. Immigrant students’ and teachers’ individual and professional identities are created and recreated in the
course of the daily professional practice of interacting with others—students, other teachers, and parents. The ways in which immigrant students present their individual identities and teachers their professional identities tend to demonstrate respect for collaboration and practical work in school. In this way, immigrant students seem to protect both their individual pedagogical territory and teachers’ personal competencies and professional identities.

Three of the perspectives in the social sciences that emphasize the importance of a sense of recognition of identity, inclusion, and the integration of immigrant students in a school and social community are sociology, pedagogy, and educational sciences. Both immigrant students and teachers appear to receive confirmation of their identities through participation in the community, and successful interaction between individuals in the school context is a fundamental prerequisite for successful involvement in and integration of both immigrant students and teachers into the context. One of the important dimensions for future research within pedagogy and educational sciences is analytical examinations of relationships between teachers and the professional actors in the school context who have the task of assisting immigrant students and their parents, who are occasionally weak actors and in need of help, within the framework of their professional practice.

An interesting question has been raised in the course of carrying out this study: How do teachers present the immigrant students’ and teachers’ different roles in the school context? Another issue raised by this study is the question of how, in purely practical terms, different categories of school teachers work with immigrant students. In this study, we reanalyzed the narratives of immigrant students concerning teachers’ different roles in the school context. The study’s method of analysis does not answer the question of how school teachers work practically with this category of students. From a methodological aspect, there is a need to collect and analyze primary empirical ethnographic material (Atkinson & Coffey, 1997/2004; Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983) in the form of interviews, field notes, video material, and documents from school practice.

Another important aspect for future analyses is to examine the current perspective of newly arrived students when they are still attending school. It would be interesting to find out more about the perceptions of new arrivals with regard to their teachers, other students, the importance of learning a new language, the importance of possible traumatic experiences in conflict and war prior to arrival to the new country, and the importance of class, gender and ethnicity in interpersonal relationships between actors in a school context. Especially the two latter aspects need to be examined more closely in future analyses.
Class, gender, and ethnicity in relation to students and in the relationship between students and teachers are essential analytical aspects for analyses of interpersonal interaction in the school context. Newly arrived students, as well as teachers and other school staff, use several different identities simultaneously, such as their professional identity, their gender identity, and their ethnic identity. Several researchers use the term *intersectionality* to demonstrate how ethnicity comes into play together with the actors’ gender and class within the interaction—and to demonstrate how power structures change in the relationships between actors (Basic, 2015; Bhopal & Preston, 2012; Fuller, 2018). The important factors for future analyses are (a) to be observant of how these analytical concepts operate through a series of interactions, in which the individual enters and is involved in various types of identification; (b) to be observant of when, how and by whom class, gender, and ethnicity are brought into play in relation to school situations. Essentially, the notion of recognition (Foster, 2012) is also raised here as an analytically important factor in examining the issue of how students, regardless of their perception of class, gender and ethnicity, receive recognition based on their specific experiences and actions. The aspect of recognition seems to be important for successful collaboration and learning for both students and teachers in the school context.

Several interviewees in Cederberg (2006) seem to have brought experiences of social conflicts and war with them to Sweden. The dominating everyday explanations regarding this category of students seem to be about post-traumatic stress and medical or psychiatric needs, while competing explanations regarding the student’s difficulties seem relatively toned down (e.g., established inequalities in society and school, material and institutional difficulties in the contexts of society and school, bureaucratic obstacles in school and other areas of society, student interpretations of the perceived social conflicts and war such as now I am strong, I have learned to cope with difficult things, I have unique experience that is of benefit in the new country). These interactive aspects of school activities are also important for analysis within the scope of future analyses.

**Notes on contributors**

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Note

1. Some parts of this text were previously published in Swedish in the thesis, “When collaboration becomes a struggle. A sociological analysis of a project in the Swedish juvenile care” (Basic, 2012), and in the advanced level degree project, ‘Identification and investigation of the reading and writing difficulties of new arrivals. Qualitative analysis of teacher’s stories of opportunities and obstacles’ (Björk & Danielsson, 2016).

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